



PHOTO BY ANGELA JONASSON

Marshall men Ken Bran and Jim Marshall.

Marshall Lore

Gary Moore and Billy Duffy have no need for an amp that goes up to 11 — providing their sound is the only rock amp that has become a legend, the Marshall.

Since Jimi Hendrix and Pete Townshend first used Marshall amps to push the outer edge of the feedback and volume envelope, the black British amp with the characteristic script logo has been the rock guitarist's most essential accessory. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Marshall, and the man who provided his name and signature to the amp, Jim Marshall, recently visited New Zealand with his chief engineer Ken Bran for the Music Trade Fair.

It was in the back of Jim Marshall's London music shop that he and Bran developed the amp in 1962, after guitarists had complained to Marshall about the limitations of the amps then available. Using parts acquired from local army surplus electronics stores, they came up with a prototype amp that was capable not only of increased volume, but *usable* distortion.

"On the first Saturday we displayed the amp in the store — it only had a chassis at that stage — all the lads who came in said, 'That's it!'" says Marshall. "We sold 20 that day. Then, we could make one 50 watt amp a day, now we make 2000 a week: 1200 amps and 800 cabinets."

Favourite

Bran says that the Fender Tremolux was one of the favourite amps of the time. "But that was too clean, too thin," he says. "It suits jazz or country and western, but isn't bluesy enough for rock."

Completing the Marshall stack, and essential to the unique sound, was the cabinet they designed to suit the amp. Enclosing four 12" speakers (and known here as the quad box), the angled front of the cabinet was originally just for cosmetics, but Marshall found his selling line "it pushes the sound above the crowd's heads, not into them" was, in fact, true.

Since then, says Marshall, the company has "moved with the trends, but we've kept the first two models we designed available." Those are the 50 and 100 watt amps, with the 4x12" cabinet. Since then Marshall have diversified into many different amplifiers and combos, this year releasing their anniversary range. The new amps are called 25/50, signifying not only 25 years of Marshall amps, and Jim Marshall's 50 years in music (he was a drummer in the 30s, performing in Pete Townshend's father's band), but the way the wattage of the new amps is adjustable. The 100w amp is switchable down to 50w, and the 50w model down to 25w, to suit the requirements of different sized

venues, or studio use, but always maintaining the characteristic sound.

U Got the Look

But it's not only the sound that makes guitarists go for the Marshall, but the look. Having a Marshall stack is such a status symbol in heavy rock circles that many of the large bands have dummy units hidden among the rows of amps behind them. "Everybody wants the *presentation*, the background," says Bran. That's why electronic drums have never taken off, he says. "Everybody likes to see the drummer and his acoustic kit, going mad."

In the lineup of Marshalls behind Kiss, only 60 percent are active; Van Halen, on the other hand, have 24 Marshall "heads" (amps) on stage, all workable, but only 17 in use at once.

The Who were the first to have big stacks. "Pete Townshend wanted 8x12", at 100 watts, in one cabinet," says Marshall. "I said, the roadies will go mad, they'll be so heavy. Two weeks later, he was back, saying 'Could you cut them in half?'"

Of course, the Who's equipment made regular return visits when the band started to smash it up on stage. "I'd known Pete since he was a baby, and I thought he'd gone mad," says Marshall. "After a while we got the cabinets coming back every week, and they'd just gone through the thin cotton grill. We changed it to tougher woven paper, so he really had to clock his cabinets!"

Longevity

Essential to the longevity of the amp's popularity is that Marshall and Bran are still closely involved in the production. Guitar aficionados insist that Fenders have never been the same since Leo Fender sold his company, and indeed, American Marshall collectors will pay USD \$1000 for an old Marshall stack. But Marshall and Bran say there is very little difference between new Marshall amps and old. "We know that the new editions of old models are better," says Marshall.

Apart from extending the range, among the improvements that have been made are a master volume switch, and increased sensitivity. Split channels are now available in some Marshalls, one for high, sensitive sounds, the other lower and cleaner — "so there are two types of amps in the main box," says Bran. "There have also been changes to the EQ. It's widened, which makes it more versatile. But like a car, it's all



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