

# DREAM EXTREME

## Rivera Knucklehead Tré head

By Eric Kirkland

**A**MPS LIKE THE SOLDANO SLO-100, Bogner Überschall and Diezel VH4 are among the elite high-gain amplifiers because of their ability to create incredible quantities of gain without compromising clarity or musicality. Unfortunately, those amps come with price tags in excess of \$3,000. The new Rivera Knucklehead Tré is built for players that want a similar level of performance but have half as much money to spend. The big news here is that the Tré is more than a worthy competitor in terms of high-gain finesse; it also treats players to dazzling clean tones, pragmatic tone-shaping circuitry and scintillating touch sensitivity.

### Features

The two-channel Rivera draws its conservatively rated 120 watts from four EL34 power tubes and delivers them to speakers via a massive custom output transformer. A quintet of 12AX7s drive the preamp, and audiophile-grade electronic components ensure crystal-clear signal integrity and a superquick response. Controls for the Clean/Rhythm channel are basic: gain, bass, middle and tre-

ble, with push/pull pots that engage the midrange notch and bright circuits.

The Lead channel has independent gain and EQ controls, along with a master volume pot that can be pulled out to boost the channel's already ridiculous gain. The channel is also home to a circuit that Rivera calls Foundation. While the global presence knob adds sizzle and top to both channels, the Foundation control adjusts the Lead channel's bass depth, without producing a noticeable change in speaker damping.

The back panel has a channel-assignable effect loop and a jack for the included three-button foot-switch, which can be used for channel switching and to engage/disengage boost and the effect loop.

### Performance

Using a Peavey HP Special, I tested the Rivera with Mesa and Tone Tubby cabs. The cabs allowed me to create punchy modern sounds and sparkling Seventies-style clean tones with a level of sonic quality typically reserved for expensive boutique amps. But after notching the midrange and activating the bright circuit, I found that the Rivera was also surprisingly capable of slinky, blackface-era warmth.

I initially set the Lead channel's gain very low and the master volume at about six. The Rivera responded with a powerful Plexi-style crunch and enough headroom for some authentic AC/DC stage tones. Medium gain settings yielded rhythm blasts reminiscent of Green Day, while setting the gain on 10 made the Tré sing like a murderous chainsaw and pound the speakers with an ungodly low end.

Activating the boost was like kicking an already angry tiger in the ass, fueling the head's firestorm of gain and distortion to



### KA-CHING!

**LIST PRICE:** \$1,799.00  
**MANUFACTURER:** Rivera Research and Development, rivera.com

a frightening level. Sustain was practically endless, and no matter how fast I played, every note remained tight and

full. To assess the channel's open nature and ripping presence, I dialed the treble down to zero. Even at this setting, there was no loss of definition and screaming harmonics exploded from the speakers.

### The Bottom Line

In short, the Knucklehead Rivera Tré is one of the baddest amps on the planet. It generates gain like an unattended nuclear reactor and seems incapable of producing a weak or mushy note. Yet its delightful clean tones are among the best in its class. Rivera has again come through with a notable achievement in amplifier design. ■

**PRO:** Unbelievable gain, superb clarity, gorgeous clean tones

**CON:** No reverb, no master volume for the Clean channel

## THE FATHER AND SON TEAM PAUL RIVERA SR. AND JR. ON THE RIVERA KNUCKLEHEAD TRÉ

### What was the impetus for the Tré's design?

We needed an affordable amp that could produce extreme gain without sacrificing dynamic range. And we wanted it to have a monster clean tone, which is rare in high-gain amps. The Tré actually achieves those goals.

### What about the Tré's design or components allows it to achieve so much gain without losing clarity and headroom?

We developed a completely new circuit topology for this amp, using input from guitarists, studio engineers and producers across the globe. Internally, we use a lot of audiophile- and military-grade components, including film capacitors from Germany, oversized custom-made filter capacitors and metal film resistors. Our custom transformers have the most amazing tone, and we use costly silver-plated Teflon wire for most of our point-to-point wiring. Also, the Tré is built right here in Los Angeles, by electronic-assembly artisans that have worked with us since 1989.

### Who is currently using the Rivera Tré?

Jim Root of Stone Sour/Slipknot, Travis Miguel of Atréyu, Static X, Lincoln Park, Johnathan Montoya of Saliva, Joe Barresi [engineer for Tool's latest record]... More artists are discovering the amp every day. —E.K.