

● **Sessionmaster AW10 direct recording preamp**
RRP: £149

HOT ON THE HEELS OF the SansAmp comes another unit primarily designed to capture authentic tube-like sounds on tape without the hassle of miking cabinets or using speaker simulators. The SansAmp has set a high standard in terms of accuracy and simplicity - so how does the Sessionmaster compare?

● **construction**

On first impressions the AW10 looks uninspiring, in its very un-Rock'n'Roll light grey fronted single rack format. This unit is from a sample production run so the thin and slightly bent rack face will be replaced on future models with a thicker front cover. The non-tube circuitry is housed in a small centrally placed box around the size of a half rack.

The front cover starts with a single input and Gain rotary control which governs the input sensitivity and works with the Volume control to form sounds from 'super clean to heavy overdrive'. Next to that is a power on status indicator - there's no on/off switch (or unit bypass) and power is from the supplied mains adaptor. We then have three push boost switches - Gain, Bass and Mid.

The Gain boost is self-explanatory though it does offer, along with increased distortion, a slightly tighter distortion character, while the EQ boosts add a preset amount of bass and middle.

We then have three rotary EQ controls, treble, mid and bass which operate pre-overdrive without the Gain boost selected and post-overdrive when the gain boost is engaged.

All three controls are interactive and while the EQ ranges are quite subtle there's a lot of variation available, much in the same vein as the classic EQs on Marshall and Fender amps. Lastly the Volume, apart from governing the overall output, also marginally affects the distortion colours.

Two jack outputs are offered on the rear

of the unit - the Recording output which doubles as a headphone out and the Normal output for linking to a power amp and speakers for a live rack set-up.

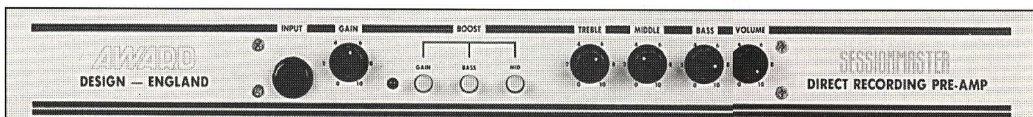
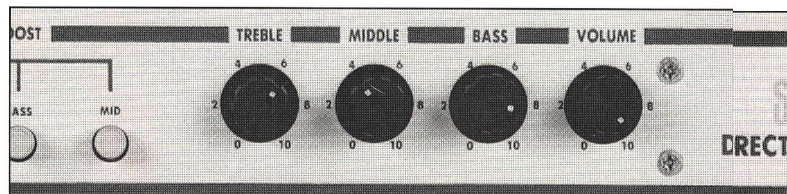
● **sounds**

For clean sounds the Gain boost is not engaged, though when the volume of the Gain control is increased you'll notice a slight thickening of the sound with reduced treble crispness. The Gain acts like a standard preamp gain, so to get a real

Levinson Blade, the clean sound was now a little crunchier yet by reducing the Gain the tone is quickly clean.

With both test guitars the clean sound is quite percussive, with a less brittle sound than you'd expect from a solid state amp, though in certain cases really strong pick attack could induce a rather clanky distorted peak.

By increasing the Gain and reducing the Volume, with a humbucking equipped guitar, you'll get plenty of crunchy distortion. For me it became a little fizzy



Rack format is the main factor differentiating the Sessionmaster from the SansAmp

clean tone even with a Levinson Blade R4 in passive mode, you'll need to set it quite low, around 5 or 6.

I found the tone to be a little thin without some help from the bass EQ and Bass boost. However there's no doubt that the tone is, with those modifications, very good and the unit very quiet with a barely audible top end hiss.

It's immediately noticeable how reactive the unit is to differing input gains. With a Hamer Sunburst taking over from the

with full Gain, but set around '7' we have a convincing crunch tone, made quite Marshall like with the addition of the midrange boost which gives a honky peak to the tone.

However, introducing the Gain boost gives an alternative crunch sound which, while having a similar amount of distortion, has a tighter less fizzy tone than the extreme Gain settings without the Gain boost.

This seems more akin to a well driven

Marshall tone and really suited the humbucking Hamer guitar.

On high Gain settings - with the boost engaged - the sound again remains very un-fizzy unless both Gain and Volume are at full! With sensible Volume settings a quite controlled high gain distortion is produced, again reacting very discernably to any chosen guitar and volume level

● **the verdict**

The Sessionmaster performed extremely well either DI'd or with a power amp and speakers. I found it easy to use, though obviously a dual channel unit (already in design stage) would save constantly recalling clean and crunchy/overdrive tones and would give more scope for live performance.

Any amp, however good, won't suit every song or every guitar but with the Hamer and Levinson I managed to

extract an awful lot of 'classic', and reasonably valve-like guitar tones reasonably quickly, without the hassles of changing amps or going through miking procedures.

Like the SansAmp the Sessionmaster offers convenient direct to tape guitar amp simulations that are certainly accurate enough to provide an option to the 'real thing'!

Dave Burrlick

AMP

CHECK OUT...

TECH 21 SANSAMP £148

Portable pocket-sized valve amp simulator, mains or battery powered. Great sound, very versatile and at the time of writing, unlike the Sessionmaster, readily available in most major stores.

Contact: Klondyke ☎ (0202) 670299

MARSHALL 9004 PREAMP £149

Switchable twin channel preamp with FX loop. More geared to live applications, and thus not as successful for 'direct-to-tape' recording as either SansAmp or Sessionmaster.

Contact: Marshall ☎ (0908) 375411

TOM SCHOLZ GUITAR & BASS ACE £88

Battery powered headphone amps with good sounds, though less versatile than Sansamp or Sessionmaster for direct-to-tape recording. Headphones included.

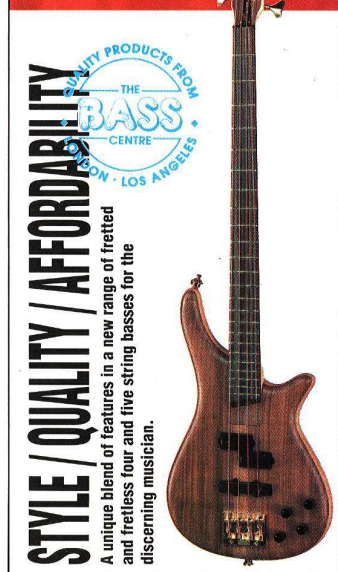
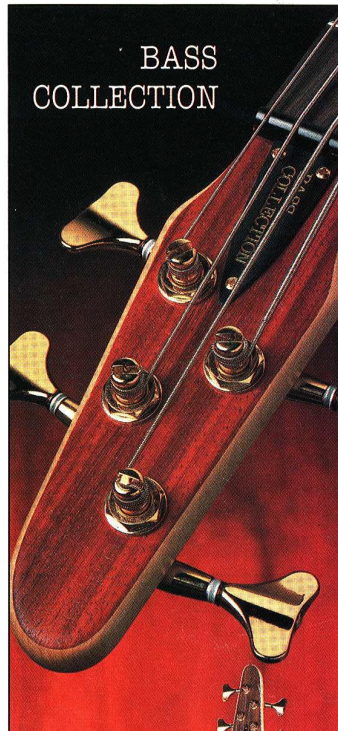
Contact: Dixies Music ☎ (0484) 425920

Factfile

Sessionmaster AW10

Features: Primarily designed as a direct to tape recording preamp, it can be used as a stand alone rack preamp with power amp and speakers or direct to the PA or with headphones. Single channel, no bypass, three band EQ with extra Gain, Mid and Bass boosts. Mains only, power supply included.

Options: None
 RRP: £149 inc power supply
 Contact: Radius International ☎ (0256) 477222



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