

# Blackheart BH15-112 Handsome Devil

## Guitar amplifier

Has master craftsman Pyotr Belov achieved the perfect hybrid between boutique design and Chinese-manufactured affordability in this well-constructed valve amp range?

### Bob Thomas

It's an interesting thought that valve guitar amplifiers are available today from more manufacturers in more flavours and in more variants than at any other time in history. What's surprising is that, taken as a whole, these valve amps are relatively cheaper than ever before. If you've been reading the small print on the back panels of new guitar amps recently, you'll probably have noticed the increasing prevalence of the legend 'Designed in the USA/England/Wherever — Built in China', as manufacturers seek to cut costs in an effort to sell more of their products into a western market that, for demographic reasons, is contracting in size. Hence the availability of more amps at lower prices than ever before.

Loud Technologies are no strangers to the concept of using Far Eastern manufacturing to provide their customers with US-designed products at attractive price points, and the success of their brands (which notably include Ampeg, Crate, and Mackie) demonstrates the viability of this approach. Launched in November 2007, Blackheart (a division of Crate) is Loud's newest brand, its raison d'être being to deliver "the best old-school, all-tube tone at

price points within any guitarist's reach".

Behind this laudable (but not entirely unique) aim is the Austin-based Russian amplifier design guru Pyotr Belov who has pulled back on his career as a boutique amp builder to become the Director of MI Amplification at Loud. If you're not familiar with his name, let's just say that at least one major corporation has used his design talents in amplifiers 'Designed in the USA'. The central idea behind Blackheart amplifiers came from Belov himself when he came up with the concept of manufacturing boutique amplifiers overseas using good design, quality materials

and making a real commitment to quality.

According to the PR, turning this concept into reality seems simple enough. In his two-car garage in Austin, Texas, Belov creates a prototype of a Blackheart amplifier that is a hand-wired, point-to-point boutique product. This prototype is then engineered by Belov for quantity production by, for example, replacing the hand-wired elements with a rugged PCB carrying heavy-duty copper tracks routed point-to-point. The components specified are basically of the same quality as the prototype. The material specifications and design elements of the prototype are retained throughout.

Then comes the part of the process that seems unique and central to the Blackheart concept. Pyotr Belov personally selects the offshore manufacturer and approves every component one piece at a time, right down



## Performing Musician

BH15-112 Handsome Devil **£407**

Designed to allow for aftermarket hot-rodding, modification and customisation, this class A valve guitar amplifier can go from searing, distorted plexi tones to clean and crunchy blues with a real Californian flavour. The Handsome Devil is a supremely touch-sensitive player's amp.

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