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Sonic Express

Bradley Labs Iron Horse Combo

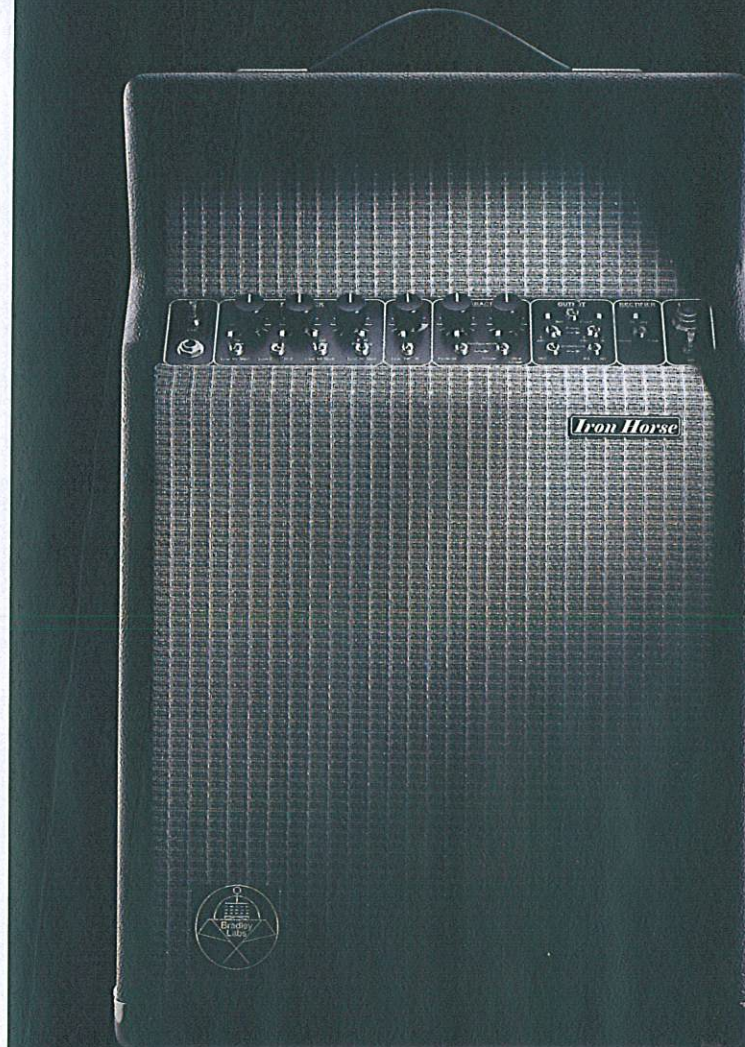
BY CHRIS GILL

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MASSIMO GAMMACURTA

IF YOU OWN or have played a variety of electric guitars and amps, you've probably noticed that some guitar-and-amp combinations work better than others. If you're really discriminating about tone, feel, and dynamics, you probably have also wished that you could mix and match the preamp, power amp, voicing, class configuration, and other features of different amps to build the ultimate companion for each instrument.

Over the years, amp builders have devised a wide variety of features that allow players to customize a model's personality to their preferences, but the Bradley Labs Iron Horse takes the concept of user-customization to an entirely new level. While not designed as the be-all and end-all of the guitar amp world, the Iron Horse offers an impressively vast tonal palette that players can tweak, tailor, and fine tune in remarkable detail.

The Iron Horse is a 30-watt combo with a straightforward non-master-volume, single-channel design, featuring four 6V6GT tubes in the power section, a preamp section driven by two 12AX7s and a 12DW7, a three-knob tone stack (bass, middle, treble), a volume control, and presence and feedback knobs. User customization comes via 14 mini toggle switches on the front panel that allow players to select gain responsiveness, EQ curves, pentode/triode/ultra-linear configuration, 4/2/1 power-tube output, Class AB/A operation, 30/20/15/5-watt output, fixed/self-biasing, output impedance, and tube/diode rectifier settings. The Iron Horse combo we tested was equipped with a 12-inch Jensen C12K speaker, but it's also available with an Eminence or JBL 12-inch or in a head-only configuration.



While the Iron Horse's 6V6 power tubes will make many amp enthusiasts think "Fender Deluxe," the uncommon quartet configuration (the only other amps with a 6V6 quartet I can think of are Jim Kelley models) makes the amp much more than that. The Iron Horse can certainly nail classic blackface and tweed tones, but the added punch of its 6V6 quartet allows it to also enter plexi and vintage Vox territory, albeit with its own *je ne sais quoi*.

The amp's 14 switches offer up a mind-boggling number of configuration possibilities,

but once you're familiar with what they do, it's easy to quickly dial in desired tones and response. The process is as satisfying as working with a tech who is swapping components based on your comments, only much faster. Whether you want sag or tightness, enhanced upper or lower mids, fatter bass, or sparkling treble spank, it's all there and accessible in a matter of seconds. **GA**

LIST PRICE \$2,500
Bradley Labs, bradleylabs.com