



GEAR

# Tex Amplifiers

## MINI EF86 COMBO

TESTED BY DAVE HUNTER

**COBBLING TOGETHER TASTY** guitar amps out of salvaged gramophones, P.A.s and other tube-fired audio gear of yore is nothing new, but not all such ventures are created equal. Among the most legendary are the handful of amps crafted by Canadian engineer Bernie Raunig several years ago using chassis and transformers pilfered from old Bell & Howell Filmosound projectors. No boutique production-amp maker has taken this platform further than Tony Teixeira. This Canadian maker has earned a sizable reputation for his Tex Bernie model, an amp played by Daniel Lanois, Alex Lifeson, Jeff Tweedy, Brian Adams, Bob Rock and Colin Cripps, among others. Now the Mini EF86 Combo springs from that foundation to add a meaty EF86 pentode preamp tube to the brew, while stuffing it all into a compact cabinet with a 10-inch Celestion G10N-40 speaker to achieve mouse-that-roared-like performance.

Specs-wise, the Tex Mini EF86 delivers approximately 20 watts from a pair of EL84

### SPECIFICATIONS

#### Mini EF86

**CONTACT** texamps.com

**PRICE** \$2,350 street

#### CHANNELS 1

**CONTROLS** Volume, master, tone

**POWER** 20 watts

**TUBES** One EF86, one 12AX7 and two EL84s

**EXTRAS** 8Ω and 16Ω speaker outputs

**SPEAKER** 10" Celestion G10N-40

**DIMENSIONS** 18" x 16" x 9"

**WEIGHT** 29 lbs

**BUILT** Canada

**KUDOS** An extremely well-built and well-designed tube combo with an original and versatile voice and tons of vintage-inspired tonal character

**CONCERNS** Low end is a little overemphasized when patched into a bigger extension cabinet



output tubes in cathode bias. Beyond what's on paper, a huge part of its appeal derives from both the simplicity and originality of the circuit itself — all further enhanced by the totally hand-wired nature of the build — and the plethora of tasty NOS components that Teixeira puts into it. Open up the chassis and you'll find highly desirable British-made signal capacitors from Wima and Mullard/Philips (known for their presence in '60s Vox and Marshall amps), alongside military-grade switches and pots, and a thick, hand-punched eyelet board. Hanging on the outside of the petite chassis are a custom-spec Heyboer mains transformer and an output transformer (OT) custom-wound exclusively for Teixeira as an exact replica of an OT from a Canadian-made Bell & Howell Model 399 Filmosound projector.

The simple control panel includes knobs for volume, master volume and tone, but that belies the versatility that these controls tap into. The circuit under the hood is unlike that in any other conventional guitar amp, and even the one-knob tone control reveals a broad, interactive range, adding gain as well as presence as you wind it up. On top of it all, this little combo looks superb, like some long-forgotten British classic, in its gray Rexine-covered cabinet with hinged metal luggage handle and retro white grille cloth.

Tested with a '57 Fender Telecaster and a Gibson Les Paul 1958 Reissue, the Mini EF86

sounded much like some forgotten British classic, too, and quickly proved itself a fierce little beast. Its thick midrange punch underpins excellent high-end clarity that never gets spiky, and it offers impressive low end for the cab and speaker size. The amp has a vintage-like sound and feel, with a gnarly yet appealingly musical edge when you start pushing it hard and plenty of tactile dynamics throughout the spectrum. It reminds me of an early '60s Vox AC4 I once owned, with the bigger voice of the 1x10 (versus 1x8) cab and push-pull output stage, but the same mix of thick midrange grind and EL84-induced shimmer once you get it cooking.

The amp delivers surprising headroom with the master up high or maxed out, where it will do warm jazz or girthsome twang and jangle as desired. However, it probably sounds its best and most dynamic with all three knobs set to right around noon, delivering everything from biting semi-clean to snarling rock and roll tones, and cleaning up easily via



the guitar's volume control or simply by adjusting your picking dynamics.

Don't let the amp's petite dimensions fool you. This combo is easily loud enough to keep up with a drummer at the average club gig, but it sounds great at a range of output levels, too. Teixeira has voiced this petite cutie to sound big and full through its own cabinet and speaker complement, which together provide some natural bass attenuation. As a result, the lows were a little bovine when patched into a 2x12 extension cab with Celestion G12M-65 Creambacks. If you anticipate using this as a "head" for bigger rooms, the Mini EF86 can be ordered with a push-pull switch that revoices the preamp to be more in line with Teixeira's bigger 1x12 combo variation. Either way, it's a great-sounding little amp with a lot of character — both in tone and looks — and a fun way to grab an original slice of vintage-inspired tonal splendor. ▶



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