

Title: Matchless Phoenix 35.(Bench Tests)(Product/Service Evaluation)

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Founded by Mark Sampson and Rick Perrotta in 1989 Matchless enjoyed a fast rise to prominence, and then abruptly went out of business in the late '90s. But, like the mythical Phoenix, Matchless miraculously sprang back to life in August of 2000. Resurrected by former Matchless production manager Phil Jamison, who joined the company in the early '90s, the new models feature the same construction methods and quality components as the original amps. The popular C-30, Chieftain, Clubman 35, Clubman Reverb, Lightning Reverb, and Lightning amps have been painstakingly recreated, and now a new model called the Phoenix 35 (\$3,495 retail)--2x12 combo based on a classic DC-30, but with two cathode-biased EL34s instead of four EIB4s---has been added to the line.

Flight of the Phoenix

Like a DC-30, the Phoenix 35 features two differently voiced preamp channels that provide contrasting tonal, textural, and dynamic characteristics. The left channel's Vox AC30-style circuit is driven by two 12AX7s, and the right channel uses a simpler circuit powered by an EF86 pentode tube. (The EF86 was used briefly in the earliest Vox AC30/4 amps.) The right channel's Tone control is a 6-position bass roll-off switch that raises the cutoff frequency as it's turned counter-clockwise. The global Cut function is an unusual circuit that attenuates treble by canceling the highest frequencies in the power amp. Also affecting both channels is Matchless' unique Master Volume control, a post-phase-inverter attenuator that remains disconnected from the circuit until the knob is pulled out.

Entrails

A peek inside the Phoenix 35's rugged, welded-steel chassis reveals a multitude of high quality, point-to-point-wired components. While most boutique guitar amp manufacturers mount the components on boards, Matchless employs terminal strips of the type widely used by radio, hi-fi, and television manufacturers until the 1960s. Terminal strip construction is extremely durable, but also very labor intensive. The tremendous amount of hand work involved in this type of construction contributes greatly to the cost.

Dressed like a Jersey hit man in greasy-looking faux leather, the Phoenix 35's ragged birch-plywood cabinet is loaded with two 12" Celestion speakers. Based on the G12H30 mid "greenback" 25, these special speakers are tweaked to Matchless' specs, then modified using a secret process at the Matchless factory. With their contrasting sonic textures mid breakup characteristics, these dissimilar speakers combine to produce a more multi-dimensional and dynamic tone.

Tough Bird

The venerable DC-30 has earned a place of reverence among amp connoisseurs, thanks to its complex shimmer and lively dynamic response. The Phoenix 35 also possesses these sonic attributes, but presents them in a more assertive manner. The stout-sounding EL34s provide more low-mid push and punch-you-in-the-guts impact than the lighter and more delicate sounding EL84s. To put it simply, the Phoenix 35 has a more street-tough attitude than the DC-30. With both a PRS McCarty and a Strat, I was able to coax rich and smooth Plexi-Marshall-like tones from the left channel. While not quite as jangly as an EL84-powered DC-30, the Phoenix still sounds impressively complex from top to bottom. It's a mighty big sound, too, as the Celestions combine to fill a room with complex layers of colorful 3-D harmonic texture.

Courtesy of its EF86 tube, the right channel provides a huskier midrange voice with a little less top-end extension and a rougher midrange texture that complements the more aggressive nature of the EL34s. The Phoenix has no

internal channel switching, but with the help of an A/B box, I was able to use the left channel for sweet clean tones and the right channel for ruder solos.

Flying High

Sure, it's expensive. But if you have the dough, the Phoenix 35 is hard to resist. And if you're a hard-working musician, you won't find an amp that's rely mine roadworthy. While the legendary DC-30 has been the flagship Match less model since the beginning, the Phoenix 35 can stand shoulder-to-shoulder with its older sibling. Yep, it's that good!

Matchless Phoenix 35

- * Two channels
- * Point-to-point wiring on terminal strips
- * Dual effects loops
- * Two dissimilar Celestion 12s
- * Illuminated control panel and nameplate
- * Tube rectifier
- * Welded-steel chassis
- * 35 watts
- * 70 lbs

JURY BOX

Matchless Phoenix 35

Pros Complex, dynamic, authoritative tones. Built to survive harsh road conditions.

Cons Expensive. No reverb. No channel switching.

Contact, Matchless Amplifiers, (310) 444-1922; matchlessampbfiers.com.

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