

AmpShock

Naylor Super Club 38

The back-to-analog trend that's reinvigorated so much vintage gear over the last few years has also fostered the development of new equipment that can achieve some of those venerable sounds, and does so without forcing a guitarist to



prowl through pawnshops with a fat checkbook and a distrustful eye.

The Naylor Super Club 38 is a perfect example of such development. The Super Club 38 is a 1x12, 38-watt, single channel combo whose white-faced exterior promises vintage sound, and whose guts deliver it. At first glance, the Super Club 38 is a simple combo outline with the controls linearly arrayed on the top of the cabinet: Hi-Gain/Lo-Gain inputs, a gain/volume combination; a Bite switch (which shifts the midrange and treble EQ points); treble, midrange, bass and presence knobs; and toggles for on/off, standby, and ground. Inside the post-backed cabinet, a Naylor-designed 12" speaker sits, and there is also an effects loop. Simple enough. But closer inspection reveals some particularly nice touches, such as hand-wired and -soldered contact points, gold-plated jacks (including the effects loop), and a hand-assembled chassis, which gives the amp that sort of Sherman tank feel that translates into sound as soon as you plug it in.

The key to getting everything out of a Naylor that you can lie in the interactivity of the gain and tone controls. The clean sounds are exceptionally clear and gutsy. In conjunction with the Lo-Gain input (which was recently updated by Naylor for higher output), you can set the gain control at max and roll back the volume, first on the amp and then on the guitar, to sift in some edge. This can approximate the old tweed Fender amp sound.

and with added volume and a kick on the Bite switch, more of the Standell kind of effect. With some midrange added, an electric 12-string takes on dimensions other than the transparent jangle of its stereotype.

As crisp as the clean sounds are, hotter sounds are where the Naylor really shines. With some experimentation you can draw most of the vintage palette out of the electronics in this combo, and then some. Those nasally British sounds come alive with the midrange control in the 50 percent or higher range. As you blend in midrange, the definition of the attack increases audibly as the tube compression takes effect. This works out especially well for double-coil pickups. On single-coil transducers, adding some low-end or taking out the Bite switch and adding a bit more presence works fine. At higher volumes the cabinet's resonance adds considerably to the overall sound, contributing a more nasal effect as the midrange is cranked. I'd recommend leaving the combo on the floor for gigs letting it resound sympathetically with the stage.

The key thing, though, is to play with the tone controls as much as possible. The Naylor was designed to create whole new tonal combinations, as well as to emulate vintage sounds. The crunch is very well defined, even in the softer midrange settings. The presence control also has a rather profound effect on the upper-end of the frequency spectrum, enabling the output to have a gritty crunch distortion with excellent definition at both the top and the bottom ends. Notes simply don't get lost in the crunch.

Much of this also has to do with the Naylor's speaker. Spiritually and technically patterned after the classic Jensen speakers of the 1950s and '60s, the 50-watt, 16-ohm, 12" speaker in the cabinet we tested was exceptionally clear and tight, with little in the way of damping at high volume levels. When you're playing at the cleaner settings, this speaker/amp combination will allow surf tones that haven't been achieved since we tossed away turntables. (You really want surf? Use the Lo-Gain input and crank the volume to max, the gain to three-quarters, and roll back the guitar's volume pot. That's surf, with some headroom for solos.) Aiding the speaker are a tuned rear port and tuned top port for added bass response.

The one little quibble I had with the Naylor Super Club 38 was that the knob labels on the top of the combo face the wrong direction when you're standing in front of the amp. But I'm really reaching here. It's the noodle in me that needs to find something to kvetch about. And that takes a lot of work in the case of this amp. Sonically speaking, the Super Club 38 covers more bases than one might expect from a combo, and does so with a level of workmanship that far outshines most of its competition. The amp gives what the best instruments and amplifiers traditionally have given to musicians: *possibilities*. — DD