

Dr. Feelgood

GUITAR BUYER
BEST BUY!

A BRAND-NEW DESIGN FROM DR Z IS ALWAYS SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE, BUT WILL THE REMEDY CURE DAVID GREEVES' CRAVING FOR GREAT TONE?

Based in Cleveland, Ohio, Dr Z Amps has been on our radar for some time now. This relatively small company produces high-quality, hand-wired amps at a price that's significantly lower than many 'boutique' American manufacturers, with designs that tend to favour directness and ease-of-use over an abundance of knobs and channels, and fine guitar tone above all.

The company's latest new amp is the Remedy, a valve head that can run at 40 or 20 watts and employs the unusual combination of a front-end with Plexi-style high and normal volume controls and a quartet of 6V6 valves in the power amp. We'll be testing it out through the 'Z Best' cab, a no-less unconventional ported 2x12 enclosure. It's hard to know just what kind of sounds to expect from this highly original mixture. All we know is that we can't wait to find out...

PRE & POWER AMP

The Remedy's front panel presents the user with a single input, bass, mid and treble EQ controls and a pair of blended volume controls,

labelled 'high/loudness I' and 'normal/loudness II'. This last feature instantly brings to mind the celebrated Marshall 1959 Super Lead 'Plexi' heads of the late '60s, which featured separate bright (or 'high treble') and normal channels, with controls labelled 'volume I' and 'volume II'.

While these channels were intended to offer different voicings, players soon discovered that, by using both inputs at once, they could not only employ the two volume controls in tandem to tailor their tone but also create one of the great rock guitar sounds.

We asked Dr Z himself if this was indeed the inspiration for the Remedy's blended high and normal volume controls. "I've always loved the sound of the Marshall 1959 with jumpered inputs," he confirms. "You've got the active blending of the two volume controls, and then the EQ section itself for fine-tuning. You've effectively got two EQs – one active and one passive – and it's a very powerful way of adjusting the front end of the amp."

However, in place of a more Marshall-esque set of EL34s, the power amp uses four 6V6 valves, a type most closely associated with smaller Fender amps. According to Dr Z, this was in fact the starting point for the amp. "The Remedy was really derived from its output section. We started with that and then worked backwards to the input jack! I've built a lot of EL84 amps and I love EL84s, but sometimes

your ear craves a different timbre. 6V6s have such a warm sound with a really sweet top end. EL84s are brilliant, but they can be a little shrill and harsh in the top end in a way that 6V6s never are. The mid-range is also very transparent, so when you hit them with that Marshall-y mid-range it works great."

Unlike the many Dr Z amps that employ a rectifier valve, the Remedy uses a solid-state rectifier to supply power to the valves. Once again, this is all about tone: "I wanted to use a nice, stiff power supply," says Dr Z. "With a tube rectifier, 6V6s can get a little soft and flubby in the low end. With the Remedy, I've designed the bottom end to be tight."

Unlike the majority of larger Marshall and Fender amps, which use a fixed bias, the Remedy's 6V6 valves are cathode-biased (or 'self-biased'). The bias sets the current in the output valves when they are idle and is a crucial factor in how they respond to your signal. Here, cathode-biasing should introduce a little of the suppleness and sag that a valve rectifier might have provided.

At the rear of the amp, there are three separate speaker outputs at 4, 8 and 16 ohms, a socket for an IEC mains power lead and an additional AC outlet. This is not a feature you see on many amps, but the idea is to provide a convenient power source for other gear, such as your pedalboard. That way, your amp and effects share a common earth and 'ground loop' hum can be avoided. ➔

GBINFO

DR Z REMEDY

PRICE: £1,299
BUILT IN: USA
TYPE: Valve head
POWER: 40 watts, switchable to 20 watts
VALVES: 4 x 6V6, 3 x 12AX7
FEATURES: Single channel with high & normal volume, bass, middle & treble controls, full-/half-power switch, 3 x speaker outputs (4, 8 or 16 ohms), AC outlet
DIMENSIONS: 248(h) x 423(w) x 241(d) mm (max, with handle, and controls)
WEIGHT: 15kg (33lb)

Z BEST CAB

PRICE: £679
BUILT IN: USA
TYPE: Ported 2x12 cab
POWER: 60 watts @ 8 ohms
SPEAKERS: 1 x 12-inch Celestion Vintage 30, 1 x 12-inch Celestion G12H30
DIMENSIONS: 718(h) x 489(w) x 349(d) mm
WEIGHT: 27kg (60lb)

CONTACT:

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GBVERDICT

DR Z REMEDY & Z BEST CAB

GOLD STARS

- ★ Blended volumes are great for tone shaping
- ★ Wonderful clean and driven sounds
- ★ Half-power mode sounds just as good
- ★ The Z Best sounds huge!

BLACK MARKS

- None

IDEAL FOR...

Rich, expressive tone in a Southern rock vein

GBRATING



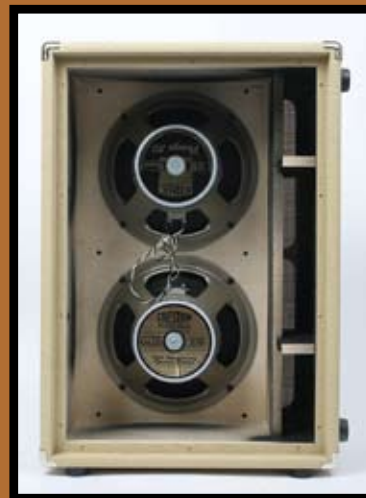
MEDICINE CABINET

WE LIFT THE LID ON THE Z BEST SPEAKER CAB

■ We asked Dr Z to tell us a little more about the Z Best cab, starting with where the name came from...

"The 'Z Best' name? It's not that I'm an egotist and I think this is the best! The name actually came from the company that makes our cabinets - Best Audio in Cleveland - who make sound reinforcement equipment. They made 2x15 Thiele-Small PA speakers and suggested making a 2x12 for guitar with a front port. With a closed-back cab, you get a tuned, direct sound, but an open-backed cab gives you that nice ambient sound. Here, the port kind of simulates what's happening with an open-back cab, but you also get that forward thrust.

"The beauty of the design is that you can set the treble, middle and bass. The treble is defined by the choice of driver - the Vintage 30 has a nice high and upper-mid response, so that's kind of like my tweeter. The G12H is a little warmer and does lows and low-mids a little better, so that's kind of like the woofer. The length of the shelf inside determines how much



mid-range is rolled around it and cancelled out. This balances the strong mids of the Celestion speakers and makes the sound cleaner and more balanced. The port sets the bass, and it's tuned to 30Hz, which is very low - you feel it more than hear it."



The Remedy still has one more trick up its sleeve: a full-/half-power switch. Not so revolutionary, you might think, but this feature is implemented in a very different way to other amps. Rather than simply switching one pair of valves off in half-power mode, the Remedy keeps all four on as before, but only feeds the signal to two.

A trickier thing to pull off than it sounds, this design ensures that everything inside the amp behaves as before - the valves' plate voltage, the load on the output transformer and so on - so you get the same sound at half the volume. We'll discover how well this works in practice shortly.

CABINETS & SPEAKERS

The Remedy is presented in a sturdy, neatly covered cabinet, with chrome corner protectors, white piping and blonde Tolex. We think it looks great, but it's also available with black or red Tolex, as well as a wide range of custom colours and speaker cloths.

Dr Z offers 1x12, 2x10 and 2x12 cabinets that will match this amp, but we're testing it with the 'Z Best' cab, a 2x12 with an unusual ported design (see box above). Ported cabinets feature widely when it comes to bass amps, PA speakers and hi-fi systems, but they're pretty rare in guitar circles.

The Z Best uses two mismatched speakers - Celestion's Vintage 30 and G12H30 - and has a closed back. A precisely positioned internal shelf affects the way sound bounces around inside the cab, which has the effect of cancelling out some of the highs and mid-range, leaving the bass to be fired out of the front-facing port.

The cab does weigh a bit more than the average 2x12, but it is very solidly built. Big rubber feet on two of the sides mean that it can be stood on its end (as pictured left) or placed flat with the port right next to floor, giving even more low-end power.

SOUNDS

The bass-enhancing effects of the Z Best are immediately obvious

DETAILS

THREE-DIMENSIONAL PLEXI-INSPIRED TONES AND A WONDERFULLY BIG-SOUNDING CAB



■ The ported Z Best cab supplies a big, balanced sound that will comfortably fill the whole room



■ The Remedy's twin, blended volume controls let you boost the high or low end according to taste



■ The spartan back panel of the Remedy is where you'll find the full-/half-power switch

when we power up the Remedy. That's not to say that it sounds unbalanced or unnatural – it's just very, very big, with a deep, full low end, detailed mids and lots of top end bite. This is the kind of cab that can really fill a big room, but unlike some closed-back 4x12 designs, which throw sound to the back of the room but can sound hard and unforgiving close-up, the Z Best wraps you up in tone whether you're right beside it or at the other end of the room.

What a tone it is too. The Plexi influence is unmistakable, with flavours of Hendrix, Cream, ZZ Top and the Allman Brothers to the fore, but that's only one part of what the Remedy has to offer. Overdriven, the sound is wonderfully thick and juicy, but the real joy is in the amp's wonderful articulation.

There's plenty of bite and definition without any feeling of stiffness and edge. Notes seem to swell and bloom effortlessly after the initial attack and you feel a direct, invisible connection between what your fingers are doing and what's pouring from the speakers. If this doesn't put a big smile on your

face, then you should probably just pack it in and take up knitting.

Even in the cleaner range of the volume controls, there's a wonderful sense of sustain and fatness. The high and normal volumes prove to be a brilliant way of shaping the sound, letting you push the low end into break-up while keeping the top cleaner, or vice versa.

Turning up the high volume brings in some wonderfully glassy, gritty overdrive that works especially well with Stratocasters, though Les Paul fans will be equally happy to plug in break out the big riffs. At all times, however, the wide, warm mid-range knits the whole sound together in a wonderfully organic way.

The half-power mode is a real revelation, offering the same tone, the same break-up behaviour – essentially, the same amp – at half the volume. There's none of the cold, anaemic sound that can afflict the low-power modes of some amps. On bigger stages, the Remedy plugged into the Z Best at 40 watts will provide all the power you need, but with a 1x12 at 20 watts the amp is well-suited to club gigs.

GBCONCLUSION

SIMPLY SUPERB TONE

■ Although we could happily wax lyrical about the Remedy's rich tone, musical articulation and responsive dynamics, the bottom line is that this amp is simply very, very good fun.

Like so many Dr Z designs, the Remedy is so intuitive to use that great tones seem to pour forth with the minimum of effort. It also has the rare ability to flatter just about any guitar you plug in while still revealing its core character. But while other Dr Z amps could be accused of doing only one thing but doing it very well, the Remedy's uniquely implemented half-power mode effectively means you can use the same fat clean tones and juicy, expressive overdrives at two different volumes with no compromise. This head and cab are not cheap – though they are notably less costly than many other high-end US imports – but if you care about build quality, performance and above all tone, the Remedy and Z Best are worth every penny. **GB**