

Lotsa Tone, Lotsa Control

The Aracom Vintage Rox VRX18



ARACOM VRX18

Price: \$1,125 (with Eminence Red Fang speaker)
Contact: aracom-amps.com.

LIKE MANY AMP BUILDERS, the work of Aracom Amplifiers founder Jeff Aragaki (VG “Builders Profile,” June ’09) combines his passion for music and guitars with decades of electronics experience. Aragaki started Aracom in 1997 and offers a line of hand-made tube amps that include custom and “tribute” designs in combo and head/cab formats using all-tube circuits, custom transformers, Mustard-style capacitors, hand-wired turret boards, solidstate rectifiers (with EZ81 tube rectifiers as an option), 1/2" birch ply cabinets with hardwood bracing, Tolex covering, metal corners, and leather handles.

Aracom’s Vintage Rox VRX18 combo is a two-channel amp – one vintage, one modern – with independent inputs and controls for Volume and Tone. It’s powered by two JJ EL84 power tubes, two 12AX7s and one 12AT7 in the preamp, a Hi/Low B+ voltage switch, and a single 12" Eminence Red Fang Alnico driver (10" or 12" drivers are options). Aracom’s Post-Phase-Inverter Master Volume Control (PPIMV) attenuates the signal before it goes to the power amp and allows complete bypass, eliminating “buzzy” preamp overdrive sounds. Coupled with the Hi/Low B+ switch (with cuts output from 18 watts to nine watts), the PPIMV gives the VRX18 a lot of volume versatility and as much clean headroom and saturated overdrive

as most any player would need for club gig, in the studio, or at home.

The VRX18’s simple lines, coupled with its dark-blue tolex, black corners, plexi-style logo plaque, and horizontal salt-and-pepper grillecloth, give it a clean look, while the top-mounted controls, chickenhead knobs, and vintage-style leather handle keep it from losing its vintage appeal. Overall, it’s a nice contrast in a sea of retro-looking amps. If for some reason the VRX’s aesthetics don’t appeal, Aragaki will dress an amp in anything from classic tweed to snakeskin.

Using a humbucker-loaded PRS Mira X and an early-’80s Ibanez Blazer with three single-coils, the VRX’s clean channel offered gobs of “California” punch. Its overtone-rich clean sound produced as much Strat-like quack from the Ibanez’s pickups as most players would ever need, while still giving a bit of gritty overdrive when dialed up. Low-end stayed nice

the PRS; OD pedals need not apply! Both channels responded well to pick attack and dynamics, and cleaned up nicely using the guitars’ Volume controls. The Tone control on each channel offers up

manageable/bedroom level. With the master Volume and channel Volume(s) cranked, the amp gives overdrive and volume ample enough for most gigs, with no “out of control” feedback or oversaturation. In the Hi B+ (18-watt) setting, there’s sufficient headroom in Channel One for most clean-tone situations outside of a jazz gig. While the VRX18 doesn’t offer channel switching, patching in an A/B box allows switching between channel inputs.

The Aracom Vintage Rox VRX18 offers solid British and American EL84 sounds with a transparent, easy-to-navigate set of controls and features at a price players are more accustomed to paying for mass-produced amps rather than a boutique amp. – *Phil Feser*



and full without falling apart, mids pulled back slightly, and highs remained complex and transparent.

Channel Two’s more pronounced mid-range and more aggressive gain produced a thick, British-flavored tone with much more substantial overdrive when called upon, especially with the humbuckers in

a subtle-yet-musical palette of voicings that work well to compensate between guitars and pickups as well as shape overall tone without extraneous coloration or making it sound un-natural. Same can be said for the Master Volume; unless it’s turned way down, it doesn’t alter the tone much. It simply brings volume to a

Got Twang If You Want it!

The TV Jones Spectra Sonic Supreme

RENOWNED PICKUP MAKER Thomas Jones may well benefit from having initials – T.V. – that are a major part of our everyday vernacular, but one does not build a reputation like his on letters

alone. More importantly, he and his company, TV Jones, design and produce stellar goods that deliver for enthusiasts of vintage tone.

Their latest creation, a guitar called the Spectra Sonic Supreme, boasts features

that read like a wish list from the most desirable vintage axes – a nitrocellulose finish, bound ebony fingerboard, and figured tonewood. Throw in a Bigsby B-12 vibrato tailpiece and vintage-inspired pickups for good measure... it sounds too easy.

In fact, there’s much more to this latest offering from the luthier and pickup maven than a catchy name and a jumble of vintage inspired parts. The Spectra Sonic Supreme is a design worthy of its influences, with a regard for design and construction detail that a vintage collector/damn good guitar player will certainly appreciate when they pick it up.

Any instrument can only be as good

as the sum of its parts. The Supreme has a chambered alder body with a multi-bound, flame-maple top joined to a set maple neck and covered with a rich red (or black) lacquer finish and fitted with top-notch hardware and two TV Classic pickups inspired by vintage Gretsch Filter Trons. It’s quality all down the line.

Grab the Spectra Sonic, and you feel the heft of the body, which is a touch wider than normal at 15 1/4", but only 1 7/8" deep. It’s a solid-feeling, yet lightweight, guitar. Thomas Jones says its body was inspired by a Kay (perhaps the Thin Twin/“Jimmy Reed” model?). Strum it acoustically and you immediately notice its resonance with a long, healthy sonic