

JUST OUT!

The Best Marshall Ever?

Marshall's New DSL100 Head

by
Lisa Sharken

Earlier this year, Marshall previewed the JCM2000 series, an all-new amp design to carry the Marshall tone into the next century. While the 900 series took the Marshall design to a new dimension, adding oodles of high-gain and hi-tech features, the 2000 series brings the Marshall amp back to its roots, going back to the original sounds that made it famous and blending them together with modern technology and features. We gearheads at *Guitar Shop* were lucky enough to get our hot little hands on one of the very first DSL100s to give you the lowdown on what to expect as the next generation of Marshall amplifiers hits the stores.

DSL stands for Dual Super Lead, because—you guessed it—this is a two-channel amp. The DSL100 is a 100-watt head with reverb. Channel A is voiced for Classic Gain and has two modes for Clean and Crunch. Channel B is voiced for Ultra Gain, with two gain modes—Lead 1 and Lead 2. With two independent channels and two modes within each channel, there are essentially four possible sounds.

sideways, against the front face of the amp. The reverb has a medium-length tail, which lasts for roughly three to five seconds. It's not nearly as splashy as Fender-style reverb, but matches up effectively with the Marshall tone.

Cosmetically, the overall look of the JCM2000 series isn't much different from that of the 900 series. It's housed in the same box, the black elephant-grain Tolex covering is the same, the front panel is still gold with the same knobs, on/off and standby switches, the same black grille cloth and large white Marshall logo. It's very much a Marshall internally and externally. It even has Mr. Marshall's signature prominently etched up front.

Features & Controls

There is a single instrument input on the far right and the front panel controls are segmented to make it easier to work the amp. Controls for Equalisation (spelled the British way) include Presence, Treble, Middle, Bass, and push-buttons for Deep, a resonance control that adds more lows, and Tone Shift, which scoops out the mids for a "V"-shaped EQ curve. Tone controls are shared by both channels, but each channel has its

own reverb controls. The controls for each channel are almost identical: each channel has its own Volume, Gain, and push-button to switch modes—Clean/Crunch for Channel A, and Lead 1/Lead 2 modes for Channel B. Colored LEDs indicate which channel is in use—green for A and red for B. An additional push-button switch is used to change channels. This function can also be performed using a separate optional footswitch. Another foot-switch option is available

for switching the reverb on and off.

Back panel features include separate jacks for the channel switching and reverb footswitches, Send and Return jacks for the effects loop with a Loop Level push-button that can be used to boost the input level of effects used in the loop. Also included on the back panel are outputs for a single 16-ohm speaker and two parallel outputs for use with either 4- or 8-ohm speakers, with a 4- or 8-ohm selector switch. The power cable is detachable and there are two fuses. A bonus feature for technicians is the easy-access volt-meter "plug-in" for setting the bias of the tubes.



Construction

The DSL100 uses four EL34 power tubes and four 12AX7 preamp tubes. Each power tube is held in place with a spring-loaded retainer that prevents the tubes from becoming loose or accidentally slipping out while in transit. While the DSL100 is not hand-wired, it's internal components are intelligently constructed, using separate circuit board modules for its preamp and master sections. This makes most repairs much easier, especially if you're out on the road, since a damaged board can simply be replaced. There are also individual fuses for each power tube, which prevents potential damage to other components if a tube should arc (surge).

The long-chassis Accutronics reverb tank is mounted

Test Drive

I tested the DSL100 through two slant cabinets—an original Marshall “basket-weave” cabinet loaded with four 25-watt “greenback” Celestions and an early ’80s JCM800 series cabinet with four 70-watt Celestions. The older cabinet was a bit sweeter sounding and an excellent match when using more “classic” settings, but the cabinet with the higher-powered speakers put out clearer and more powerful lows, especially at higher volumes. I liked both cabinets for different purposes, so it’s really a matter of personal preference as to which cabinet sounds best.

Starting out on Channel A (the Classic Gain channel), set on the Clean mode with the tone controls set flat (everything on 5), the amp produced a sound similar to that of the vintage-style model 1959 non-master volume head, especially when it’s cranked. Switching to Channel A’s Crunch mode adds warmer crunchy distortion with more mids, sort of like using a Tube Screamer. As the channel’s name implies, it’s got an excellent tone for playing blues or classic rock, with just a touch of overdrive. I found Channel A worked well to cover just about anything from Hendrix to AC/DC. The DSL100’s clean sound is quite impressive, too, similar to that of a Hiwatt. It’s a big improvement over the clean sound on some of Marshall’s previous 100-watt heads. Channel and mode switching features are both smooth, without any pops or glitches.

Moving over to Channel B (the Ultra Gain channel), I found all the modern high-gain crunch necessary for heavier rhythm tones and molten solos with lots of gain. It’s the ultimate tone for power chords, shredding, or doing any fusion-fired riffing, and there’s really no need for using an additional distortion stompbox. The DSL100 packs a lethal dosage of crunch and sustain which should effectively satisfy almost any player’s requirements, and it doesn’t get too buzzy, noisy, or mushy when the Gain is cranked. Lead 1 can be used for a heavy rhythm tone, then Lead 2 can be kicked in for playing hotter solos with its boosted gain. For the ultimate metal tone, use the Deep and Tone Shift to emphasize the lows and scoop the mids. The two channels can be set up for a wide variety of contrasting rhythm and lead or clean and dirty tones.

Final Verdict

With four modes to switch between, footswitchable reverb, and an effects loop, the DSL100 covers a lot of ground, delivering enough options to gratify most live and studio situations. The DSL100 can be used at both practice and concert volumes without all that much variation in tone or performance. With lower volume settings, the distortion becomes more saturated and it gets cleaner as the master level is increased. If 100 watts seems too terrifying for your needs, an identical 50-watt version (DSL50) is available with all the same features, just less power.

As someone who’s owned and/or played through nearly every model amplifier Marshall has ever made, I truly believe that the DSL100 is the best-sounding 100-watt amp Marshall has produced in recent years, and certainly the most versatile. It combines the best tonal qualities and features of both modern and vintage Marshall amps in one formidable package.

TYPE OF AMP: Tube head

PROS: Great mixture of clean and dirty Marshall sounds, very versatile

CONS: Tone controls shared by both channels

WATTAGE: 100 watts

TUBES: Four EL34 power tubes, four 12AX7 preamp tubes

FEATURES: Two channels with two modes per channel, voicing and resonance switches, spring reverb with separate controls for each channel, built-in effects loop with variable loop level, inputs for optional channel-switching and reverb footswitches, 16-, 8-, and 4-ohm speaker outputs

DIMENSIONS: 29.53" (W) x 12.2" (H) x 8.66" (D)

WEIGHT: 50 lbs.

PRICE: \$1,599 (DSL50 \$1,449)

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(+46) 90 17 87 00

Furugränd 5, S 904 33 Umeå, Sweden