

# TAG PHWOAR!

HAND WIRED AND LOW WATTAGE EQUALS SWEET, SWEET TONE. **MICK TAYLOR** PLAYS THE MARSHALLS WE'VE ALL BEEN WAITING FOR

\*\*\* The 'point-to-point' wired versus printed circuit board argument in amplifier construction continues to draw plenty of input from manufacturers, enthusiasts and journo alike. Depending on your company history, your attitude to marketing and your production capacity, building amps entirely by hand and without the aid of modern PCB technology is either a *raison d'être* (take Cornford and Matchless for example) or an achilles heel (likewise Mesa Boogie and THD).

Now, nobody in their right mind would argue that any of the above don't make great amps, so perhaps the argument isn't quite as polarised as some may have you believe. What is beyond question however is that there are a handful of classic designs that owe their tone and feel to that labour-intensive, relatively high-cost construction method that is hand wiring from a single, simple tag board.

Two such amplifiers are Marshall's 1974 combo and 2061 'Lead & Bass 20' head. First introduced in the mid-1960s they boast fewer watts between them than most modern combos have alone, yet nevertheless trigger misty-eyed nostalgia whenever mentioned. With original examples becoming increasingly rare – and expensive – it's a real treat to have them reissued from the mighty Marshall.

## PRE & POWER AMPS

One of the first things to get your head around with these amplifiers is that (unless you're of a certain generation) they're a far cry from what most people associate with the Marshall name. That's to say no fixed-bias EL34 power tubes, no 50- or 100-watt power section and no 4x12 cabinets. Instead, we have cathode biased EL84 tubes – as you'd find in Vox AC15s, 30s and indeed many lower-powered valve amps – and around 20 watts power output. For many that alone makes them near as dammit the perfect recording amplifier because you can get the power amp working at sensible levels, but as I found out, don't make the mistake of thinking they're not loud enough for gigs.

Taking the 1974 combo first: here we have a two-channel preamp but not in the modern sense. Instead there are two independent, non-footswitchable channels, one straight up with just volume and tone, the other with an inbuilt tube-driven tremolo effect with controls for speed and intensity. The two inputs of channel one are identical, each feeding half of just one dual triode ECC83 valve, while the tremolo channel features hi and low inputs, the latter with –6dB gain, but again feeding just one tube and therefore one gain stage. The way the channels are configured it's possible to bridge the two channels by plugging into the tremolo channel input one, then using a short patch lead to link

## GBINFO

### MARSHALL 2061X HEAD

PRICE: £999  
BUILT IN: England  
TYPE: All-valve head  
POWER OUTPUT: 20 watts RMS  
VALVES: 2 x ECC83, 2 x EL84  
FEATURES: Two independent channels  
FOOTSWITCH: N/A  
DIMENSIONS: 508(w) x 227(h) x 210(d) mm  
WEIGHT: 9.6kg

### 2061CX CABINET

PRICE: £499  
POWER HANDLING: 60 watts RMS  
SPEAKERS: 2 x Celestion G12H 70th Anniversary  
DIMENSIONS: 635(h) x 655(w) x 300(d) mm  
WEIGHT: 22kg

#### CONTACT:

Marshall Amplification Ltd  
PHONE: 01908 375411  
WEB: [www.marshallamps.com](http://www.marshallamps.com)

## GBINFO

### MARSHALL 1974X COMBO

PRICE: £1199  
BUILT IN: England  
TYPE: All-valve combo  
POWER OUTPUT: 18 watts RMS  
SPEAKER: 1 x 12-inch 'aged' Celestion G12 M Greenback (20 watts, 15 ohms)  
VALVES: 3 x ECC83, 2 x EL84, 1 x E281  
FEATURES: Two channels, in-built tremolo  
FOOTSWITCH: Included for tremolo on/off  
DIMENSIONS: 532(h) x 610(w) x 225(d) mm  
WEIGHT: 18.2kg

### 1974CX CABINET

PRICE: £449  
POWER HANDLING: 20 watts  
SPEAKERS: 1 x 12-inch 'aged' Celestion G12 M Greenback (20 watts, 15 ohms)  
DIMENSIONS: 532(h) x 610(w) x 225(d) mm  
WEIGHT: 16kg

#### CONTACT:

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AC/DC

THOUGHTS ON VALVE AND SOLID-STATE RECTIFICATION

■ An amp's 'rectifier' is what changes mains AC electricity to the DC required internally. The important part about this relationship is the efficiency with which it performs, which then affects how the power tubes respond.

Valve rectifiers are noted for being somewhat less efficient than more modern, solid-state types, increasing the likelihood of power amp 'sag', distortion and fatter EQ. These are the more random, 'musical' aspects of tube amp dynamics that we've come to regard as highly desirable in many playing situations. If you want the half-technical

explanation, as more voltage pulses through the rectifier (the harder you hit your guitar), the voltage across the tube's plate momentarily decreases. When an output valve is 'seeing' less plate voltage, it will distort, sag and compress more easily. Incidentally, it's why some Fender Bassmans had two tube rectifiers – Fender was aiming for more headroom, therefore two rectifiers did the job more efficiently than one (likewise, you could pull one out for more sag, but we digress).

The 1974x combo has a valve rectifier, while the 2061x head uses solid-state rectification for more headroom and attack.



■ This is it. Your whole tone comes from two knobs. Or four if you link channels

input two with the normal channel. Both channels have a 'tone' control that's post-gain and passive (that's to say not radically powerful or defining) which dials in progressively more treble as you wind it clockwise. You can use this over it's whole range, and I found that somewhere near maximum was necessary to get good top end definition from humbuckers, so don't be afraid to push it.

era. The control panel of both amps is constructed from the classic gold coloured 'Plexiglass', which is in fact good ol', workaday perspex.

**CABINET & SPEAKER**

Covering all the amplifiers and cabinets on review is Marshall's trademark vinyl, beading and piping, and to keep it era-specific, we have the

**"IT'S IMPORTANT TO SQUASH ANY PRECONCEPTIONS ABOUT HOW LOUD 20 WATTS MAY, OR MAY NOT BE"**

From there, your signal goes to just two EL84 power tubes that use a further EZ81 for valve rectification – read more about that above – and the only other thing remotely resembling a bell or whistle is the tremolo jack for the included on/off footswitch. No reverb, no FX loop, just an impedance selector to match your chosen cabinet.

The 2061x head's front end is similar, minus the tremolo, and with one channel voiced brighter than the other (Lead & Bass – see?). You're presented with an even simpler front panel, that on more than one occasion during its stay at GB had unlightened guitar playing members of the audience chuckling into their beer. Until they heard it...

The power amp is configured slightly differently here; we have the same pair of EL84s, though with solid-state rectification for a little more punch and headroom. Simple!

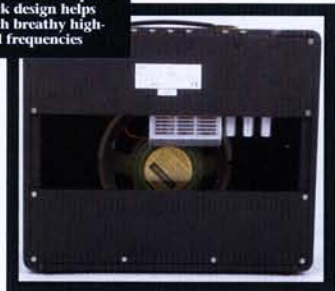
Finally, if you're wondering where the term 'Plexi' comes from, it's this

small gold Marshall logo. Constructed from birch ply throughout with fingerlocked joinery, there's little to suggest any longevity issues here.

The overall aesthetic is enhanced by the more grey-ish grille cloths (rather than black), and to underline the timelessness in design, everything still looks up-to-date and tasteful.

Inside the open-backed 1974 combo is a rather special custom Greenback speaker by Celestion. Rated at just 20 watts and with a 15-ohm impedance, it's a faithful

■ The 1974x's open-back design helps with breathy high-end frequencies



## GB RATINGS

## MARSHALL 1974X COMBO

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★☆
SOUNDS	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
GB VERDICT	★★★★★

recreation of the 1974's original driver, then tweaked by Celestion to 'age' its sound slightly for an instantly played-in feel (compared A/B with units from Marshall's own museum). Apparently this involves matching the magnetic flux to the older speaker and manufacturing a more 'pulpy' cone material. How this will stand up over time remains to be seen, given that it's time itself that makes the original drivers sound so sweet.

The 1974 1x12 cabinet is identically constructed and contains the same speaker as the combo – the perfect partner for increased sound spread.

The 2061's cabinet resembles a compact 4x12 from a distance, suggesting perhaps a 4x10 configuration. Open it up however and you'll find two

12-inch speakers, one mounted top left and the other bottom right. This time it's a closed-back design with plenty of internal volume for some seriously solid bass response. Speakers themselves are a pair of Celestion's Vintage Series G12H 70th Anniversary Special Edition, with higher power handling than the Greenback of the 1974 combo. Compared with a 4x12, it's a right little cutie... albeit with a mammoth gob!

## SOUNDS

I think it's important to squash any preconceptions about how loud 18 or 20 watts may or may not be. So let me paint a picture. The drummer in our pub/club band has a stonking Drum Workshop kit. He's a builder with hands like shovels and forearms nearly as big as most people's thighs. He mics up the Deedub through our modest 2k rig, and on more than one occasion I've turned round to see him smashing the bejesus out of the kit with the fat end of the sticks. Ouch. Normally I play a 50- or 100-watt Mesa which never struggles with volume, and to my utter and complete astonishment,

neither does the 2061 Lead & Bass 20. And how is that possible? Well, as anybody

Marshall's smaller, gold logo is era-specific for these amplifiers



who regularly gigs either a Vox AC30, or indeed a 50-watt Plexi will know, there are precious few smaller gigs where you can get either really singing. 20 hand-wired, tube watts is enough!

What I really love about the 2061 though, is that when you've got it cooking at that three-quarters sweet spot, the addition of two choice filth pedals turns it into a 'three-channel' monster. With just one preamp tube per channel, there always seems to be enough headroom for another pedal and even with a Crowther Audio Hot Cake and Blackstone Overdrive set to similar three-quarters levels, the Marshall holds onto it all, keeping the notes clear and well defined. What's more, you're never in any doubt as to what guitar you're playing, such is the sheer transparency of the tone. In addition, the thump from the low

## GB OPINION

## MARSHALL 2061X LEAD &amp; BASS 20

## GOLD STARS

- ★ Easy to use
- ★ Very portable
- ★ Fabulous, classic sound

## BLACK MARKS

- Only your preconceptions about having enough volume

## IDEAL FOR...

Serious gigging and recording tone hounds who have high quality guitars, pedals and aspirations



## WHAT'S INSIDE COUNTS

## TAG, YOU'RE IT

The whole point (to point) of these reissues is that they're meticulously hand wired to create faithful reproductions of the original models.

Where most modern amplifiers use flow-soldered printed circuit boards to house most – if not all – of the electronics, here you can see the simple tag board that requires assembly entirely by hand. Marshall has gone to great lengths to find components either identical to, or as close as is physically (and in terms of safety legislation) possible, including custom-made Dagnall transformers. The tube bases are all ceramic and the chassis is aluminium, made slightly more rigid than the originals' with closed ends. There are plenty of tone buffs who say they can notice the sonic differences between an alu and steel chassis.

and whether that's true or not – and indeed there are other factors involved during an amp's evolution – Marshall has nevertheless recreated these amplifiers as faithfully as possible.

And a couple of absolute crackers they are too!



**DETAILS**

TWO HANDSOME REISSUES FROM BRITAIN'S MOST FAMOUS AMP STABLE



■ Celestion's custom Greenback in the 1974



■ The 1974 also comes with this footswitch to turn the tremolo on and off

**GBCONCLUSION**

TECHNOLOGY TAKES SECOND PLACE TO INSPIRATION WITH THESE VERY WELCOME REISSUES

■ These amps ought to have a lot of guitarists asking a lot of questions. The first is 'do I really need 50 or 100 watts?' and the second is 'do I really need multi channels and endless modes?'

They are two questions I've asked myself during my time with the 1974 and 2061, such is their tonal transparency, ease of use and all-up fun factor.

Whether the tone and hand wiring will be absolutely consistent from model to model will be a question that'll hang heavy on the lips of other manufacturers, but nevertheless I can't find enough complimentary things to say about the new Marshall hand-wired amps. They are the perfect choice for pedal fans who also want to hear their guitars shine through. In fact a good friend of mine who is an experienced amp tech, monster guitarist and all-round tone-fiend said that the 2061x and 2x12 cab is the best sound he's ever heard for his brand of dynamic blues/roots gigging and recording. Various vintage Fenders and Voxes excepted, I don't think he's far wrong. **GB**

**SAME BUT DIFFERENT**

NECESSARY CHANGES FOR TODAY'S HAND-WIRED MARSHALLS

■ There are a few differences between the original versions and these modern reissues. However, Marshall is keen to point out that they make no difference

(positive or negative) to the resultant tone. For example, the tag board material had to be tweaked slightly, as did the cabinet grilles in order to meet flammability standards. Similarly both the speaker connection and the mains inlet now feature standard connections rather than being hard wired, and an impedance selector enables you match speaker cabinets correctly. Finally, you also get accessible fuses – much easier to replace if one blows!



■ It's called 'Lead & Bass 20' because one channel is bright sounding, and the other dark

so massive-headroom clean sounds are out of the question. Yet that musical distortion is what these amps are all about. You can experiment further by bridging the channels with a short patch lead on both amplifiers, where you can mix the tonal variances of each to your own preference. I found this useful on the 2061, where the second 'bass' channel has a darker character.

As for the 1974's tremolo. Mmmm. What a fabulous tone; authentic and tube driven for subtle pulses in your playing. Not an everyday sound, maybe, but one you can make great use of from time to time.

end has to be felt to be believed.

The 1974 combo and cab combination provides a similar, if somewhat more spongy and dynamic experience with more apparent highs and openness courtesy of the open-backed cabinet. It lacks the all-out headroom of the 2061, but it's still loud enough to gig reasonably, particularly if you mic up. As you push the volume, especially with humbuckers or P90s, you usher in a solid slab of thick, musical distortion,

**GBOPINION**

**MARSHALL 1974X COMBO GOLD STARS**

- ★ Wonderful aesthetics
- ★ Simple to use
- ★ Fabulous, classic sound

**BLACK MARKS**

- Stapled-on name panels (rear) are authentic... but vulnerable

**IDEAL FOR...**

As 2061, with less headroom and more open top end

**GBRATINGS**

**MARSHALL 2061X LEAD & BASS 20**

BUILD QUALITY	●●●●●
FEATURES	●●●●●
SOUNDS	●●●●●
VALUE FOR MONEY	●●●●●
<b>GBVERDICT</b>	●●●●●