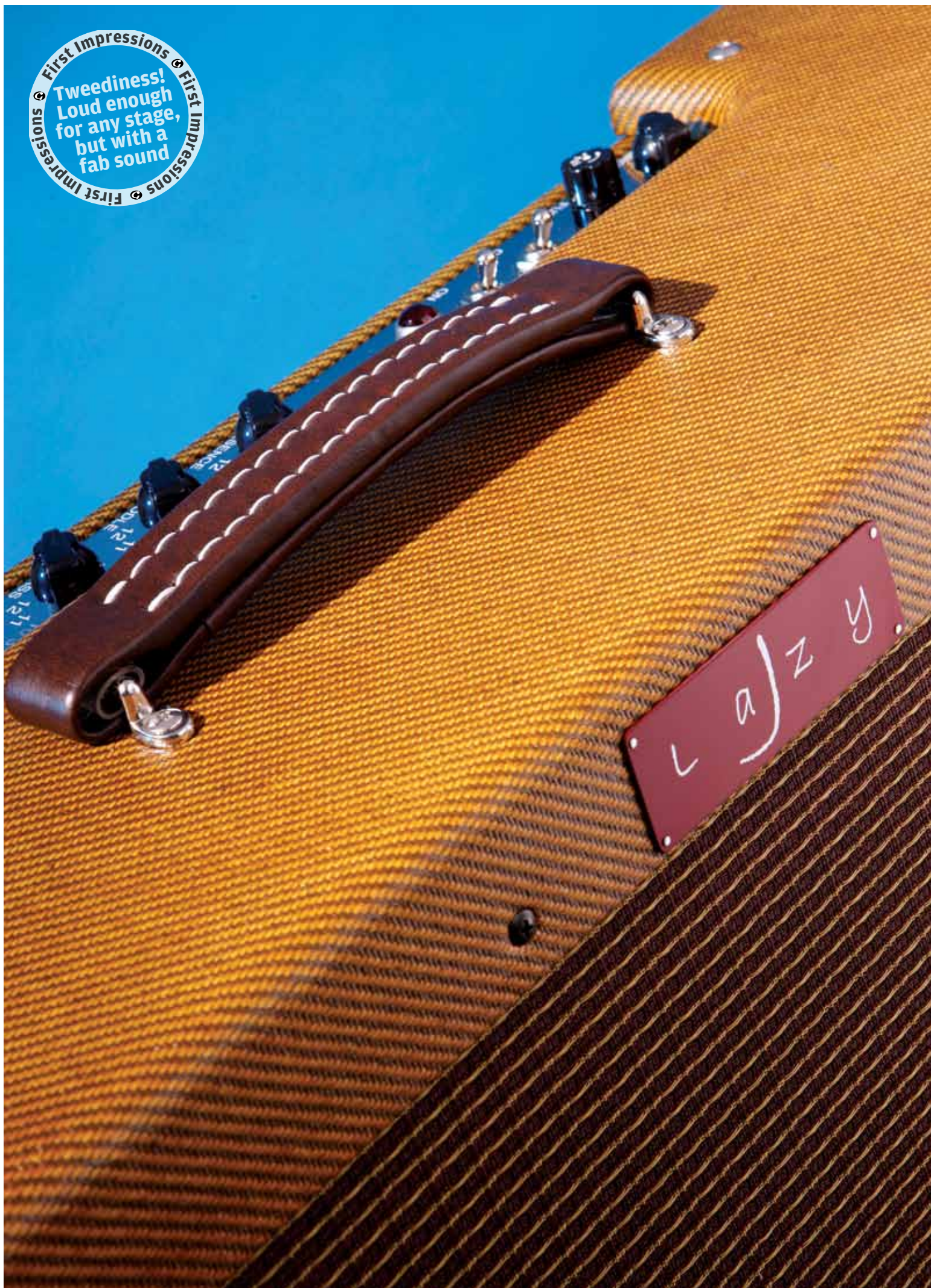


First Impressions
Tweediness!
Loud enough
for any stage,
but with a
fab sound
First Impressions



From: £2058.87



Neatly intercepting an amplifier en route to its famous owner, Huw Price discovers that the new higher-power combo from UK-based Lazy J is a force to be reckoned with

Lazy J

80 Combo

Jesse Hoff is fast making a name as one of the UK's top amp builders. His client list already reads like a 'who's who' of rock's glitterati, and the amp we're reviewing this month actually belongs to Paul Weller. So big thanks to The Modfather for letting us see it first.

This is the second addition to Lazy J's product line and, like the Deluxe derived Lazy J 20 we reviewed last year, it's Hoff's spin on a classic Fender design from the tweed era. Now Hoff has turned his attention to the 'high power' 5F8-A Twin that Fender first introduced in 1958.

The 5F8-A Twin shared the same preamp circuitry as the 5F6-A Bassman amps but had an extra pair of power tubes to up the power to 80W and two 12" rather than four 10" speakers. Designed for pedal steel players, these rare, collectable Twins became popular amongst guitarists - most notably Keith Richards.

Although it has a vintage-correct control layout, the J 80 has 6L6 power tubes rather than 5881s and the ground switch is replaced with a push/pull pot that doubles as a Sensitivity control and half power switch. The Bright channel volume pot is also a push/pull that activates a gain boost for both channels.

This J 80 is equipped with Lazy J's optional valve-driven spring reverb and bias tremolo modules, which screw onto the inside panels of the cabinet. The accompanying foot controller has on/off switches along with Reverb Level and Tremolo Speed controls. Further controls



If you order your Lazy J with built-in throb and 'verb, you'll find the knobs located on extra modules at the back



Here's the tremolo unit. The two speakers are UK-assembled 25W Tayden ACE 25s with alnico magnets

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for Reverb Level and Tone plus Tremolo Intensity and Speed are found on the modules themselves.

Most of the signal resistors in this amp are carbon composites and the audio capacitors are metal films. All Lazy J cabinets are made from finger-jointed solid pine, and the quality of the tweed covering is superb. Hoff also ages the tweed with tinted lacquer to enhance the vintage ambience.

SOUNDS

If the Lazy J 20 was a stropky adolescent flexing its muscles, the J 80 is in its prime. The volume controls are very responsive, so there's life before '2' and overdrive comes on quite gradually. At halfway up things are still fairly clean, but the speakers are really pushing some air and you can sense the pine cabinet resonating.

The clean tones are impressively clear and open, so the character of all our

FACTFILE

LAZY J 80

Specs: 80/40W 2x12" combo with three 12AX7s, four 6L6s and a GZ34. Handmade in the UK

Controls: Volume (x 2), Treble, Bass, Middle, Presence, Reverb Level (on module & footswitch), Reverb Tone, Tremolo Speed (on module & footswitch), Tremolo Intensity, Gain & Sensitivity switches, On/Off, Standby

Price: basic amp £2058.87; with reverb £2316.47; with tremolo £2213.47; with reverb and tremolo £2470.97

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The Lazy J 80 has a gain boost on its Bright channel Volume knob, plus Presence, Middle, Bass and Treble. The control far left operates Sensitivity and the half power switch

THE COMPETITION

GARTONE
Bluesmaster 80W
 Another UK-made 5F6 replica. The Bluesmaster has Mercury Magnetics transformers and comes with either Tayden Ceramic or Celestion Alnico Gold speakers
PRICE: £1750-£1995

CLARK AMPLIFICATION
Low Country
 A no-holds-barred 5F6-A replica made with Jensen paper/oil capacitors, carbon comp resistors and Tone Tubby hemp cone speakers
PRICE: \$3675

FENDER
'57 Twin Amp
 Fender's own tweed twin reissue is based on the 40W 5E8-A circuit that preceded the high power Twin
PRICE: £1995

test guitars came through along with a degree of harmonic enhancement. Through the Normal channel the bass is pretty immense, then switching over to the Bright channel the sparkling chime through the upper mids and highs seems to de-emphasise the lows. An underlying growl reminds you of its tweed origins, but with the luscious reverb on and the treble up, there's a hint of blackface too. I don't think I've ever played through an amp that's more satisfying for country picking on a Tele or Gretsch, and it can even make a Lester chime.

Some tweeds can be slightly dark and muddy, especially when pushed. The Lazy J 80's tone controls are so powerful that you can dial in your fave tones with any guitar. The Middle control has a profound effect; you can even get scooped mids. The open back cab creates a big, three-dimensional room-filling effect, and the alnico Tayden ACE 25 speakers seem to provide more openness, smoothness and high frequency chime than Fender-style Jensens (though this type of cab design can't give you the ultra-tight low end solidity of an infinite baffle cabinet).

The half-power switch cuts the power from 80 to 40W. This sounds dramatic, but doubling the power of an amp doesn't actually double its volume. Rather than switch off two of the 6L6 power valves, Hoff uses a mixed bias system to drop the power while maintaining the same impedance relationship with the output transformer, keeping the tone unchanged and the amp still punchy and full of life.

The 5F8-A's feedback loop sends some signal from the output back to the driver stage. This was a method used for controlling distortion when distortion was considered undesirable. Hoff's Sensitivity control allows the J 80 to operate in true vintage mode, or you can gradually remove the negative feedback. This results

delivers sag without softness and natural compression without losing dynamic response. A final mention should be given to the tremolo, because it's deep, swampy and eminently playable. Switch to the neck pickup, crank up the reverb, and bang... this amp will shoot you down.

VERDICT

Forget any older reviews you may have read: since last year, Hoff has tweaked the circuit to make it more responsive and easier to overdrive. It can still do loud, clean and sparkly, but dark, grungy and raw is on the menu too. Remember, the J 80 is an amp for gigging and recording musicians, but it would probably be completely wasted if you only ever play quietly at home.

Here's a simple equation to consider: sound + feel = tone. Sound is the noise your amp makes; feel is the way it responds

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to your playing; and tone is the confluence of these elements that puts a smile on your face and facilitates everything you try to do as a player. It seems that the best amp builders understand this, and Jesse Hoff is a case in point. To us, the J 80 seems to combine the huge physical presence and wide frequency range of a high-power '60s-era Fender with the dynamic feel and overdrive characteristics of a low-power '50s-era tweed. Believe us, that's a special combination.

in extra overdrive and upper midrange harmonics, with a wilder and looser feel. The gain boost switch makes a big difference to the overall grunt. It slightly beefs up the midrange, and it's very effective with vintage output single coil pickups. If you want thick, creamy overdrive the J 80 is more than capable of supplying it... but not at bedroom levels.

Loudness is subjective and hard to quantify. Fender's impressive '57 Tweed Twin reissue is very loud despite the mere 40W rating; in a medium-sized room it can really take your head off. The Lazy J 80 is a very loud amp too - but somehow it doesn't take your head off. The big difference is that even at full strap, it doesn't become edgy or painful to listen too. You can feel your flares flap, and the low mids seem to fill your chest cavity. In fact it should probably carry a health warning because cranking it up is so much fun. Of course you can get loud clean tones, but when overdriving the J 80



Jesse Hoff uses a clever mixed bias system on the output valves to achieve its half-power setting

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	19/20
Playability	19/20
Sound	20/20
Value for money	18/20
Vibe	20/20
TOTAL	96%
Good for... country, rockabilly, blues, rock, running pedals, classic metal	
Look elsewhere... infinite baffle low end tightness, bedroom volume overdrive	