

TONESMITH

MESA BOOGIE

THE EDITED HIGHLIGHTS

1969: Randall Smith guts, then rebuilds a seriously hot-rodded Fender Princeton. Carlos Santana hears it and utters the immortal words, "Shit man. That little thing really Boogies!" Word spreads fast, Randy builds plenty more.

1972: The first amplifier with cascading gain debuts: The Boogie Mark I.

1980: The first modern channel-switching amplifier: The Mark IIA. IIB model follows in '82 with the first ever effects loop. Mark Series continues to evolve, culminating in the immense Mark IV of 1989.

1991: Mesa introduces the Rectifier series, and redefines the sound of rock music again. Lots more amps follow throughout the 1990s

2002: The Road King offers four channels, different assignable power tube types, output levels and speaker cabs

2005: Hello Stiletto – see the previous pages

For the full story, see Mesa's website, www.mesa-boogie.com

MESA BOOGIE'S FOUNDER TAKES TIME FOR A CHAT

Randall Smith is the founder and designer of Mesa Boogie amplifiers. From the first Boogie-modded Fender Princetons, all the way through Mark Series amps right up to the latest Rectos, Randy has brought you the lot. The latest amp from the Mesa 'Home Of Tone' is the Stiletto (reviewed on the previous pages), so we took the opportunity to ask him about his new baby.

GB: How did the concept for the Stiletto come about?

Randall Smith: "We were interested in making a sonically compatible 'partner' for the Rectifier, especially for bands with two guitars. We wanted to enable each player to carve out and OWN a niche in the spectrum such that the individual sounds were distinctive, identifiable and ultimately compatible.

"Using EL-34 power tubes put us on the path toward tones that are distinctive from, yet complimentary to the 6L6s used in the Rectifiers. Both the dynamic and harmonic characteristics of these two tubes are quite different. Where the 6L6s have massive, airy low end that seems to emanate from the center of the earth, the EL-34s, by cutting off that 'sub-sonic' octave, are more tightly focused and punchy. Their frequency response goes to the bottom of the musical spectrum and stops there. But the 6L6s just keep going, almost gathering momentum as they drop below the lowest musical frequencies – kind of suggesting the movement of tectonic plates far beneath the earth's surface! And moving this kind of heft makes them slower and less urgent than the EL-34s.

The high-end distortion characteristics are also way different. The ELs have a fine crystalline granularity that pokes out above the presence region where the 6L6s are smoother and less peaky. They actually go higher even though that harmonic peak of the EL makes them seem brighter.

The job was to develop circuitry that accentuated these different characteristics and took them further out, while paying homage to the classic ancestry of British amplification."

Were you concerned about cannibalizing the market for the Dual Rectifier series?

"No, not really. For some players, the Rectifier is just right; for others, it isn't. We wanted to offer something for those other guys.

"One of the hippest things about what we get to do is that different amplifiers create different musical styles. You can play a lot of different musical styles on a piano, and yet the instrument always sounds the same. But you can take one guitar and, depending on the amp you use and how you set it, totally different musical styles are suggested and become possible. It's the AMP that's setting the style and in many cases DEFINING the style. With the Stiletto we're just offering another sonic palette to play with."

How different is the Stiletto to a Dual Rec in terms of the circuit?

"Well, there are lots of similarities, but when you look close, everything is different, often substantially different. For example, we amassed a PILE of prototype transformers, both power and output, before we were satisfied. They may look like Recto transformers, but everything inside is different – same thing with the circuitry. You can see familiar bits here and there but on a closer look, everything is different. Remember, most everything can be traced back to the original source, which for both amps is the four-ten Bassman. And that's pretty much like tracing all hot-rods, race cars (and most modern cars) back to the '32 Ford with a flat-head V-8 – The fabled 'Deuce Coupe'. I like to give credit to the original source, because NONE of us would be doing amps otherwise. And yet... everything is different."



Are there technical barriers to making the Stiletto's modes footswitchable, or is there another reason they're non-switchable options?

"Making the modes footswitchable would put us on the slippery-slope toward compromised performance. You would need to re-set the controls in order to dial-in the optimum tone for each sound. So if we had made them footswitchable you would then want to have a separate gain control, then you would need another master, and at least a treble, but better a whole 'nother tone stack. And actually, the presence is kind of crucial to getting it just right... See what I mean?"

Anything else you'd like to add?

"Yes. Thanks. For the opportunity we're given by guitarists to do something we love. I'm speaking for myself, Doug [West], Jim [Aschow], Steve [Mueller], Tien [Lawrence] and the Mesa/Boogie crew.

"There's a circular reinforcement, not just among ourselves but with the whole world of guitar players out there. We often talk about how fortunate we are to be doing something we love and the positive feedback we keep getting just pushes us to go for it even more. Just like hitting a great groove on the bandstand and getting that audience feedback.

So, Thanks, thanks again!" **GB**