
Subject: Price ranges

Posted by [candoon](#) on Thu, 25 Mar 2010 17:21:18 GMT

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I have no idea what I am shopping for but I would like to surprise the mate with a new amp. Right now there is a very old Fender, but I know thats not the preferred brand. The bad part? I have no idea how to justify the prices I see for the brands I am looking at.

Subject: Re: Price ranges

Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Thu, 25 Mar 2010 18:44:40 GMT

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Fender not a preferred brand? That's the first I've ever heard anyone thinking of Fender as an off-brand. Maybe things have changed but it seems to me they have always been one of the favorites, like Marshall. I know now days there are lots of choices, and maybe Fender has fallen out of favor, but I can't imagine that. At any rate, you can't go wrong with a classic Fender amp, like a Twin Reverb or something like that.

Subject: Re: Price ranges

Posted by [Thermionic](#) on Mon, 29 Mar 2010 15:22:35 GMT

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Howdy Candoon,

What type of music do they like to play, and what kind of guitar do they have? These two preferences (especially the first one) will have a huge bearing on what type of amplifier to buy.

Most players prefer tube amps (which are generally more expensive) over solid state amps, even for room-volume practice. Tube amps most always sound and "feel" better, although there are good solid state amps and bad tube amps. However, there are MANY different categories of tube amps, depending on which genre of music you play.

Thermionic

Subject: Re: Price ranges

Posted by [Thermionic](#) on Mon, 29 Mar 2010 15:33:46 GMT

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Hi Wayne,

Fender amps can range from "the Mother of Tone" to "avoid it like the plague at all costs,"

depending on the year and model. While Fender is indeed a household name and made some amps half a decade ago that are still spoken of in hushed, reverent tones by players today, they definitely made some real turkeys too, especially some of the '70s amps with ultralinear output stages, and most of their solid state stuff since when they introduced it in '66 or '67 to present.

Nearly anything pre-1968 is highly desirable (except solid state, of course), with amps made before '65 (when CBS bought Fender) being the most valuable. Although CBS didn't really mess things up until '68 when they introduced the "silverface" series, quality had really went down in '67 after they had finished running off the old employees and bringing in unskilled replacements.

Pre-1960 amps are among the most valuable and collectible. These include the "woody" (bare wood cabinetry) amps of '46-'47, and especially the '48-'59 tweed-covered amps, simply known to players as "tweeds." A '59 Bassman is considered the Holy Grail, and is worth several grand in decent condition. Tweed Fenders in general have a fat, warm, gutsy clean tone that serves blues, jazz, and country players well, that grows quite a bit of hair on it when the amp is pushed hard.

The first Marshall amp was built on Jim Marshall's kitchen table using the tweed Bassman circuit, except with a different output transformer, all-ECC83/12AX7 preamp tubes (the Bassman's first stage had a 12AY7), and KT66 power tubes instead of 6L6 (which were very expensive in England). The eventual definitive production version of this amp was called the JTM45.

"Brownfaces" or "brownies" were made from '59 to '63, and had both brown and cream Tolex coverings, and wheat-weave or oxblood grillecloths, and of course, brown faceplates. The rare '63 Vibroverb represents the cream of the crop in brownface/blond-era amplifiers, and is considered one of the most desirable of Fenders. This series marked the introduction of reverb in Fender amps, and they also had an exceptional sounding tremolo effect, which differed in design from the tremolo circuit used in the later blackface amps.

"Blondes" or "blondies" were made from '60 to '64, and had cream Tolex coverings and either wheat-weave or oxblood grillecloth. Blondes and brownfaces shared a lot of things cosmetically, as well as many carry-overs from the tweed circuitry designs, along with the new tremolo and reverb effects (which would also be staples of Fender's next series). However, blonds are tube-rectified, whereas most brownfaces are SS-rectified.

"Blackfaces" were produced from '64 to '67, and had black Tolex coverings with silver sparkle grillecloth. These amps are legendary for their "sparkle" and "chime" clean sound, which forever defined what country-fried chicken pickin' on a Telecaster is supposed to sound like. Each consecutive year of blackface production is less valuable than the former, although the circuits did not significantly change during this period.

"Silverfaces" were produced from very late '67 to '81. They are cosmetically similar to the blackfaces except for their (of course) silver faceplates, and silver-blue sparkle grillecloth. These represented a "redesign" of the original Fender circuits by CBS engineers, with disastrous sonic results. The silverface Deluxe Reverb was somehow spared from this fate, as it retained its blackface circuit and sonics throughout its production. Only the cosmetics were changed. But, the rest of Fender's amp line took a serious decline in tone.

To add insult to injury, in '72 a very noisy and rather ugly sounding pull-knob gain boost was

added (the first distortion circuit seen on a Fender). In '77 they went to a 135 watt ultralinear circuit, that is regarded as one of the worst sounding tube amp lines ever made by a mainstream manufacturer.

The good news here is that all pre-'72 silverfaces can be "blackfaced" to blackface series specs and sonics. Most '72-'76 amps can be successfully blackfaced as well, but with much more effort.

"II Series" amps were made from '82 to '86. Most are very decent amps indeed, due to the fact they were designed by Paul Rivera (to whom Rivera amps of today owe their name), whom Fender brought in to revamp its amplifier line and boost lagging sales. They had somewhat vintage-Fenderesque clean channels, and a modern, Marshall/Mesa Boogie-like overdrive channel voicing. Most of these were point-to-point wired, and are now becoming collector's items.

"Red Knob" amps were made from '87 to '93, and had black Tolex, gray grillecloth, and needless to say, red knobs. Their model names were on a little tag on the upper right of the grillecloth, versus silkscreened on the control panel as in most earlier and later Fenders with front-facing control panels. IMO, these amps are er, uh, not exactly the last word in tone.....

After the red-knob amps, Fender returned to blackface-style cosmetics, along with some modern-style and vintage tweed cosmetics on certain specialty amplifier lines. Everything Fender has made since the red-knobs has been a mixed bag. Their regular production models have ranged from horrid, to so-so, to pretty good. Some of their "reissues" of classic vintage Fender amps have been decent to good, though none of them will do battle with properly serviced and restored original versions, or good boutique clones of them.

Thermionic

Subject: Re: Price ranges

Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Mon, 29 Mar 2010 16:47:16 GMT

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Wow, excellent, interesting information. Thanks!

I knew the 1960's Twin Reverbs and the like were the cat's meow for musician friends of mine. But I now see Fender made some lemons too. I guess that's probably true for their guitars as well.

Subject: Re: Price ranges

Posted by [Thermionic](#) on Tue, 30 Mar 2010 03:38:00 GMT

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Wayne Parham wrote on Mon, 29 March 2010 11:47

Wow, excellent, interesting information. Thanks!

You're welcome! I've been playing guitar for around 30 years, and servicing guitar amps for a bit over 25. I also build custom, made-to-order guitar amps designed to a customer's specific tonal preferences. So, it would be a cryin' shame if I hadn't learned at least a little bit of Fender history by now, LOL!

Wayne Parham wrote on Mon, 29 March 2010 11:47 I knew the 1960's Twin Reverbs and the like were the cat's meow for musician friends of mine.

Blackface Twins are THE vintage amp for clean country and blues tones, as well as certain clean jazz tones. They also have an incredible tone for funky, jangly chords played on a Strat with the pickup selector set to position 4. Actually, pretty much anything you play on a Strat or Tele into a blackface twin is gonna sound good, as long as it's a clean (not overdriven) sound you're looking for. Also, Gibson ES335-type guitars + blackface Twin = killer blues tone.

Wayne Parham wrote on Mon, 29 March 2010 11:47 But I now see Fender made some lemons too. I guess that's probably true for their guitars as well.

Yep, they made some hokey guitars too, again because of the bean counters at CBS poking their noses into things they didn't understand. Fender's guitars went to pot about the same time as the amps did. Any time (1) your sole motivation is maximum profit margin without regard to quality and usefulness, and (2) you place the design of artisan products in the hands of "white-coated engineers" that cannot comprehend anything but figures on paper, the same thing will always happen.

When CBS put Fender up for sale in 1983, it was still making money but just barely. Had it not been bought in 1984 by Fender's management and some investors (who were themselves musicians and as a result musician-minded) who resurrected it from the dead, CBS would have probably had to eventually close it down.

However, even those guys made some mistakes in the name of profit, such as scrapping the nice sounding point-to-point II Series amps in favor of the not-so-great PC board red knob amps. Simply taking those same II Series circuits to PC board construction would've been much wiser than designing a new circuit that sounded worse and taking it to PC-board construction! When faced with the same dilemma of rising manufacturing cost back in '74, Marshall simply translated their existing point-to-point amp circuits to PC boards. Well, they did cut a corner, in that they eliminated a filter cap to save money. But, it was still the same circuit, more or less.

Today, Fender is still living off of what Leo Fender did in the '50s and '60s. The classic Strat and Tele platforms are still their bread and butter guitars. Practically every "modernized" variation of the them (such as the late '80s "HM Strat," designed for playing "hair metal") has largely been a commercial failure. Ditto for most of their "modern" amps designed for playing rock and metal.

You won't find one professional using their acoustic guitars, or rock/metal amps and guitars, but you'll find oodles and gobs of 'em using the classic-style stuff.

The reason is twofold. One, players just don't associate Fender with guitars and amps designed

for playing modern rock and heavy metal, or with PA systems, or with acoustic guitars. They associate the name with their classic products and the classic sounds they produce. Two, there are a hundred manufacturers who do things like acoustic guitars, PA systems, and rock/metal guitars and amps better than Fender in the first place.

Fender was probably wise to preserve the classic Strat and Tele platforms and offer reissues and "mod-variants" of several of their vintage amp models (which are among the best products in their lineup), instead of trying too hard to go head-to-head against other major manufacturers in areas where they simply cannot beat them. I guess this is one of those places where "if it ain't broke, don't fix" it applies en force. The fact that these products are still top sellers today, some of them more than half a century after their introduction, is a testimony to the unique genius that was Leo Fender.

Thermionic

Subject: Re: Price ranges

Posted by [candoon](#) on Wed, 14 Apr 2010 19:34:12 GMT

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Sorry to have confused just about everyone it seems, when I noted preferred brand I should have said its not my spouses preferred brand. I know that I hear the complaining almost all of the time of just "how old it is" and how its "been around for so long". I am just wondering if maybe I can upgrade and give the gift of a surprise instead.

Subject: Re: Price ranges

Posted by [Shane](#) on Wed, 28 Apr 2010 04:15:25 GMT

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What kind of music will be played with what kind of guitar? That's really the basics of where to even start looking.

I've got several different kinds of amps and guitars. From a early 90's Epiphone Les Paul to Paul Reed Smith PA SE. Peavey 5150 combo for hard rock to the dreaded early 70's Fender Silverface Vibrochamp. Nothing pricey in my arsenal.

What I really want is a USA Strat with a Fender Tweed Deluxe (or 5E3 clone) for blues.

Subject: Re: Price ranges

Posted by [candoon](#) on Fri, 11 Jun 2010 17:33:39 GMT

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Most a rock fan but some blues too, which I adore.

Les Paul, I would love but I am not sure if my budget can allow for it. Mostly right now its still picking what works best for the needs (which I can only tell by being a fan) and then saved up and hoping prices do not change too much. Still looking into this, it didn't happen for the birthday so I hope by Yule if at all possible.

Subject: Re: Price ranges

Posted by [Adveser](#) on Sun, 25 Jul 2010 02:59:56 GMT

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I would like to add, which I am sure most of us are aware of...the more distortion you need, the LOWER the wattage. If you want to play creamy blues, get the 250watt. If you want to play screaming shred, 15-50 watts should cover it.

The reasoning is pretty simple: a 15-watt combo at full blast is going to create a good metal tone. a 250watt dialed back considerably to suit the volume is not going to be. And same thing the other way. a 15 watt is not going to be loud enough once you produce the tone you want for blues.

Or you could find a very old SRD power soak, which was built so a marshall stack could be set all the way up without being 150db.

Subject: Re: Price ranges

Posted by [Shane](#) on Sun, 25 Jul 2010 03:05:54 GMT

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Adveser wrote on Sat, 24 July 2010 21:59: I would like to add, which I am sure most of us are aware of...the more distortion you need, the LOWER the wattage. If you want to play creamy blues, get the 250watt. If you want to play screaming shred, 15-50 watts should cover it.

The reasoning is pretty simple: a 15-watt combo at full blast is going to create a good metal tone. a 250watt dialed back considerably to suit the volume is not going to be. And same thing the other way. a 15 watt is not going to be loud enough once you produce the tone you want for blues.

Or you could find a very old SRD power soak, which was built so a marshall stack could be set all the way up without being 150db.

Agreed on the distortion, if you're using distortion direct from the amp. OTOH, a good distortion pedal will eliminate the "need" for a low wattage amp. 15W is plenty of amp in my experience, especially if you're just playing by yourself. If you're not and you're gigging, most likely you'll be mic'd thru the PA system and it won't matter anyhow. I gigged with a 10W amp for the better part of a year because of setting up that way.

Subject: Re: Price ranges

Posted by [Taylor-Sue](#) on Sat, 07 Aug 2010 14:09:04 GMT

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Take it from one who knows... the best and only present worth giving to a man obsessed is the thing he is obsessed with! Better to save for the item than to risk giving something else
