

LINE 6 SPIDER JAM £351
GUITAR AMPS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMANDA THOMAS

Line 6 Spider Jam £351 Guitarist CHOICE

Has Line 6 come up with the ultimate hybrid gigging and practice amp? *by Trevor Curwen*

There are many aspects to learning to play the guitar, with solitary practice being the one that is likely to take up the vast majority of your time. However, if the aim is to play in a band, that solitary practice is not the be all and end all but just something that prepares you for that situation – you will really only progress by getting together with other musicians and learning the art of listening to and playing in time with a rhythm section. Getting live sessions together, though, takes organisation and it isn't something that all guitarists will have access to on a day-to-day basis, so ideally there should be something to fill the gulf between practising scales and learning riffs on your own, and the act of playing with other musicians. That halfway house has to be playing along with backing tracks and Line 6 has just come up with something that easily facilitates that: the Spider Jam, a combo amp that comes loaded with quality backing tracks for you to play along with.

Now, this concept isn't exactly new: Fender launched its G-DEC over three years ago. However, Line 6 has developed the idea with an amp of sufficient size to be able

to hold its own at gigs while it also features onboard backing tracks recorded by some of LA's finest sessioneers. On top of that there's an onboard looping recorder with plenty of memory for recording your own backing.

The Spider Jam is a compact 75-watt combo equipped with a 12-inch Celestion Custom speaker (plus a two-inch full range tweeter for the backing tracks). Like the rest of the Spider III family, this is a modelling amp and you get 12 amp models selected by a front panel rotary knob. There are 'red' and 'green' versions of

Clean, Twang, Blues, Crunch, Metal and Insane models all based on famous names. The front panel offers the usual array of amp controls and there are three knobs to add effects. The first knob selects either chorus/flange, phaser or tremolo and also dials in the strength of the effect from subtle to extreme. The second knob does the same for delay, tape echo or sweep echo and is allied to a tap tempo button, while the third simply turns up the reverb. If you don't fancy dialling in your own sounds from scratch there are also a bunch of onboard

presets, over 200 of which are artist-created alongside over 150 that are song-based and 36 user-programmable ones.

The backing track facility consists of a whole bunch of pure drum loops but also over a 100 jam tracks with full instrumentation, all categorised by musical styles. The tempo of the drum loops can be altered to taste and the pitch of the jam tracks can be changed to accommodate alternative keys – the tempo automatically altering up or down dependent on the change in pitch. All backing tracks can be put on endless repeat for sustained practice.

For the jam tracks, Line 6 tells us that it compiled a roster of A-list session players and recorded them at quality studios including Steve Vai's studio and Sound Emporium's Studio B in Nashville. What you get are a bunch of tracks featuring players like Carmine Appice, Gregg Bissonette, Simon Phillips and Steve Turner on drums, Tony Franklin and Dave Pomeroy on bass plus a varied cast of other respected sessioneers including country guitar legend Brent Mason. An appropriate guitar tone from the presets can be loaded automatically with each

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The Rivals

Fender was the first to come up with this concept with the G-DEC range. The **G-DEC 30** (£299) is an updated version of the original model and sports a 30-watt output and 28-second phrase sampler. **Tascam** is well-known in the field of guitar tuition for its phrase trainers, none of which have ready-made backing tracks onboard but do allow you to take music from CD computer or wherever and play along. The **GA-30CD** (£199) puts a CD-based phrase trainer into a 30W solid-state guitar amp with a set of workable sounds; not as sophisticated as the Spider Jam's though.



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jam track, or you can just choose your own.

Up to 24 minutes of CD-quality recording time is available with the recording facility and you can either record with or without the internal backing tracks. As well as the guitar input there's a mic input with its own EQ, reverb, delay and compression plus an aux input to take sounds from a CD or mp3 player. You can either record from the guitar input or the mic input and the aux input can be simultaneously recorded with either if desired. The length of your first recording sets a loop length and you can overdub more guitars in each subsequent pass. For anyone who wants to quickly capture newly thought-up riffs, there's also a 'Quick Capture' mode for instant recording. A stereo output on the back of the amp lets you save any recordings to a separate recorder.

Like other Spider models the Spider Jam can make use of Line 6's FBV foot controllers, either for its usual amp functions or to control all the jam track playback, recording and looping.

Sounds

Tune up with the onboard tuner and you can get stuck into trying out the sounds, which are the same as the rest of the larger amps in the Spider III series. What's on tap are some of the finest modelled sounds that Line 6 has to offer, with the amp models progressively getting dirtier

sounding as you turn the front panel selector clockwise. The presets show great attention to detail and there really is something here for everyone when it comes to dialling in a tone – exactly what you want when faced with backing tracks in many different musical styles.

Line 6 has really come up with the goods with these tracks – where computer programmed backing tracks can be a bit sterile and stiff, the studio recordings here actually groove and ought to provide more of the feeling that you are playing with a real band, and what a band this is...

Rock, blues, country, funk and others are firmly covered with tracks that are a real pleasure to play along to, featuring basic chord changes in various tempos and keys. The backing tracks come out of the amp powerful, crisp and clear and if you choose to have a matching guitar sound automatically loaded with the track, it usually sits deftly in with the backing so you feel an integral part of the 'band' rather than just floating over the top of it. However, any sound you choose can be quickly made to 'sit in' simply by adjusting the reverb and channel volume.

It's an easy adjustment if you want to play a track in a different key, but it's best not to stray more than one or two semitones as the instruments start to sound unnatural with extreme pitch shifts. Also, each key for any



Guitar, aux, mic, CD and mp3 inputs

particular song will have a fixed tempo that may not be ideal. If you want to practice to specific tempos, the pure drum sounds are the way to go although, being real recordings, the pitch does change slightly with each BPM increment. The drum tracks are also good inspirational fodder for songwriting plus solid backing when using the recorder – simple to operate and a perfect tool for working out new parts as well as recording your own chord sequence to play over.

Verdict

There is no doubt in our minds that the Spider Jam is a killer product. It is one hell of a practice facility that, with sustained use, should improve anybody's playing in terms of timing, learning what notes fit in the various keys and increased versatility by familiarity with different musical styles. On top of that it's a perfectly capable gigging amp. It would take a very long time for any user to tire of what it has to offer. **G**

The Bottom Line

We liked: Quality backing tracks; full range of guitar sounds; easy-to-use recording facility

We disliked: Small display
Guitarist says: It's a unique practice facility combined with a stage-ready amp – essential for any practising player.



The orange and blue lit display panel and buttons make for easy on-stage viewing



SD card and Line 6 POD output



Line 6 Spider Jam

PRICE: £351

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Modelling amplifier with built-in instrumental backing tracks and loop recorder

OUTPUT: 75 watts

DIMENSIONS: 440 (h) x 530 (w) x 280mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 18/40

LOUDSPEAKER: Single Celestion Custom 12-inch

CONTROLS: Mic level, amp model selector, drive, bass, mid, treble, channel volume, FX selector/adjuster x 2, reverb, master volume, tap tempo/tuner button, controls for backing tracks and loop recorder

AMP MODELS: 12 custom amp models based on sounds from a '73 Hiwatt Custom 100, Fender (blackface '65 Twin Reverb, '63 Vibroverb, blackface '64 Deluxe Reverb, tweed Deluxe Reverb, '58 tweed Bassman), '60 Gibson Explorer, Marshall ('65 JTM-45, '68 Plexi 50-watt, '68 Plexi 100-watt with a few added extras: jumped input channels and a Variac transformer), Supro, Vox AC-30 with an updated and expanded tone control circuit, Mesa/Boogie Dual Rectifier

EFFECTS: Chorus/flanger, phaser, tremolo, delay (with tap tempo), tape echo (with tap tempo), sweep echo (with tap tempo), reverb

FOOTSWITCH: None

CONNECTIONS: 6.4mm jack guitar input jack, 6.4mm aux input, XLR mic input, mini stereo mp3/CD input, 6.4mm jack stereo headphone output, Routable RCA (phono) outs (L&R), SD card slot

OPTIONS: FBV (£339), FBV Express (£86) and Shortboard (£269) foot controllers

Line 6 01327 302700

www.line6.com

Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★