



Rivera Clubster 45

By Trent Salter



Clubster 45

Hitting the review bench this month is the Rivera Clubster 45, a 1x12 tube combo. It's one of the newer combos in the Clubster/Pubster Series currently available from Rivera Amplification. The Clubster 45 sports two independent switchable channels, genuine Accutronics three-spring reverb and a specially voiced 12" Celestion speaker. The open-back design boasts 45 watts of true tube tone powered by a pair of EL 34 tubes in the power section and a pair of 12 AX7A's in the preamp section. I must confess, I'm a real fan of the larger Rivera amps such as the renowned Knucklehead, but this is the first combo in the Rivera line that I've had a chance to audition. So, here we go. Calling in an assortment of guitars, a couple of beers and an hour of uninterrupted "tone time," it's time to put some rubber on the road with the Clubster 45.

Roadie Time . . . The Clubster weighs in at a manageable 38 lbs., right out of the box. One particularly cool feature is the slant-back front. Simply place the amp on the floor—no amp stand or riser needed—and it'll provide significant bass enhancement without sounding muddled or, worse, underpowered. The front panel offers both high and low gain 1/4" inputs. Channel I -- the overdrive channel -- features Volume, Bass (pull the switch for boost), Middle, Treble and Master Output controls. The 1/4" input for the supplied two-button footswitch is found between the two channels. Channel II features Volume (pull the switch for channel selection), Treble (pull for bright) and Bass. Common front-panel features include a global Reverb control, Presence and two rocker type switches for power and standby. The footswitch controls channel switching and reverb.

The rear-panel features include two speaker outputs, a line out and a patch section that can be used as an effects loop or for routing Power Amp In and Preamp Out. The Clubster is powered by two EL 34's and two 12 AX7A's in the preamp section. The speaker is a good one, too: a specially voiced 12" Celestion G-12 P-80, which really makes the most of the open-back cabinet.

Sound Check. . . As we get wired and ready to rock, I'll be testing with two traditional based guitars: a 2002 flame top Les Paul Standard with Burstbucker pickups, and a '90s photo-flame Telecaster. The Clubster's channel protocol departs from the traditional, since channel I is the overdriven channel and channel II is the clean one. So, let's get started with the Les Paul, going through the overdriven (channel I). I'm ready for some grittiness, so I tweak in the following settings: channel volume (which serves as the preamp master) on "10," Bass on "7," Mid on "6" and Treble on "7." With the master set at "2" and the global Presence control on "7," the Clubster spanks out a higher crunch tone that's warm with some amazingly tight bass response for an open-back 1x12 combo configuration. This channel is also equipped with a Preamp Boost function, which is engaged by a push/pull pot integrated with the Bass control knob. This function might have been better suited with a push/pull on the actual channel volume, which serves as the preamp control. It'd also be cool if this function could be foot-switched to boost solos on the fly. Regardless of where it may be located, this function brings a nice boost to the preamp saturation that seems to be just enough but not over the top. Power chords retain their tightness and definition, even at this higher gain setting, without getting mushy. Harmonics are lively and there's enough sustain to let the notes sing, along with the ability to achieve chimey overtones while tapping. The Clubster isn't intended to be a high-gain amp, but for a front-end section that uses just two 12AX7's, it offers a surprising amount of gain to dial in those great "Plexi" type crunch tones. Don't let its size fool you -- this is a loud 'n' punchy 45 watts. With further exploration of varied gain settings by reducing the channel volume, the Clubster performed very well, dishing out tones ranging from a mild crunch to something decidedly more aggressive.

Clean It Up . . . Next we'll move to channel two, the clean channel. I'll use a stock, photo-flame Telecaster to achieve that signature clean, spankin' tone. After tweaking the EQ I arrive at the following settings: Volume at "2-1/2," Treble at "5," Bass at "7" and Presence at "7" as well. This channel is where the Clubster excels. With a Telecaster the tones are transparent and spanky, just the way a Tele should be. I'm impressed with the amount of headroom in the power section, too. It lets the amp breathe without sounding choked or compressed. Moreover, the EQ section of the Clubster is very receptive to subtle boosts and cuts. With a slight increase in the treble response, I get a beautifully glassy tone out of the Tele. The genuine Accutronics three-spring reverb helps give the tone some depth and dimension that's very natural sounding, without the cheese factor of lesser-quality reverbs. My next step is to check out the effects loop. For me at least, a clean FX loop with a low S/N ratio is essential. Running a Visual Sound H2O pedal with the loop, choruses are lush and full. The Clubster is also equipped with a line out to get all the tone to your recording console. Plus, it has an external speaker output that works very well powering a Marshall 2x12 cab.

Final Mojo . . . The Rivera Clubster 45 packs a huge amount of punch into a small package. Overdriven tones are crunchy and chunky, while clean tones are transparent with ample headroom. From country to classic rock, this amp is certainly capable of producing the kind of tone you're looking for. The best part is, all that tube tone is packed into a 38 lb. chassis with enough power to handle most any gig. Line out and a clean FX loop add to the value of this club companion. Based on my road test, the only suggestion I'd offer is a foot-switchable "boost" function. That sure would be a great feature on this amp. At a pro user net price of \$1099, the Clubster won't break your back or your wallet! For this, the Clubster receives the acclaimed Silver M award. Register to win this amp at www.musicianshotline.com.



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