



*Barnett Daves*  
FIFTEEN THIRTY

VOL

GAIN

VOL

BASS

MID

TREBLE

REVERB

MADE IN ENGLAND

STANDBY POWER



Britain's latest contender in the luscious valve combo market has a beautifully voiced mid-Atlantic accent. Our amp man Dave Petersen is pleasantly surprised

# Barnett Davies

## Fifteen Thirty 1x12" Valve Amp

Unlike another amp maker with a double-name trademark, there really is a Mr. Barnett (Dave, to his numerous happy repair customers in the Hastings area) and a Mr. Davies (Clive, a former customer and now his amp-building colleague). The pair worked on this amp for three years before introducing it as their first product to the UK market; Davies is a busy gigging guitarist, and the Fifteen Thirty is Barnett's answer to Davies' musical and technical requirements. A dozen pre-production BD combos, not much different to the example we're reviewing, are doing the business in the Hastings area, used by no less than the town's favourite sons Keane and folk-blues guitarist John Pearson.

The Fifteen Thirty is unusually light for a 30W valve combo – lighter, in fact, than the 15W Vox combo we reviewed last month. Part of the reason is the alloy chassis and neodymium speaker, as well as the pine cabinet, although this is standard 18mm thickness in the corner joints, with solid top and bottom rear panels, and doesn't look as if it's about to fall apart. The chief impression is of a solidly-made piece of engineering which just happens to be light enough not to do your back in.

Another contribution is from the circuitry. Most four-EL84 30W amps tread the well-beaten class A path with its inherent need for big transformers, but the BD is a class AB (fixed-bias)

### First Impressions

Neatly designed and easy to carry, to the extent that you wonder if it really has valves in it. It's like the offspring of a valve amp and a digital camera



design, and the transformer size is around 40 per cent less for equal output – and no corners have been cut by, for instance, using solid-state in the reverb or overdrive circuits. Innovative features include the panel/footswitch operated channel-switcher/combiner, and the reverb level-changer on the footswitch that allows you either to cancel reverb on one channel or alter its level with a preset control.

The trim is well up to scratch, although we thought the choice of some materials, the covering in particular, a little below the standard of other aspects of the amp. The speaker grille is well fitted, but could use more robust cloth or some support backing to match the strength of most of its competitors in this price bracket. Still, the overall effect is pleasing, and the panel and badge work is classically

clean and simple. The high quality gigbag-type slip cover, supplied as standard, will defend the cabinet from the worst effects of careless handling.

Internally, there's more unfussy ingenuity. The chassis is fully enclosed, but removal of two lock-screws allows the top panel, which is one piece with the sharply angled front panel, to pivot forward on a piece of piano-hinge which spans the chassis, thus answering the question 'how the hell did they wire it?'. Inside is a neat assembly of two hardwired fibreglass circuit boards, connected to the

This amp is very light thanks to an alloy chassis, neodymium speaker and class AB design with smaller transformer

### FACTFILE

#### BARNETT DAVIES FIFTEEN THIRTY

**Description:** Valve reverb combo with Celestion Century 12" speaker

**Price:** £1500

**Front panel:** Single jack input; Clean Volume; Channel selector/combiner switch; Overdrive Gain; Overdrive Volume; Bass, Middle, Treble tone controls; Reverb control; Standby switch, Mains switch

**Rear Panel:** Mains fuse; speaker jack; power selector 15W/30W; DI level control; DI XLR output socket. Footswitch: Channel Select, Reverb On/Off/Preset level change/ Channel Combine (all piloted)

**Valves:** 4 x EL84, 3 x ECC83, 2 x ECC81 (all JJ/Tesla). Accutronics 10" reverb tray. Accessories: heavy-duty slipcover included in price

**Dimensions** 43cm wide, 43cm high, 25cm deep

**Weight:** 13kg excl. cover & footswitch

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**Web:** www.barnettdavies.com





Clean, simple front panel, and well kicked back to protect the knobs

THE COMPETITION

**VOX AC30CC1**  
Bigger, heavier, no channel switching, but aggressively priced if you shop around  
**RRP: £659**

**CORNFORD HURRICANE**  
Ticks the handwired & single 12" boxes, with some of the same features but no power selection  
**RRP: £1199**

**BOOGIE LONESTAR**  
A single-12", EL84-powered contender, but probably PCB-structured  
**RRP: £1699**

chassis-mounted pots and valve holders by symmetrically laid-out, lace-tied wiring looms. There's no awkward crowding, although the passive components are all bigger than average, and nine valves have to be fed and housed. There's no effects loop, but why use outboards for functions which are ably supplied by the onboard circuits? There's an effective-looking DI, fed from a floating transformer tap to remove the need for de-earthing other units in the chain. The three-function footswitch is fed by a multi-pin plug and socket, which is pro-grade metal and should withstand the abuse that often destroys the plastic-cased variety.

– it usually requires class A, with its bass and lower mid advantages, to balance out the EL84s' typically glassy highs. Second, efficient neo speakers seem to favour mids and highs... so plugging the Strat in to the amp set clean, we were expecting jarring high-mid jangle and not much else. This isn't the case here – the sound is round, full, and balanced. There's a solid but lively bass, clear middles, and a smooth treble more suggestive of 6L6s than EL84s. It's tempting to classify the sound as American, but

The sound is round, full and balanced with a solid but lively bass, clear middles and a smooth treble

SOUNDS

Two things about the Fifteen Thirty led us to expect an unexceptional sound. Generally, class AB amps that use EL84s don't bring out their full tonality

there's an element of early Marshall (JTM45, ali chassis – is there a connection here?) that gives a British richness to the midrange. It also produces a good touch response, with a blend of control and elasticity that doesn't feel as slack-strung as a single-ended but still allows easy vibrato.

The tones work effectively, the Bass having a progressive cut-and-boost action with a neutral mid-point. Mid changes the contour gently without affecting the overall volume, and Treble produces enough boost to brighten a foggy humbucker without making a single coil sound too brittle when you want a bit of metallic edge on those lower strings. Set the Volume at around 4/10 for rehearsal, 6 for gigs, and you'll have enough in hand for strong clean backing work in all the usual live situations. The noise-floor is quiet and even, reflecting the filtered DC supply for the preamp heater-chain and good grounding technique.

Reverb is strong at anything above 4/10. It won't go into sci-fi territory but still manages to sound cavernous

at maximum. It blends with the dry sound seamlessly and provides the desired 'big live hall' effect. It's free from buzz and howlback, and that makes it as well-designed and useful as any of the amp's other features.

The Drive channel can be switched in from the front panel or from the footswitch, both offering the combining facility, although the panel switch has to be in the mid position if the footswitch is in use. The Gain contour is progressive and the Drive channel can be set to sound like a fatter Clean channel if needed, the footswitch then being used as a level or tone changer. This was one of our favourite sounds in a live test.



Advancing the Gain produces a smooth increase in overtone sustain, with the Les Paul going into two-register harmonics in the higher settings, and the Strat compressing but staying pleasingly detailed on single notes, while crunched chords keep their musical identity. The higher gain settings can benefit from a dose of combined Clean channel for that clarity-plus-edge combination that's so popular these days, but the Fifteen

Thirty's Drive channel would make a big contribution to the amp's all-round usefulness without this facility.

VERDICT

The Fifteen Thirty is a cleverly designed, well-made, excellent-sounding amp, and lightweight too. Its fortunes will be affected by its hand-built price tag, which will have to stand comparison with China-built competition – but enough guitarists will value its unique qualities to create a demand that may be hard for its makers to satisfy.

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality .....	16
Versatility .....	15
Sound .....	16
Value for money .....	12
Vibe .....	18
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>77%</b>
Good for... pop, art-rock, indie, blues, jazz, country and alt.country	
Look elsewhere... for heavy rock and metal sounds	



Clever, compact design with a pine cabinet and a lightweight neodymium speaker