

20 Mule Duel: we wrangle a herd of new boutique amps

23 custom vintage guitar amplifiers

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Author: Thompson, Art

Excerpt: review of the Electroplex Rocket 50

The Electroplex Rocket 50 (\$1,895; \$2,045 as tested with Mojotone MP10R speaker and GE 6L6s) is a 6L6-powered 4x10 reverb combo with clean and overdrive channels and independent volume and tone controls. The Electro's "green" channel offers volume (pulls for channel select), treble, mid and bass, while the ballsier "red" adds a gain control. Reverb and presence knobs affect both channels. Rear-panel items include dual effects loops, channel footswitch jack, line-level out, speaker jacks and an impedance selector (4 ohms, 8 ohms, 16 ohms).

The Rocket 50 pumps out one heaping helping of wicked-sounding midrange from its four Eminence-made 10s. One tester dubbed it the Tyrannosaurus Rex of Bassmans, another a fire hose of sound. We'd agree with both -- the Electroplex's responsiveness is amazing. There's an overwhelming physical presence to this amp's tone, and something very three-dimensional about how the sound seems to leap from the cabinet. In practical terms, the Rocket does the Twin Reverb clean thing very well, but it also offers the carnivorous crunch of an old Marshall. It really gets it at lower volumes too; the Rocket sounds like an amp tuned way up, even when it's not. Feedback is another of this amp's specialties. Even at moderate gain settings, you can just grab a note and dig the ride.

The Rocket's stellar tone belies its PC-board circuit and average wiring and parts quality. Among the best aspects of this baby's innards are its NOS Sylvania 6L6GCs, Switchcraft jacks and mostly CTS pots. Board-mounted preamp tube sockets grip four Chinese 12Ax7s and one GE 6201 (an industrial 12AT7).

Do we like the Rocket? You bet. Terms like "growling," "drippingly harmonic" and "toothy" were thrown about as we sampled its sonic wares. And, best of all, it has that open quality that seems to enhance playing, no matter what your style. Comments: It's amazing how well this amp can do the big booty chunk thing and still chime." "One of the best feedback amps I've ever played." "Super responsive."

Judgment Day. While you could hardly go wrong with any amp in this Shootout, a few managed to steal our hearts. . . . The Electroplex Rocket 50 is living proof that a properly designed printed-circuit amp can deliver astonishingly explosive tone.

Manufacturer's note: the retail price of the Rocket 50 4x10 has changed since 1997. Please consult Electroplex Amplifiers at talktome@electroplex.com for current pricing.