



Marshall DSL1CR

Is there still a place for 1-watt tube amps in the modern age of modeling? I got hands-on with the DSL1CR to find out

By Matt McCracken

▶ DELIVERING TUBE AMP tones minus the the huge weight and noise levels, the Marshall DSL1CR is the smallest tube amp I’ve ever had my hands on. Despite its practice amp size and looks, it’s packing 2 x ECC83 preamp tubes and a single ECC82 power amp tube alongside a Celestion G8C-15 “Eight 15” speaker, making it a much more interesting prospect to tone purists than it might appear at first glance.

I still lug a tube amp around with me to shows, but I can never play my 30-watt Orange Rocker 32 at home thanks to its ridiculous amount of volume, even on the half-power setting.

Of course, a 1-watt tube amp should still be pretty loud, but for those moments where you need a much lower volume, Marshall has included a power reduction option down to just 0.1W, which should hopefully be low enough to still get tube saturation at manageable volumes.

The DSL1CR features two channels, with a classic gain setting and an ultra gain setting. In theory, this means pure, clean tones right up to heavy distortion and everything in between. On the iconic gold panel you’ve got a volume control for the Classic Gain channel, with separate gain and volume knobs for the Ultra Gain section. A classic three-band EQ gives you Treble, Middle, and Bass in that order, and there’s a Reverb knob for the built-in digital reverb circuit.

There’s also a Tone Shift button, which reshapes the preamp mid EQ to give you access to more scooped, modern tones to be used in conjunction with that Ultra Gain channel. Moving to the back panel, you’ve got a series FX Loop, the footswitch input, plus 1/8-inch sockets for audio in or emulated out. Finally, there’s a low power button, which gives you access to that reduced power mode.

Build quality

Picking the DSL1CR out of the box it’s no heavier than any other cheap solid state practice amp I’ve encountered over the years. It’s an easy one hand carry, and very compact in terms of size. It feels like a proper Marshall too thanks to the rough black Tolex and gold control panel combination. The classic red power switch and white piping around the speaker cloth just add to the overall vibe of it.

It feels extremely well put together, and my visual inspection of it could find no issues with screws, application of the logo, or anything else out of place. Peering through the panel I spotted chassis mounted transformers, and the ends of the three tubes poking through. The speaker is mounted to the right-hand side of the cabinet as you look at it, giving space for the tubes and transformer.

Usability

Getting started with the DSL1CR I began plugging in the power and the footswitch and leaving it to warm up for a while. The footswitch cable is huge, meaning you can position yourself well away from the amplifier if you need. Grabbing my usual Telecaster I plugged straight into the front of the amp, and set the EQ controls to 12 o’clock.

With the gain knob of the Classic channel

“Delivers uber-satisfying edge of breakup tube saturation that won’t annoy your neighbors”

set at around 4, I found it immediately too loud for home practice on 1-Watt mode. This is the point where you start to get some nice breakup, and also the point where I got the first noise complaint from my partner. Reaching over to push in the low power mode button, the reduction in volume was significant, and I was able to continue testing the amp sans complaints.

It still has the potential to get too loud at higher volume settings, but shy of the mid-point mark I found it worked just fine for home practice. Switching to the Ultra Gain channel is seamless thanks to the footswitch, and the dual controls make it easier to get a hugely saturated sound without having to crank the volume.

As you’d expect from a tube amp, it’s super straightforward to use, and honestly quite refreshing in a world dominated by modeling tech. If you’re the sort who just wants to plug in and go, you’ll find this amp a great companion for home practice.

Sounds

I started my testing with the classic gain channel, slowly moving through the full range of the knob to see what sounds are available. It can do a lovely and pristine clean tone, warm and full with the series circuit of my Telecaster engaged. Dialing in some of the Reverb knob you can get some pretty spacious tones that pair beautifully with arpeggiated chord work and slide guitar.

It’s a digital reverb that sounds like a hall to my ear, so you’ve got plenty of scope for dialing in something subtle or cavernous. Some might bemoan the lack of a spring reverb here, but overall I found the sound was really pleasant and suited the size of the amp, delivering plenty of ambience with the clean and slightly dirty tones of the classic channel.

Once I started pushing the gain knob to the midway point and beyond that lovely tube breakup started to emerge, but I was definitely be pushing the boundaries of what might be acceptable to others in the household. It sounds phenomenal considering the size, but I wouldn’t call it low volume by any means.

Switching to the Ultra Gain channel, I was very impressed and quite surprised at just how much saturation is on tap here. It goes right through from early Metallica-type thrash tones that meld brilliantly with power chords right through to all out Swedish melodic death metal chainsaw riffing, further enhanced by pressing that tone shift button in.

It really makes the DSL1CR a versatile proposition tonally, allowing you to cover a huge variety of styles before you start adding pedals into the mix. It’s so gainy though, that it did make me bemoan the universal reverb, which sounded great on the cleaner tones but here just ended up getting in the way, meaning I

GUITARWORLD VERDICT



A brilliant little guitar amplifier for pure tone fiends who don’t want to sacrifice their tubes when playing at home, the DSL1CR delivers an amazing amount of versatility for such a small amplifier. Yes, there are natural low-end limitations to an 8-inch speaker, but I can easily look past these when it sounds this good while practicing in the comfort of my own home.

PROS

- + Dual channels offer excellent versatility
- + Low power mode for home practice
- + Can get loud when it needs to
- + An easy one-hand carry
- + Includes footswitch

CONS

- Speaker size lacks low end
- I’d prefer the reverb wasn’t universal

SPECS

TYPE: Combo
ORIGIN: Vietnam
OUTPUT: 1W (0.1W setting)
SPEAKER: 1 x 8” Celestion Eight 15 speaker
CHANNELS: 2
CONTROLS: Gain, Volume, Treble, Middle, Bass, Reverb
CONNECTIVITY: 1 x 1/4” (instrument), 1 x 1/8” (aux in), 1 x 1/8” (softube emulated out), 1 x 1/4” (internal speaker)
FOOTSWITCH: Yes, included
WEIGHT: 17lbs/7.7kg
DIMENSIONS: 340 x 360 x 215mm

had to manually turn it down when changing the channel.
It’s a small amp, which means I found myself cranking the bass knob more due to the natural limitations of the 8-inch speaker. It’s not completely lacking in low end, but obviously it doesn’t deliver the same heft as a larger speaker. For practicing at home at low volumes, I can’t imagine this will be a deal-breaker for most players.

Verdict

If you must have a tube amp for practice, the Marshall DSL1CR will absolutely do the job for you. The low power mode makes it more than usable at lower volumes, delivering uber-satisfying edge-of-breakup tube saturation that won’t annoy your neighbors, partner, children, or small animals.
The dual channels make it incredibly versatile, and adding pedals into the mix with the built-in FX loop means you can create a huge array of sounds. The Softube emulated out allows for silent practice and easy recording with an audio interface, and the included footswitch is a nice touch for seamless channel switching.

