

AMPLIFIERS: SESSIONETTE S75R112

Review

Sessionette S75R112

A brand new, completely redesigned and upgraded version of a British combo that set the 80s alight. **Simon Bradley**

PRICE: £369

ALTHOUGH THE HISTORY OF MANY famous amp manufacturers is well documented, the story behind one of the most popular combos of the 80s, the original Sessionette 75, remains untold around guitarist's camp-fires.

Designer and guitarist, Stewart Ward, built a combo for his own use way back in 1976, and decided to launch it onto the market four years later. He takes up the tale: "We released it as a compact combo providing the working tones that guitarists needed for both live and recording applications.

At that time it was very small – about the size of a 14-inch portable TV – and weighed just 16kg. Originally, Session made valve amps, which were quite a bit larger, so you can imagine the response when I took a solid-state prototype to Chandler Guitars. Charlie Chandler exclaimed 'It's a Sessionette!', the name stuck and the first Sessionette 75 was sold in April 1981."

The combo remained in production for the next seven and a half years, during which time over 50,000 were made. It's only now, in 1997, that Stewart has released this brand new design that includes facets that made the originals so popular, as well as several features from his excellent SP75 pedal (reviewed in *Guitarist* January 1997), not to mention some new ideas too.

Apart from the logo, you'd be hard pushed to recognise the S75R112 from Sessionettes of yore



BUILD QUALITY

The look and layout of the combo are slightly different to that of its predecessor. For example, the control panel is front, as opposed to top mounted, while the livery now borrows from the aforementioned Award-Session pedals.

The combo is an open-backed affair, and the plywood cabinet, which is swathed in black vinyl, has corner protectors only on its rear edge. With most of the unit's revolutionary features enclosed within its tray, it won't necessarily win any medals for 'Construction Beyond The Call Of Duty', although it's certainly as sturdy as anything else in the price range.

FEATURES

It's here that the Sessionette 75 comes into its own and, although the controls may seem simple, each one has had a great deal of time and thought put into its function.

The 80W output is controlled through two channels, labelled 'A' and 'B', with one instrument input, and master volume and reverb pots, the latter controlling an Accutronics three-spring unit. You can switch between the two channels via the footswitch only, (included in the price) which is unusual, although hardly a problem.

Channel A is set up to be the dirtier of the two, and boasts several features that made the SP75 pedal such a good buy. Two of which are the 'Accent' switches. Labelled 'Drive' and 'PAFtone', the former is subdivided between 'Crunch' where the circuitry mimics valve characteristics, and 'Heavy', which ladles on the gain in spades.

PAFtone is basically humbucker emulation, and the Sessionette is the first amp of its kind to be equipped with such a feature. The basic idea is that switching these circuits in, enables you to obtain the tone of a humbucker from your single-coil-loaded guitar. Stewart is quick to acknowledge that this feature won't automatically turn your Fender Strat into a Gibson Les Paul ("Both are unique instruments," he explains), but has been designed to produce what he calls "a very usable emulation, plus an expanded range of new tones not previously available".

Even channel A's familiar three-band EQ hasn't escaped the influence of Stewart's ➤

SPEC CHECK

SESSIONETTE S75R112

PRICE: £369
ORIGIN: England
OUTPUT: 85W RMS solid state
FEATURES: two channels, master volume, master reverb, Crunch/Heavy drive, PAFtone humbucker emulation, 'Super-T' three-band EQ, 'Classic-T' two-band EQ, bright switch on channel two, dual extension speaker outputs, effects loop, 'Main Amp' input, 'Recording' output with speaker simulation
SPEAKER: Celestion G12T-75
SIZE: 53 x 47 x 25cm
WEIGHT: 20kg
COVER: no
FOOTSWITCH: included
CONTACT: Radius, PO Box 3, Basingstoke, RG24 9QA
Tel: 01256 477222

Also check out

PEAVEY EXPRESS 112S

PRICE: £299
Reviewed: October 1996
What we said: "Overall, this is an impressive little unit and, as a valve-sounding, totally solid-state amp, the TransTube technology makes it among the most impressive I've heard. For studio, rehearsals and small gigs, it could be exactly what you're looking for."
Verdict: Another classic from the Peavey stable that's small, versatile and well-priced.
Contact: Peavey Electronics
Tel: 01536 461234

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Also check out

AWARD-SESSION SP75 PEDAL

Price: £79.95
Reviewed: January 1997
What we said: "The SP75 is a fine unit, with a top tone and excellent features, and any player who has a need for an overdrive pedal could find that this one fits the bill. It deserves your close scrutiny and it's hardly the most expensive way of getting 'that' tone."

Verdict: One of the most versatile effects around, the guts of which reappear in this Sessionette 75 combo.

Contact: Radius International
Tel: 01256 477222



HUGHES & KETTNER ATTX 50

Price: £305
Reviewed: September 1996
What we said: "The Attx 50 is aimed at the lower end of the market and recommend for use in small venues, rehearsals and in the studio. The combo's range of tones, while not exactly varied, will certainly suit many styles and, at a reasonable price, represents good value for money."
Verdict: A workhorse combo from the German company that covers more musical bases than it misses.
Contact: Korg UK
Tel: 01908 857100

planet-sized brain, as he's developed the 'Super-T Classic EQ' system, an enhanced version of that used in many of the sought-after 'tweed' amps of the fifties and sixties. Channel B makes do with a 'Classic-T' two band EQ, but there's also a bright switch for those times when only a zing will suffice.

Along with a mono effects loop and two external speaker outputs, there are two other interesting jacks on the rear panel; Recording output and Main Amp input. The former features G12T speaker simulation, circuitry first designed by Stewart for the JD10 Jerry Donahue pedal, which can be used either for DI-ing straight into a PA, or for getting your licks sounding cool directly on to tape.

The latter is extremely useful, as it enables, among other things, the use of the GG10 Gordon Giltrap acoustic pedal with the combo. Simply connect the GG10 to the 'Main Amp in' socket, plug in your trusty electro-acoustic and away you go; both your hollow body and the electric guitar in the main input will be heard at the same time. Obviously, the potential for saving time, space and money is huge, and it's hats off to Stewart for designing such a practical feature.

SOUND

Just like its smaller bother, the SP75 pedal, the Sessionette 75 requires a modicum of twiddling to arrive at a sound you want.

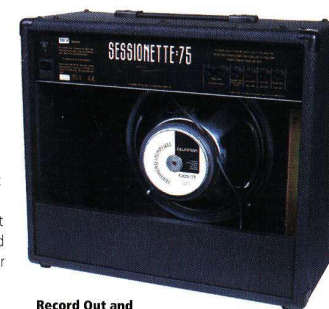
The EQ of both channels is very efficient and the bass end kicked out by channel A is phenomenal. It's possible to obtain virtually any type of distortion, from a weep-worthy break-up, to a scoopstastic, high-gain overdrive, thus proving what a great idea the 'FlexiDrive' distortion is.

The differences between the 'Crunch' and 'Heavy' drive options are easily apparent, and I found that I had to alter the EQ somewhat when switching between the two, as you do when switching between 'PAFtone' and 'Normal'.

Using our Woodworm Review Special guitar, fitted with two Fender single-coils and one Gibson humbucker, the PAFtone option adds a great deal of middle to the sound. This certainly beefs the tone out, while flicking to the humbucker and switching to 'Normal' turns your guitar into a veritable razor, a sound easily rounded off by the Sessionette's EQ.

Even though channel B only has two-band EQ, the tones here are also rather nice, possessing a real vintage feel at some settings. In fact, it seems to get a little warmer the higher the output, which is quite unusual for a solid-state amp.

The reverb is warm and cosy, and tops off a product that's incredibly versatile, especially considering its simple appearance. The only minor niggle is that the Drive and PAFtone options aren't footswitchable, but I suppose you can't have everything and, as you have to alter the EQ anyway,



Record Out and Main Amp in enable DI recording and use of the GG10 acoustic preamp

probably wouldn't offer much help while on stage.

VALUE FOR MONEY

Stewart is keen to emphasise that he doesn't use valve emulation technology as such (like Peavey's TransTube circuitry, for example) and says that it "isn't technology that makes great sounds, but the designer's knowledge and how he applies it. To credit valves or transistors alone is a gross over-simplification of our art."

At a mere £369, the VFM jury have the flags out for the Sessionette 75. It's portable, has potentially two amps in one and, above all, it sounds great.

VERDICT

Stewart is justifiably proud of the new Sessionette 75 combo, and after playing with this example for a few days, I can see why. The tonal shaping features are more than usable and should suit most, if not all, styles of playing. The fact that it hasn't one, but two external speaker outputs ensures that it's certainly a combo for the stage.

The idea of plugging in other Award-Session pedals into the Main Amp socket is a master stroke that doubles the combo's usefulness. In the 80s the Sessionette was known as the 'British Boogie'. Obviously such comparisons are ridiculous – as Stewart implies, the two are completely different animals – but I'd be surprised if the latest model didn't find a lot of new friends among old Sessionette users, as well as new converts to a cleverly designed and great sounding product. ■

BUILD QUALITY ●●●●

FEATURES ●●●●

SOUND ●●●●

VALUE FOR MONEY ●●●●

GUITARIST SAYS: A welcome return for the old favourite, featuring a plethora of tonal options and sounds to complement almost all playing styles.

Still in production, although visually updated - see main brochure for details