

Named after it's 80s predecessor, the Sessionette:75 combo from Award-Session aims to offer updated and improved performance. Long time Session man Paul Day finds out if it succeeds.

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Back in 1980 Stewart Ward introduced his first guitar combo, the Impressive all-valve Session 15:30, but soon switched sides via the Sessionette:75, a successful little solid-stater which was to put his company in the forefront of the UK amp scene during that decade.

This model was certainly among the first to offer a more-acceptable argument for the attributes of solid state amplification, and Ward has staged a champion of this cause ever since, ably supporting his often vehement views on the subject with a succession of high-performance products.

The latest of these revives the Sessionette:75 name, and is the first fully-fledged combo from Ward's current company, joining various effects pedals and other useful playerorientated devices.

Here I should state a degree of personal interest. I bought examples of both those early Session combos when they first appeared, and still have them, my trusty Sessionette:75 now being a veteran of over 3,000 gigs. I was therefore keen to see how the newcomer compared, as its intention is to offer all the best aspects of that SOs original, but with updates which better suit modern market requirements.

Open the box

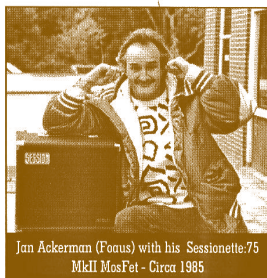
The cab and cosmetics are notably different for a start. The black vinyl-clad chipboard enclosure is now open-backed and also bigger all round than that of its ultra-compact ancestor; although still very easily managed by the single top-mounted strap handle. Black-plated metal protectors adorn all but two corners, and the grille cloth covering the slightly sloping baffle maintains the finereal theme, but with a plastic strip along the bottom sporting twin smart gold stripes and the Session logo.

The location of the controls is another major stylistic departure from previous Sessions as, instead of being top-mounted, the panel is angled and located on the front above the speaker baffle. The cabinet's top edge is suitably cut away to improve access and visibility, although as usual the trade-off is

that this exposes the controls to greater risk of damage.

The fascia continues the black and gold combination, with all legends easily seen and the small plastic knobs sporting equally apparent line type position pointers. The lively certainly looks classy, and indeed overall image is neat and purposeful in a quietly stated sort of way.

A single input is followed by the controls for Channel A. This caters for the dirty side of life via a comprehensive array resembling that employed on the Sessionette:75 stompbox, offering different distortion modes and tonal textures. Clean Living Channel B boasts a simple but effective trio of knobs, plus a single small push switch for the bright option. Last in line comes the master section, comprising reverb level and overall output volume.



Jan Ackerman (Focus) with his Sessionette:75 MkII. MasFet - Circa 1985

The rear panel carries a handily placed mains switch and socket, plus jacks covering numerous functions. There are two extension speaker outputs - ideal for extra sound spread on stage, and one more than most combos can muster. A recording output incorporates speaker simulation and is equally ideal for feeding a PA as well as more obvious duties. The effects send and return loop has been designed to prevent undue noise or distortion problems, while a main amp input allows direct connection of digital multi-effects units, preamps and similar devices, this service supplementing the standard input round at the front.

There's plenty of space around the single Celestion G12T-75 12in speaker; and the reverb tank is mounted on the side of the cab. This leaves the floor free for stowing accessories behind the lowlevel back panel, including the footswitch which provides the only means of changing channels. This is permanently connected and the cable supplied should be long enough for most situations, but I'd be happier with a few more feet.

MART

Performance

With the clean channel selected, the new Sessionette:75 is immediately impressive. The treble and bass controls ably cover all the requisite frequencies with abundant warmth and clarity. A separate mid-range facility is certainly not missed and the bright switch adds just the right amount of sweet sparkle if required. With this simple set up it's easy to dial in a sound that should suit most guitars and playing styles.

This new combo improves on the original's ability to go loud and stay clean, kicking out more than enough oomph for beat-the-drummer duties. Cranking things further brings in a gradual gentle break-up which avoids the usual solid state sonic pitfalls, the delivery staying rounded and dynamic.

Switching to Channel A results in a vast array of overdriven sounds - from convincing crunch, through sweet, singing or stinging sustain, to demolition-level distortion. Again, the controls are geared to making this choice as player-friendly as possible, but time needs to be taken to obtain the best from this side of the Sessionette:75, purely because of the variety offered via the drive depth and EQ controls, and the attendant mode switches.

Reverb is equally up to par soundwise, ranging from subtle to surf, but care needs to be taken when employing large amounts at higher volumes, as this combination tends to induce an unwelcome whistle.

Conclusion

The old Sessionette:75 was a winner; but this one tops it on looks, versatility and a delivery that's expressive, authentic and positively inspiring. It's hard to believe that something so small, light and affordable can sound so expansive, heavyweight and expensive - qualities which make a very convincing case for solid state over the often over-hyped and over-priced merits of hot bottles.

In terms of practicality, performance and pennies, the new Sessionette:75 is the most impressive combo I've reviewed to date and definitely qualifies for best-buy status. PAUL DAY - MM

REVIEW SESSIONETTE PUNK

FACT FILE

ORIGIN UK
TYPE Solid state
OUTPUT 100W RMS
SPEAKERS One 12" Celestion G12T-75
INPUTS One
CHANNELS One
CONTROLS Drive depth, treble, middle, bass, volume, plus crunch/heavy and normal/PAF accent selectors
EFFECTS None
DIMENSIONS 53x47x25cm
WEIGHT 17kg

Alternatively...

This combo occupies a unique niche in the market as no competitor currently offers a single-channel combo, or even an alternative solid-stater delivering 100W RMS for the same money. But if a second channel is a must, then pay the extra for models such as the Sessionette:75 (£369); Laney's GC80 (£299); the Marshall VS100 (£384); or Trace Elliot's Super Tramp (£240). Also in the Punk's price range are the Carlsbro GLX40, 1x12" combo (£279), Crate's GX65 (£338) or H&K's Atax 50C (£269). If it's valve power for a similar price you're after then try Laney's LC15R (£229) or Trace Elliot's 1x10" Veloette at £329.

TOTAL GUITAR VERDICT

Sessionette Punk

The Punk 1 x 12 combo • £279

Construction	4
Features	3
Ease of use	5
Sound	5
Value for money	5

No bells or whistles, just loud, proud and affordable. More versatile soundwise than its name suggests.

Total rating 88%

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TOTAL GUITAR

Sessionette Punk

£279 1x12 SOLID-STATE COMBO

DAVE HEAP curls his lip, pierces his nose and comes over all aggressive with the help of the second new combo from Award-Session. This one adopts a less-is-best attitude.

Hot on the heels of the Sessionette:75 comes another combo from Award-Session, the Punk. The title hints at a brash, abrasive attitude and this newcomer is less refined than its partner in terms of on-board benefits.

Basically this is a single channel version of the impressive Sessionette:75, and it will go loud and clean if desired, but is best suited to dishing out copious quantities of dirt.

With no switching facilities it's a case of opting for one set-up or the other, a primitive approach compared to the all-singing, all-dancing concepts adopted by most modern combos. But Award-Session's Stewart Ward argues that many players want just one good basic sound and resent having to pay out extra for unnecessary facilities such as another channel or even reverb. The Punk's no frills/low cost combination targets this market.

FEATURES

The new combo employs the same black vinyl-clad, open-backed enclosure as the Sessionette:75, likewise the black grille cloth adorned with a twin gold-lined plastic strip. The speaker is also identical and its lugging weight is even lighter, thanks to the fewer facilities on board.

The angled black fascia is easy to see, courtesy of the cab's cutaway top edge, and functions duplicate those of Channel A on the Sessionette:75 combo. But all controls are luddled down one end, and the adjacent expanse of unadorned metal seems to emphasise the missing channel. The layout is obviously born of commercial economy and works well enough, but the end result just looks a little incomplete.

The Punk's rear panel is equally spartan, carrying just the mains socket and on/off switch, plus a pair of extension speaker outputs. No effects loop is provided, again against accepted thinking, but in keeping with the Punk's less-is-more ethic, and any extra sonic stimulants can be inputted round the front.

PERFORMANCE

The no-frills design means it's just a case of power up, plug in and go. As with its stablemate, the Punk's EQ

section is wide-ranging, effectively voicing the amp to almost any guitar. Balancing the drive depth and volume controls yields a delivery that's loud and surprisingly clean, but this combo is really intended for those who want a big, filthy tone.

Increasing drive depth dirties up the sound as desired, and can be suitably tweaked by the tone controls, and the accent push-buttons take things further. The PAF option injects mid-range muscle into a single-coil pickup-equipped guitar, while engaging the crunch mode makes things more rumbly, and the heavy setting supercharges the gain and filth factors.

Award-Session states that 'this amp kicks ass' and, while I can't condone such physical abuse of dumb animals, the Punk is definitely a pretty ferocious performer, contrasting its quietly spoken appearance. The asking figure suggests home use, but this combo is certainly loud enough for serious onstage service. Such volume shouldn't be allowed from such a small box and will certainly make the drummer wish you'd bought something quieter.

CONCLUSION

This amp is the ideal choice for those who don't fancy forking out for features they don't want. There are no extras, hidden or otherwise, but what is provided is more than up to this UK brand's well established high standards. Therefore, the Punk is very much a pro performer at an almost entry-level price, making it another bargain buy from the Award-Session stable. **EG**



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Still in production

Discontinued