

# Small But Mighty

## The Carr Raleigh amplifier

**I**N THE WORLD OF SMALL, high-quality combo amps, these days it appears some builders are obsessed with bells and whistles, while others are simply looking to recreate a piece of folklore.

At the end of the day, what matters most is what comes out of an amp. And for years, Carr Amplifiers' Steve

Carr has been proving he knows a lot about that.

In the spirit of the retro-funky practice amps of the 1950s and '60s, Carr's new Raleigh oozes coolness. The three-watt Raleigh's stature may be small at only 12<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" tall, but the design packs a punch. It's loaded with a single 10" Eminence Lil' Buddy speaker and its controls are

simple – Volume, Tone, and Master. There's also a clean/overdrive switch that allows for a cool breakup when driven hard. Otherwise, the frills stop there – no footswitch, no reverb, no effects loops. It's kinda Henry-Ford-like. "You can have whatever color you want, as long as it's black."

The heart of the Raleigh lies in the

tubes Carr selected to run it. Within this pint-sized amp are two 12AX7s and an EL84. This tried-and-true combination helps the Raleigh deliver everything from glassy blackface-style clean tones to seriously raunchy overdrive. For an amp that could easily be perceived as a one-trick pony, it offers a few sonic options, and its cab does an admirable job dispersing sound, most notably in terms of low-end response. There's more to this little unit than meets the eye.

Aesthetically, the Raleigh is pure flashback. Its cream-colored grille and front shout "retro," and it can be kicked up a notch with the variety of available custom colors or, for the epitome of

# Gear

boutique hipness, a maple front panel. Our tester came in a custom-option Navy blue.

Overall construction on the Raleigh is top-notch, with a heavy-duty handle that proves Carr pays attention to small details, which is nice for an amp in this price range.

Through rigorous use on a number of recording sessions, it was obvious there's a lot of tone in this little guy. Dirty or clean, the Raleigh held a great amount of warmth, but was surprisingly transparent. It did not overly color the natural tone of the guitar unless called upon to do so, yet retained the natural characteristics of an EL84 amp. This is a very cool balancing act. And clean tones are full of shimmer.

Whether with P90-loaded hollowbodies or double-cut solidbodies, the Raleigh relayed the vibe of each instrument. Single-coils had the bell-like quality players love, and lipstick-tube pickups yielded a wonderful array of garage-band goodness. Jazz players will love the way P90s and humbuckers react, as well. Due to the way the low-end is focused in the

cabinet design, hollowbodies take on a fullness that you wouldn't expect from an amp so small. This is a very cool feature and since this is a rather loud three watts, players can use the Raleigh for small jazz gigs with no worries.

Engaging the Clean/Overdrive switch brings out the "other personality" of this little monster – and where things get *really* fun. Faster than you can say "Pass the biscuits," the Raleigh gets greasy like your grandma's fried chicken. The first image that comes to mind is Billy Gibbons' Les Paul on ZZ Top's *First Album*. It's definitely breakup-style overdrive, but notes stay articulate and strong. And the more you push the amp, the more it opens up. The Raleigh loves to be ridden hard. Funny that there's this much rock in something the size of a breadbox.

With its wealth of clean and overdriven tones, the Raleigh offers something else worth mentioning – the fact it's very quiet. Even in rooms notorious for lighting that causes 160-cycle hum, the Raleigh stayed pristinely silent. This is a *priceless* commodity for recording, and

shows why this may be one of the best recording amps on the market. Session players will love its portability and how it'll fit in virtually any recording space. It also reacts very well to different microphones, especially when adding a large-diaphragm mic near the side of the cab to pick up its bass dispersion. Again, there's a lot of tone in this small package.

So, is this amp worth the price – that is, literally twice that of some of its competitors? That's a subjective call based on one's needs. But the fact is this amp has a *ton* of righteous tone. It



## CARR RALEIGH

Price: \$1,250 (base)

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looks as cool as a dropped-and-chopped Roadster, and it can fit in the rumble seat. Everything about it proves Carr cares. – Sean O'Bryan Smith