



**Total
Guitar
BEST BUY**

USB

HOOK it up to your computer, and the BEAM acts as an interface for recording using your DAW, with Blackstar's free Insider software for deep patch editing

VOICE

SIX ID: Core electric voices are at your disposal, but pressing the voice knob gives you electric sims, acoustic preamps and bass voices, too

BLUETOOTH

IT doesn't alter the amp experience, but Bluetooth makes listening to music that bit easier, and there's more than enough volume to fuel a small house party

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: Bluetooth-enabled desktop modelling amp

OUTPUT: 20W

SPEAKER: 2x 3"

CONTROLS: Voice, gain, volume, ISF, mod, delay, reverb/dist, tap tempo buttons; effects type, effects level; manual/store button, Bluetooth button

SOCKETS: Input, emulated out/ headphones, mp3/line in, USB, footswitch

WEIGHT: 3.9kg

DIMENSIONS: [HxWxD]

169 x 291 x 166mm

CONTACT: Blackstar Amplification

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BLACKSTAR ID:CORE BEAM £229

Super Wide Stereo, acoustic and bass models, plus Bluetooth music playback? BEAM us up...

BACK in the 50s, cash-strapped guitarists plugged into their radios to save investing in the combos of the day. Now, we've come full circle, and we're happy to play through amps that double as music playback systems, which not only give more bang for your buck, but also save space in your living room. Blackstar's BEAM represents one of the most evolved forms yet, introducing Bluetooth streaming alongside its wealth of models and rugged good looks.

The BEAM concept is simple: it's a more compact entry in the ID:Core line (291 x 169 x 166mm, as opposed to the Stereo 10's 340 x 265 x 185mm), packing the same principle electric models and adding Bluetooth for wireless music playback. It doesn't stop there, though: the BEAM is also Blackstar's first product for

acoustic and bass players, with two acoustic preamps, a pair of bass voices and two acoustic sims for your electric, too. That's in addition to the modulation, delay and reverb effects from the ID:Core line, as well as a few surprises along the way. As anyone who's used the Fly 3 will attest, you

feels as if it's coming from all around the amp, rather than just the direction of the speakers. That makes playing music via Bluetooth a killer experience, too, and the BEAM's sound quality is comparable to similarly priced portable speakers. ID:Core fans already know what to expect from

slightly over-active noise gates of these voices, but that's fixed easily by hooking the BEAM up to your computer and deep-editing using Blackstar's free Insider software. And while the ISF control is great for fine-tuning, we found that some voices did get a little bass-heavy when you hit fully clockwise – a standalone tone control wouldn't have gone amiss here.

However, click the voice knob down and you're granted access to an all-new bank of tones. Electric players get two acoustic simulations (one for single coils, one for humbuckers). As with most sims, neither will set the world alight, but they're perfectly viable for a recording mix. More intriguing are the two acoustic patches (one flat for active EQ'd electro-acoustics and one hi-fi, record-ready preamp) and bass

The BEAM is Blackstar's first product for acoustic and bass

can trust Blackstar to deliver big tones from small packages, and the BEAM pushes some serious air from its pair of three-inch full-range speakers and ported construction (see Home On The Range, p68). It also utilises Blackstar's Super Wide Stereo tech, which delivers a sound that

the amp side, starting with two flavours of sweet, rich cleans and varying levels of dynamically responsive crunch. Upping the ante with the OD 1 and 2 channels delivers fat, chunky gain sounds, with plenty of saturation for legato leads. That said, you might find your sustain cut short by the

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Home on the range

Why full-range speakers are cropping up in our guitar amps

On a normal guitar amp, you can't just plug in a bass and expect it to sound good; guitar speakers are designed to produce mid and high frequencies, not deep low-end. However, in recent years, companies such as Yamaha, Line 6 and Blackstar have begun employing full-range speakers – found in hi-fis – in their guitar amps. Why? Because they faithfully replicate all frequencies, which not only means they can accommodate all kinds of instruments, but they're as at home projecting tunes from your phone as licks from your guitar, too.

While a traditional guitar amp speaker covers guitar-centric frequencies from 75Hz to 5kHz, a full-range speaker might cover as much as 20Hz to 20kHz, which is the typical human hearing range. You need these frequencies for solo acoustic work, too, which is why most acoustic amps have a bass driver as well as a high-frequency tweeter. Full-range guitar amps cram all those frequencies into living room-friendly enclosures, and that's why they sound good no matter what you plug in.

sounds (classic and modern). Acoustic 2, in particular, really makes an electro sizzle, especially with a dab of reverb, and there's enough volume here to power small cafe gigs. Even the bass voicings impress, with plenty of oomph for practice and recording.

What really makes the BEAM sing is its range of delays and reverbs – there are four kinds of analogue-voiced delay and four sizes of room, up to a colossal plate, and thanks to Super Wide Stereo, it's as if they're ringing out around you, enveloping you in the sound. The modulations – phaser, flanger, chorus and tremolo – are



The BEAM's reverb, delay and modulation effects contribute to its sizable sound



Bluetooth connectivity and a USB output make the BEAM highly usable

all pedal-worthy, as well, rather than just tacked on to bulk out the features list. What's more, buried away on the bass voices, you'll find a funky envelope filter, plus a gnarly gated fuzz, both of which sound great on guitar. You can save your favourite sounds to any of the amp's 12 onboard patches, too.

While the original ID:Core line provided the blueprint, we reckon Blackstar's nailed the formula with the BEAM. Its dimensions make it ideal as a desktop amp, and although it's bulkier than your average portable speaker, it does a damn fine job of Bluetooth streaming, and makes playing

along to your tunes a totally immersive experience. Sure, it doesn't have unlimited modelling options or an iPad app, but the BEAM's strengths lie in its simplicity, which encourages you to play and listen more at home – and that's a design philosophy few of us could argue with.

Michael Brown

SUMMARY	FEATURES								
	SOUND QUALITY								
	VALUE FOR MONEY								
	BUILD QUALITY								
	USABILITY								
	OVERALL RATING								



ALSO TRY...



**LINE 6
AMPLIFI
TT**

£149
Reviewed last issue,

the TT offers a ton of Line 6 models, in addition to Bluetooth music playback and tone matching – you'll need separate speakers, though.



**YAMAHA
THR10**

£280
There's no

Bluetooth, but the THR10 offers a similar twin-speaker desktop amp and music player vibe, plus a broad range of modelled tones and effects.



**IK
MULTIMEDIA
ILOUD**

£239
A Bluetooth speaker designed for

musicians, the iLoud also features a built-in iRig circuit to hook up to iOS devices running AmpliTube or other music-making apps.