
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
