

FIRST PLAY



ORANGE O TONE 40
£329

WHAT IS IT? Single-channel Class A/B solid-state 40-watt combo with effects loop, tremolo and reverb

Orange has manufactured a very presentable amplifier, with its perfectly appointed Tolex and black trim fronted by the fawn basket-weave speaker cloth

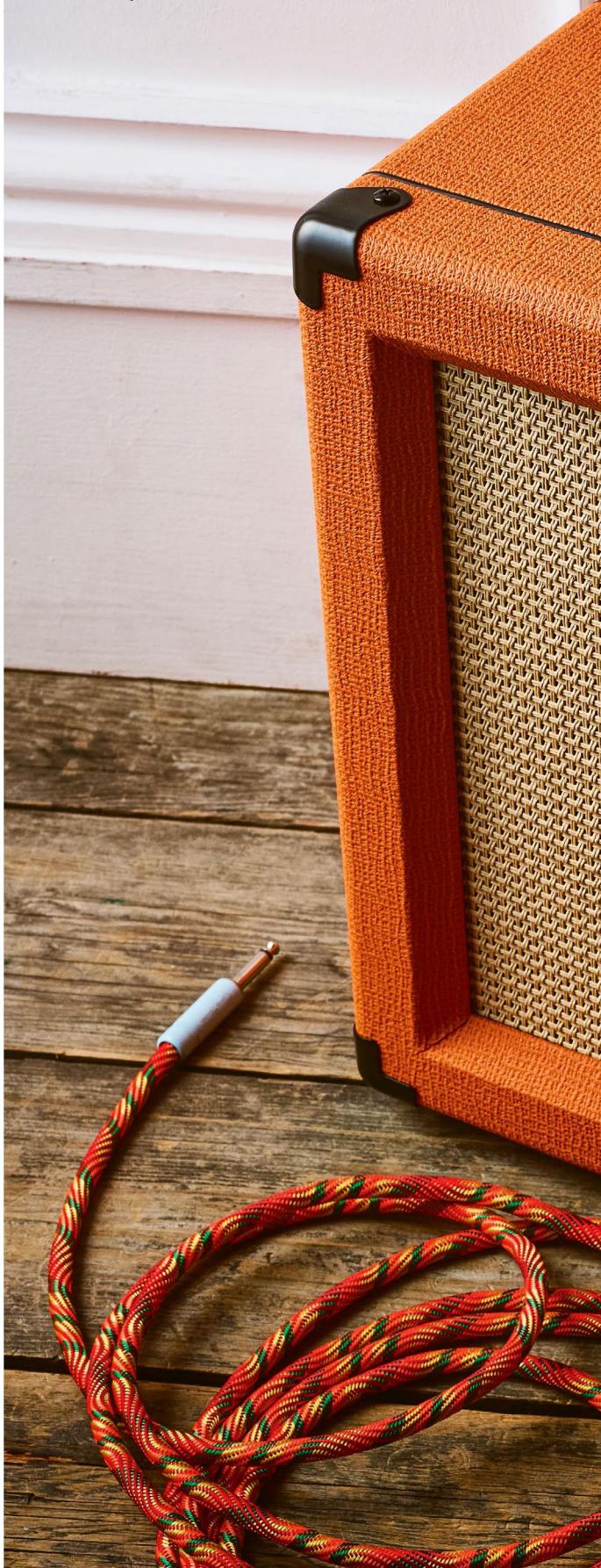
Tangerine Dream

What's loud, light and orange?
The latest solid-state and
affordable combo from Orange

Words Martin Smith **Photography** Olly Curtis

Cliff Cooper, Orange's first CEO, founded the company back in 1968 during the beat combo heyday of British music, creating one of a select handful of history-making British valve amplifier brands. Orange had no issue marking itself out with a slew of oversized, colourful cabinets and even a trendy London store called, naturally, the Orange store. Business boomed and soon the brand had expanded to include both a record label and an artist management company. Ownership and production issues from 1978 to 1998 led to only a few products being manufactured with various partners including Gibson. However, since the millennium Orange has managed to rebuild its market position, retaining the esoteric sound and styling that has set the brand apart since its inception.

Today's market for guitar amps can perhaps be split into two general categories: powerful heads and cabs for professional touring musicians, and smaller units for smaller gigs, practice and domestic use. The new O Tone 40 attempts to bridge





1. Orange's penchant for 'picture' control labels is continued here. It may take some moments to fathom, but the graphics do at least make sense

2. The deep, sealed-back cabinet design allows for a tight and punchy bottom-end response, far exceeding our expectations

3. The integration of the effects loop allows for the best connection to your reverb, delays and certain modulation effects



this gap, being loud enough for band use but portable enough for a one-hand carry. This is achieved by combining A/B Class solid-state topology with a sealed-back cabinet, housing the custom-designed 'Voice of the World' speaker. While such a small combo would often feature an open back, allowing for pedal and cable cartage, that isn't possible with the O-Tone's sealed cabinet, and so extra luggage will likely be necessary. That said, this is a traditional design feature of Orange amps that produces the punchy sound many users know and love. The extra depth of

this cabinet combined with the clean gain brings the Roland Cube amps to mind for their clean power and portability.

The clean single-channel structure of this amp would certainly suit players who have their pedal game dialled in to perfection and who may regard amps as anywhere from a device to make their pedals louder to a necessary inconvenience. In response, Orange wisely designed this to be small, light and loud. This amp leaves the character of the sound wide open for whichever guitars and pedals are appropriate for the application.

A line output is provided to feed a power amp or recording device perhaps, but it's worth noting that this isn't a speaker emulation or an impulse response signal.

Feel & Sounds

We thought a suitable test for this amp would be an old-fashioned jam session with a drummer and bass player in our studio's live room. A wide array of the usual suspects, pedal-wise, were rigged up, anticipating the potential for some extensive tone flavouring. Beginning with the straight-up natural sound of the amp, we were greeted to a much larger soundstage than expected from its small form. This combo could be a contender for the loudest, smallest amp we've used and it had more than enough horsepower to hold its own against our loud rhythm section. The depth of sound emanating from the single 12-inch speaker was impressive.

Responsiveness to touch on the strings is a huge contributor to the enjoyment of playing electric guitar. Powerful notes may cause the amp to sag, resulting in a form of compression that feels sympathetic to the player. It's a beautiful thing – and thankfully we can feel a certain amount of that familiar response here. What usually accompanies this compression effect, certainly in most valve amplifiers, is saturation. This would come in the form of glassy excitement courtesy





of electrons screaming through metal grids inside glass bottles.

With solid-state design, we don't have an overdrive facility built-in, but there are many reasons why it may be preferable for an amp not to distort. Indeed for the jazz, country and folk fraternities, the lack of hairy sizzle would be quite desirable, and with the O Tone's addition of reverb and tremolo this amp may make a very good partner for the cleaner-sounding guitarist.

It's a great-sounding digital reverb, too, tuned very much to our taste with a classic drip of presence and a good amount of dwell. The tremolo effect performed its throbbing duties in the expected way; however, its top speed is perhaps a little less than dizzying.

There's plenty of tone-shaping potential available via a three-band tone stack comprising the usual bass, middle, treble. These controls, due to the circuit design, offer more effective range than passive EQ, as found in traditional valve amplifiers like Fender and Marshall, for example. There's a solidity and boldness, too, resulting from the A/B Class power amp combined with the custom driver and cabinet, and we were able to achieve a slinkier tone by rolling off some bass and increasing the treble, contributing to a more Fender-y tone. Conversely, bringing up the mid control and reducing the top and bottom achieves a more Marshall-like frequency profile, overdrive pedal permitting.

This combo could be a contender for the loudest, smallest amp... and it held its own against our loud rhythm section

Kicking in a subtle amount of valve-style overdrive provides a base layer of colour and personality and begins to illustrate where you can take the amp. We were even able to produce the sizzling saturation Orange is known for by the addition of a certain rodent-themed distortion pedal, with the amp staying tight and punchy despite some punishing gain. The effects loop is usually the most suitable place to connect some final reverb and delay, and we were soon swimming through a sea of modulated reverb.

Verdict

The balance of power and convenience here is ideal for the rehearsing/gigging guitar player, and the onboard reverb and tremolo have you covered for a wide range of clean sounds, extended further by the effects loop. Of course, where you take the amp is down to you and your pedalboard, but the O Tone supports that potential diversity, offering bags of power and punch in a tiny and very portable package. **G**



ORANGE O TONE 40

PRICE: £329

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Solid-state combo

VALVES: None

OUTPUT: 40W

DIMENSIONS: 440 (w) x 395 (h) x 230mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 11.5/25.9

CABINET: MDF

LOUDSPEAKER: 12" 'Voice of the World'

CHANNELS: 1

CONTROLS: Reverb, Tremolo Depth, Tremolo Speed, Bass, Middle, Treble, Gain.

FOOTSWITCH: For tremolo only (not included)

ADDITIONAL FEATURES:

1/8" jack playback input, 1/4" headphone output, effects loop, 1/4" line output

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: None

Orange Amplification

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www.orangeamps.com

8/10

PROS Tons of bold, clean headroom; lots of depth for a small 1x12 cabinet; very light and portable

CONS We would have liked a switching jack for both the reverb and tremolo effects – only the tremolo is footswitchable here