

ORANGE OR50H & PPC 412 LTD £999 & £699
GUITAR AMPS





Orange OR50H head **£999**

Feast on the spirit of the 1970s with a new take on a classic theme. Life begins at 40? Quite possibly... *by Mick Taylor*

What we want to know

- 1 There are two 40th anniversary amps, right?**
Well, yes and no. Technically there are, ahem, 41. There's this one – the standard, production model OR50H – but there are also 40 ultra-limited Custom Shop one-offs, the electronics of each one being ever so slightly different from the others.
- 2 What makes this different from other Orange heads?**
It's currently the only single-channel 50-watt Orange outside of the Custom Shop series. It also has a Plexiglass front panel for ultimate retro appeal.
- 3 Who's likely to buy one?**
Gigging pedalhead rockers who find themselves liking certain elements of both classic Marshall and Fender tones, but who want something different.

2008 is Orange Amplifiers' 40th anniversary, so a whistle-stop history lesson is in order. Come on, pay attention at the back...

The brand was born of Cliff Cooper, proprietor of London's Orange recording studios and music store in 1968. The earliest amps were built by Mat Mathias' Radio Craft company in Huddersfield – guitarists know it better as Matamp. Cue Peter Green and Fleetwood Mac, among many others, and the whole world slowly began turning Orange.

Since those heady days, the brand has had mixed fortunes. Revival number one came in the early 1990s, powering much of Britpop, then after a brief licensing deal with Gibson Orange was back under Cooper's full control and totally revitalised in the early/mid-2000s. Under managing director Damon Waller and designer Adrian Emsley, the most recent amps have been the company's best.

OR50H

This amp is not a reissue; it takes inspiration from 1972's 80-watt Graphic Valve Amplifier – in Adrian Emsley's opinion, the time that Orange really found its "glam crunch" sound. The OR50H uses a new circuit, which claims a slightly more realistic 50 watts from its dual EL34 output

valves. It also adds a gain stage and includes the intriguing HF Drive knob.

The HF Drive knob controls presence and gain in the power section. Turning it fully clockwise makes the sound brighter, more lively and with maximum attack. Emsley says: "Up to around eight, it's a cross-line presence on the power amp only, between eight and 10, it adds negative feedback as well to really make it scream."

One feature that's not immediately obvious is the switchable master volume. You can switch the master completely

out of the circuit, and control everything from the gain knob. We recommend you take care when you do this for the first time – we had a bit of a Back To The Future/Marty McFly moment!

In terms of build, the OR50H comes in Orange's standard, high quality ply cabinet, but uses a Plexiglass front panel rather than steel which, along with the more bulbous Orange logo, adds extra retro flavour to the visual package. Inside it's built to a good standard: the circuitry, pots and preamp valves are on a single, main PCB that's secured to the chassis with bolts. Transformers (wound in the UK), power valve sockets and switches are chassis mounted and are hard-wired, while the jacks have little PCBs of their own.

Inside the PPC412-LTD speaker cabinet you'll find four 12-inch Celestion G12H 30 70th Anniversary drivers. Adrian Emsley: "Most of the '72/'73-spec

The Rivals

The **Marshall Vintage Modern 2266 50-watt head** (£709) is becoming the go-to 50-watter for classic British crunch sounds, though it uses KT66s instead of EL34s. Last issue's **Hughes & Kettner Statesman Dual EL34 head** (£949) is a more versatile beast that's well worth a look. Finally, the cracking **Cornford Roadhouse 50 head** (£899) should also be on your try-list.



The OR50H has an oh-so-retro Plexiglass front panel



You'll get use out of the carrying handles as there are no optional castors available

A broad range of rock tones you wouldn't think possible from a single channel

4 x 12s had G12H 30s (75Hz)... They do sound the best of all in my (and many other players') opinion, so I wanted to try and re-create something close."

Two small quibbles: first, the plastic jack-socket retaining nuts protrude ever-so-slightly, so they could get damaged in the throws (literally) of spirited van loading. Second, in time-Oranged tradition there's no provision for castors. The wooden slide rails on the bottom are better than nothing, but we'd prefer wheels. The cab is completed with a commemorative 1968-2008 badge, available in this spec for 2008 only.

Sounds

Is a single-channel amp too tonally limited for you? Try this: plug into the OR50H's 'Hi' input, set everything straight up at 12 o'clock and experiment with the gain control. Using vintage-style humbuckers, below half is where your clean-ish to light crunch tones are. Any classic guitar's natural character is served well, thanks to the focused mid-range and plentiful bottom end. A Telecaster bridge pickup, for example, returns a raunchy rhythm sound that'll suit biting

blues, The Stones, Springsteen and beyond. With a Les Paul, it's Peter Green territory at lower levels, and classic British rock just below half. It does seventies glam-type sounds particularly well, but goes way, way beyond...

Just past 12 o'clock on the gain control brings another gain stage that, when using PAF-style humbuckers, offers heavier crunch tones and heads into a fuzzier distortion. This will be enough drive for most blues and classic rockers; rounder and slightly more compressed than you'd get from a 50-watt Marshall JCM800. It retains a fair helping of bite though, so we're not talking super-smooth Mesa-style gain.

After around two o'clock on the gain control, in comes the third stage, which takes you into metal levels of distortion if you so desire – certainly not a feature of the 1972 amp! It's a thick, rich drive with tons of bottom end though, with the 50-watt power stage, metal isn't perhaps best served. Combined with the relatively low power G12H 70th Anniversary speakers, the power amp lacks the headroom of a 100-watter, instead saturating and compressing slightly for a more elastic feel.

The HF Drive control is intriguing. For want of a better tonal description, imagine you have a series of thin cotton sheets held a few feet away from the speakers. Turning the HF Drive control clockwise feels to us like removing the sheets, one by one, until you're hearing – at about two or three o'clock – the clearest representation of the sound. Turned past that point you get an enhanced version of the tone, with extra punch, presence and more visceral power. Lower settings are good for darker tones, but we like the HF Drive more at the higher settings: it feels alive, edgy and super responsive to the dynamics in your playing. We should also note that it can prove to be extremely revealing in terms of string noise and sloppy technique.

The defeatable master volume switch helps expand your dynamic options too. With a gig-level master volume setting of between 11 and two o'clock before you switch, it provides a great headroom/volume boost which you can use to either get your solos heard more clearly, or conversely, to enable you to roll the guitar's volume back to clean things up: unconventional but nonetheless useful.

Verdict

If you're the kind of player who doesn't need reverb, effects loops and channel switching – you just want a half-stack to plug in and rock with, perhaps on the end of your pedalboard – then the OR50H comes highly recommended. It's very well built and covers a broad range of rock tones that you wouldn't think possible from a single channel. These 50 watts are more than enough for medium-sized gigs, and although it has a respectable set of clean sounds, it's crunch and medium gain Brit-rock where it really shines. Nice work once again, Orange Amplifiers. **B**

The bottom line

We like: Looks; versatility; straight-up spirited rock tone

We dislike: No castors; vulnerable jack sockets on the cab

Guitarist says: No-nonsense, single-channel simplicity for rock and blues.



Orange OR50H & PPC412 Ltd

PRICE: £999

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: All valve, single-channel head with solid-state rectification

OUTPUT: 50 watts RMS

VALVES: 3 x ECC83/12AX7 preamp,

2 x EL34 power amp

DIMENSIONS: 240 (h) x 550 (w) 240mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 21/46.2

LOUDSPEAKER: Head only

CHANNELS: One

CONTROLS: Gain, bass, middle, treble, HF Drive, master volume

FOOTSWITCH: Single latching footswitch for master volume defeat (£22.95, not included)

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Master volume defeat, hi and lo inputs, 2 x 8-ohm, 1 x 16-ohm speaker out

RANGE OPTIONS: None

Orange PPC412 LTD cabinet

Price: £699

Handling: 120 watts RMS/16 ohms

Speakers: Four Celestion G12H 30 70th Anniversary

Dimensions: 740 (h) x 780 (w) 380mm (d)

Weight (kg/lb): 50/110

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Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★