

BUGERA 333-212 Guitar Combo



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BUGERA

333-212 Combo

SRP £446.00

All prices incl VAT

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WHAT IS IT?

A 120W, three-channel tube combo with built-in speaker damping, reverb and an FX loop/boost mode. It's aimed at the player that covets an expensive boutique tube amp but maybe doesn't want to spend boutique amp prices.

WHY SHOULD I WANT ONE?

The Bugera 333 sounds very convincing and is packed with features that belie the modest price tag. Indeed, the 333 conveys the impression of an expensive hand-built tube amplifier. It has quite an uncompromising tone with a fierce distortion but the overall definition and clarity of the 6L6 power tubes is always to the fore. The versatile EQ and extra voicing options from the speaker damping circuit also open up lots of potential for creating some truly amazing sounds.

A meaty-looking 3-channel valve combo that claims to offer boutique-amp performance at a temptingly low price.

If you're not familiar with the concept of 'boutique' guitar amplifiers, the phrase broadly applies when describing any amp that is assembled using some degree of hand-wiring or equally skill-dependant element in its manufacturing process. Boutique-style guitar amps can either be jaw-droppingly simple designs or else they bristle with a plethora of tone-enhancing whistles and bells that make no bones about their ability to put you at the cutting edge.

Either approach claims to offer superior performance and tone compared to your typical mass-produced guitar amplifier – and both can also leave a sizeable dent in your wallet. Hand-wired tube guitar amps usually don't come cheap, and this is where the Bugera 333 aims to justify its claim to bring something new to the party by virtue of a price tag that

falls just short of £500! That seems a bargain for a 120W three-channel valve combo, so let's have a look at the beastie and see how she goes.

Well worth a Grunt

The Bugera 333 appears to be a solid and well-built combo and considering the type of performance it claims to deliver, it really needs to be.

Driven by a quartet of 6L6 output tubes and a tube-driven preamp with four 12AX7 valves, this 212 combo packs a lot of hardware inside its chassis and its twin-speaker design naturally implies that it is both physically large and at 28.5 kilos (or a back-straining 60-odd old-school lbs), it is also fairly heavy.

Weight issues are an unavoidable fact of life with big valve combos, as they need to be rugged to withstand the typical slings and arrows of weekly gigs.

Luckily the Bugera features stainless steel corner protectors and a large ventilated steel grill at the rear that helps maintain a constant flow of cooling air around the output tubes whilst protecting them from damage.

Around the front, the combo presents a smart and purposeful modern design, with a black and silver control panel complimented by black speaker cloth trimmed with silver piping.

The busy control layout offers the first clue that we are dealing with an amp that is designed to cover the whole tonal spectrum from clean to high-gain rock and metal. (A remote footswitch is included).

Besides individual volume and EQ controls on each of the three separate clean, crunch and lead channels, the crunch and lead channels also have separate gain controls that offer totally independent control over ▶

▶ the overdrive sounds. This versatile setup puts you firmly in the driving seat as far as dialling-in any distorted lead or rhythm tones you could possibly want. The Bugera 333 easily covers everything from a bluesy purr to a full-on Metallica-style roar and while we're at it the clean sounds aren't to be sniffed at, either.

The amp's overall volume level is governed by a single master volume control, while an adjacent master reverb control adjusts the overall amount of the amp's built-in spring reverb globally across all three channels.

So far, so good. The Bugera is user-friendly enough to let you get some good working sounds up and running straight from the crate but there is still more on offer when you delve a bit further.

The three-way speaker damping



Besides the extra low-end wallop, another advantage of the mid and low-damp modes is that they let you sound 'louder' without actually having to increase the amp's volume level and risk drowning out everyone else. Bargain.

If you want even more kick, the Bugera's FX loop send and return level pots double up as an extra boost that can be selected via the amp's footswitch. The boost is global and cannot be assigned to individual channels but is nevertheless useful

expensive US-built amplifier for build-quality. Something about the Bugera's control shafts conveys a sense of fragility and while the control knobs don't exactly snap off at the merest touch, they don't look as though they will withstand too hefty a pounding, so be mindful of this when you are lugging the Bugera in and out of the car.

With that in mind, we have no complaints about the Bugera's tone and if you prefer overdriven sounds with a taut, modern sound,

and we can see it serving perfectly well as the main lead channel for many guitarists who will doubtless make excellent use of the broad meaty midrange and muscular yet flexible gain; which is spot-on for modern blues or classic hard rock.

The lead channel takes everything up a gear and now you're getting into full-on modern rock and metal territory; it's as mean as Mike Tyson with a hangover and can strip wallpaper at 20 paces once you really begin to crank up the gain. This is a truly savage sounding overdrive that is about as subtle as a brick through a window but if unbridled shred is your bag, then the Bugera 333 can and will take you all the way.

You can tailor this amp to sound tight and punchy like a vintage Fender combo or dial in big ballysy metal tones that sound as contemporary as it gets without having to remortgage your entire life's possessions to afford it. To be honest, the 333's sounds aren't an issue; the thing to bear in mind is that this amp is built to a price and build-quality issues might arise faster than you'd expect from a more expensive amp if you don't look after it properly. However, the low price notwithstanding the Bugera 333 feels solid, reasonably well made and sounds damn good.

If only tubes will do but but cash is an issue, you could take this amp out on a gig and not feel as though you are carting around mutton dressed as lamb. **PU**

The Bugera gives you great sounds straight from the crate...

control is a feature sometimes found on more expensive combos (Peavey's Triple XXX combo immediately springs to mind) and if you are an out-and-out heavy rock or metal guitarist, it might be useful to appreciate how this feature works – it may well be your secret weapon.

Imagine how the speakers react inside the cabinet when you hit a big chord; they flap around a fair bit don't they? Well, the damping switch lets you select between three separate presets that adjust the combos low-end response.

Highly damped, the combo has a tight bass response that sounds fairly efficient as an all-round voicing for clean and overdriven sounds; it's usable but maybe nothing special. However, decrease the damping factor and suddenly the amp sounds flippin' huge! In a nutshell, when you lower the damping factor you are basically increasing the cabinet's resonance by making the speakers 'flap' around inside the cabinet more, resulting in a dramatic low-end boost that sounds really big and chunky; more like a 4x12 cabinet, if you like.

whenever you need even more kick; reverting back to standard FX loop mode when the boost is disengaged. Finally, a line out jack and a line out level control feeds the combo's signal to a PA or a recording console, while allowing a useful degree of control over the line-level signal.

If you still feel you need a bit of extra throw via an external speaker cabinet, an impedance selector switches between 4, 8 and 16 ohms to keep the amp functioning at full whack, so long as you remember to select the correct impedance to match your external speakers.

It all looks and feels very impressive and, as we said earlier, straight from the crate you can get some good solid tones from the Bugera, but let's have a closer look.

Rock Steady

Loaded as it is with 6L6 output tubes, the Bugera has the typical hard-hitting tone of an American amp.

However, one touch of the Bugera's rotary controls reveals that this Chinese-made combo doesn't necessarily match an

the Bugera delivers. Compared to the warm sound of a typical EL34 equipped amp such as a Marshall JCM2000, the 6L6-equipped Bugera 333 is much harder-edged and more aggressive. Even the clean channel has a tough, glassy quality that delights the ear, and when you are playing a Strat with the neck pickup set to 'stun' it feels like a marriage made in heaven.

Complex chords sound bright and uncluttered and you can more or less just plug in and find great usable clean sounds from the word 'go'. Flicking between the three channels quickly shows that the Bugera is easily capable of producing a workable range of tones. The crunch channel sounds smooth and articulate

It's as mean as Mike Tyson with a hangover and can strip wallpaper at 20 paces...

