

The Fallen Angel range is topped off by this delightfully mad powerhouse that uses six EL34s to deliver 180W of pure valve mayhem





Ashdown Fallen Angel 180 head £1,099

For the ultimate de-tuned sound, who better to ask than one of the world's top bass amp builders? Time for the lowdown on Ashdown's new Fallen Angel by Nick Guppy

Synonymous with top-flight bass amplification, Ashdown planted a big flag in the 6-string camp last year with the introduction of the Peacemaker range. From affordable combos to the delectable Peacemaker hand-wired head we reviewed in May of last year, there's no doubt that Ashdown's expertise has bridged the gap separating bass and guitar amplification with instant success.

Following in the Peacemaker's footsteps there are some tempting new offerings to look at this year. The hand-wired Cotton Club series looks set to boost the Essex company's reputation for world-class 'boutique' design, while for those after something a little less subtle there's the Fallen Angel range. This series of combos and heads is topped off by this delightfully mad powerhouse that uses six EL34s to deliver 180W of pure valve mayhem.

On looks alone, the Fallen Angel's design marks it out as a serious 'rawk' amp. A simple black vinyl-covered sleeve is given a touch of class with the addition of red stringing that echoes the screen printed control panel legends. Behind the mesh grille, the detailing continues with red anodised screen caps for the four preamp tubes. Ashdown's new cream double-wing badge picks out their other trademark: a cream VU meter that displays the amp's output level. It's hardly the most useful feature on a guitar amp, especially one like this, but these

details blend vintage and modern styling in a way we find very appealing. Ashdown is one of the few British amp builders to escape the 'parts bin' look and challenge the Americans for style.

Inside the steel tray chassis there are two large printed circuit boards: one holds the power supply and the bases for the Fallen Angel's sextet of EL34s, the other handles the bulk of the preamp circuitry including all the front panel controls. Both PCBs are single-sided, not what we would hope for in an amp in this price bracket, especially for the power supply board. However, they are quite substantial and properly supported to minimise flexing when valves are replaced. The tray design of the chassis coupled with two very heavy transformers means care has to be exercised when removing it to keep flexing to a minimum, although the general build quality means this isn't likely to happen very often, if at all.

FALLEN ANGEL 180 HEAD TEST RESULTS

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

WE LIKED It nails that sound very well, and has versatility to cope with a lot more besides. And it looks cool too

WE DISLIKED It would have been nice to see separate series/parallel loop switching, also external bias adjustment would help to keep those six valves running as long as possible

Chrome Telecaster-type knobs seem to be de rigeur for this type of amp, and the Fallen Angel's control panel is no exception. Two straightforward sets of gain, bass, mid and treble with separate channel volumes govern the Angel's clean and lead sounds, with pushbuttons for lead channel boost and effects loop dedication adding extra versatility.

There are two effects loops, which can be set to run in series or parallel mode. Series means all the preamp signal is routed through the loop, while in parallel mode the loop signal is mixed in according to taste. Why have both? Well, series mode is best suited to effects like EQ or compression, whereas delays and modulation effects like chorus are best run in parallel, letting you mix the effected signal into the amp's audio path.

At the far right is another common feature on amps of this type: a footswitchable dual master volume control. This lets you preset one level for rhythm and another for lead, so any one sound can be used for both.

The sparse rear panel holds two pairs of send/return jacks, a pair of return level controls and a selection of speaker outlets, as well as a trio of jack sockets for using either the Fallen Angel's dedicated footswitch or standard latching types.

SOUNDS: Plugged in and revved up, the Fallen Angel delivers exactly the

ASHDOWN ENGINEERING FALLEN ANGEL 180 HEAD

PRICE: £1,099

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: All valve, dual-channel Class AB head with solid/state rectification

OUTPUT: Nominal 180W RMS

VALVES: Four ECC83/12AX7 preamp, six EL34EH power amp

DIMENSIONS: 260 (h) x 640 (w) x 290mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 20/44

CABINET: Birch ply

CHANNELS: Two

FOOTSWITCH: Included. It switches channels, boost function and toggles effects loops on/off

CONTROLS: Gain, bass, mid, treble, channel volume x 2, master volume x 2, channel 2 boost

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Dual effects loops capable of being routed to either or both channels and switchable from series to parallel mode, DC heater supplied to reduce hum levels

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: Fallen Angel 40-watt combo (£425), 60-watt combo (£525), 60-watt head (£449), Fallen Angel 4 x 12 cabinets £299 – available angled and straight

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It is touches like the VU output meter that enable Ashdown to compete with the Americans on looks

The rivals

Marshall MF350	£650
Hughes & Kettner	
Warp 7 Head	£799
Peavey Triple XXX	£999

Marshall's MF350 is the Ashdown's most serious competitor: awesome power, great tone and Marshall's reliability at an amazing price. Hughes & Kettner has nailed the right tone, serious looks and the Warp 7's solid-state design is also going to be more reliable. Peavey's Triple XXX is also a worthy contender. Behind its slightly suspect styling is a serious three-channel amp that delivers the right sounds and plenty of power

sounds its aggressive styling suggests. Channel one is intended to be used mainly clean but it can be driven into a respectable crunch if you need it. It's a bright, slightly edgy tone that sits well in a mix for rhythm work, with more than a hint of Tweed Bassman in there. The lead channel has plenty of gain, even without the boost engaged. Plugging in a PRS delivers a fat, greasy lead sound with plenty of dynamic touch sensitivity. Unlike other amps that use tone-altering switches to focus in on a particular sound, the Fallen Angel relies purely on its conventional EQ, which in some ways makes it more versatile as you aren't stuck with the designer's idea of the perfect 'scoop on a switch'. Just nail bass and treble to 10, start with mid-range at zero and dial in to taste. Kicking in the boost adds extra sustain, with plenty of grit and harmonic filth. It's one of those tones that isn't British or American, but somewhere in between with a character all of its own.

The dual effects loops add to the amp's versatility. For example, it's easy to fine tune that lead tone by plugging in an EQ, with another loop left free for delays, chorus or whatever else. Using the selector buttons you can preset either loop for channel 1, 2 or both. On the rear, a small pushbutton changes both loop modes from series to parallel. It would have been handy to have one of these for each loop, but with the return levels up full the loop is effectively working in series anyway.

As for output power, well, with six EL34 valves delivering in excess of 180 watts you'd expect the Fallen Angel to be loud and it is truly, mind-bogglingly powerful. Ashdown has used some of its bass expertise here. Unlike smaller valve amps, where the power stage is intended to be overdriven to colour the sound, the Fallen Angel's tone is almost entirely from the preamp section, with that massive power stage working to extend the clean headroom and really punch low frequencies home.

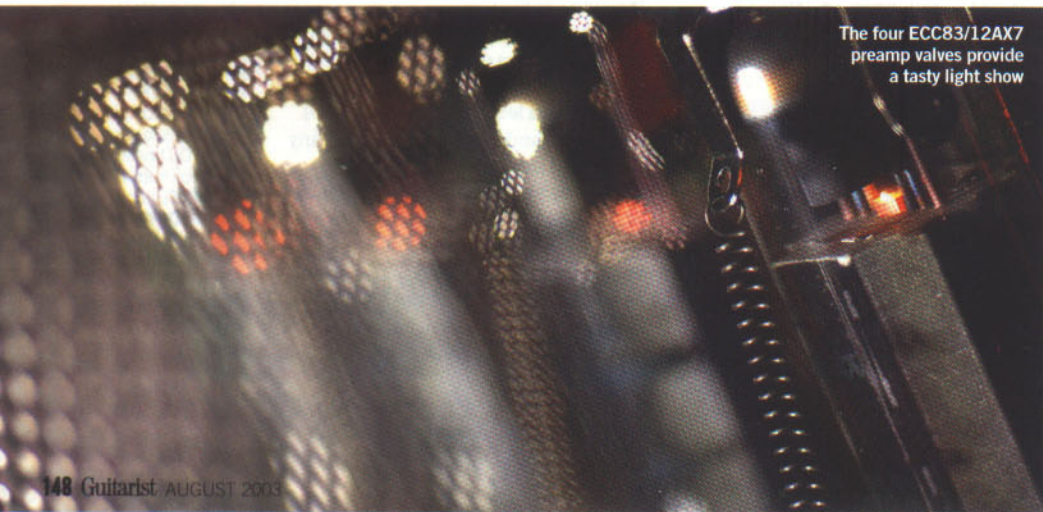
Take a regular guitar down a tone to D, or even lower, and with the right loudspeakers the Fallen Angel will make the earth move in a way that will have seismometers twitching nervously for miles around. Just for fun we plugged in a 5-string bass and were rewarded with a superb sound that was clear almost down to low B, using a 4 x 12 cabinet. Loudspeakers become vulnerable when you're dealing with this much power at the low end of the frequency scale, and Ashdown rightly warns against using open-backed cabinets. You really have to use sealed enclosures to damp the cone excursions this amp can deliver, otherwise the voice coils will do something quite dramatic and leave you contemplating a large repair bill.

Verdict

Ashdown's Fallen Angel looks set to be another hit. Many amp builders now have a modern nu-metal specialist amp in their catalogue, almost all of them are black with chrome knobs and as a result the market is looking somewhat crowded. Despite stiff competition, this one stands out from the crowd and has enough versatility to appeal beyond its niche. Yes, it can sound evil but there's also a subtle edge that many amps like this don't have. Priced to compete strongly against other mainstream contenders, the Fallen Angel is likely to get picked up by a lot of players. So if you want to experience the joy of six, contact your local dealer and book an audition now. **L**

Ashdown Fallen Angel 180 Head

Guitarist RATING



The four ECC83/12AX7 preamp valves provide a tasty light show