

R**reviews**

THE BEST ON TEST

Honest AC

Carr Lincoln Amplifier

BY PAUL RIARIO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MASSIMO GAMMACURTA

SOME OF STEVE CARR'S most popular combos like the Impala and best-selling Slant 6V have been loosely compared to and lovingly inspired by classic amps like the 1968 Bassman and 1964 Deluxe Reverb, respectively. However, that is where the resemblance ends. Each of Carr's award-winning amps is an original design, with completely distinctive tones and tube complements, and most feature variable power attenuation and channel switching, all of which makes practical sense for modern guitarists.

This time around, the newly inspired Lincoln takes its cues from a 1964 Vox AC10 but injects more personality and plenty of moxie in its dynamic voice without being a clone. If you get the chance to spend any time with the impressive Lincoln, you'll soon find out it's a powerhouse combo packed with a versatile range of features that definitively makes it a great amp for any application you'll ever need for the studio or stage.

Judging solely on its appearance, the Lincoln is a real modern-retro beauty, with two-tone tolex covering its meticulously crafted, dovetailed, solid-pine cabinet that houses a single Celestion Creamback M-65 12-inch speaker. The 18-watt combo features clean and overdrive channels, built-in all-tube reverb with independent reverb controls for each channel, and a built-in attenuator switch to cut output power down to a manageable, bedroom friendly six watts. The tube complement consists of a duet of EL84s and a quartet of 12AX7s, and a solid-state rectifier keeps

the tone tight. Carr goes above and beyond in build quality with point-to-point hand wiring and superior components that include Analysis Plus speaker cable, Solen Aerospace Satellite capacitors, and custom output transformers built to his spec. The Lincoln also comes with a rugged foot-switch that changes the channels and adds boost on the drive channel.

The amp sounds incredibly warm and full with a humbucker-equipped guitar like the Les Paul Custom I used to test it. Channel one is optimized for clean tones, and features volume, treble and bass, reverb 1, and a normal/bright toggle switch. Setting the toggle to normal, the Lincoln delivers snappy cleans with crisp highs. Pushing the volume produces some grit, but the amp solidly maintains single-note clarity while imparting extraordinary roundness to chords. Moving over to a Telecaster and switching the toggle to bright, I found that the Lincoln begins to sparkle with brilliant top-end ring rather than the chime you would expect from the AC model it's based on. The reverb is also remarkable, ranging from subtle hall to splashy surf tones.

Most guitarists are going to dig the harmonically rich crunch found on channel two. On this side, controls for drive, tone, master, reverb 2, and a high/low toggle switch govern the overdriven character this channel pumps out. Turning up the drive and master past noon and setting the toggle to low, the amp delivers thick and chewy overdrive, with well-defined body for chunky rhythms and bluesy leads without sounding boxy. The tone control allows for perfect midrange sculpting depending upon the type of guitar you use. The footswitchable boost is also useful, adding a midrange bump and creamy sustain to single notes without boosting the volume. With the toggle switched to high, the amp kicks into high gain and growls with unbridled force. I don't believe I've encountered this much gain in a Carr amp before, but I unequivocally love it. The reverb is impressive here as well, because at its lower settings it doesn't swallow up your guitar sound but instead gives it natural depth.

To my ears, the amp sounds best when the attenuator is set to its full 18-watt payload, offering superb headroom and clarity, but that's not to say it falters at six watts. If anything, the amp at lower wattage has a warm compression and smoothness that is absolutely charming. No doubt, the Lincoln is a hybrid beast, but considering the amount of refinement in its detailed clean and lead tones, it packs a sonic wallop that's unforgettable. **CA**

PRICE \$2,980.00 as shown in two-tone tolex
Carr, carramps.com

ARTS AND CRAFTS

Carr-tography: Steve Carr opens up about his latest combo candidate.

This isn't your first EL84-inspired amplifier. What was the goal for this one?

With the Lincoln, I really studied the early-to-mid-Sixties Vox amps. I bought a 1964 AC10 from a collector in England and mapped out what was so fun about it. I added the Normal/Brite switch that allows you to get the Vox chime and bite (Brite) or a new sound (Normal) that is a blend of blackface Fender and Top Boost, but a bit rounder and fuller. Reverb is one of my favorite effects, so we had to add that! Then I felt that bringing a fully conceived overdrive channel with channel switching to the mix would make the Lincoln a fantastic live machine for almost any musical style.

A lot of your amp designs have attenuation. Do you find most players want this?

Yes. These days so many folks are home players. Even if you gig a lot, the domestic atmosphere is not typically stack friendly. We have had great experience designing transparent and real-feeling attenuators, which have become a Carr signature. I find attenuators super useful at home myself. Necessity is the mother of invention!

Who is the player that will want the Lincoln?

The Lincoln has such a huge range of tones that it really might work for almost anyone, but more importantly it will be as pleasing onstage as it is at home or the studio. This is what modern versatility is all about. The clean tones are so clear and alive, yet they will crunch when turned up. The overdrive can go from just-breaking-up Tom Petty vibes to sustaining hair metal leads. That is a ton of fun! I feel that way, and I hope other guitarists will too.