

Traynor Darkhorse

BY ART THOMPSON

OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS A NUMBER of ultra small tube heads has emerged from companies such as Egnater, Mesa/Boogie, and Orange. These amps are typically powered by EL84 or 6V6 tubes (or both), and develop between 15 and 20 watts, making them well suited for rehearsals, gigs, and recording. Canadian amp maker Traynor, who has a long history of making rugged and good-

sounding tube amps, rolled out its own mini amp last year called the Darkhorse, which, at about a foot long, has a footprint similar to that of the ultra-tiny Mesa TransAtlantic.

The Darkhorse is a fairly straightforward design with one channel, a quartet of controls, and a tube complement of two 6V6s, a pair of 12AX7s in the pre-amp, and a 12AU7 that can be activated for an output of 2 watts. This is done by putting the Standby switch in its downward position (middle setting is standby, upper position is full power). The amp also features a 3-position mini toggle that selects between Brit, USA, and Pure settings—the latter of which bypasses the

tone stack for an increase in gain. The steel chassis sports a removable perforated metal cover that makes the tubes very easy to access. The knurled aluminum screws that hold the cover in place aren't the more convenient "captured" variety, however, which makes them fussier to reinstall and easy to lose. All of the circuit components except the transformers are neatly arranged on five PC boards, which are linked together via short wiring runs.

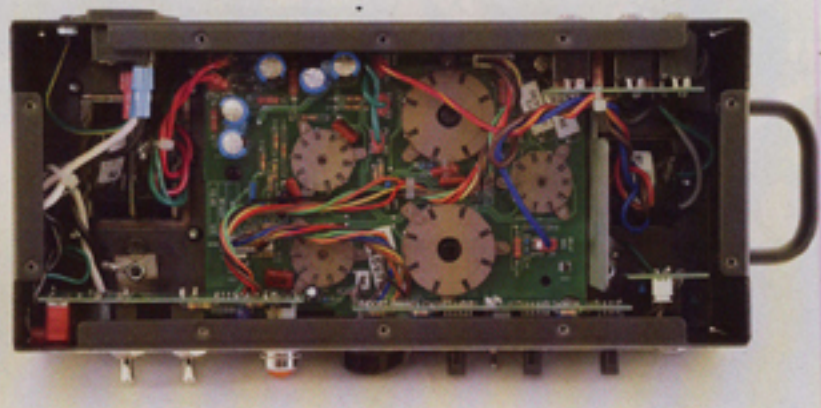
I tested the Darkhorse through its companion DHX12 cabinet, which is fitted with a Celestion G12M speaker and has a removable rear panel that's also held in place with knurled screws. Plugging in a

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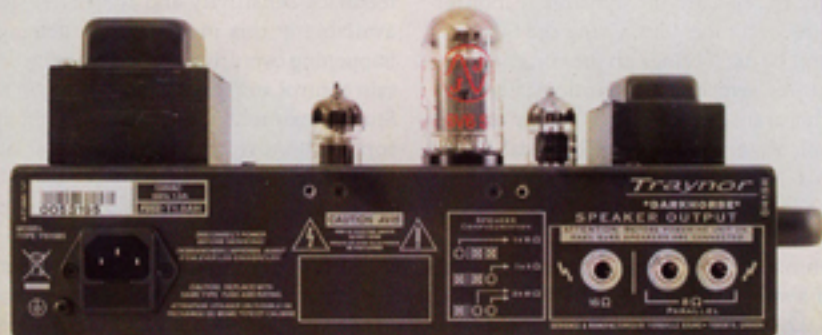


The majority of the Darkhorse's components are mounted on five PC boards.

PRS SC245 with the Darkhorse on its Brit setting, the Gain and Tone controls about halfway up, and the Master wide open, the sounds were righteously gritty with nice stringiness in the highs and good low-end kick. There's enough sustain for singing leads at or near the maximum Gain setting, and switching to Pure creates an instant increase in both gain and volume. If you want the maximum amount of distortion from this amp—which is not super high gain to begin with—the Pure function is the way to go.

Switching to the American setting and bringing the Gain control a little lower

than halfway elicits the kind of warm clean tones that are in the camp of a Fender Deluxe. A higher setting brings on a gritty rhythm tone, and there's enough distortion for lead playing with the Gain full up. Switching to a new single-coil equipped PRS DC3 yielded sparkling clean tones, but also significantly less overdrive. You'd definitely need to add a boost pedal for serious sustain with single-coils. The Master Volume tames the output effectively, and if you want to rock out at a really low level, switching to the 12AU7 setting allows you to rage away at a level you can talk over.



With the cover removed, the tubes are readily accessible.

STOMPBOX FEBV

For gigs, practice, and home recording, the Darkhorse is a great choice. It's one of the lightest amps in its class, and its abundant headroom is cool for players who use pedals for overdrive tones. It's also possibly the lowest priced amp of its type made on the North American continent, which is reason enough to give it a try. **A**

SPECIFICATIONS

CONTACT	Traynor, dist by Yorkville Sound, Inc., (716) 297-2920, yorkville.com
DH15H DARKHORSE	
PRICE	\$649 retail/\$499 street
CHANNELS	One
CONTROLS	Gain, Bass, Treble, Master, 3-position Voicing switch (Brit, USA, Pure)
TUBES	Two Sovtek 12AX7WA, one Electro-Harmonix 12AU7A, two JJ6V6S
POWER	15 watts/2 watts
EXTRAS	Standby switch has a 12AU7 setting for 2-watt operation, 16Ω and dual 8Ω speaker outs.
SPEAKER	DHX12 Darkhorse 1x12 w/Celestion G12M Greenback speaker (\$299 street)
WEIGHT	10.5 lbs
BUILT	Canada
KUDOS	Super compact. Handy Voicing switch. Delivers a good variety of clean to moderately overdriven tones.
CONCERNS	May not have enough gain for single-coil