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EZ RIDER

IN A UK EXCLUSIVE, **DAVID GREEVES** TEST-DRIVES THE NEW EZG-50, DR Z'S HOMAGE TO ONE OF THE GREATEST GUITAR SOUNDS OF ALL TIME

... We got our very first tantalising glimpse of the much-anticipated EZG-50 when we visited Dr Z back in issue 85. Taking its lead from classic mid-1960s 'blackface' Fender amps like the Super Reverb and Pro Reverb, the EZG-50 is billed by Dr Z as delivering the definitive 6L6 clean sound – in other words, big, bright and beloved of blues, country, soul and rock 'n' roll players.

The Fender Super Reverb was used by a whole host of great players, including Muddy Waters, Johnny Winter and Stevie Ray Vaughan, but it's the latter who is largely responsible for the reverence afforded to this amp by blues fans.

Dr Z is very open about the sound he's aiming for with the new EZG-50: "With all my amps I try to capture a sound that I've heard on a recording or a sound that's in my head," he says. "For example, the Stang Ray – that was the opening chord of 'A Hard Day's Night'. Clang! That piano-like tone. The Route 66 was a 'Hideaway'-type tone from the Bluesbreaker's 'Beano' album. The EZG came about because of the SRV *Live At The El Mocambo* tone and later Hendrix recordings when he was using blackface amps."

These are certainly big shoes to fill, but if the EZG-50 can deliver... Let's just say that there will be a lot of tone freaks out there taking an interest in this one. Let's see what it's made of.

PRE & POWER AMP

The EZG-50 is a single-channel amp, available in head format only. As is typical of Dr Z amps, there aren't dozens of different knobs to fiddle about with – the company generally prefers to offer the player a minimalist selection of functional, carefully designed controls. And so it is with the new EZG-50, which has just seven ribbed cream control knobs.

The layout is clear and easy to get your head around, with pre and post volume controls, treble, mid and bass EQ controls and reverb dwell and mix controls. However, it's worth pointing out that the pre and post controls work a little differently to conventional gain and master volume controls. Dr Z explains: "That circuit came out of the need to get to the sweet spot that 40-watt Fender amps have at 4 on the dial. Today, turning up to 4 is just too loud for most clubs. I designed the circuit to give enough output drive to thicken the output at a lower volume." We will see how this works in practice in due course.

Meanwhile, the EQ controls are self-explanatory, while the reverb dwell and mix knobs set the length of the reverb tail and level of the effect respectively. The tube-driven reverb circuit uses a short spring reverb tray, mounted in the bottom of the head. There's no effects loop at the rear, just three speaker output sockets (at 4, 8 and 16 ohms) and an IEC mains power socket. The rear of the amp features

the same elliptical opening as the front, though without a grille cloth, allowing clear sight of the amplifier's valve complement.

Alongside the pair of 6L6 output valves is a GZ34 power rectifier valve. The natural compression that occurs when this valve is faced with a surge in demand for power on the initial attack of loud notes should hopefully add some bouncy and expressive 'sag' to the sound of the amp. The preamp uses two 12AX7s and two NOS ('new old stock') 12AT7 valves. A couple of sizeable transformers also hang down from the amp chassis and contribute to the EZG-50's 18kg weight.

Inside the chassis, the circuitry is all meticulously wired by hand and, having visited Dr Z's workshop in Cleveland, Ohio, we have the utmost confidence in the build quality of these amps. The EZG-50 uses high-quality components throughout, including some NOS Allen Bradley carbon comp resistors. So far, so good.

CABINETS & SPEAKERS

We're testing out the EZG-50 with one of Dr Z's open-backed 4x10 speaker cabinets, fitted with a quartet of custom 10-inch ceramic-magnet speakers, made to the company's exact specifications by Eminence. A number of other options are available, including the unusual 2x12 Thiele-ported 'Z Best' cabinet (£599).

The 4x10 cab uses a traditional floating baffle design and is built

GBINFO

DR Z EZG-50

PRICE: £1,450
BUILT IN: USA
TYPE: All-valve head
POWER: 50 watts
VALVES: 2 x 6L6,
 2 x 12AX7, 2 x 12AT7,
 1 x GZ34
FEATURES: Single channel
 with pre & post volume,
 treble, mid, bass, reverb
 dwell & reverb mix
 controls, spring reverb, 3
 x speaker outputs (4, 8 &
 16 ohms)
DIMENSIONS: 257(h) x
 578(w) x 254(d) mm
WEIGHT: 18kg (40lbs)

DR Z 4X10 CAB

PRICE: £549
BUILT IN: USA
TYPE: Closed-back 4x10
 cab
POWER: 280 watts @ 4
 ohms
SPEAKERS: 4 x 10-inch
 Dr Z custom speakers
DIMENSIONS: 610(h) x
 610(w) x 254(d) mm
WEIGHT: 24kg (53lbs)
CONTACT:
 Peach Guitars
PHONE: 01376 553675
WEB: www.drzamps.com



THIS YEAR'S MODEL

DR Z CELEBRATES THE BIG TWO-ZERO

Sharp-eyed readers may have noticed this small metal plaque screwed into the top of the EZG-50.

This neat, unobtrusive adornment celebrates Dr Z Amps' 20th anniversary and will appear only on amps made during 2008. Mike Zaito (aka Dr Z) started the company, which is based in Cleveland, Ohio, back in 1988, and soon



found himself building bespoke amps for sometime Eagle and all-round guitar god Joe Walsh. The company has since expanded to offer over a dozen different designs, all hand-built in traditional fashion, and can count the likes of the Black Crowes, Death Cab For Cutie, the Bluesbreakers' Buddy Whittington and Brad Paisley among its users.

"THERE'S SOMETHING ALMOST MAGICAL ABOUT THIS SOUND"



Both head and cab are neatly upholstered in smart and durable blonde Tolex

from high-quality Baltic birch ply. Both head and cab are neatly upholstered in smart and durable blonde Tolex, though as with all Dr Z amps, they're also available in black or red. When it comes to the grille cloth, you have the choice of 'salt & pepper' (shown here), tan, brown or black, though we think the grille/Tolex combination seen on the review samples works particularly well with the amp's black and cream control panel, complete with its funky Interstate signpost-style EZG-50 logo.

If the head looks rather large (and it's certainly not small), this is something of an optical illusion caused by the fact that the 4x10 cab is the same width as the head. In fact, the EZG-50 is smaller than a Marshall DSL head, for example, and looks much more in proportion atop a 2x12 or 4x12 cab. However, for Fender Bassman and Super Reverb fans, it has to be a 4x10, and we don't think that anyone could disagree that this matching head and cab have a very strong visual presence.

SOUNDS

So, on to the important stuff – how does it sound? Before spending some quality time with our review sample, we'd already seen the EZG-50 being put through its paces by some top-class players (including Bluesbreakers guitarist and long-time Dr Z user Buddy Whittington) and were mightily impressed. So, after getting the amp all to ourselves and putting it through its paces under laboratory conditions, we were pleasantly surprised to find that the EZG-50 sounds even better than we remembered.

There's plenty of volume and lots of clean headroom, and even when the



The 10-inch speakers are custom-made to Dr Z specs by Eminence

amp does start break into overdrive, the sound doesn't lose any of its wonderful, sparkly clarity. Thanks in part to the open-backed 4x10 cab, the amp pumps out a huge, room-filling sound. There's masses of full and fruity bass, even with the bass control turned well down. Ease back the mid control too and you're rewarded with a sweet, chiming tone that works brilliantly with single-coil pickups. Turning up the treble knob seems to bring in more gain in the top end, adding some dirt to the high frequencies.

It's rare to find an amp that manages to sound so clean and bright *and* sweet and lush at the same time. There's something almost magical about the top end here. Even with the volume and treble turned up high, there's no harshness in evidence – and we do mean none. The sound is supremely bright and clear but always very pleasing and musical, and certainly never piercing in that take-your-head-off way that some Twins and Super Reverbs can be.

The EZG-50 covers everything →

DETAILS

HIGH-QUALITY BUILD AND OUTSTANDING BOUTIQUE TONE



■ The clearly laid-out front panel features some suitably traditional cream knobs



■ The control panel is completed by a funky Interstate signpost-style EZG-50 logo



■ The dwell and mix controls set the length of the reverb tail and level of the effect

GBVERDICT

DR Z EZG-50
GOLD STARS

- ★ Tone to die for – big and bright but never harsh
- ★ Simple yet powerful controls
- ★ Very high build quality

BLACK MARKS

- None

IDEAL FOR...

Anyone seeking a loud, clean amp for blues, soul and old-fashioned rock 'n' roll

GBRATING



from completely clean territory up to medium break-up, and if you want more distortion, the amp responds brilliantly to boost and overdrive pedals. As we've said, the post volume control doesn't function like a master volume control – you can't turn it down while turning up the pre volume to create preamp distortion at lower levels, for example. Instead, turning up the post control brings in more fullness and growl in an exceptionally useful and natural way.



While it will excel with any guitar, the EZG-50 seems particularly suited to Strat players. There something about it's mix of full, chewy bass and sweet, shiny treble that brings out the best in Fender's most celebrated six-string. Stevie Ray Vaughan fans will certainly not be disappointed. As promised, the EZG-50 positively nails the sound of SRV on the seminal *Live At The El Mocambo* concert video and on tracks like 'Lenny' and 'Little Wing'. Speaking of which, there's more than a little of Hendrix in his cleaner moments in here too. The same character also guarantees that this amp will cut through and carry to the back of the room, even with the amp at a relatively modest volume.

After so much gushing praise, you may be surprised to learn that we haven't even got to the best bit yet – the reverb, which is one of the sweetest (there's that word again), loveliest reverb sounds we've heard from an amp in a long time. The dwell and mix knobs offer detailed control over the effect, from a subtle shimmer to a full-on spring reverb sound. Turn up the dwell and mix controls and you are rewarded with a wonderfully authentic and over the top Dick Dale surf guitar tone.

GBCONCLUSION

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

■ As you'll no doubt have guessed, we absolutely love this amp. With a tone this big, lush and beautiful, we have no hesitation in giving the EZG-50 our 'Best Buy' seal of approval.

That's not to say that this is everybody's perfect amp – if you want a 'British' overdriven sound, look elsewhere, and metal? Forget about it. But what it sets out to do – to provide perhaps the ultimate dual-6L6 clean tone in the classic American mode – it accomplishes brilliantly. With a couple of high-quality pedals for company, this amp will cover a huge amount of ground, from jazz to rockabilly (crank up that reverb!), and Stones-ey blues rock to SRV in full flow. Even though this is Dr Z's most expensive amp to date, it's still considerably cheaper than many high-end, hand-wired US amps, and more than a match in terms of design, components and construction. If this is the sound you've been looking for, look no further. **GB**