



# Industrial Amps Rock 120

BY BRIAN TARQUIN

Today it seems as though there's a boutique amp manufacturer around every corner. Don't get me wrong – boutique amps aren't a bad thing, but a great many of them focus on recreating the same types of tones that we've heard before, sapping all of the meaning from the word, "boutique." If you were to be objective about it, you could make the argument that Leo Fender's Bassman was the forefather of modern guitar amplification – it was the very amp that Jim Marshall and Randall Smith [Mesa Boogie] hot-rodged to make their own famous amps. But with so

many small builders basing their sounds off these designs, where is the room for improvement?

With that said, I literally bumped into a mom and pop operation by the name of Industrial Amps at the Boston Guitar Festival, hosted by none other than Premier Guitar. I was wearing a Marshall t-shirt when I ran into JoAnn Niekrewicz, the co-owner of Industrial Amps; seeing my shirt's logo, she shouted through the crowd, "Try our amps – they are Marshall killers!"

Needless to say, it was a bold statement,

but curiosity got the best of me; I immediately sat down and tried all of their amps. Plugging into models like the Rock 120, Blues 60, Crunch 15 and the Overdrive 15, I soon noticed that each amp had its own special sound. The Blues 60 had a nice, hollow blues tone, while the Crunch 15 and the Overdrive 15 seemed perfect for studio recording, providing dynamic tone saturation. When I arrived at the Rock 120, I was thoroughly blown away by the depth of crunch that it produced, especially when it was played through the IA extended 4x12 speaker cabinet, loaded with Celestion Vintage 30s. To explore this amp further, I had them send the Rock

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120 combo to my studio, so I could really put it through its paces in a working environment.

## Industrial Rock

Right out of the box, the Rock 120 is a striking piece of modern, industrial design. The amp is constructed in a white tolex case made from 3/4” true 11-ply hardwood birch, with the speakers enclosed behind a heavy duty grill made from 1/4” aluminum for kick-proof protection. As for the cabinet itself, Industrial Amps Designer Tony Niekrewicz works closely with a non-profit organization called Living Classrooms in Baltimore, MD. The program gives out-of-school youth, from ages 16-19, a chance to learn carpentry hands-on in a practical work environment.

The tubes, transformers and capacitors all cleverly reside behind 1/4” thick glass, so you can experience the mesmerizing glow of electronics at work. As an added bonus, the Rock 120 is tour-ready, boasting a set of large, riveted, zinc-coated handles with grips on both sides of the case, as well as four caster wheels for easy transport. Electronically, the amp features 120 watts, two channels – Classic and Heavy – point-to-point hand wiring and an open back cabinet fitted with two 12” Celestion 80s. The amp itself is powered by four premium 12AX7s, four EL34s, one 12AT7 for reverb and a solid state rectifier tube.

Turning my attention first to the Classic channel, I ran several guitars through it. In particular, my Gibson double-neck Jimmy Page Model produced a gorgeous, ringing tone, much like the tone you hear on the Birds song, “8 Miles High” or even the Zeppelin classic, “The Song Remains

the Same.” A word of advice: when using double humbuckers, you’ll have to back off on the guitar’s volume a bit so you won’t overdrive the amp. What worked best for me was a Fender Strat. Though the Classic channel, the single coils produced a very smooth and fresh reverberation, similar to that of a Fender Deluxe.

Switching over to the Heavy channel produced a genuinely heavy bass response, perfect for shaking your tree. Overdriven, the Rock 120 is a cross between a classic Mesa Boogie Mark II and a Soldano amp. I used the amp on several recording sessions and even had Leslie West [of Mountain] play through the amp. He was very impressed with the amp’s gain – this coming from a guy that can never have too much gain. The notes were expressive and had an authentic, singing overtone; for those of you who remember the short-lived Fender Prosonic amp, this amp has a similar, driving tone.

The Rock 120 also recorded very well, especially using a Les Paul Goldtop with a Seymour Duncan ‘59 humbucker in the bridge position and a Duncan Custom in the neck position. The tones were very saturated, but without the muddiness that some overdriven amps generate, due to the Mercury Magnetics transformer inside – designed to provide both clarity and bottom growl. It has that Mesa Boogie singing tone and is great with pinch harmonics. The Treble, Bass and Presence controls are quite responsive, and unlike some amps, each one of the knobs really affects the tone. As an added bonus, the Heavy channel features a Gain control and a Master, so you don’t have to sacrifice your eardrums for sweet tone.

There’s lots to love here, but IA has thought to add in plenty of little touches

that will make the purchasing decision easy. Each amp features dual speaker outs, voltage and ohm selectors, military spec components, and even, “severe duty Honeywell explosion-proof aircraft quality switches.” How much more rock n’ roll can you get?

## The Final Mojo

Being an avid collector of vintage tube amps, I’m always skeptical of new products claiming to have superior sound. But my experience with Industrial Amps opened my ears to what small amp builders can achieve. While the price may be equivalent to other boutique amp models out there, the Rock 120 definitely gives you a lot more, in terms of sound and power. You won’t find this amp in Guitar Center, Sam Ash or any of the others commercial retailers – this a true underground find.

### Buy If...

*you want an amp that stands head and shoulders above most boutique designs out there*

### Skip If...

*you’re playing in small live settings*

### Rating...

**5.0**

**Industrial Amps**  
**MSRP \$3199**  
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