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# Egnater Rebel-30 Guitar Amplifier Head Review By Michael Ross: Boutique Sound A Working Musician Can Afford

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Guitarists of a certain age remember a time when the available amplifiers were restricted to offerings from a select few companies—Fender, Ampeg, Gibson, Marshall, and Vox. We now live in an age of option anxiety, with numerous models by the aforementioned and other major players, such as Peavey and Line 6, not to mention the new boutique manufacturers that seem to pop up every month. Consequently, it's becoming increasingly difficult to decide which head or combo amp to buy (though it's hard to complain when the results are pro-level amps for under \$500).

Bruce Egnater started out in the boutique-amp world but has since segued into the mass-production market through his affiliation with Boutique Amps Distribution based in Los Angeles. An early innovator in developing the concept of the 2-channel amp, Egnater's reputation in the guitar community was solidified by his modular system, which allowed players to switch out various preamp modules for different sounds, a process he has also licensed to Randall.

Egnater's modular amps and modules are still available through selected dealers, but Bruce has since been concentrating on his line of combos and heads that combine a handcrafted vibe with assembly-line availability. His collaboration with the Boutique Amps Distribution folks has facilitated this move into offshore manufacture and wide distribution, offering a variety of models that encompass a wide range of applications: bedroom practice, home recording, and small gigs (Tweaker, Rebel-20); bars, clubs, and large stages (Rebel-30, Tourmaster, Renegade); and, more recently, arena metal (Vengeance, Armageddon).

## **Rebel Yell**

The Rebel-30 combo amp was a huge hit with Egnater fans, leading to a call for a head version, which is reviewed here. I used the head to power a custom-built cabinet that houses a 12-inch Eminence Texas Heat speaker. I put it through its paces using Fernandes S- and T-style instruments equipped with DiMarzio Virtual Vintage pickups, a Fender Blacktop Jazzmaster with a Sheptone humbucker in the neck and the stock humbucker in the bridge, and a Danelectro Dano Pro.

The saddle-shoe look of the Rebel-30 derives from its two-toned Tolex separated with black piping, combined with the white-rimmed, hound's-tooth grill-cloth adorning the face. It might easily have been a bit too much, yet somehow it works together to create an elegant but functional appearance.

Fans of multiple knobs and switches will find much to love here. Simplicity lovers, like yours truly,

will be glad to learn that, unlike some amps, where all this tweakability yields minimal audible result, each of the controls on the Egnater serves a discernable purpose that is useful in the real world of gigging and recording.

The clean channel sports Volume, Bass, and Treble controls, while the Overdrive channel adds Gain and Midrange knobs. The Channel switching button on the front panel is overridden when you use the included footswitch.

Both channels have Bright and Tight switches. As with the bright switch on vintage Fenders, the Bright switch on the Rebel-30 adds presence at lower volumes, becoming less evident as you turn up the channel's level. The Tight switch reduces flab on the low end; conversely coming more into play at higher volume levels.

The knobs at the far right of the front panel include individual wattage controls for each channel and a single Tube Mix knob. The wattage selectors allow you to choose anywhere between 1 and 30 watts. Do not assume that this acts like a power attenuator: There is actually little audible level drop between operating a channel at 30W and 1W. You will not be able to crank the master volume on the clean and/or overdrive channels and then play at bedroom volumes by lowering their wattage. Even at the lowest wattage setting both channels remain very loud. Instead, lowering the wattage changes the feel, offering more "sag" at lower wattage and a more focused response at higher wattage levels. This is most noticeable when playing at higher volumes.

The Rebel-30 power stage houses a pair of 6V6 tubes and a pair of EL84s. The Tube Mix knob lets you blend in any desired ratio of each. This sets the stage for another misconception: You might believe that playing through the 6V6's will yield a totally American sound, while the EL84s produce a British effect. In fact, the majority of an amplifier's character resides in the preamp stage. The Rebel-30 is voiced to favor amps from across the pond, like Marshall and Vox, regardless of which power tubes you choose. Still, I found that employing the 6V6s, while not sounding like a Fender Deluxe, did lean the tone in a smoother, more American direction. On the other hand, exclusive use of the EL84s served up more British edge and significantly more volume. Mixing the two evenly, with the Tube Mix knob centered, provided even more headroom. Using a knob to blend the tubes—as opposed to a switch that chooses full 6V6 or full EL84 operation—seemed at first to be a gimmick, until I discovered that many spots in between reveal unique and musical tones.

Moving around to the back of the amp, we find a switchable (100-117-230) power supply—no need for a bulky voltage converter when touring foreign lands (see **Fig. 1**). The screw-off Plexiglas cover insures that you won't accidentally switch voltages. The impedance switch permits you to choose among 4, 8, and 16 Ohm single- or multiple-cabinet options.



*Fig. 1: Rear-panel options include Silent Speaker mode, which allows you to practice or record without angering the neighbors.*

Often in multi-channel amps with a single reverb adjustment control, what works for the clean channel disappears when using the distorted channel. Conversely a perfect amount for a lead tone can be too much wash for the clean sound. So it is an advantage that the Egnater's rear panel features individually adjustable digital reverb for each channel. The reverb sounds terrific, and digital means no thunderous crashes on shaky stages. The only down side is that it tends to come on very quickly, with little wiggle room between subtle and surf.

If you want to use your own reverb or other ambient effects, the Rebel-30 provides a buffered, series effects loop that worked well with everything from a Hermida Reverb to a computer's audio interface, the latter letting me add all sorts of digital plug-ins with no loss of amp tone.

An XLR output combined with special speaker cabinet voicing circuitry allows you to send a signal to a recording device, or to the front of house mixer when playing live. The Power/Standby switch on the front panel offers the third option of Silent Speaker mode. For late-night home recording, this lets you leave your speaker plugged in for its load resistance, while quieting it completely to avoid family or neighbor issues. Standard On mode lets you send sound simultaneously to your speaker, for monitoring, and direct to the mixing board.

### **Igniting the Egnater**

Plugging in at home and engaging the clean channel produced a warm, tube tone. Between the Bright and Tight switches, the wattage control, and the Tube Mix options, I could quickly mold a multitude of sounds: Vox-style chime—check; Fender-like soul-jazz—check; quick attack funk—check; saggy blues—check.

At a large club I was able to push the clean channel into some classic blues grit; don't try this in an apartment, as this channel stays unsullied until it is pretty darn loud. For a singing blues-rock tone or fusion sound I merely had to kick in the lead channel. When pushing the clean channel into distortion, backing off the guitar volume cleaned it up nicely. The lead side worked better with the guitar volume full on.

Various makes and models of guitars maintained their character through all levels of grit, with the

Rebel-30 responding well to both single-coil- and humbucker-equipped instruments. Many amps favor some effect pedals over others but both channels of the Rebel-30 adapted brilliantly to overdrive and fuzz pedals of all sorts: This amp never met a pedal it didn't like.

### Budget Boutique

The Rebel-30 passed my “no reverb test” with flying colors (the amp must sound good without any reverb)—a test that even some boutique amps fail. Both clean and lead channels on the Egnater have a sonic depth that makes reverb an option rather than a necessity.



If you are looking for a vintage Marshall, Fender, or Vox clone, there are plenty of amps like that out there, but this isn't one of them. Though the Tube Mix can shift you from Brit to Yank territory, the Egnater has a tone of its own. If you seek an amplifier with rich harmonics, sonic flexibility, plenty of clean headroom combined with lead tones that range from smooth to nasty, and all of this at half the price of a comparable boutique amp head, the Egnater Rebel-30 is just the thing.

**Pros:** Wide range of tonal options. Boutique-amp sound quality. Bargain price.

**Cons:** Reverb requires careful adjustment.

*Michael Ross is a New York City-based guitarist/producer/music journalist. He contributes articles to Guitar Player, Premier Guitar, Guitar Edge, EQ, Sound On Sound, and Gearwire.com. He is the author of the Hal Leonard books Getting Great Guitar Sounds and All About Effects.*

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