

Music Man 210-65

Amp time! This month's relics ain't rare or unusual, but they are often overlooked values in great-sounding, reliable, "almost vintage" guitar amps: Music Man. Many folks today are familiar with the "second-generation" Music Man instruments produced by Ernie Ball, but a lot of people don't know that there's a long thread winding back through CLF Research (that's Clarence Leo Fender) basses and guitars produced and marketed by Music Man, an amplifier company whose roots go back to the original "pre-CBS"



Fender Electric Instrument Mfg. Co. For about 12 years, beginning in 1972, Music Man, Inc. produced a successful line of hybrid (tube power with solid-state preamp) bass and guitar amps, and many are still out there today, singing loud and strong. Walk into most any "rehearsal-by-the-hour" studio in New York City, and you're likely to find a Music Man—maybe their 130-watt bass head, or an HD-130 Reverb half-stack, or (if you're lucky) one of their 65-watt combos, like my favorite, the 210-65. These incredibly durable amps sound as good as, or better than, comparable "silverface" Fender amps of the same period, with about twice the power and at about half the cost!

Background. The early 1970s saw an amazing period of growth for rock music, as bands toured incessantly, playing long nights and generally abusing their equipment as much as themselves. Concert sound reinforcement was in its infancy, and the trend was toward mammoth guitar amps capable of filling an arena on their own. Solid-state was the new technology, and great walls of transistor-powered Acoustic, Standel, or Peavey amps backed many of the big touring acts of the day. Although they were not as delicate and didn't need the constant maintenance of all-tube amplifiers, they didn't necessarily sound all that great. In stepped Music Man, founded by longtime Fender executives Forrest White and Tom Walker, to bridge the tone gap, producing a line of two-channel instrument amplifiers with a new, hybrid approach that coupled solid-state quietness and reliability with the warmth and tone of tube power, for "the Music Man who hears the difference!"

Music Man. Starting out, they made two basic models: the Series Sixty-Five (65 watts RMS) and the Series One-Thirty (130 watts RMS), which were available as separate bass heads, guitar heads with reverb and tremolo, or guitar combos, also with reverb and tremolo. The Series Sixty-Five combos came in 1x12, 1x15, 2x10, 4x10, and 2x12 speaker configurations. Though the HD-130 (HD for Heavy Duty) was available in 2x10, 4x10 and 2x12 combos, it was most often used in stack format—an HD-130 Reverb head with a pair of 412-GS cabinets. The 1976 Music Man catalog has a great full-page, color photo boasting "ERIC CLAPTON in concert," cigarette stuck in headstock of his korina Explorer, and backed by three HD-130 Guitar Stacks. Especially popular with country and southern-rock acts, Music Man amp users have included Alabama, Aerosmith, Merle Travis, James Burton, and Albert Lee, who still

favors his 210-65 today. Cheap Trick's Rick Nielsen had a wall of dummy Hiwatts and Marshalls onstage, but actually played through offstage combos, often including a Music Man 210-65.

The Specs. Let's examine this particular model as an example, since all Music Man guitar amps share the same basic features. The 210-65 has a distinctly Fender look to it, especially the faceplate, displaying its heritage proudly. Channel One has two inputs and Volume, Treble, and Bass controls. Channel Two has the same, plus a Bright switch and a Midrange control, as well as Reverb and separate Speed and

Intensity controls for the Tremolo. A Deep switch, a Master Volume and a Power Reduction switch (Hi/Off/Low) operate on both channels. This Power Reduction switch cuts voltage going to the tubes, plates working the power tubes harder for more distortion at a lower volume. Power comes from a pair of EL34 tubes with a 12AX7 phase inverter; it's capable of 65 watts RMS through a pair of 10" Eminence speakers with 18-ounce Alnico V magnets. The back panel has a courtesy outlet, Standby and Ground switches, main and extension speaker outputs with a selector switch for 4 or 8 ohms (nice touch), plus inputs for the provided reverb/tremolo footswitch. All aspects of construction bespeak durability, reliability, and quality. Cabinets are solid pine, lock-jointed, with marine plywood baffle boards, and covered in black Tolex with heavily plated metal corners. The amp chassis is 18-gauge, cold-rolled steel, and the mounting and access to all wiring and components is an amp-servicer's dream. List price for a 210-65 in 1976 was \$545. A vinyl amp cover or set of four heavy-duty casters were available for \$12.50 each.

The Test. These amps sound great, with enough range and versatility for a lot of different applications and playing styles. Like a Fender Vibrolux with three times the output, the 210-65's Fender heritage is evident in the clean, percussive attack at lower volumes that Tele players especially love—great for chicken pickin'—and when you crank the volume, you get a lot of punch with your crunch for some very ballsy power chords. The Music Man's full-gain distortion lacks the total saturation of a Marshall JCM or a Soldano, but has a more distinctive clarity that is sometimes likened to a Hiwatt. Certainly not a heavy-metal amp, the 210-65 is a fantastic—and loud—club amp for all the other shadings of rock, and is especially tasty for playin' the blues.

Wrap-Up. Music Man upped the Series Sixty-Five to Seventy-Five in 1980, so don't be surprised to see one. HD-130 Reverb heads sell for \$250 to \$325 or so these days, and a 210-65 combo might go for about the same. If you're a working musician on a budget, you should definitely check out these vaguely Fenderish amps with the two guitar guys on the big "M" logo.

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