

Award-Session Sessionette 75

THE NAME MIGHT BE familiar but the all-new, relaunched Sessionette 75 is setting out to clobber the competition with a wealth of unique features. Review by Jim Matthews

Like its 1980s namesake, the Sessionette 75 is an 85-watt, solid-state combo (also available in head format), designed and built in the UK – but behind the name, a lot has changed. The 75 creates a good first impression with its classy, modern appearance; larger than the original but no less portable, the vinyl-covered, open-backed cab is constructed from high density chipboard and contains a single 12" Celestion speaker. Main features include two-channel operation, FX loop, main amp input, G12T speaker simulation, PAFtone humbucker emulation, crunch/heavy option and spring reverb; the new Sessionette 75, as you'll have gathered, is not exactly short on features.

As on all well-designed combos, a cutaway top edge allows easy access to a well laid out control panel. Here – from left to right – you'll find the instrument input, channels A and B, master reverb, master volume and the power indicator. Channel A is the dirty channel and allows two modes of operation. The drive button allows you to



FACTFILE

AWARD-SESSION SESSIONETTE 75
RRP: £369

UK-designed and built twin-channel solid-state combo with spring reverb, 85 watts RMS into custom-design Celestion 12" speaker. Channel A offers crunch/heavy drive option, PAFtone humbucker emulation, 3-band EQ with enhanced mid control, drive depth and volume. Channel B has bass and treble EQ, volume and a pre-set high boost. The master section has reverb and volume. Extra features include recording out via

G12T speaker simulation, main amp input, FX loop and extension speaker outputs. **Options:** The Sessionette 75 will be available shortly in head format (price TBA) but there's always the Punk 95 (£279), a more basic 1x12" combo with the PAFtone and SuperT features but offering a louder, cleaner output than the 75 – "ideal for use with pedals," say Award-Session. **Contact:** Radius International Ltd, Box 3, Basingstoke, RG24 9QA. ☎ 01256-477222.

choose either crunch or heavy or, more simply, light or heavy gain; having picked your basic distortion parameter you then dial in the exact desired amount with the drive depth knob. Here, Award-Session introduce what they call a FlexiDrive control; this, they feel, mimics the performance of a valve by creating an increase in distortion that's smoother and more gradual than the cruder leaps associated with solid-state circuitry.

More change is evident in channel A's EQ, where alongside bass and treble you'll find the Super T mid control, designed to offer a wider midrange response. Next up is a small push-button which knocks in what is probably the world's first in-built humbucker emulation facility; last in the line comes channel A's volume control.

Channel B, the clean channel, is a far simpler affair with just bass and treble controls, volume and a push-button treble boost dubbed bright. The master section houses two rotary controls for reverb level and master volume.

Round the back you'll find the power switch and input for the detachable mains lead. Two external speaker outputs are provided – most welcome in an amp with real live potential. The FX send and return have been padded to -20dB to prevent overloading of pedal FX.

But the Sessionette really hacks divots out of its competitors in two areas. The first is the G12T speaker simulation output that allows the amp signal to be sent direct to a

CHECK OUT...

Under £400, there's not exactly a whole heap of stuff out there that matches the Sessionette 75's thrills-per-pound ratio. Still, there are a few amps with at least two-channel operation and comparable specs for around the same money. These include...

PEAVEY's Bandit 112 Transtube (£349) is an 80-watt solid-state 1x12" combo with 'T-Dynamics' and well-respected flexibility, **contact** Peavey Electronics ☎ 01536 461234.

CRATE's GX80 (£375) offers 80 watts

of solid-state power with HM leanings, **contact** Washburn UK ☎ 01462 482466.

LANEY's GC120 (£349) is a powerful 120W 2x12" with dual reverb, also available as a 1x12" 80-watt combo (£299), **contact** Laney ☎ 01384 633821.

MARSHALL's New Valvestate VS100R (£384), is a hybrid 100-watt 1x12" with 3 channels and comprehensive EQ, **contact** Marshall Amplification ☎ 01908 375411.

TRACE ELLIOT's 100-watt Tramp Tube (£349) is a hybrid combo with 3-channel operation in 1x12" combo package, **contact** Trace Elliot ☎ 01621-851851.

PA or recording console – remember, a decent mic or speaker simulator can be quite costly for the low budget home recorder – and the second is the main amp input. The what? Patience – we'll explain...

The main amp input is a tonally transparent input which goes into the FX loop,' expands Sessionette designer Stewart Ward. 'It will also drive the reverb section; from there it goes into the master volume, and then on to the power amp and speaker. It's a general purpose input that can be used with any outdoor multi-FX/preamps, such as the Digitech RP-6 or Zoom 5050. Importantly, this input works simultaneously with the standard front input.'

So, apart from allowing you to duet harmoniously with your very bestest mate, the main amp input means that with, say, an acoustic preamp like the Award-Session GG10, you could convert the Sessionette into an acoustic combo. Ace! Indeed, if you own a guitar like the Parker Fly then you could run both outputs into the amp – the magnetic into the front input and the piezo via the GG10 into the main amp input. Alternatively, you could even plug a mixer into the input.

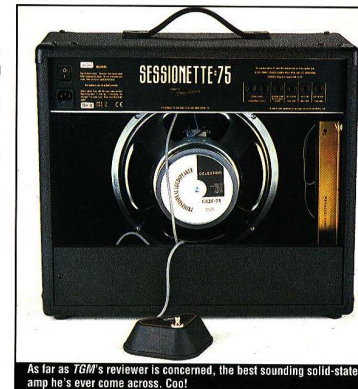
Lastly there's a hard-wired footswitch that allows you to change between channels, with a green LED providing visual aid (note, however, that channel switching is not possible without the footswitch). Sensibly Award-Session have provided the footswitch with a cable of decent length, so you won't be tethered to within six feet of your amp on an all-important gig.

SOUNDS

Approaching the 75 with trusty Gibson Les Paul and vintage reissue Fender Strat in hand, I was a bit concerned that this amp might prove to be all features and no sounds – but I shouldn't have worried. Stewart Ward reckons the key to a good sound lies within the EQ and refuses to accept that the valve is as important as some gear gurus make out. 'It's not technology that makes great sounds – it's the designer's knowledge and

how he applies it,' he says. One thing's for certain; this Sessionette 75 sounds nothing like its '80s predecessor.

Starting with Channel B, the clean channel, single-coils sound bright and lively right from the word go. Despite having only bass and treble EQ controls there's tone



As far as TGM's reviewer is concerned, the best sounding solid-state amp he's ever come across. Cool!

aplenty, with the cool reverb adding extra sheen to chords and picked notes. One word of caution: if you're looking for lots of clean headroom, look elsewhere. The 75 begins to break up at volumes approaching the 30 per cent mark. Leaving the big clean duties to its brother amp, the Punk (see *Factfile*), the 75 is free to provide the mild, warm overdrive often associated with valve amps alone.

VERDICT

A huge round of applause, whistles and foot-stomping for Award Session – not only have they come up with an impressively well-equipped amp for the price, but one that sounds mighty fine, too. Is it an improvement on its '80s namesake? Too right it is; in fact, I'll go so far as to say that this is the

best sounding solid-state amp I've ever come across. Furthermore, it also out-performs some considerably more expensive hybrids and all-valves that we had in the studio as well. If you're brave enough to ignore the hype – not only of valve amp makers but, especially at this price, the claims of hybrid makers – and instead trust your ears, the Sessionette 75 will deliver the goods. **G**

Switching to the hotter output of the Les Paul, the 75 really begins to rumble with master volume boosts creating a surprising amount of weight and sustain; back off the guitar's volume, though, and the amp responds nicely with a wide range of controllable playing dynamics. The bright boost offers a distinct lift in the high end that I find a bit unnecessary – if it was footswitchable then it might prove useful on a packed stage, but as it's not then you'll surely find enough highs in the EQ provided. Switching to channel A via the footswitch, selecting crunch and keeping drive below 25 per cent, I found myself in much the same territory as the upper reaches of channel B. You'll notice a slight increase in compression as you wind up the sensitive drive control, with the midrange producing plenty of sustain and bite; the increased scope provided within the mid control becomes extremely apparent and is capable of some quite extreme tonal changes. Lead work especially benefits from a spot of extra mid boost and by adding more treble you'll locate plenty of stinging attack; chords can sound rather boxy with such mid-boosts, though, especially on the milder distortions, but less so as you increase the drive and the response flattens out.

Reverting back to the Strat and engaging the PAFtone switch, I was chuffed to find a rather realistic humbucker tone as the 75 pushes in slightly more mids and rounds off the high end. This is a welcome addition, especially as you move from crunch to heavy gain; to my ears it helps the Strat cope with what is pretty extreme distortion.

Indeed, I'd be surprised if even the most fervent metallurgist could feel cheated with the tones here; plenty of weight and thud, with the mid happily scooping away any of the nasty nasal tones that curse many a riffing tone – the Les Paul sounded especially fat.

If you notice your sound becoming less distorted and slightly thinner when you employ the speaker simulator, don't be alarmed. This is common enough on most simulators and should it become a problem you'll probably be able to compensate via the amp's controls and the EQ of the receiving console. And it would be worth checking just how bad a cheap mic – or a badly placed expensive mic – can sound in comparison...

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