



Vox AC30CC2X Custom Classic 2 x 12 combo £1,049

An AC30 for the new millennium! The Chinese-made Custom Classic mixes traditional appeal with cool boutique features and we think the result is a winner by Nick Guppy

For its legions of devoted fans, the Vox AC30 will always be the definitive British guitar amplifier. Its sound comes from a mixture of many things: the EL84 cathode-biased power stage, oddball EQ circuit, transformers and loudspeakers all play a part in creating that unique Vox tone which has been a part of so many memorable signature sounds over the years. From George Harrison and Hank Marvin to Status Quo and Brian May, it's all there.

However, in the modern world the AC30's quirky features are something of an anachronism, frequently at odds with the needs of many players. How, then, do you update one of the world's most iconic guitar amps without losing its traditional appeal?

A couple of years back, we saw a sign of things to come in the shape of the AC30HW: a limited production hand-wired amp with a traditional appearance but featuring a totally new

circuit design that blends vintage and modern sounds and features to devastating effect. With a lot of positive feedback from this toe-in-the-water, Vox has released the Custom Classic range – designed in England but made in China. The AC30CC is Vox's new vision of what a modern production AC30 should really be like, combining vintage looks with modern features and a much wider range of sounds.

The AC30CC's cabinet design hasn't strayed from the original. Those who like the 'big suitcase' styling of this amp won't be disappointed and the materials are decent quality too. Cabinet construction is up to a good standard and the traditional basket-weave vinyl is fairly well applied, with neat finishing around the tricky control panel area.

The chassis follows the original AC30 L-shape layout, with preamp valves mounted horizontally and power valves (including a GZ34 rectifier) mounted

vertically. The electronics (including all the controls) are PCB mounted on a mixture of double and single-sided boards connected by neat wiring. Preamp valve bases are soldered into the main vertical PCB, while the power valves are hand-wired. Just like an original AC30, to replace any valve means taking the chassis out and you may also need a soldering iron to disconnect the speaker leads.

The Custom Classic's controls are an interesting mix of old and new with a number of cool 'boutique' features. There are two input jacks – one for the normal channel and one for the Top Boost channel. Next to these is a small toggle switch that allows you to 'jumper' both channels together, replacing the patch lead many players use on standard AC30s, to thicken up the sound and widen the amps tonal range. The normal channel has a single volume control with a toggle switch marked 'brilliance' that adds extra



VOX AC30CC2X CUSTOM CLASSIC 2 x 12 COMBO
PRICE: £1,049
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: All valve two channel Class A combo with valve rectification
OUTPUT: 30W RMS
VALVES: Three ECC83/12AX7 preamp; four EL84 power amp, one GZ34 rectifier
DIMENSIONS: 540 (h) x 705 (w) x 265mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 32/70
CABINET: Birch ply
LOUDSPEAKERS: Two Celestion Alnico Blue
CHANNELS: Two
CONTROLS: Normal volume, Top Boost volume, bass and treble, reverb level and tone, tremolo speed and depth, master volume & cut
FOOTSWITCH: Two-button footswitch included, toggles tremolo & reverb effects
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Channel jumper switch links both channels in parallel, brilliance switch on normal channel, standard/custom EQ switch, bias switch, capacitor switch, series effects loop with switchable levels and true bypass, external speaker connections
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: AC30CC1 1 x 12 combo (£649), AC30CC2 (fitted with custom Wharfedale loudspeakers, £679), AC30CCH head (£499). Standard brown cloth cabs include the V412BN 4 x 12 (£319), V212BN (£159) and the V212BNX Alnico-loaded 2 x 12 cabinet (£599)
Korg UK
01908 857100
www.voxamps.com

VOX AC30CC2X	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** A great range of Vox-inspired sounds in a really useable modern amp and the price is right

■ **WE DISLIKED** Hard to fault at this price, but we felt the tremolo speed could do with being upped a few notches

highs. Then there are volume, treble and bass controls for the Top Boost channel and another switch that allows you to swap between standard and 'custom' EQ types.

As it was with the AC30HW, reverb is an integral part of the Custom Classic, featuring tone and level controls combined with a useful Dwell switch that varies the reverb circuit's input level. Tremolo has been retained, with speed and depth controls, and finally there's a master volume and the traditional backwards 'cut' control, which takes out highs as you turn the knob clockwise.

On the rear panel you'll find jack sockets to hook up external speakers with an impedance switch. Next to this are two more switches with rather esoteric functions: one changes the EL84s' cathode bias resistor values, giving you a choice of either the early four-input model's 22-watt output with less headroom or the extended

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headroom and higher output (around 33 watts) of a six-input AC30. The other switch varies the smoothing capacitor values in similar fashion for a tighter or looser response.

There's also a series effects loop with switchable levels to suit rack or stompbox-type effects, and a jack socket for the included footswitch, which enables you to toggle the reverb and tremolo effects.

SOUNDS: There's no doubting the Custom Classic's sonic heritage – the glassy highs, slightly boxy mid-range and balanced low end so typical of the AC30 are just as they should be, while the Alnico speakers on this top-of-the-range CC2X version add that characteristic edgy sparkle. An original AC30 normal channel is somewhat

'flubby' and lacking in highs, and the Custom Classic reproduces this. However, plug a decent treble boost pedal into this channel, wind up the volume and you're as close as you can be to the Queen guitar sound... especially if you play a Red Special loaded with Burns Trisonics and use a sixpence for a pick! Flipping the normal channel's brilliance switch into action restores the highs for a rich, crystalline jangly rhythm sound that cranks out classic sixties pop riffs with consummate ease.

The Top Boost channel's capabilities are considerably widened thanks to the dual-range EQ switch that varies the control's interactivity; being able to jumper both channels together fattens up the tone for a really thick lead sound. The Custom Classic's preamp

The rivals

Peavey Classic 50/212	
combo	£749
Orange AD30R	£969
HiWatt Studio/Stage 2 x	
12 combo	£1,361

Peavey's Classic is another favourite take on EL84 power. As you'd expect, the sound is more American in influence, but the power amp adds an aggressive grunt that you won't get from 6L6s – great value for money. Orange's AD30R combo is a well-made amp with typical Orange styling: big, heavy and very orange. Typical Orange tone too, with a boxy mid-range coupled with a thick, almost fuzzbox distortion – classic seventies rock tone. HiWatt's hand-wired in the UK Studio/Stage combo is another good example of a classic British guitar sound that's been successfully re-issued, with bold glassy highs and a ferocious crunch when wound up. It doesn't have the Vox's flexibility or range of features, but if one good sound is all you need then it's worth checking out

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→ gain range has sensibly been kept fairly modest so that at stage volume levels it's easy to dial in a great overdrive tone that blends preamp and power amp distortion for maximum effect. The rear panel bias and smoothing switches act to fine-tune the amp's response – you can use these to give the Vox a tighter or looser feel and vary the dynamic range.

The reverb is excellent. Being able to control tone, mix level and dwell really capitalises on the potential of this effect. The tremolo sounds great for low speed pulsing effects, although we felt that the LFO's top speed could do with being a little faster.

Overall, it's a far cry from the somewhat stiff and unforgiving nature of a standard AC30. This is one of those amps that makes you want to dig in, hit the strings hard and really get into playing with all the nuances. Anything



The footswitch toggles reverb and tremolo effects




The top panel is clearly laid out to make controlling your AC30CC a simple affair

from vintage Beatles and Shads riffs to Queen and beyond is possible. The clever design means that this is an amplifier with a lot of versatility while the controls remain simple and intuitive to use.

Verdict

The Custom Classic is definitely an AC30 for the modern player without any of the frustration that comes from using an original. The new circuit and controls make for a much more rewarding experience, and tonally it's pretty much spot on. Some might throw up their hands in horror knowing that this quintessential British amp is now made in China, but that makes it more affordable for many players and the build quality hasn't suffered at all. In fact it's much better than it has been in recent years.

If you can't stretch to the Alnico-equipped version, the standard CC2 model (fitted with specially designed Wharfedale drivers) delivers most of the magic at an even more attractive price. We had both models to try out and couldn't find fault with either of them, although for the full-on Vox experience the Alnico speakers really are worth paying extra for.

There's a lot of competition in this price bracket, but few manage to combine sound quality, features and looks with quite as much success as Vox has done with this amp – it's a real achievement. Check it out at your nearest Vox dealer but we think you'll agree: the Custom Classic has hit the proverbial tonal bull's eye. 

Vox AC30CC2X

Guitarist RATING

