



The Great Guitar Amp Modeler Extravaganza of 2001

Johnson Amplification J-Station,

Perhaps I'm being unfair to the folks at Johnson Amplification, but if there's any doubt that the Line 6 POD is the standard by which other amp modelers are judged, one need only look at the Johnson J-Station—its features and execution are frighteningly similar to POD. Perhaps this is simply a case of parallel invention, but it certainly suggests that this is the right way to go about building a guitar amp modeler.

Like the POD, the J-Station is a tabletop model with an external power supply. The J-Station features 17 different amp models (of which three are specifically bass amps) plus two acoustic guitar models, designed to make your electric guitar resemble an amplified steel string acoustic.

Again, the amps are modeled after the usual suspects: Fender, Marshall, Boogie, Vox, Hiwatt, and Matchless are represented, with bass amps from SWR, Trace-Elliot, and Ampeg. Two of the amp models occupy slots that will be software-updateable in the future, allowing the J-Station to avoid obsolescence; should classic tube amps of the 1950s-90s ever go out of favor, you'll still be able to download a model of a Fisher-Price Speak'n'Spell or whatever guitarists in 2010 are playing through.

12 speaker cabinet models are available, and again the appropriate speaker is called up when an amp model is selected, but you can mix and match. Besides the expected variety of 2x12 and 4x12 guitar cabinets, the J-Station features three cabinets to complement the bass amp models, including an SWR Goliath 4x10 with horn tweeter, an Acoustic 1x18 folded horn, and an Ampeg Portaflex flip-top. There is nothing stopping you from routing a Martin D-28 steel string emulation through an Acoustic folded horn bass cabinet...except perhaps common sense.

Seven different effects are selectable, in addition to which Delay, Reverb, Compression, and Wah are

available at any time. (Wah requires the optional Johnson J8 pedalboard or a MIDI foot controller.) The seven effects include Chorus, Flanger, Phaser, Tremolo, Rotary, Auto Wah, and Pitch/Detune.

In addition to the most common effect parameters, which are easily tweaked via the front panel controls (what Johnson calls Top Level Editing), there is a comprehensive assortment of detailed parameters available via Deep Level Editing, including 13 different Reverb types, and frequency-selectable lowpass filtering in the Compressor sidechain. Despite this substantial depth, every Deep Level parameter is accessible from the front panel...though you'll need to keep the manual handy to remember what parameters #00-39 are or what their range of values represent; all communication is via a two-digit LED display.

MIDI implementation is as exhaustive and thorough as the POD's, including the sending/receiving of continuous controllers for every parameter. A Windows-only (boo!) editor/librarian is included for easy access to the Deep Level Editing parameters.

There are 30 factory preset locations in ROM, and another 30 user memory locations (RAM). There is no manual WYSIWYG mode; to start with a clean slate you must first select any preset, then zero out every knob on the front panel controls.

The Bass, Middle, and Treble tone controls can be pre- or post-modeling eq depending upon which amp type is selected; for example the eq is before the BlackFace model but after the Rectifier model. Their wide range allows them to be used intuitively and effectively.

The J-Station offers an impressive array of tone shaping capabilities; even more impressively, that array is all within reach of a few knob twists or button pushes.

Price: \$299

More from: Johnson Amplification, 8760 S. Sandy Pkwy., Sandy, UT 84070. 801/566-8800, fax 801/566-7005, www.johnson-amp.com.