

# VERSATILITY WITHOUT MODELING!

With interchangeable preamp modules, Randall's MTS series can faithfully reproduce the sounds of dozens of classic amps. But, it's not modeling—it's the real thing.

Since the advent of modeling, guitarists have become increasingly interested in “all purpose” amplifiers that can credibly deliver a broad tonal variety. While other manufacturers have turned to digital technology to deliver this flexibility, Randall, a division of U.S. Music, has taken a decidedly retro approach. The company's all-tube MTS series is designed to accept “pop-in” tube preamp modules that mimic the most sought-after U.S. and U.K. amplifiers. And with 20 distinct modules available, the MTS amps can reproduce virtually all of the classic amp sounds. It's tempting to call this technology “plug-in modeling,” but Randall director Doug Reynolds says, “We're not modeling anything. These preamps are faithful copies of the originals, and they perform just like the originals, especially in a high-volume, live performance application.”

The MTS series includes a variety of amp configurations to fit just about any application. The RM100 head offers 100 watts of power amp and slots for three different preamp modules, enabling the player to explore three distinct tonal palettes. The RM50 head



Randall's MRS All-tube preamp modules provide flexibility, and tremendous after market sales potential.



**Randall management: Doug Reynolds, product director; Rudy Schlacher, CEO; Jody Dankberg, director of marketing**

offers 50 watts of power and slots for two preamps. The RM20 offers 20 watts of power with a single preamp slot. There are also three combo formats: a 100-watt unit with three preamp slots, a 50-watt unit with two preamp slots; and a 20-watt unit with a single preamp slot. With easy thumb screws on the faceplate, preamp modules can be easily interchanged in a matter of seconds.

For Randall management, it's hard to decide what's more exciting about the new amps: their musical applications or their commercial potential. "When I was playing, I would have loved to have had one of these units," explains Jody Dankberg, director of marketing, who was a founder of Krank amplifiers before joining U.S. Music. "Instead of hauling two or three amps to a gig, I could have gotten the sounds I needed with a single MTS head." Shifting to his marketing role, he adds, "These amplifiers offer tremendous aftermarket sales potential for retailers. Guitarists are continually exploring new sounds. Sell them an MTS amp and you have numerous opportunities to sell them additional preamp modules."

After market sales in any industry are extremely desirable because they usually generate higher margins and they

enable a retailer to maintain contact with the customer. That's why Gillette is willing to lose money on razors to spur the sale of razor blades, or why Hewlett-Packard makes the lion's share of its profits on ink cartridges, not printers. In the music industry however, after market sales have consistently been disappointing. Only a small minority of keyboard buyers ever purchase aftermarket cards for adding sounds or sequences, and sales of add-on modules for mixers and other audio gear have been even more disappointing. Randall's MTS Series may be something of an exception. Three years after its introduction, module sales have begun to significantly outpace amp sales. Dankberg says, "We've established a user base and they're starting to experiment with different modules."

It's easy to see why the Randall modules are drawing such interest. Most customers special order a combo or head with the modules of their choice. Afterwards, they have the opportunity to explore tones with 20 different modules ranging from the "Tweed," which mimics a '59 Fender Bassman, to the JTM, which is based on classic Marshall circuitry. There are even modules that capture the tonality of boutique

amps like Bogner and Mesa Boogie. The most exciting development in the preamp module lineup has been the introduction of signature series preamps. Randall is currently offering three Kirk Hammett modules that reproduce the Metallica star's distinctive sound. At summer NAMM Randall will add the RM100KH Kirk Hammett amp to the MTS line. Equipped with three Hammett-inspired preamps modules, the RM100KH offers tones that run the gamut from classically clean to brutally crunchy, representing tones from Hammett's early, middle, and later years. Randall Artist Relations Manager David Karon said, "We perfected the tones of the amp by working side-by-side with Kirk for well over a year, making sure we had his input and insight every step of the way. It's this intense attention to detail that makes the Kirk Hammett Custom amp a versatile rig for guitar players practicing at home, recording in the studio, and playing live."

Randall also offers George Lynch and Dan Donegan signature models. For both Dankberg and Reynolds, these signature series modules offer almost unlimited potential. Dankberg says, "We've only scratched the surface. There are a lot of great players who have expressed interest in working with us, and we could be adding to this lineup for a long time to come. We can keep this product line fresh and exciting almost indefinitely."

To date, Randall's MTS line has been something of a "stealth" product. The company has promoted it with an artist relations effort and a strong consumer ad campaign. However, it hasn't fully exploited all the retail merchandising opportunities. That is due to change. Dankberg and his team are currently working on elaborate point-of-purchase displays that enable potential buyers to sample all 20 available preamps in a retail environment. "The opportunity to really see and experience these modules has been the missing part of the equation," states Dankberg. "Once we put these units where players can try them out, sales will really take off."

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