

Blackheart BH100H, BH15H, BH5H, and BH1H

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

Designed by famed boutique amp maker Pyotr Belov, the Blackheart series amps range from the miniscule one-watt BH1H Killer Ant to the mighty 100-watt BH100H Hor Head. In between are the 15-watt BH15H and the 5-watt BH5H, both of which are available in combo format. All Blackheart models are push-pull designs

SPECS Blackheart Engineering, (866) 858-5832; blackhearteng.com				
MODEL	BH100H Hot Head	BH15H Handsome Devil	BH5H Little Giant 5	BH1H Killer Ant
PRICE	\$1,365 retail/\$899 street	\$530 direct/\$349 street	\$303 retail/\$199 street	\$273 retail/\$179 street
CHANNELS	Two	One	One	One
CONTROLS	(Channel 1) Drive, Level, Treble, Middle, Bass, (Channel 2) Gain, Level, Treble, Middle, Bass, Global Volume and Presence controls. Full Power/Half power (Pentode/Triode) switch. Class AB/Class A switch. Rear panel: 2x4Ω, 2x8Ω, 1x16Ω speaker outs. Effects loop with send and return controls and series/parallel switch.	Drive, Level, Treble, Middle, Bass, Presence. 15 watts/7 watts (Pentode/Triode) switch. Rear panel: 2x4Ω, 2x8Ω, 1x16Ω speaker outs	Volume, Treble, Middle, Bass. 5 watts/3 watts switch. Rear panel: 2x4Ω, 2x8Ω, 1x16Ω speaker outs	Volume. Rear panel: 4Ω, 8Ω, 16Ω speaker outs
TUBES	Four JJ EL34 power tubes, six JJ 12AX7 preamp tubes, solid-state rectifier.	Two EL84 power tubes, two 12AX7 preamp tubes, solid-state rectifier.	One EL84 power tube, one 12AX7 preamp tube, solid-state rectifier.	Two 12AX7s
POWER	100 watts/50 watts in class AB mode, 60 watts/30 watts in class A mode.	15 watts/7 watts (Pentode/Triode)	5 watts/3 watts (Pentode/Triode)	1 watt
EXTRAS	Two-button footswitch included, DC heater supply (preamp tubes only).	Birch ply cabinet, DC heater supply (preamp tubes only).	Birch ply cabinet, DC filament supply for all tubes.	Birch ply cabinet, DC filament supply for all tubes.
WEIGHT	52 lbs (head).	28 lbs (head)	21 lbs (head)	12 lbs
KUDOS	Independent EQ. Tons of gain. Wide spectrum of clean and overdriven tones. Flexible effects loop. Effective power switching.	Startlingly cool EL84-style tones. Effective power switching.	Five watts of pure class A joy. Effective power switching.	Defines the term "quiet storm." Surprising overdrive punch at very low volume.
CONCERNS	None.	None.	None.	Hard to justify at only \$20 less than the BH5H.

(except for the single-ended BH1H) that operate in single-ended class A, although the BH100H is switchable between class A and class AB. All but the BH1H also include a half-power function that switches between pentode and triode operation for the power tubes. For low noise, all models have DC filament supplies for their preamp tubes (and for the power tubes as well in the BH5H and BH1H).

Construction details for the series include birch-ply cabinets, 16-gauge steel chassis with folded and spot-welded corners, and double-sided, custom color PC boards with thick, two-ounce copper traces. Every Blackheart also features multiple speaker jacks to make it easy to interface with different speaker impedances. We tested these amps with an Epiphone Wilshire and a PRS SC245, and tested each amp through a Blackheart BH412 cab (\$834 retail/\$549 street) with four custom Eminence 12s.

BH100H HOT HEAD

The bruiser of the series, the 100-watt BH100H sports two footswitchable channels with Independent Drive, Level, Bass, Middle, and Treble controls. The channels share Master volume and Presence controls, as well as a tube-powered effects loop with Send and Return controls and a Series/Parallel switch. You can toggle the loop off and on with the footswitch, or, if you don't need to run effects in the loop, set it to deliver up to a 3dB volume boost via footswitch.

The BH100H covers the bases for different style and tastes via its similarly voiced but gainfully different channels. Channel 1 (a.k.a Loud) takes things from clean and open to thoroughly distorted depending on where you set the Drive control. The tone controls aren't fussy as to their settings, and with the Bass knob set on the high side and the Presence closer to zero, it was easy to elicit great sounding blues and rock tones from our test guitars. The sonic difference between the Class A and Class AB modes is subtle to say the least, though a bit more looseness is detectable in class A if you really tune in. Switching from full to half power makes a very significant difference in volume, however, which isn't always the case with half-power functions.

Switching to channel 2 (a.k.a. F'N Loud) unleashes the BH100H's gain and aggression potential, providing gobs of sustain with a bright, edgy attack. At lower volumes the Bass control needed to be set toward maximum to get that bottom-end kick in the gut, though simply turning up the volume also brought the lows into balance. The half-power mode is very useful here as well, which is a godsend since running the output stage hard is a punishing experience. The difference between operating classes is about the same as with channel 1, which is to say don't expect much Vox-like jangle from this amp when running it in class A. That's hardly a concern, however, given the BH100H's rock/metal orientation. Well made and equipped with the essential features that players of multi-channel tube heads want, the BH100H is a quality stage rig that delivers the goods at a very fair price.

BH15H HANDSOME DEVIL

Compact and lightweight, the BH15H is a dual-EL84, class A design, with one channel and a set of Drive, Level, Treble, Middle, Bass, and Presence controls. A good example of Blackheart construction, the interior workmanship of the BH15H is super neat, with all components (including the tube sockets) mounted to a hefty, blood-red PC board. As with the most of the other Blackhearts, the BH15H has a full complement of speaker jacks—two 4Ω, two 8Ω, and one 16Ω—which provide a lot of connectivity options for multiple cabinets. The only thing missing is an effects loop, but that's not surprising for an amp in this class.

With the Drive control set at around 2 o'clock, the BH15H's sounds range from clear and jangly at lower guitar volumes to quite crushing when you play aggressively with your guitar cranked up. There's plenty of Vox-like chiminess to be had here, and by pushing the Drive toward maximum you can get copious amounts of harmonically engorged distortion that's very happening for blues or rock lead playing. There's a notable increase in volume and gain when using the 15-watt power setting, but I pre-

ferred the silkier sounding overdrive tones in the 7-watt setting. For some reason, the switch from pentode to triode operation in the EL84s makes quite a difference in how this amp sounds. (Interestingly, single-ended triode operation is also favored in many high-end, hi-fi tube amplifiers.)

The BH15H is a pretty amazing amp considering what it costs, and suffice to say that if you're interested in a 15-watter that does the Vox thing and then some, this model would

be a great choice. Small, simple, and toneful, the BH15H earns an Editors' Pick Award.

BH5H LITTLE GIANT 5

If something smaller and less powerful is on your wish list for practice or recording, the BH5H might fill the bill. Sporting one EL84 in single-ended configuration, the BH5H operates in pure class A like other designs of its ilk, including the classic Fender Champ. Unlike some low-cost single tubebers, the BH5H maintains surprisingly solid tones across the volume spectrum. Shimmering textures abound at lower settings, where the BH5H can inspire everything from clean fingerpicking to jazz chording to on-the-edge-of-breakup sounds that are great for primal blues and roots rock. You get more headroom and loudness when using the 5-watt setting, but the 3-watt setting (which switches the EL84 from pentode to triode operation) sounded sweeter to me for the more overdriven sounds. With the Volume knob at two o'clock or higher, you get tough crunch-rhythm tones that smoothly into sustaining lead tones when you jack up your guitar's volume. The squashy saturation feels great under your fingers and is one of the delights of amps in this power class. Bottom line: The BH5H comes in at a low price but its sounds are anything but cheap. Put this one on your shopping list if you seek lots of bang-for-the-buck in the five-watt arena.

BH1H KILLER ANT

Producing 1 watt of output courtesy of two 12AX7s, and armed with a Volume knob and a trio of speaker jacks, the BH1H is a convenient package to keep around the hacienda for jams or recording. It's very housemate friendly too, because even when played all the way up through our Blackheart 4x12 cabinet, we could still talk over the din. In this mode, the Ant's tones are very distorted, with a voicing that sounds more like a tiny Marshall than a tube preamp. Cleaner tones are available at lower settings, but the fun of this amp truly lies in letting 'er rip with all the aural glory that a single watt's worth of overdriven fury can muster. Pummel the Ant with pedals for gonzo lead tones, use it to warm up a piezo-equipped acoustic guitar, or even try running a vocal mic through it! There are myriad applications for a "color" amp like this, but just remember when the time comes to swipe your credit card that only \$20 more buys you the BH5H—a far more capable amp with five times the power. **A**



The BH15H's tidy interior features a heavy-duty PC board with thick copper traces. Most of the components are board mounted, including the pots, jacks, and tube sockets.