



## Marshall 1959RR £1,270

The latest addition to the Signature Series, and one with a genuine legacy to pay tribute to *by Simon Bradley*

**W**hen John 'Ozzy' Osbourne was unceremoniously dumped from Black Sabbath in 1979, many rock fans assumed that was that from the Brummie warbler. However, he stumbled across a gem of a guitarist when conducting auditions for his new solo venture who would subsequently help in no small way to revitalise his career. It was Randy Rhoads, of course, from Santa Monica, California. Legend has it that the young musician and teacher arrived with just a guitar and practice amp and completely blew Ozzy away.

Just three years later Randy was dead: killed in a stunt-gone-wrong plane crash. Thanks to just two Ozzy albums lavished with his spluttering solos, kinetic riffs and sheer presence, the rock world went into mourning at this huge talent lost long before his time.

Naturally, one major part of Randy's impact on the guitar world was his unmistakable tone. It wasn't rocket science: he simply purchased the amp he wanted and used it exclusively throughout his career. That amp, finished in white of course, was a Marshall JMP 1959 Super Lead, that he bought in 1980 after a visit to the company's factory. It's upon that very amplifier – including its modifications – that this new 1959RR has been based.

It was Marshall's vastly experienced Signature Series

development engineer Danny Thomas who took the concept's reigns and here he takes up the story behind the new amp.

"I went out to Musonia in North Hollywood," he says. "It's where the music school his mother Delores runs is, and also where Randy used to teach as a kid: his teaching room's still there. His mum is a real sweetheart and his brother Kelly is a really nice guy."

So did you get to play around with the original? "I was allowed complete access to the amp, yes. I took it apart, measured and checked it all against records I had from other amps produced at that time: it was a stock JMP 1959.

"They took all of the equipment they received back from the Ozzy tour after Randy's death out of storage and brought it over to the school," he continues. "Basically we opened up the flight cases and took out the gear. We checked it through, drew sketches of the circuits, catalogued it, measured it, and took photos. Then we put that data into a prototype back here [at Marshall HQ in Milton Keynes]. I believe they do also have the guitars and pedalboard, although I didn't see them, just the white 100-watt head and six white cabinets."

Was there anything that made Randy's amp somehow different from others made at the time? "Surprisingly, when I was checking the circuits, I did find something that was out of place,

a resistor that had been cut and moved, so I duly noted that."

He continues: "I also noted who had wired and tested it, and when we got back to the factory I called the test manager from the day. He remembered meeting Randy Rhoads and told me he'd tested and modded the amp for him."

Ah yes, the famous mod. How did that work? "I asked him what he'd done and he'd cascaded the first valve: the inputs from the normal channel get fed back through the input of the high treble channel. He said we used to do that occasionally for some people when they wanted a bit more gain and guts, and, as Randy had asked him if there was anything he could do to get it a bit

beefier, that's what he did."

How have you included the mod into the 1959RR? "Channel one is a normal '59 'Plexi' and channel two has the mod on it, but the thing is to pull back on volume one. Randy actually had both volumes set to about six and six and a half. So volume two was driving a great deal in to the next half of the valve, and then that again was opened up a fair whack. You get it loud and you're getting in the zone. The other thing is to pull the bass down. Actually, the rest of his settings were presence to six, middle to five-and-a-half, treble to six-and-a-half: that should give an approximation of the tone."

Having just reviewed the 2203KK Kerry King, was there any thought of including a switch that instantly brings up the classic Rhoads tone as with the KK? "The



Input/volume I is a stock 1959SLP. Input/volume II has the cascaded gain modification



**Marshall 1959RR**

**PRICE:** £1,270  
**ORIGIN:** UK  
**TYPE:** All-valve amp head  
**OUTPUT:** 100W  
**DIMENSIONS:** 740 (w) x 270 (h) x 210mm (d)  
**WEIGHT (kg/lbs):** 21.4/47  
**CABINET:** Birch ply  
**VALVES:** Four EL34, three ECC83  
**CHANNELS:** Two, not footswitchable  
**CONTROLS:** Treble, middle, bass and presence, plus two volumes for each channel  
**FOOTSWITCH:** N/A  
**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** Two speaker outs  
**OPTIONS:** None  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** Check out the standard 1959SLP (£1,166) or the even more toneful hand-wired option, the 1959HW (£1,470)  
**Marshall Amplification 01908 375411**  
**www.marshallamps.com**

**NB:** Guitarist would like to thank Paul Marshall and Danny Thomas.

“You don’t have to play painfully loud to get a great tone out of a Marshall, but they are designed as pieces of public address equipment and they have to breathe” **Danny Thomas, Marshall**

brief was to pay tribute to Randy Rhoads and so, like we did with the Hendrix 1959, you have to make it as close as possible to the amplifier the man played in the day. The Kerry King project was more about how to define his sound and working with Kerry on getting his outboard equipment into the amp so you only need one piece of kit.”

So, with all that background info and knowledge to hand, the only thing left to do is plug in. And lest we forget, no 100-watt Super Lead is an amp for wussies, least of all this one. Gulp...

**Sounds**

On revving up the amp for initial sound tests, we found that – just like the regular 1959 model – the 1959RR has immense, visceral power in abundance. We asked Danny if there were any tricks of the trade when it came to obtaining the best from a singing 100-watt Marshall ‘Plexi’?

“These amps are designed to throw sound to the back of Wembley Arena, so simple things like turning your cab around can make all the difference,” he says.

“In modern day use, you have to be sensible and even be prepared to tell the soundman that you won’t need your guitar through the PA. Don’t be intimidated either: you don’t have to play painfully loud to get a great tone out of a Marshall, but they are designed as pieces of public address equipment and they have to breathe with the guitar, otherwise we’d all be using

modelling amps and sound as if we were on a record!”

With Randy’s own settings dialled, we took Danny’s advice and turned our 4 x 12 cab to the wall, which certainly made things a tad easier to deal with in a relatively small space. [What, no stadium gig this week, Bradders? – Ed.] Compared with a standard ‘Plexi’ the modded channel II section has noticeably more gain to play with, and what’s more the character is altogether more full and indeed open sounding than you could expect from a Tube Screamer or similar. Cranked, there’s also a good dollop of power tube drive on offer, adding its own inimitable dynamic: essential to balls-out classic rock tone.

We did find it difficult to recreate the abrasive edge of high gain we remember from those Ozzy albums. In fact Danny tells us that Randy did use an EQ and BOSS distortion ‘as a booster’, something you may well want to add to this rig as, like many simple designs, it takes to high-quality pedals very well indeed.

**Verdict**

Can Danny give any idea as to the future availability of the 1959RR? “It will be a limited edition, but we haven’t set a number on the limit as yet because we want to give people the chance to own it,” he says. “A feeding frenzy caused by producing 300 or something wouldn’t serve the legions of Randy fans out there.”

That’s a laudable sentiment as Randy’s legacy still remains to

this day: even current Ozzy guitarist Zakk Wylde agrees that he can’t fill the man’s shoes, let alone the rest of us.

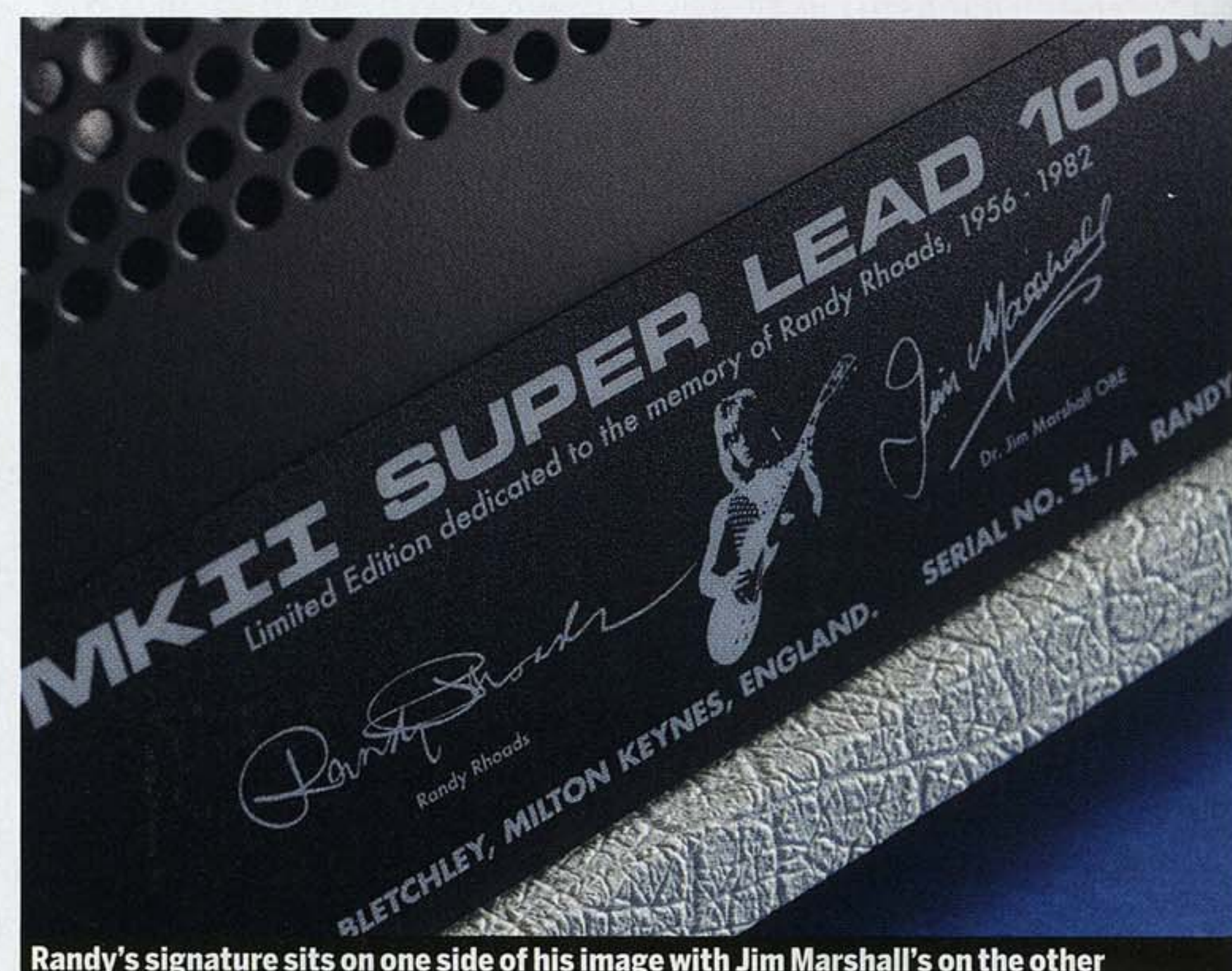
As a concept, the amp ticks all the right boxes and, as there’s nothing cooler than a Marshall ‘Plexi’ – let alone one finished in white – the very competitive price is attractive too, your affiliation to Rhoads notwithstanding. **G**

**The bottom line**

**We like:** Lots of thought and research has gone into making this what it should be, and the white livery makes it even more frosty cool

**We dislike:** Don’t underestimate the sheer power any Marshall 100-watt ‘Plexi’ can provide – anyone without ear plugs and decent sized gigs need not apply

**Guitarist says:** There’s little point in going for the 1959RR if, as a player, Randy means little to you. For everyone else this is a fitting and toneful tribute, but you do have to crank it up!



Randy’s signature sits on one side of his image with Jim Marshall’s on the other

**Test results**

<b>Build quality</b>	★★★★★
<b>Features</b>	★★★★★
<b>Sound</b>	★★★★★
<b>Value for money</b>	★★★★★

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★