

# LAZY J J40

Dan Steinhardt take an exclusive look at Lazy J's new mid-powered creation

When Lazy J released its award-winning J20 Deluxe-style 20-watt amplifier a couple of years ago, the guitar-playing elite seemed unanimous in their praise.

Soon after, the J80 Tweed Twin-style amp became a reality, and a shiny new Lazy J was on the wish list of guitarists all over the world. Lazy J users now include Joe Walsh, Jeff Beck, Joe Bonamassa, Pete Townshend, Doyle Bramhall II, Ronnie Wood, Eric Clapton, Paul Weller, and on and on it goes. There are only a handful of amp companies in the world who can put claim to having such a prestigious line-up of world-class players on their artist roster, and even fewer who can say that they've achieved this all within a couple of years of making their first commercially available amp.

Jesse Hoff, the affable, if not slightly eccentric genius behind Lazy J amps, designs and builds these amplifiers by hand, one at a time, right here in the UK. He is the man that rock stars take their invaluable vintage amps to for some Lazy J love and is respected as one of the best valve amp guys in business today.

After the success of the J20 and J80, Jesse has designed an amp that in power-rating terms lies somewhere between the two – so no prizes for guessing what it's called ... yes, the J40. The name may have been somewhat predictable, but that's where any and all preconception about what this amp is and does goes out the window.

## Pre & Power Amp

On first inspection the amp looks like a hybrid between the J80 and J20. It's similar to the 1x12" lacquered tweed-covered cabinet of the J20, with an almost identical control layout to the J80.

The J40 utilises two 5881/6L6 valves in the output section as

opposed to the four that reside in a J80, which stands to reason as this amp has half the power. This, however, does not equate to half the volume, a point made blindingly obvious as soon as we fire the amp up.

The solid finger-jointed pine cab is covered in gorgeous lacquered tweed, which helps keep the resonance of the cab intact. Mounted in the back is a single high-powered Tayden Ace 50 Alnico speaker. The J40 also uses one GZ34 rectifier valve, and three 12-AX7s for the preamp and phase inverter valves.

The amp's controls are fairly classic: two separate volumes for the bright and normal channel, which can be linked for extra flexibility, interactive bass, treble and middle controls, a gain boost which is a pull switch on the treble

## You can buy the amp as stock or you can add a reverb or tremolo module - or both!

control for the bright channel, a sub cut/pull switch on the bass control to tighten the bottom end, a presence control that sets the negative feedback for the upper frequencies, and an overall resonance control that sets the negative feedback for all frequencies. This control in particular opens up amazing tonal possibilities depending on how you have it set.

Another really great feature available on all of the Lazy J amps is

the optional modules. You can buy the amp as stock or you can add a reverb or tremolo or both. These options come as modules that sit in the back of the amp and are activated with a very clever footswitch that has a speed control for the tremolo and a depth control for the reverb – an amazing feature that lets you control the amp's effects right from your pedalboard.

Finally, the J40 hides a clever little switch in the back of the amp. This switch controls the voltages inside the amp, switching from a lower Tweed-era amp voltage, to a higher Blackface-style voltage.

If you think that there's little chance of a single 12" speaker format combo being able to rock the house, you'd be very wrong indeed. When Ronnie Wood performed onstage with Rod Stewart in Hyde Park recently, this is the amp he chose to get him heard above the massive band. That's not to say that the amp doesn't sound sweet at lower volumes, it truly does, but the amp can kick, and what it kicks is sublime.

There are two channels, one normal and one bright, and with





the aid of a small patch cable you can link the two of them together and have them interact – as is the vintage way.

## Sounds

Just by looking at the amp you may be fooled into believing that you can guess what it's going to sound like, and you'd be half right, but the J40 delivers so much more than what you might think.

Yes, it delivers the highly prized Tweed-style tones with aplomb, the strange mix of musical compression with sizzling top end, though thanks to the hi/lo voltage switch, that compression turns into a faster attack, which goes a long way towards nailing a Blackface character.

The quick attack, the thick yet biting top-end clarity really sings with a Telecaster, and yet the J40 is not about just copping those vintage-style tones. There is a quality to the sound that, while still familiar and comforting, sits so beautifully in a modern context.

The hi/lo voltage switch is such a great feature and brings even more flexibility to an astounding-sounding amplifier.

Plugging into the channels separately we can very easily dial in some superb tones, the normal channel being the biggest surprise. On many amps of this format the normal channel alone is too muddy, but we find with use of the presence and resonance control that we can easily dial in some fantastic bite that works with the round bottom end of the normal channel.

Likewise with the bright channel, but here we end up with the channels linked together for our favourite tones. The tone controls are highly interactive, so spending some time getting to know how



The construction is flawless

they work is well rewarded and so much fun to boot.

The resonance control dictates to a large extent the overall energy and vibe of the amp's sound. Using the Tweed setting with the resonance set high gives a tone that is almost Bassman-like with its edge and slower attack, while on the Blackface setting, with the resonance control dialled back, it's everything a Pro Reverb dreams it could be, but almost never is.

With the volume at a reasonable level the clean sounds are remarkable. Beautiful but never sterile – indeed we're hard-pressed to remember a better-sounding clean amp. Yes, it's definitely in the vintage Fender camp, but it has something else to it. Generally, old Fenders set at this level can sound a bit lifeless, but the J40 is anything but.

Turning up the volume gets the output stage working and rewards us with a rich, naturally compressed overdrive. The Tayden speaker sounds superb in this application, unlike many speakers that would seem a natural fit with



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## The thick yet biting top-end clarity really sings with a Telecaster

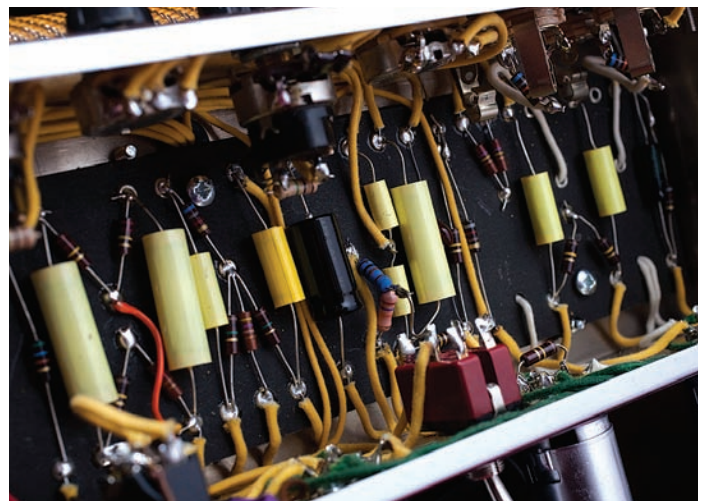
this style of amp. They have headroom but they break up on the sweet side of permanent hearing loss – a really great balance.

With the amp turned up we pull up the treble control to engage the extra gain. It's not a huge amount of gain, just enough to add a bit of hair to the tone. Pulling up the bass control tightens up the bottom end and adds a touch more mids for a slightly more defined, throaty sound. With a Les Paul plugged into the amp dialled in like this, it is nothing short of heavenly. There is punch and clarity complete with an amazing sustain as the amp brings out all the harmonics in the overtones. We also have one of the Lazy J

Cruiser overdrive pedals on hand, so plug it into the amp as well to see how the front end handles a bit of boost. It more than handles it, it devours it. The amp's character is never overtaken by the pedal, it just takes it to a new level. We marginally prefer the Blackface setting with the pedal, but in both states it sounds glorious.

The reverb in the amp is everything you'd hope it would be. It doesn't affect the tone of the amp, it just washes over the original sound creating a lush valve-driven spring reverb tone. The reverb module is located in the back of the amp, and although it may seem hard to get to, it's a problem overcome with the help of the very clever included footswitch. Once you've set the tone of the reverb on the module you can control its depth and turn it on and off directly from the footswitch. It's the coolest reverb footswitch we've ever seen and, like many of the features of Lazy J amps, gives you a glimpse into the creative mind of the designer of the amplifier.





One thing worth mentioning about this amp, and indeed this is something consistent with all the Lazy J amps we've tried out, is how the 'vibe' has been designed in.

This may sound a bit nondescript, but I promise we have a valid point. There are amplifier companies who design circuits to run at the edge of their limits to give the tone a certain character; not so with Lazy J amps. Jesse Hoff has designed these amps to run well within tolerance. The tone unleashed from these amps is not the sound of the power valves about to give out, or the output transformer screaming in agony, it's a tone derived from a man's obsession with understanding

what makes this style of amplifier sing, and then being able to deliver that in an amp with modern components operating comfortably no matter where you have it set.

Why is this important? Two reasons: reliability and consistency. In our experience, amplifiers that run at the edge of their component specs have a much higher probability of giving out just when you're about to step up to take the most important solo of your life. This has a lot to do with the tremendous amount of heat that these sorts of amps generate, especially in amps that use hot biasing as the basis for their tonal output. Amps biased too hot also go through valves very quickly, and as a working musician it can become a real expense. This may be another clue as to why the pros have embraced Lazy J with such enthusiasm. Yes, the amps sound incredible, but what a bonus to know that the tone you're enjoying is the sound of a very happy

amplifier, not the sound of the amp dying behind you, and that it's going to sound exactly the same for the rest of the tour.

## Conclusion

Even though there are a host of mid-powered, vintage, Fenderesque tones on tap here, the J40 is not an amp that is trying to be all things to all people. The enormous amount of tonal options and flexibility are there simply to provide you with a sound that, as a guitar player, you can connect with. No matter how you have it set, or what instrument you use it with, it's an amp that is dripping with character and not at the expense of clarity or headroom.

The J40 is not a variation on a theme, nor is it a clone. It has a feel and vibe all its own. All of its elements, such as the optional modules, hi/lo voltage switch, custom output transformer and Tayden speaker, come together with a sprinkling of magic to

deliver yet another truly stunning amplifier from Lazy J. **GB**



## Modules

These clever modules designed by Jesse give you the chance to have an amp designed just for you without changing its aesthetic, as the modules sit in the back of the amp, out of sight. The reverb's tone control is truly fantastic; you can go from very dark to warm and lush so easily. Even though the controls may seem a bit tricky to get to, the included footswitch gives you the ability to control the level of reverb and speed of the tremolo directly from your pedalboard.



## The Amp Tech

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## Technical Specification

**Price:** £1,699  
+ reverb £275  
+ tremolo £165  
**Built in:** UK  
**Type:** 1x12 combo  
**Power:** 40 watts  
**Valves:** 12AX7 preamp and 6L6 power section, GZ34 rectifier  
**Features:** Reviewed model includes tremolo and reverb  
**Footswitch:** Included  
**Dimensions:** 16"(h) x 20"(w) x 9.5"(d) mm (max, with handle and controls)  
**Weight:** 12kg (26lb)

## Contact Details

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## What We Think

### What did our test results reveal?

**Pros:** Fantastic tones.  
Great options

**Cons:** None.

**Ideal For:** Working guitar players looking for an amp that will sound stellar in any situation.

## GB Rating

Rating out of five stars

Lazy J 40 **★★★★★**