

HUGHES & KETTNER

Coreblade



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SRP £1999.00

All prices incl VAT

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WHAT IS IT?

A sophisticated yet very user-friendly all-tube 100 watt guitar head with built-in effects, 128 programmable presets and a self-biasing tube output stage. Touring pro players will love the facility to store and upload tones via a USB port.

WHY SHOULD I WANT ONE?

Viewed in context of bang for buck, the Coreblade is actually very good value for money. Bulletproof build-quality, great tones, innovative features and more sounds than you can shake a stick at make a very convincing argument for the Coreblade as the ultimate heavy metal amp.

Good old tube power meets cutting edge technology in the awesome shape of this ferocious new four-channel 100 watt head from Hughes & Kettner...

When it comes to obtaining different tone textures from a guitar amp, there are two equally valid schools of thought. One is that it requires little more than a decent electric guitar, a small Class A tube amp and an ability to use the guitar's volume knob and pickup selector to harness the tonal alchemy 'twixt axe and amplifier. The other approach, however, takes the viewpoint that to cover all bases you need an amplifier that is the sonic equivalent of the evil android assassin in Terminator 2, able to assume any guise at will before unleashing a veritable firestorm of doom upon anyone and everyone within reach. Hughes & Kettner offer different amps that cater to both types of guitarist but in this instance we are dealing with the German company's latest all-singing-all-

dancing metal-tastic flagship. Ladies and gentlemen, introducing the Coreblade Metalhead 2010.

Give it some 'stick...

H&K stand out courtesy of their elegant yet robust construction and an almost imposing sense of style, qualities that feel typically German. Indeed, the Coreblade does convey something of the feel of a Mercedes S-Class saloon; it is beautiful and graceful looking but when time comes to get on with the job it doesn't mess about! As the latest

addition to H&K's Pro Class series of high-end tube amps, the Coreblade owes a lot of its heritage to its classy stable-mates in the Switchblade range. Like the Switchblade amps the Coreblade is a highly advanced all-tube guitar amplifier with built-in effects and an impressive set of hi-tech goodies that are aimed at increasing the amp's tonal range and improving reliability. Another thing that quickly becomes apparent is that the Coreblade – like the Switchblade – is amazingly simple and intuitive to use; programming

“The Coreblade will thrill those that like to express their more aggressive side...”



The usb port saves personal settings and uploads new sounds

presets simply requires twisting the control knobs until you find a sound that you like and pressing the 'store' button; no LCD displays or complex menus to wade through and all the user need do is trust their ears.

One of the Coreblade's unique points, however, is the onboard USB port that lets the player save their own personal settings or indeed upload new sounds directly into the amp's digital memory from an

maintain a correct bias – which is essentially the right balance of current flowing between the output tubes. Even a correctly biased amp will drift after a fairly short time, especially if the amp is gigged regularly, and poorly biased tubes can wear out with depressing speed, usually noted by the amp's sweet spot gradually diminishing until the amp sounds like a shadow of its former self or the worst case scenario where it gives up the ghost altogether.

The Coreblade's TSC circuitry stops all that nonsense by automatically sensing and correcting any bias shift before it starts to do any naughty stuff to the amp, without the player even having to think about it. Tubes are fragile things and even good quality tubes sometimes go wrong but in the event of a dodgy tube calling it a day mid-gig, the TSC circuit simply shuts down the faulty tube, which results in a slight drop in output but

is a complete and utter no-no in conventional tube amp operation. This is great because it also means that if for whatever reason you happen to have a lone 6L6GC among your spares but your amp is running EL34s – or vice-versa – then in the event of a sudden mid-gig tube failure you can still lob in the spare tube without fear of your amp throwing a fit and sending you home for an early bath. With all this advanced technology on board H&K deserve credit for maintaining a remarkably user-friendly design and it seems to have covered all the bases with regard to making this amp accessible to the non-technical layman as well as qualified amp techs; the rear panel even includes a slot for inserting a guitar pick to monitor the tubes' bias status!

Channel hopping...

The Coreblade is a four-channel amp with separate Clean and Drive channels, plus two dedicated high



Four channels offer a wealth of tasty tone options

dial-in a classic 'scooped' rhythm tone with the mids dropped way down so as to enhance the low and high frequencies; complimented by a solo channel with smooth liquid mids that add muscle for powerful-sounding lead work that cuts through a dark and heavy band mix like a blow torch. The Coreblade's built-in so called 'intelligent' noise gate really comes into its own here and five gold stars to H&K for including a noise reduction circuit that works so efficiently and yet feels so unobtrusive, even though a bypass switch is included if the noise gate is somehow deemed as surplus to requirements. The Clean and Drive channels both calm things down a bit but are no less versatile. With 100 watts of headroom to play with you won't find quite the same level of natural compression and squashy dynamic punch on clean tones that you get from amps of around 50 watts or less, but this is still an incredibly crisp clean channel with bags of detail and a very distinctive top end sparkle. The Coreblade's Drive channel restores some of the dynamic feel of a lower powered amp and players who enjoy the warm touchy-feely relationship with their tube amp that we mentioned in the opening paragraph of this review will definitely like this side of the Coreblade. Drive spans quite a range from a mild gravelly-sounding crunch to fairly respectable dollops of gain that respond well to volume changes and pickup

“Coreblade is amazingly intuitive to use; just twist the control knobs until you find a sound that you like and press the ‘store’ button: no LCD displays or complex menus to wade through - all the user need do is trust their ears...”

external memory stick. Imagine the advantage that the USB function offers the touring pro player: freed from the hassle and expense of transporting a hefty amplifier on and off 'planes, boats and automobiles, all you need do is arrange to have a Coreblade amplifier ready at your next gig, upload your sounds straight into the amp via a USB stick and – hey presto! You are in business! The average weekend warrior should also be able to benefit from the Coreblade's TSC (Tube Safety Control) circuitry, which could prove very useful in terms of helping to keep the show on the road by effectively letting the owner become their own amp tech. Maintenance is one of the few bugbears about using a tube amplifier and TSC is a great benefit to players that maintain their own amps and also bone novices who don't wouldn't know an oscilloscope from an elephant!

How? In order to sound their best, power amp tubes need to

more importantly the show still goes on, thank you very much. With the output tubes continually operating at maximum efficiency it is easy to forget that they still need replacing eventually and so the Coreblade features a network of LEDs on the rear panel to indicate when a tube is about to let go. The Coreblade even breaks the rules by being able to run a mixture of 6L6GC and EL34 output tubes simultaneously, which

gain overdrive channels with individual voicing that covers just about every tonal spectrum between 'apocalypse' and 'Armageddon'. Make no bones about it; this amp is clearly aimed at the guitar player who enjoys expressing the more aggressive side of their musical personality. The dual high-gain channels offer tremendous versatility from a hard rock or metal player's perspective thanks to the facility to



The rear panel, revealing the Coreblade's tube status monitoring features

HUGHES & KETTNER COREBLADE



The Coreblade: packed with great features yet the layout is very user friendly

▶ selection without necessarily needing recourse to the heavy-duty channel changing MIDI footswitch to alter the tone. Talking of the footswitch, another thing in this amp's favour is that the footswitch is included in the price and is vital to gain access to all of the 128 separate presets. With up to three separate effects available per channel, there is no compromise when sorting out the perfect sound for any song or set list and the effects themselves sound as cool and vibey as any good quality stomp box.

With reverb and delay plus modulation effects including chorus, flanging and phaser there is plenty to play around with - all topped off with a

the grill cloth to complete the setup.

H&K has always maintained a very distinctive style with all of its products, no matter how big or small, and the Coreblade has a curious slotted chassis that seems to suggest the bars of a cage holding the beast within at bay until you are ready to release all that monstrous energy and power. Indeed, lurking among the front panel rotary controls (which are Programmable Resistor Network, or PRN potentiometers that don't have conventional mechanical workings and therefore are free from crackles) is a Resonance control, which lets the user adjust the resonant peak of the speaker cabinet to dial-in extra low-end

“...two dedicated high gain overdrive channels cover just about every tonal spectrum between ‘apocalypse’ and ‘Armageddon!’”

good old fashioned tremolo for authentic swamp boogie textures! H&K insists that the signal path remains truly analogue all the way through the amplifier and we have no reason to doubt this, the effects can be blended so that they dominate the tone or simply add subtle colouration when needed and it soon becomes easy to appreciate the benefit of having so many meat-and-potatoes effects to hand when you no longer need to cart them along in a separate rig; although the amp also includes a built-in effects loop for adding

thump should they need it. The really cool thing about the Resonance control is that the extra bottom end comes at no expense to the power amp, so that even at fairly modest volumes the Coreblade conveys the impression that the amp sounds absolutely huge. Whether recording or in a live gig where you need to be mindful of the volume without sacrificing the meat, the Resonance control is the one to remember.

The Coreblade is certainly an incredibly versatile amp but that isn't just what makes it so



The heavy-duty MIDI footswitch is included with the price of the amp

external modulation or time delay based gadgets. One area we haven't covered yet is the amp's appearance; the black and silver livery features a small tribal tattoo-style logo on the front panel which feels like a subtle reminder that the Coreblade is designed very much with heavy metal players in mind. As if the point needed reinforcing, H&K also offers a complimentary Celestion-loaded 412 speaker enclosure with a similarly aggressive-looking tribal tattoo logo on

appealing. The attention to detail and thought behind it hasn't masked the ultimate goal, which is to deliver an amp stuffed to the brim with spine tingling sounds and the USB stick facility is a truly great idea. By the time that you read this it shouldn't be long before Coreblade owners can download new settings and artist presets or even patches programmed by fellow Coreblade owners via the H&K website. With this amp, the sky really is the limit. **PM**



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