



WKZ Amps Little Devil head £1,499

The Little Devil mixes classic seventies tone with hand-wired panache and enough gain to bring out the WKZ side in all of us... by Nick Guppy

It's always good to see another new British amp on the market, and this month we're looking at one that's already made a considerable impact with several high-profile British artists. Like many first-time amp builders, WKZ's Martin Wisbey built the Little Devil primarily to satisfy his own need for an amp that would deliver the sounds he wanted to hear.

"I'm into great vintage tone with plenty of gain but the kind of transparency that lets the natural sound of the guitar through so you can hear that it's a Strat, or a Les Paul or whatever guitar you want to plug in," describes Wisbey. "That's something many vintage amps have, but they don't have modern facilities like switchable boosts, effects loops or dual master volumes. So I built the Little Devil to

For classic rock and blues it's going to nail pretty much whatever you want to do with authority

cover both bases. It's a relatively simple design, which means it's sonically very transparent and it has the essential features most modern guitarists need. We've covered a lot of ground showing it to some very well-known artists and all the feedback we've had so far has been very encouraging."

The Little Devil is a straightforward single channel 50W all-valve head, built to an exceptionally high standard. The sleeve is constructed from tough birch ply and covered in thick basketweave vinyl. The electronics are housed in a

heavy-duty steel box chassis that's powder coated in black enamel for a tough, long lasting finish. The circuit is hand-wired, using several tagboards to support high-quality components. Heavy gauge cable is used throughout and the soldering is clean, bright and almost obsessively neat. However, we'd prefer to see heavy-duty crimps with insulating boots used for the mains inlet and fuse connections, as solder has a tendency to 'creep' over time. This aside, the construction is faultless.

Four quality ECC83 preamp valves and a pair of EH EL34 output valves provide the Little Devil's tone generation, while both mains and output transformers are custom-built by Dagnall to WKZ's exact specifications. Both mains and standby switches operate with a satisfyingly



heavy clunk, and the 'power on' light is a posh purple jewel type, which can easily be unscrewed to replace the bulb if it ever pops.

The full width front panel is home to a simple control layout that isn't going to need hours spent with a manual to understand. There's a single input jack feeding two footswitchable gain controls, a three-band EQ and two master volumes, again footswitchable. The footswitch itself is a similarly solid steel box that plugs into the other socket on the front panel and features status LEDs so you know what's going on, although these aren't mirrored on the front panel. Around the back, you'll find a pair of send/returns for the Little Devil's simple series effects loop and a pair of speaker outlets with switchable

WKZ LITTLE DEVIL HEAD	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<p>■ WE LIKED Simple control layout makes you drive amp from the guitar; flight case</p> <p>■ WE DISLIKED It's a little too noisy for an amp in this price bracket</p>	

impedance. Overall, it's good to see that no corners have been cut in terms of build quality and the Little Devil looks like it should survive just about anything. To make sure that it does, WKZ are even including a smart flight case, thereby ensuring your hard-earned amp isn't going to mix it with the mic stands in the back of a van when everything's thrown in post-gig.

SOUNDS: The Little Devil is anchored firmly in the early seventies, with Marshall's early master volume models serving as the source for much of its sonic inspiration. To get the full range from those amps you had to use the guitar's volume control, backing off for cleaner tones and turning up for increased overdrive, and the WKZ functions in exactly the same way, delivering crisply defined notes when backed off and a warm, dynamic overdrive when turned up that tracks your picking, adding more grit as you dig in. The boost control governs an extra preamp stage that's rather like having a built-in overdrive pedal that you can stamp on when the need arises. Kicking this in at higher gain levels fattens up the sound

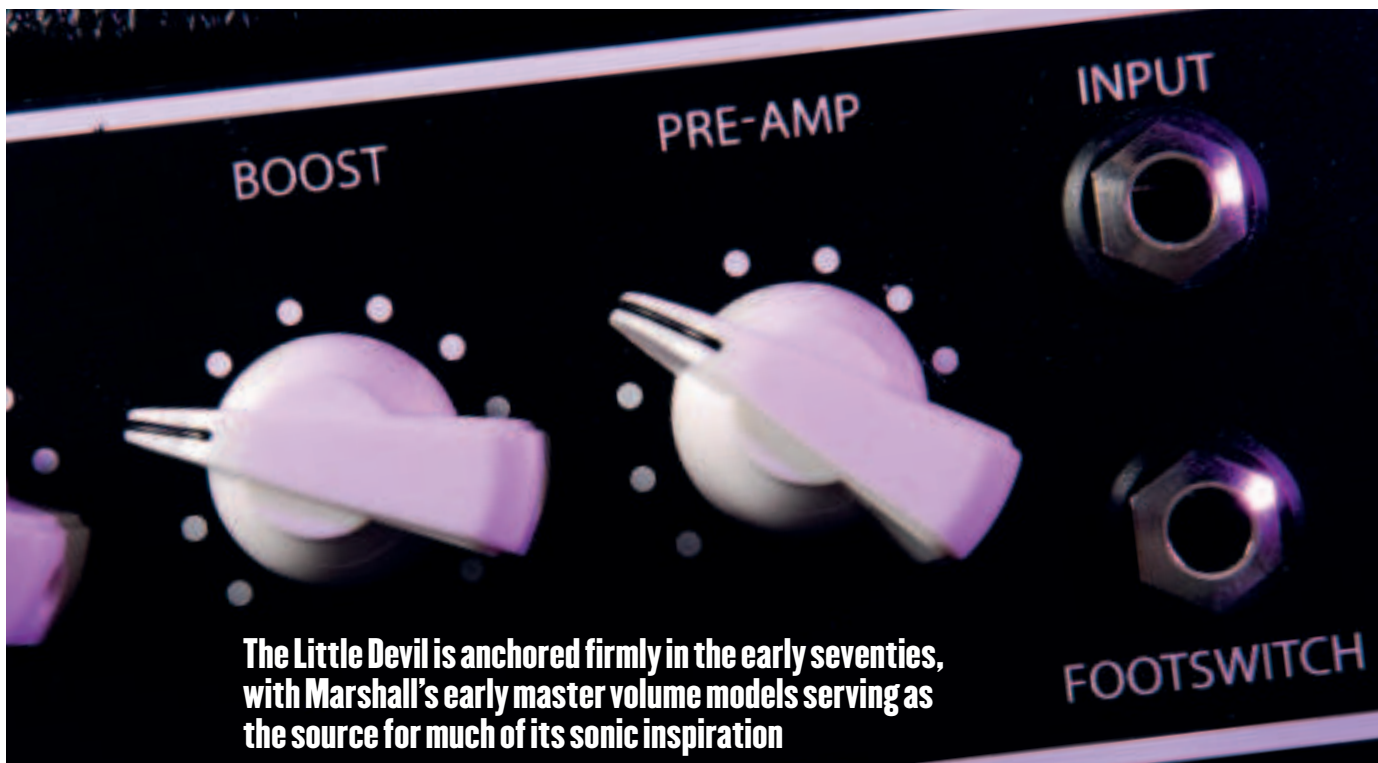
The rivals

Cornford MK50H Mark II	£1,999
Mesa Stiletto Deuce	£1,975
Orange Retro 50 head	£1,399

Cornford's superlative MK50 head in Mk 2 guise might cost 500 quid more but you are getting a proper two-channel amp that's totally hand-wired and boasts a few clever extras too. It sounds truly awesome and totally deserved our rare Gold Award. If you fancy more of an American flavour to your EL34 tone, Mesa's Stiletto Deuce is another great design from the acknowledged master of high gain amplification. Randall's Stiletto takes many classic British amp sounds and gives them a distinctive Californian twist. It's a highly versatile and deadly powerful amp that's an ideal partner for the Rectifier. Orange's Retro 50 is another superb piece of kit with the classic dark and woody overdrive and instant Brit tone circa 1970 – it's perfect right out of the box, however the uncompromising styling means an Orange cab is an almost compulsory purchase.

The Little Devil features four ECC83 /12AX7 preamp and two EL34 power amp valves





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WKZ AMPS LITTLE DEVIL HEAD
PRICE: £1,499
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: All valve, single channel head with solid-state rectification
OUTPUT: 50W RMS
VALVES: Four ECC83/12AX7 preamp, two EL34 power amp
DIMENSIONS: 270 (h) x 700 (w) x 210mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 21/45
CABINET: Birch ply
CHANNELS: One, with footswitchable boost and dual master volume controls
CONTROLS: Preamp gain, boost gain, bass, mid, treble, master volume x two
FOOTSWITCH: Two-button footswitch (included) toggles boost and master volume controls
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Series FX loop, flight case and leads included
OPTIONS: WKZ's 4 x 12 cabinets are loaded with Celestion Vintage 30 loudspeakers and start at £699
RANGE OPTIONS: A 1 x 12 combo is due to be introduced shortly, £TBA
WKZ Amplification
01304 853653
www.wkz-amps.com

→ considerably, and adds a lot of extra harmonic content for a rich, singing lead sound reminiscent of that found on early SLO100s – aggressive yet also very touch-sensitive, with an excellent sustain that clings to each note for what seems ages.

The tone controls are not particularly powerful, which actually suits this type of amp – the sound is already there to start with, and fine-tuning it to taste is all that's needed. The mid-range can be lowered to provide a reasonable scoop effect or pushed up to add a woody bark that will penetrate any drum kit thrash, although we found the best sounds were with everything roughly at the halfway mark. As claimed, the Little Devil is very transparent and you will really hear the character of any guitar you choose to use with it. Alongside our benchmark '94 PRS McCarty, we tried an early sixties Telecaster, a re-issue Gibson ES-335 Dot and a Tom Anderson Classic, all of which were flattered by the WKZ's creamy mid-range warmth, sparkling treble response and tight bass. However, you'd better make sure your picking is up to scratch, as in common with most amps of this type the Little Devil tends to show up mistakes rather than mask them. The only downside to the WKZ's excellent performance was a degree of mains hum on this sample, which wasn't noticeable at gig levels but could be a pain for home practice or low-level recording. Having said that, this is an early production model and with this type of construction such niggles are easily sorted.



Gain and the master volumes can be controlled via footswitch

Verdict

Anyone bringing a new product to the market in the UK's present economic climate certainly deserves full marks for effort. But more importantly, we were seriously impressed with the way the Little Devil captures that elusive vintage British rock voice. Yet this isn't just another 'Plexi' clone – the WKZ definitely has its own thing going on and won't sound out of place in many contemporary settings, although for classic rock and blues it's going to nail pretty much whatever you want to do with authority.

At the asking price, it's obviously aimed at the upper end of the market and for pro players the Little Devil represents excellent value; however, well-heeled amateurs who buy this amp primarily for home use might be a little disappointed. But that's missing

the point, which is that this isn't a piece of furniture, it's an amplifier that's meant to be wound up and played hard. Use it like that, and you'll quickly find out that the Little Devil is worth its price tag for the luscious tones it cranks out. Compared to the competition, we think it's fairly priced – especially as you're also getting a quality flight case and all your leads thrown in. WKZ is presently developing a 1 x 12 combo version at the request of none other than Geoff Whitehorn, so if the Little Devil sounds right for you but you don't fancy lugging a 4 x 12 around, be patient for a little longer. If classic rock and no frills are all you need, then this Little Devil could be right up your street. **G**

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Guitarist RATING

