

Genz-Benz El Diablo 100 Head and G-Flex 2x12 Cabinet



Reviewed By “Cos”

I was on the hunt for an amp that would fill the void of my long lost Mesa Boogie MKIII that I parted ways with years ago.

My current application called for an amp that had a clean channel and lead channel that had enough gain that I did not need a stomp box distortion pedal. (for whatever reason I never got into stomps). My old Boogie had gobs of pre-amp gain the provided more than enough singing sustain for solos and it had tons of tight crunch as well. I was on the lookout for a used MK III but after searching a while I never turned up what I was after. Plus, I was concerned that maybe my baritone guitar might not get the thundering clear lows I was after either.

I had had my eye on the Genz-Benz El Diablo for a while as a candidate among a few others. No local dealer and not too many videos about it on YouTube at the time either. A friend had tried one and he said it lacked clarity. But I wanted to find out myself.

Well loaded with a good case of amp gas I found a deal on Ebay for a Genz-Benz El Diablo 100 and matching 2x12 Genz G-Flex cab with very little use for a price that was just stupid to pass up on.

When I got it I t looked as cool as I thought it would. Glowing Blue LEDs, old style looking Fender jewel red and blue lights for power and standby. But, how did it sound?

Well? This is a long one so go grab a cup of your favorite drink.

First, I think my amp had a little more use than was advertised. I new set of Svetlana medium EL34s and some time tweaking the bias, and a few emails to Jeff Genzler (he is

as available to his customers as people say), and a fresh set of Tung-Sol 12AX7s really breathed some life into what I was afraid was a dull sounding amp at first.

THIS AMPS CHARACTER. Lets talk about this a second. From the looks of this amp, the fact that it has active tone controls vs. passive, and from the clips on the Genz website, from the 3-Doors Down adds, I got the impression this was a “nu-metal amp”. Well that was a wrong call on my part and kind of off the mark. Let me explain.

OK, so what the hell kind of amp is this then? I’m an electronics guy and I have some theory about tube amps behind me (enough to be dangerous). So what did I notice about the circuit in this amp from what I could see? My take is it is a highly modified Marshall but no one will fess up on that. (unofficially they did but I don’t want to quote anyone LOL!!)

So my guess is if you took a JCM800 and did the following:

- 1) Add a solid state phase inverter! What! Yep. If you think about it the phase inverter does not add that much tone (I know Marshall one wire mod guys will throw rocks at me here but hold on). The phase inverter splits the signal why not make it solid state and save on tube failures AND then use that tube for another gain stage or use it for a separate clean channel? Let the solid state inverter create your buzz saw pre-amp distortion your after anyway.
- 2) Add active tone controls to the tone stack to give more control and less interaction between bands.
- 3) Add all the stability mods in the power tube section that you have read about.
- 4) Bring the bias out to where it is easily accessible and monitored (my amp is on older model that does not have this☺).
- 5) Take some of the popular mods that are done to a Marshall and bring them out to the front panel in the form of switches and knobs. This lets the amp be in “plain Jane” mode and then tweak it. Such as the “Texture Switch” for Dynamic or Compressed. tones, or the “Tube Contour” control that varies that additional gain stage (it acts like it is in parallel to the lower gain stage like the old four input jumper cable trick I think). And the “Global Attack Switch and control” that acts like a modded presence circuit. You want to add presence but it seems like the wrong freqs are coming forward? Well now you can dial them in.

I have to add here that these controls are subtle. Just like some of the mods guys do to amps. The basic circuit stays in tact but you’re sculpting and shaping your tone. I think some people trying this amp out do not realize this and when they twist one of these knobs and the entire tone does not drastically change that think it is not working or a poor design. So with that said my take is what we have here is a tricked out Marshall built like a tank.

GAIN-Let’s talk about gain. This amp has very similar gain to a JCM800 in my opinion i.e some but not a lot. I had a Pearly Gates pickup in my guitar for a while and I was always trying to dig in to get that “little extra” that I could not get (keep in mind I played

a MKIII before in the lead channel set to chainsaw mode LOL!). When I put a Jeff Beck pickup in my guitar then the amp lit up nicely and I could get what I was after. So kudos's for an amp that has just the right amount of gain to let your pickups and playing style shine through.

The Warm aka. “clean” Channel- This is where it gets sweet. While I have never played a Blackface Fender I have played various other old style Fender tube amps (Twin, and Super Reverb) I can imagine that this sort of bell like, high headroom clean, with no breakup, and warm bottom end is what most people are talking about in a Blackface-like tone. This a beautiful clean sound with no breakup. Kick on the Vintage switch and now you have some breakup and a light vintage crunch as you turn up the gain. This and Les Paul and you would be set for some nice '70 classic rock jamming. Tone controls in this stage are also active so when you go to add some bottom end your gonna get **BOTTOM END!** Having an active EQ on your clean channel is a nice feature to have to get that clean tone “just right”.

The Hot channel-In this channel we have Classic and High settings. These really just pick up off where the Warm Channel vintage settings left off. However, as I said in this channel now we have the Texture and Tube Contour controls added in to play with our tone. The Texture control really just adds more gain and compression not over the top but usable. If you liked the Metallica type tone you'd like to have this in. If you like a blues rock tone you might want to leave it out I am guessing. The Tube Contour control I call the “brown” knob. You dial it back the amp gets warmer sounding dial it up it gets a tad more brittle, or loose and tight might be another way to describe it but I don't want to confuse this with rectifier loose and tight, that is a different animal. BTW this amp has a solid state rectifier.

Things I like:

The clicking detent knobs. Having an active EQ this lets you recall settings easily. The EQ on this amp is very sensitive.

The versatility. If I could go into a studio and bring only one amp with me this might be it. It can cover A LOT of ground. I think Genz is dropping the ball on marketing this amp. The videos on his website nowhere near show off the versatility of this amp.

It is built like a tank.

The double grab handles. (note the 2x12 G-Flex cab is lighter than the head!!)

World power and removable AC cord with a world power chart on the back. (I only hope I can use this feature one day).

THREE FX LOOPS! Global and one for each channel.

Things I don't like:

Some of the controls on the front panel like the Texture and Global Attack are on the footswitch. IMO I would never switch these via foot switch. What I would switch are the FX loops which there is NO ability to do! At least let me switch the global FX loop. Or better yet put two footswitch connectors on the back and sell a couple of footswitches so I can get the options I'm after.

While the retainers on the preamp tubes are a nice touch they are WAY hard to get at. At a gig and having to change out a tube on the spot would lead to a flurry of ##(*\$)(\$*_ *%!!! words coming from behind the amp I am sure..

The open top grill. While I love the look it is asking for a drink to be dumped in the amp. I do appreciate the idea to keep the amp ventilated and it looks awesome with the blue back lights but even a Marshall's small vent is a magnet for drinks. Hot channel could use just a tad more clear gain.

A final note on a nu-metal tone with low tuned guitars. With a few tone tweaks and dialing back the gain my baritone guitar sounded perfect (to me at least). Clear, tight, thundering, crunchy, and no mud. Also this amp has no "Depth" control for bottom end. IT DON'T NEED IT turning up the bass on the Hot channel with a baritone guitar and this thing will drop kick you across the room!

You can hear this amp in action on the Marauder track "Stay Alive" here:

<http://maraudermusic.com/Muisc/StayAlive.mp3>

All backing and solos were done with the El Diablo. Solos on this were with the Pearly Gates pickup in a Strat and the backing guitars were an ESP baritone with EMGs.

I hope you find this review helpful and informative. If you're a fan of "Marshall like" metal tones and looking for an amp that can go other places as well, the El Diablo might be worth looking into. I would think this amp would be a great one to have in a studio as well due to its flexibility. While it may not out perform some amps in a one-on-one aspect, it is a good jack-of-all-trades and in my opinion represents an interesting take on amp design while being able able to produce some nice clean, vintage and, modern tune tones. While I may use other amps for various applications I can't see myself ever letting this gem of an amp go.

Oh! almost forgot that cab. That little monster can really put out. The best way I can put it is if you took a Greenback, a V30, and GT75 cab, added the oomph of a Recto cab, made it light weight you'd have a G-Flex. I'd have no problem playing a club with this cab. Granted it is not physically the same size as a 4x12 but I think it could hang with most. Plus when you go low tuned with this cab the front pots just crush you with bass where some 4x12s may not be able to hang in the realm. Plus the jack panel on the back give you lots of hookup options and again I love the top double handle configuration of these cabs.

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