

# CRAZY HORSE

Traynor DarkHorse DH15H amp

The amp pumps out 15 watts at the 6V6 setting and two watts at the 12AU7 setting.



\* BY CHRIS GILL

**T**HE RACE TO build the coolest tube mini head gets more and more interesting with each passing year, especially since several well-known amp builders have recently entered the fray. One new tube mini amp that has been generating a lot of buzz (not the 60-cycle hum way) is the aptly named DarkHorse from Canada's Traynor amp company. The Traynor DarkHorse is one of the tiniest 15-watt tube heads on the market, but Traynor managed to squeeze in a few extra features for about the same street price that its main competitors sell for.

## FEATURES

LIKE THE ORANGE Tiny Terror and Vox Night Train, the Traynor DarkHorse features an all-metal "lunch-box" chassis. However, unlike those amps, the DarkHorse leaves its transformers exposed and encloses the tubes in an easily removable cage that provides generous ventilation to keep them from overheating.

The DarkHorse is one of a handful of new amp designs that take advantage of 6V6 power tubes, which played a significant role in the magic tone of beloved Fender Deluxe, Princeton and Champ amps during the Fifties and Sixties. A pair of 6V6 tubes provide 15 watts of output power the DarkHorse, but the circuit also features a 12AU7 tube that guitarists can select for two watts of output and different tonal personalities.

The amp also has a tone-stack switch that gives the DarkHorse three distinct characters. At the USA setting the tone stack is placed between the first and second tube stages, while the Brit setting puts the tone stack after the second stage. The Pure setting bypasses the tone stack, providing higher overall gain and boosted midrange.

Designed to complement the DarkHorse head, Traynor's DarkHorse DHX12 1x12 speaker cabinet allows the amp's personality to shine. The cabinet features a single 25-watt Celestion G12M Greenback speaker as well as a clever removable rear panel that allows the DHX12 to function as a true closed- or open-back cabinet. Birch plywood construction and the slightly oversized cabinet allow the speaker to move an impressive amount of air, resulting in surprisingly loud and focused volume output.

## PERFORMANCE

WHETHER THEY'RE HEADS or combos, most tiny amps have their very own personality. The tone-stack



## SPECS

**LIST PRICES**  
DarkHorse DH15H head, \$649.00, DHX12 speaker cabinet, \$359.00  
**MANUFACTURER**  
Traynor, traynoramps.com  
**OUTPUT** 15 watts (two watts with 12AU7 switch engaged)  
**TUBES** Two 6V6 (power), one 12AU7 (power), two 12AX7 (preamp)  
**CHANNELS** One  
**FRONT PANEL** 1/4-inch input jack, gain, bass, Brit/Pure/USA tone-stack switch, treble, master, 6V6/Standby/12AU7 switch, On/Off switch  
**REAR PANEL** One 16-ohm and two eight-ohm 1/4-inch speaker output jacks  
**SPEAKER CABINET** 1x12-inch Celestion G12M Greenback

switch gives the DarkHorse several distinctive personalities that should appeal to a wide range of players. The USA setting produces bright clean tones with sharp attack as well as fat, tweed-like overdrive with big bottom end. The Pure setting is much louder, and when pushed to overdrive it produces snarling midrange and crunchy power chords with crisp harmonic overtones. The Brit setting provides the most distortion when the gain control is all the way up, and it scoops out a slight amount of midrange to produce slightly fizzy highs.

All three tone-stack settings have a rather pronounced midrange sweet spot that's perfectly dialed in for bluesy ZZ Top crunch and fat, sustaining solo tone. The gain doesn't quite push the amp into saturated distortion, but it provides a versatile palette of clean, overdrive and classic distortion textures. Although there's no midrange control, the amp's distinctive midrange voice is tuned for most styles of music, and it allows chords and single notes to sing with definition and power.

With the cabinet's removable back in place, the tone was focused and tight. The large cabinet produces ample resonance that makes the amp sound even bigger than it is. When cranked all the way up at 15 watts, the amp has just enough output to drive the Celestion Greenback to distortion, providing added crunch and harmonic complexity.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

IF YOU WANT more versatility than the average lunch-box amp provides, the Traynor DarkHorse is a true contender. It's especially fine for blues and hard rock players who want classic tones that they can rock with all night long. **BC**

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THE TONE-STACK SWITCH GIVES THE DARKHORSE THREE DISTINCT CHARACTERS.

•PRO	•CON
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>VERSATILE TONE-STACK SWITCH</li> <li>15- OR TWO-WATT OPERATION</li> <li>UNIQUE OPEN/CLOSED-BACK CABINET DESIGN</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NO MIDRANGE TONE CONTROL</li> </ul>