

# GEAR REVIEW

## HUGHES & KETTNER TUBEMEISTER 18 COMBO

### 1 POWER SCALE

AS WELL as giving you a speaker-simulated output with its built-in Red Box, the TubeMeister is switchable from 18- to 5- or 1-watt outputs – enough to suit most occasions

### 2 SPEAKER

HUGHES & Kettner has fitted the TubeMeister with a 10-inch Celestion speaker, but the level of low-end that it achieves goes far beyond its size

### 3 WEIGHT

YOU'LL also be surprised at how lightweight the TubeMeister is, offering gig-worthy power levels without the backache



Total Guitar  
**BEST BUY**

# HUGHES & KETTNER TUBEMEISTER 18 COMBO £655

This valve amp offers heavyweight tone in a lightweight format

### AT A GLANCE

**TYPE:** Valve combo  
**OUTPUT:** 18 watts (switchable to 5 Watt, 1 Watt and Speaker Off modes)  
**SPEAKER:** 1x 10" custom Celestion  
**VALVES:** 2x 12AX7, 2x EL84  
**CONTROLS:** Clean gain, master, lead gain, master, shared bass, mid, treble, channel select switch, lead boost switch, power soak control, reverb  
**SOCKETS:** Input, speaker out, Red Box output, footswitch, FX loop send/return  
**WEIGHT:** 9.4 kg  
**DIMENSIONS:** (HxWxD) 360x395x260mm  
**CONTACT:** Headline Distribution 01223 874301 hughes-and-kettner.com

**THE** Hughes & Kettner mantra has long been 'the technology of tone', and its latest offering, the 18-watt TubeMeister, is testimony to that. On the face of it, the new combo has a fairly standard layout: two channels, Clean and Lead, with a Boost on the latter; three-band EQ; two 12AX7 preamp valves; and a pair of EL84s in the output stage. Take a closer look at the back, though, and you'll start to understand where the 'technology' bit comes from. Onboard is a digital reverb, TSC valve protection and an auto-biasing circuit, a four-mode power soak, a built-in Hughes & Kettner Red Box, and footswitch/effects loop sockets. So what about the tone?

The sounds available from this amp vary quite a bit depending on where you have the power soak control positioned, and you've got four choices. The 1 Watt mode drops the output power and headroom of the amp, so the

power section is easier to push into break-up. It's the mode you'll probably use for practice at home, and unlike some small valve amps, it's actually quiet enough to get decent sounds at a realistically low volume level. The Clean channel stays clean to a point, but it doesn't take too much to push

**"It's a reminder that design is as important as a spec sheet"**

it into crunch territory. Because you can drive every stage of the amp harder in this mode, you'll also find that the compression and saturation from the Lead channel and its Boost mode is greater too.

Switching to 5 Watt mode removes some of the crunch, yielding jangly AC30-style cleans from the first channel. It's when you kick into 18 Watt mode, though, that the real character of the TubeMeister shines through.

We're talking about useable clean headroom, punchy stack-style rhythm sounds and added girth from the Lead Boost. One thing that sets the TubeMeister apart from its competition – and believe us, we've tried most of 'em – comes from the output stage. Hughes & Kettner has used beefy, oversized

transformers in the amp, which translates into headroom and the most impressive low-end output we've heard from an amp of this kind. It's all being fed through a fairly humble 10-inch Celestion speaker, but there's a fundamental bottom-end punch that adds power to your tone in 18 Watt mode. The Red Box offers a speaker-simulated output in each mode to send your sound to a PA or recorder without killing the amp's

speaker. Unless you want it to – Speaker Off mode does exactly as you'd expect, muting the output. It's great for recording when you don't want to disturb anyone.

With the rest of the amp's features sticking pretty close to the blueprint for small-valve numbers, it's a reminder that design is just as important as a spec sheet. What you're getting here is a high-quality combo that's surprisingly light, with characterful tone by the bagful. The only thing we missed is a footswitch, which most companies include, and it seems like a tight omission at this price. Other than that, you'll be happy with both the technology and tone.

Stuart Williams

FEATURES	
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★
BUILD QUALITY	★★★★
USABILITY	★★★★
OVERALL RATING	★★★★★