

Product Reviews

Product Review
Monza 1 x 10 Combo
Dr. Z Amplification
Maple Hts. OH

The prototype for this amp may have generated more talk at and after *Z-Fest* than any of the amps there. People seem to be looking for that grab and go amp and this will likely fit the bill for many folks. Things like, "great things come in small packages" and "lightning in a bottle" come to mind with this amp. While the *Monza* we reviewed does come in a small package, the 1 x 10 combo measures 17 3/4" W x 10" D x 16" H, and weighs in around 40 lbs, it produces tons of sound. With all of the controls dimed and a *PRS Mira* turned up all the way I got 122.1 db out of the thing measured at 6 ft. As the controls are set in the picture it easily hits 108db. The amp is rated around 20 watts, but as most people know *Dr Z* watts are loud.

As for controls, the front panel has a single input jack, then knobs for volume, drive and tone. There is also a standby and power switch and the pilot light. The pilot light on ours glowed a real cool purple/red iridescent color. The back panel has the jack for a removable IC cord, a 4 and 8 ohm speaker out and a fuse. Tucked down with the speaker is a *Dr Z Brake Lite*. The *Brake Lite*, as we reviewed in a previous issue, allows you to get the power tubes working and then turn the amp down before the signal hits the speaker.

The speaker in the amp is a 10" *Eminence* alnico *Red Fang* rated at 50 watts. The folks at *Dr Z* auditioned 10 speakers and the *Red Fang* was the clear winner. I'd have to agree with that. In this amp the speaker sounds amazing. It sounds big and round with more bass than you would expect from a 10 in a small cabinet, smooth musical high and lots of those all important mids. For tubes the amp comes with two 12AX7 preamp tubes, two EL84 power tubes, and a 5AR4 rectifier, so you can get some sag when the amp is pushed.

The volume control works very smoothly and gives you a big range of sounds. It does come up kind of quick at the beginning, so if you want it quieter you then start clicking on the *Brake Lite*. Most single tone control amps have a sweet spot where everything seems to come together. I kept trying to find it on this amp and couldn't. Wherever I put the tone control I got great useable tone. I first started with the control at 12:00 and thought, hey sounds great. I

crept it up to 2:00 and got more highs, but I also got a nice little bump in the mids that I really liked. This became my go to spot. I then dimed the control figuring the highs might become too much for me. I'm more a fan of mids than highs. I was wrong. I then went left of 12:00 and while the highs started to roll off, even with the knob completely counterclockwise, there was plenty of usable tone there, without the amp sounding too bassy or muddy. I'm sure everyone will find a spot that will make them happy.

The key to this amp, and where all of the fun is, is the Drive control. The amp starts out, with the drive control completely counterclockwise, with a bunch of drive. You can get clean from the amp in this position but it's not that squeaky *Twin* clean. The clean has a little bit of hair on the note. At least it did for me and I like my cleans that way. As you turn the control up you get more and more drive and distortion. With the control up all the way the amount is amazing. You've now put a full fur suit on that note. Some folks at *Z-Fest* nicknamed the amp "Billy in a box" after that great *Billy Gibbons* sound. It starts at *Billy* but can go way beyond. The *Monza's* tone and drive controls are perfect if you want great crunchy slide sounds.

The Drive control is not your typical cascading overdrive control like on *Mesa's* and other amps, giving you preamp distortion. It actually works on the phase inverter. With my limited electronic knowledge it works kind of like a phase inverter master volume in reverse. With a phase inverter master your master cuts the signal to the phase inverter so it has less to pass on to the output tubes so the amp gets quieter. Here you have a control that works in a limited range that as you turn it up boosts signal, actually lets more signal through to the phase inverter, so it drives the output tubes harder. This gives you the big, open, touch sensitive, sweet, smooth output tube distortion that most players crave and sounds so good. Crank the amp and you get that EL 84 karang. I ended up keeping the drive around 12:00 and had all the sustain and drive I needed. With it turned up the amp will sustain for days. As a matter of fact if you normally use a compressor to get added sustain, I don't think you will need it with this amp. It sustains like the compressor is there already.

If you are someone who likes to ride the volume control this is the amp for you. I have never played an amp where I could turn down the volume control so much and still get useable sounds. Normally I set my volume around 7, go up from there for more and drop back to



around 5 for less and then the signal starts to wane and the amp sounds thin. With the Monza no matter where I set the drive control I was able to turn the guitar knob down to 2 and it still sounded good. With the drive control down all the way and the guitar volume down too, there is some jangle available in the amp. A quick turn of the volume control and you go from that hairy clean to full bore distortion. It truly is a grab and go amp. You could easily go to a jam night or gig with just the amp and a guitar without any distortion or overdrive pedal and do the night with the overdrive and distortion in the amp. This is a very responsive amp that responds really well to volume changes and pick attack.

Speaking of pedals, after running the amp through its paces for a couple of days I realized I had forgotten to try it with any pedals and I had not missed them. I usually use a little reverb on my amps and with the harmonically rich tones of the Monza hadn't missed it. I then got to work. All the time and tone pedals like reverb, delay, chorus and wah of course worked well. Then I tried distortion and overdrive pedals thinking the added gain might cause me a problem. I went into the distortion box and pulled out a Digitech Screamin Blues and Deathmetal and Marshall Jackhammer. Dang if the thing didn't handle them all and give sounds I could use along with the amp's natural overdrive.

All this talk of overdrive and distortion may give you the idea the amp would mask the sound of different guitars, but that isn't true. I ran the PRS Mira, a PRS McCarty and Fender Telly and Strat through it and you could always still hear the distinctive character of the guitar.

The Monza will be available in the 1 x 10 configuration we got for \$1299. It will also be available as a head only for \$1149, a 1 x 12 and 2 x 10 with Dr Zs own 10s for \$1399.

Since it will be available in other configurations and we had a 1 x 12 and 2 x 10 Dr Z combo around I hooked the Monza up to each. For me using the 1 x 12 with a Celestian G12M30 I thought the Red Fang sounded better, The G12M was a little too bright for me and had more upper mids than the Red Fang. A G12H30 was better, more lows and lower mids, but I still preferred the Red Fang. With the 2 x 10 with Dr Zs the amp sounded massive. I mean wow. The sound was definitely louder and more potent, with tighter bass, crisper highs and a more scooped mid sound that made the amp sound different but still wonderful. I would give serious consideration to the 2 x 10 if you are not concerned about the extra size and weight. You will also be able to get it with two Red Fangs for an upcharge.

The sound of an amp is hard to describe in words. If you want to get some idea of how the Monza sounds follow this link to a demo of it done by Cleveland guitarist Frankie Starr from the Frankie Starr Band. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MO9kBcgvvfc>, then you'll know what I'm talking about.

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