

## What Is A Good Practice Amp?

*By Gary Allen*



You finally decided you need a good practice amp. Or maybe you are just starting to play guitar and you want a small amp at an affordable price to learn with. Great!! You made your first decision. But wait..... Now you find you need to make a whole bunch of other decisions. Should I buy a tube amp or solid state? How many watts do I need? Should I get something with built in effects or a no frills model? Lets face it. Buying an amp that you will be happy with is no small task. There are many considerations, and I am going to try to sort through some of the basics for you.

There are many practice amps on the market today. Some have great tone and others are about as annoying as the garbage truck backing into your driveway under your bedroom window at 5:30 in the morning. Ask yourself this. What kind of music do I play and what tones will sound best for that style?

Tube, Solid State, or Hybrid? **Tube Amps:** Tube amps are probably the most expensive of the amps and many players like them for their warm tones. They have a more natural sound. The downfall is price and more maintenance. Tubes go bad and need to be replaced in time. Note: It is always a good idea to put your amp on standby when you turn it on and let the tubes warm up before you start playing. **Solid State:** Solid State amps use transistors instead of tubes. They sound a little more mechanical and do not have as much warmth in tonality. They are generally less expensive and there seems to be a lot more of them on the market. While transistors can go bad just like tubes it has been my experience that they last much longer and require less maintenance. **Hybrid:** Hybrid amps are a combination of tube and solid state. These are more versatile in tone and fall in the mid price range. You will get some of both worlds but neither will quite be as good as it would be by itself.

**Wattage:** The sacrifice you are going to make with lower wattage is that you will have a dirtier tone. If you play with mostly dirty tone this should suffice for you. The higher the wattage on the amp the more clean volume you are going to get before natural distortion sets in. Even then I would not recommend over 20-30 watts in a practice amp. A 20-watt amp is still pretty loud when it is cranked and can even be used in a small jam session environment. I use a 70 watt Peavey Bandit for practicing and I can barely crack the volume or it gets way to loud. It really is overkill.

**Built In Effects:** Are you a tone purist or an effect junkie? I am an effect junkie personally but I prefer my effects to be separate from my amp. The only effect I like built into my amp is reverb. If you buy an amp with built in effects you are going to pay for

them. You can always add effects later whether it is stomp boxes or an all in one effects processor. If you want to buy something with onboard effects check them out before you buy. Make sure they do what you want them to. Compare the effects on the amp to some stomp box effects. You are going to lose some versatility in each effect in a all in one unit compared to stomp boxes. How do you think they can sell them so cheap? Something is going to be missing. For a practice amp though you may not mind the effects not being quite as good, and they will only improve with time and technology. You may want to find out if the effects are upgradeable also.

Here are a couple of personal reviews on some practice amps that I have tried:

**Fender® Pro Jr. :** This is a simple little 15-Watt tube amp. It has pretty good tone and features a 10” speaker. It sells for about \$299.00.



**Marshall MG-15RCD** – This features 15 watts of power through an 8” speaker. This little guy pumps out some big sound. You will be amazed. It has built in reverb and twin gain controls.

**Fender Bullet™ Reverb :** This is a solid-state amp designed to emulate a tube amps sound. I was impressed with its tone and flexibility.

**Vox V9159 Cambridge 15 :** This is a hybrid amp that will leave you speechless for the size. It’s 15 watt solid state power supports the tube preamp giving you awesome tone.

**Squire® Sidekick :** This as a \$50.00 practice amps with few frills. It is 10 watts through a heavy duty 5” speaker. If you are on a budget this is a great little amp although it doesn’t have any frills.



There are many more on the market so try them out. I hope this was a helpful article and would appreciate any comments.

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