



LOUIS ELECTRIC

Buster & KR12 combos

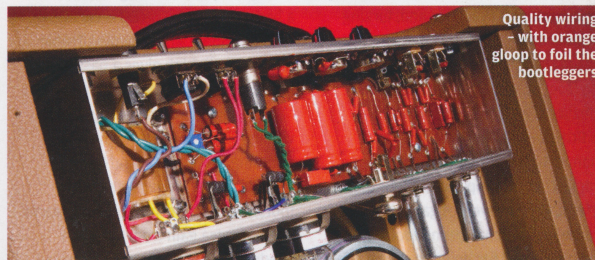
Keith Richards, Hubert Sumlin, Duke Robillard, Danny Gatton and Robben Ford are just some of the players who have played Lou Rosano's amplifiers - and now they're over here. Review by **Richard Purvis**

New Jersey has given us Whitney Houston, Bon Jovi, My Chemical Romance and the Jonas Brothers. On balance, perhaps, New Jersey ought to stop giving us stuff. But let's make room for Lou Rosano of Louis Electric, who designs and builds all his acclaimed amps himself in Bergenfield, NJ - and now they've arrived in the UK.

These two combos are classy-looking bits of work, with tidy trim and a swish retro-styled logo. The open-backed pine cabs are unfinished on the inside, displaying Rosano's flawless carpentry, and going deeper we find minimally-wired eyelet boards with orange paint splodged over all the caps and resistors to hide their values from cloners. They're both fixed-bias Class AB combos, and each has a Celestion G12, but in voicing terms there's a distinct US/UK split: the 25W Buster is a 6L6-driven product of the tweed Fender school, while the 40W KR12 has EL34s and reflects Rosano's love of old Marshalls. Oh, and the 'KR' stands for Keith Richards, as this is his signature model. That's some real pedigree.

Buster

Well spotted - it's not tweed. The fudgy vinyl is more reminiscent of Fender's early-'60s brownface era, but the three-



Quality wiring - with orange gloop to foil the bootleggers

With a Les Paul, the Buster delivers all the soaring, splatting magnificence of Neil Young at his ragged best

knob, four-input panel is straight off a late-'50s 5E3 Deluxe. There are two key differences, though: the output valves are 6L6s rather than 6V6s, allowing this amp to belt out roughly double the 5E3's stated 12W; and the speaker is a G12H, usually associated with classic Marshall tones, rather than a Jensen.

The panel has a brushed finish, and the jewel light is luscious purple. You get Normal and Bright channels with two inputs and a Volume control each, and one shared Tone knob. A patch lead can be used to bridge both channels together for maximum gain and more tone-sculpting possibilities.

Sounds

We're not expecting shimmery clean sounds from this little amp, and we don't get them. Even with Volume around 2, where the output tubes

FINAL SCORE

LOUIS ELECTRICS BUSTER	
Build Quality	20/20
Playability	16/20
Sound	20/20
Value for money	17/20
Looks	18/20
TOTAL	91%

FACTFILE

Louis Electric Buster

DESCRIPTION Two-channel 25W 1x12" combo with 2 x ECC83, 2 x 6L6 and 1 x GZ34 valves, Celestion G12H Anniversary speaker. Made in USA
PRICE £1,550

CONTROLS Normal Volume, Bright Volume, Tone; Standby and On/Off switches

DIMENSIONS 51cm wide, 44cm high, 25cm deep
WEIGHT 18kg/39.6lbs

CONTACT ToneDoctor UK
 01775 713528
www.tonedoctor.co.uk
www.louisamps.com

Like this? Try this...

Fender

'57 Deluxe
 Handwired reissue of the tweed 5E3 model, surely the most influential small amplifier in history
 RRP £2,050
 REVIEWED June 2008

Volt Amp Co

Humble 18
 British take on the Deluxe-based Dumble Overdrive Special, the original boutique wonder-amp
 RRP £1,499
 REVIEWED June 2011

FACTFILE**Louis Electrics
KR12**

DESCRIPTION 40W 1x12" combo with 3 x ECC83, 2 x EL34 and 1 x 6Z34 valves (solid state rectifier optional), Celestion G12 Vintage 30 Speaker. Made in USA

PRICE £2,150

CONTROLS Preamp Volume, Master Volume, Treble, Bass, Middle, Presence; Standby and On/Off switches; negative feedback control at rear

ACCESSORIES Footswitch for gain boost (included)

DIMENSIONS 61cm wide, 53cm high, 25cm deep
WEIGHT 22kg/48.4lbs

CONTACT ToneDoctor UK
01775 713528
www.tonedoctor.co.uk
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**Like this?
Try this...****Bogner**

Shiva 112

Two-channel monster with reverb and four EL34s blasting 80W through a single Celestion

RRP £2,199

Orange

Rockerverb 50 MkII 1X12

Seriously noisy lump of pure retro rock, with two EL34s driving the same V30 speaker as the KR12

RRP £1,428

REVIEWED August 2010

are just about waking up, the Buster is fat and loud enough to compete with a 12W silverface combo close to full blast. Push things up past 4 or 5 and the solid, sticky, creamy, touch-sensitive magic of a classic tweed amp fills the room. Sonically, it's perfect. There's not much difference between the channels - just a hint of added chime on Bright - and the lack of variety on offer through running both together and adjusting the relative levels is slightly disappointing.

The true test of a valve-rectified amp like this involves plugging in a Les Paul and patching both channels in line with everything on full for a half-hour pummelling of *Cortez The Killer*. The Buster delivers all the soaring, splatting magnificence of Neil Young at his ragged best. It's on the edge but the tone always remains smooth, clear and well-balanced, which all in all makes this amp an absolute joy to be with.

KR12

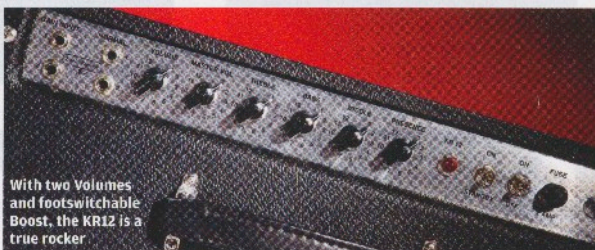
Two EL34s, gold piping and the size all recall a Marshall 1974, but the porthole baffle gives the KR12 a look all its own, and the brushed metal control panel and chickenhead knobs mix things up further. The KR12 has Volume controls for both ends of the circuit, a three-way tone stack plus Presence and, lurking on the underside of the chassis, a little cream Damping knob which adjusts the level of negative feedback. The speaker is a Vintage 30, well-suited to British-style overdrive and more than up to handling 40W. This one's a single-channel amp but the four inputs offer different levels of gain, and there's a cute footswitch... but no footswitch socket. How's that going to work?

Sounds

With a Tele plugged into Normal 1 and all the controls at halfway, the KR12 has a crisp, throaty tone with lots of crunch and an element of



To bridge both channels on the Buster you'll need an old-school patch lead



With two Volumes and footswitchable Boost, the KR12 is a true rocker

The KR12's four inputs offer different levels of gain from crisp, crunchy throatiness to a hefty vintage rock bark

Marshall-style boxiness... fantastic. More or less overdrive is easily dialled in, and the tone stays rich even with Master very low (although this is not a bedroom amp). The EQ is excellent: zeroing Middle while keeping Treble and Presence high gives a passable impression of a blackface Fender Twin.

Plugging into Gain 1 brings a hefty vintage rock bark that'll have you swearing it's a 2x12" - and there's more to come. Plugging the little footswitch into Normal 2 gives a warm blast of extra gain from the extra triode. Cleverly, the inputs are wired so the switch works like a stage-linking patch lead that you can plug and unplug with the flick of a toe. With the footswitch in Normal 1 the grind is even more ferocious, but always tight and controlled. The only thing you can't do

with just one channel is adjust output levels to get a perfect match between clean and dirty settings.

The extra knob round the back is a good advert for non-negative-feedback amps, as every sliver of damping you dial in robs the KR12 of a little more depth and sparkle. A careful dose could be useful for taming a bloomy semi-acoustic, but go too far and the whole thing becomes strangely cold and stiff.

Verdict

This has to be the greatest debut since Fabrizio Ravanelli pulled on a Middlesbrough shirt and put three past Liverpool. If you're looking for a loud, versatile 1x12" combo, it'd be hard to do better than the KR12; and if you're looking for a compact but giggable tweed-type, it's just as hard to see how you could beat the Buster. There's some high-class competition at this price, for sure, but it would have been downright perverse not to give either of these amps 20 out of 20 for sound, and that might be all you need to know. 🎸



Innovative circuitry includes an input-socket footswitch and a negative feedback control

FINAL SCORE

LOUIS ELECTRICS KR12

Build Quality 19/20

Playability 20/20

Sound 20/20

Value for money 17/20

Looks 16/20

TOTAL 92%
10