

KUSTOM '36 COUPE COMBO

Kustom's new all-valve combo range promises vintage tone with a stylistic nod to their famous tuck 'n' roll amps of yesteryear. Max Sims takes the '36 Coupe for a spin.



If you want to catch people's attention with a guitar amp then one way of doing it is to make it stand out from the crowd visually, and back in the 1970's Kustom certainly did that with their famous tuck 'n' roll vinyl covering concept, which fitted in perfectly with the fab and groovy fashion of that time. However, beauty wasn't just skin deep where these early amps were concerned – their innovative solid-state designs were built to last and earned a reputation for high reliability, making Kustom one of America's most popular brands despite a premium price tag. Original pieces are now becoming very collectable and the look is back in vogue again – Sheryl Crow is one of Kustom's most famous contemporary devotees and takes her tuck 'n' roll cabs everywhere on tour. After several ownership changes which saw Kustom shift focus to PA and disco installations during the eighties and nineties, this famous

logo is once again adorning instrument backline and the new '36 Coupe is one of a pair of all-valve guitar amps that pay tribute to the original styling concept – tuck 'n' roll is back, but with an attitude that's bang up to date.

Under the hood

Built with imported parts to keep the cost in check, but designed and assembled in the USA, the '36 Coupe is certainly eye-catching. The curved top edge of the cabinet is covered with a tough foam-backed vinyl in a way that's reminiscent of the bench seats in 70's era American cars – different to Kustom's original total 'sofa look', but still good looking. The control panel is easy to understand, with backlit sections to tell you which of the two channels is active – there are two pairs of gain and master volume controls sharing a traditional three band EQ network, with master reverb level and tone controls. Both channel gains incorporate a pull-bright switch; a simple means of setting up the amp for single coil pickups or warmer humbucking types. On the rear panel, pro features include a series effects loop, a speaker-emulated balanced direct out with ground lift and level controls, and a level control for the Coupe's footswitchable volume boost – a useful addition that means both channels can be used for rhythm and solo work. The electronics consist of two



robust through-plated PCB's, which are connected by a minimum of wiring – parts and soldering are both more than acceptable and the overall impression is that the Coupe will handle the rough and tumble of live work with ease. The Coupe's loudspeaker is specially made for Kustom by Eminence – its metal dustcap echoes the original drivers used in



Sheryl Crow in front of Kustom's 4x12 tuck 'n' roll cabs.



Kustom guitar and bass amps – as well as looking the part, it's capable of handling a lot of power, which is just as well because the Coupe is far from polite in the volume department.

Hit the road

Switched on, with backlit footswitch and control panels glowing, the '36 Coupe is easy to dial in – even without reading the manual, a few minutes was all it took to get some really good sounds happening. The clean channel's bright and spanky blackface-inspired tone has a lot of dynamic punch and there's enough range on the gain control to push this into a quite aggressive crunch that's great for Texas-style blues/rock, especially when teamed up with a good single coil guitar like Vintage's V6 or TC200. The lead channel's voicing is very different and much, much hotter – it's got that eighties British raunch, but with a sweeter and more useable high end. The tone controls are relatively powerful and the best sounds are found away from extreme settings, a mark of good design. We were very impressed with the KEI (Kustom Eminence Integrated) 12" loudspeaker – metal dustcaps can sometimes have a sharp presence peak that's often detrimental to the area of frequency that the guitar uses, but not so with this gem. Excellent treble response that stays clear and bright without becoming piercing is matched by a tight low end that can really snap if you want it to. The reverb has a fairly short delay that fits in well with this amp's aggressive bluesy character – the separate reverb tone control is a welcome extra here and lets you fine-tune the effect to



perfection. The Coupe's response is excellent and we think this is largely down to the clever power stage design, which blends cathode and fixed bias methods for a 'best of both worlds' dynamic envelope – it manages to feel punchy and aggressive but with a refined quality that's very engaging. The amp's low noise floor is very useful when recording – we used the

speaker-emulated output to both PA and desk and it makes getting a good recorded sound very easy.

Chequered flag

So, if you're looking for something a little different, with bags of vintage 70's cool and



a tough, ballsy sound that's great for country, blues or high-octane rock, Kustom's new Coupe certainly fits the bill – this 36-watter is perfect for club and pub gigs, while power-crazed axe heroes who want more, more, more should check out the '72 Coupe, which doubles wattage and speakers, adding vibrato and tremolo to the control panel. The new '36 Coupe is definitely a winner from Kustom and we hope some future models include the full-on sofa look – we can't wait.

Max Sims

KUSTOM

• '36 Coupe



MADE IN USA

Spec Check KUSTOM

Kustom '36 Coupe 1x12 combo

TYPE: All valve two channel Class AB combo with solid-state rectification

OUTPUT: 36W RMS

VALVES: Four ECC83/12AX7 preamp, two 6L6GC power amp.

DIMENSIONS: 480 (h) x 570 (w) x 270mm (d)

WEIGHT: (kg/lb): 21/45

CABINET: Birch ply

LOUDSPEAKERS: One KEI (Kustom Eminence Integrated) 12"

CHANNELS: Two

CONTROLS: Lead gain with pull bright, lead master volume, rhythm gain with pull bright, rhythm master volume, bass mid and treble, reverb level and tone.

FOOTSWITCH: Three button footswitch included, toggles channels, effects loop in/out and boost functions.

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Series foot switchable effects loop, external speaker jacks with switchable impedance, footswitchable variable volume boost level, balanced speaker-emulated DI output with ground lift and level control, spring reverb.

RANGE OPTIONS: The '72 Coupe is a 72 watt 2x12 combo including the same features, with the addition of vibrato/tremolo.

- '36 Coupe £699.00rrp
- '72 Coupe £849.00rrp

