



Egnater Armageddon \$3,395

This new Egnater workhorse has tonnes of personality and oodles of tone **by Steve Henderson**

Bruce Egnater has a problem. He keeps coming up with new ideas that are really practical, and then releasing them into the market in cool-looking boxes that are both rock 'n' roll and refined... a neat trick. But that's not the problem. His amps have facilities that you don't see anywhere else, facilities that make this guitar playing caper just a bit more

fun. But that's not the problem, either. The problem is, he makes them all just so damned good.

The Armageddon head is a 120 watt powerhouse that has three channels, two tone sets, various gain and voicing switches, a half power switch, a smart gate, various global tone shapers and loads of volume knobs to access the gain at various points in the signal

chain. It also has a buffered loop with in and out controls, a reverb control for each channel, a speaker-compensated XLR line out, MIDI, and a footswitch with 7 buttons that accesses all the important stuff and connects with any old mike cable. Best of all, and in spite of all of the above, the Armageddon is easy to use.

The Armageddon speaker box is a mono/stereo 412 with a

couple of twists. First, Bruce Egnater's fascination with tone has led him to build what looks like a slant quad but with a straight baffle, eliminating any phase issues associated with adjacent drivers mounted on different planes. Second, he's built into the cab a fairly comprehensive DI arrangement with microphone and speaker emulation, level and ground lift switches, even a mike axis selector, and an XLR to connect to the system. All that aside, it sounds great: two Celestion Elite 100s and two G12T75s do their thing with ease and produce robust cleans, plenty of crunch when required and a good deal more body than the usual suspects.

Sounds

The clean channel is just that, if you want it to be. It has loads of body and harmonic content, and doesn't sound at all thin or lifeless. It has real "substance" (a word that kept coming up as we wrote this review) and reminded us of a really good Twin Reverb but with a bigger bottom end. Dialing in some reverb (annoyingly on the back panel), the sound was decidedly "Californian" with that lovely Accutronics-style ambience – very smooth and very even. There's no bounce in this reverb, so you won't be playing any surf gigs with the Armageddon (although, I'd love to see that!), but it offers a really sweet spatial dimension that transports you to a different environment. Feature alert: the reverb tails out through the channel change, so there's a very natural transition – not an original idea but superbly executed with no glitches or level changes.

If you're not into pristine cleans, you can push the clean channel by flipping the Gain switch for some organic crunch, which can turn into a solid grind by tweaking the two volume knobs. Any flubbiness can be tempered with the Tight and Bright switches (the Tight switch really focuses the response), and the interactive EQ dials. The Density knob will also tame the looseness but this is global and is really designed to affect the cabinet characteristics.

Switching to channel 2/3



(identical channels with shared EQ but separate pre- and post-EQ gain structures), the vibe is immediately rockier with oodles of gain on tap and an EQ circuit that ticks all the right boxes in terms of why we love this stuff. It has midrange presence without being honky; it has a rounded treble that isn't overly bright; it has a bottom end that thumps with authority...and then we used that word again: substance. The tone doesn't buzz or thin out when the preamps are pushed. Even at extreme high gain settings, it's easy to dial in some "substance" that allows the notes to stay defined and full of character. Our EMG-loaded Anderson Strat and our Les Paul produced smooth, articulate drive with a touch-sensitivity that cleaned up very quickly. Backing off to just 8 on the guitar, the tone was still driven but with a little more openness and a little less dirt. In fact, we were happy to use just the one gain setting (Gain 2 at 7, Volume 2 at 4) and work the guitar volume knob to produce "high gain" to "almost clean" sounds for rock and modern blues.

"But what's this Decimator thingy?" I here you asking. There's always noise associated with high gain amps and some pickups accentuate this more than others. The ISP Decimator G-String Noise Reduction (er... ISPDGNSR...nope, that didn't help!) circuit is basically a noise suppressor or smart gate that

triggers from the guitar signal and not the level at the gate, so it's very sensitive to the touch. Usually, you won't need it for the clean channel but it can be a godsend for those noisy guitars or effects boards. AND, it's footswitchable – turn it on and off whenever...cool!

A fabulous feature in the Master section is called, simply, Midrange. These two knobs, Depth and Volume, offer a continuously variable curve from hump to scoop at any volume, providing a wonderful range of mid colours for that featured solo or to retune the response of any channel or the whole amp to a particular guitar. Dial in the amount of boost or cut with the Depth control (12:00 is flat) and then adjust the Level. As a midrange effect it works fine but in the real world it can also be a very useful solo boost because (1) it can boost the mids only, (2) it can boost the level only, (3) it can boost both, and (4) it's footswitchable. This is one of the coolest features we've seen on any amp. Single coils work great with a lot of positive Depth and a bit of Level; humbuckers need less Depth and Level. Actually, the humbucker character can change dramatically: we gave our 335 and Les Paul plenty of negative Depth for a scooped sound and then pumped the volume back up to a usable level – and we had ourselves a great rhythm sound in channel 2 but we could switch to that familiar

A real tube amp with a real output and power transformer, all built to withstand years of road work and produce some glorious guitar tones

Test Gear

'62 Fender Strat, Anderson Strat (all maple; EMGs), Fender Tele, Godin Icon Convertible, Gibson 335, Gibson Les Paul, Gibson Firebird V, Gretsch White Falcon (Filtertrons), Boss DS-1 and DN-2, Hermida Audio Zendrive, MI Audio Crunch Box, Suhr Shiba Drive, Suhr Riot.

Gibson honk in channel 3, with the same gain settings. The P-90s in our Godin Icon were particularly comfortable with this arrangement.

The Armageddon's other global controls are Presence (high treble), Density (bass thickness) and Main (master volume). The series effects loop is channel assignable and, because it's footswitchable, can be a handy clean boost (volume is set by the send/return levels), if you're running a gadget-free system.

Verdict

The Armageddon offers plenty of subtlety for the more refined player and loads of solid grunt for the rest of us. Even with all the options, we found it a very simple amp to negotiate – and all those little LEDs kept us abreast of what was doing what and when. At 17 kilos (near 40 for the cab), the Armageddon is not a light-weight amp from any perspective. But this is a real tube amp with a real output transformer and a heavy duty power transformer, all built to withstand years of road work and produce some glorious guitar tones. It will produce heavy Brit-inspired crunch, big Californian clean sounds, and smooth American drive. Bruce has managed to cram some great options into a well-laid out, large format amp that covers a whole lot of sonic territory – from shred heaven to hard rock to dirty blues to (dare I say it?) spanking country. Even the clever features are simple and are there for a reason – to produce great tones, tones that you can use, tones that have...er... substance! **G**

The Bottom Line

We like: Quality tones, easy to use and super-well built.
We dislike: (Still thinking...)
Guitarist says: This is a serious amp for the player who wants classic tones and then some.

Egnater Armageddon

PRICE: \$ 3,395
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: All-tube amp
OUTPUT: 120w
VALVES: 6L6 x 4, 12AX7 x 6
CHANNELS: Three
FOOTSWITCH: Seven button
DIMENSIONS: 711.2mm/" 28"(w) x 228.6mm/9"(d) x 254mm/10"(h)
WEIGHT: 17kg/46lb
Egnater Armageddon \$ 3395 /
Armageddon AR-412A \$1895
CMC Music
02 9905 2511
www.cmcmusic.com.au

Test results

Build quality ★★★★★
Features ★★★★★
Sound ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★