

HEADWAY SHIRE KING SK120

THIS COMPACT ACOUSTIC COMBO IS PACKED WITH FEATURES FOR THE PRO PERFORMER, AS NICK WELLS DISCOVERS...



After being suitably impressed by Headway's HE2 acoustic pickup (reviewed in last month's *Guitar Buyer*), we decided to check out the Shire King 120, Headway's flagship acoustic amplifier.

The bigger brother of the Shire King SK60, the SK120 is a solid-state amp with what looks like a very comprehensive range of inputs, controls and on-board effects. Headway Electronics is renowned for its range of acoustic pickups, but what can the UK company show us when it comes to building acoustic amps?

CONSTRUCTION & FEATURES

The Shire King SK120's control panel is mounted on top of a birch ply cab, which has a truncated wedge shape and houses a single 10-inch speaker along with a three-inch tweeter to add definition to the higher frequencies. A front-facing bass port is designed to fill out the low end.

Thankfully, the multitude of control knobs that look after the amp's two channels are clearly labelled and intuitively laid out. Channel 1 has four inputs labelled 'Active', 'Passive Mag', 'Hi Imp' (high impedance) and '+Hi Imp' (extra high impedance), each having been designed for a specific setup: respectively, battery-powered preamps, passive soundhole pickups, passive undersaddle pickups and coaxial or piezo film pickups. Channel 1's five-band Baxandall EQ provides +/-12dB of cut or boost at 120Hz, 590Hz, 900Hz, 1.9kHz and 8.5kHz.

Channel 2 has an XLR mic input with switchable phantom power, an instrument input identical to the 'Hi Imp' input on channel 1, and a stereo quarter-inch jack input that will prove

useful if you use a guitar fitted with a dual-pickup system. The phantom power button also applies to the stereo input and can be used to power some preamp units. The signal then passes into a three-band interactive EQ.

The built-in Alesis digital effects offer a choice of eight reverbs (two hall, three room and three plate), chorus, flanger, two delays, two combined chorus and reverb effects, a vocal setting (an EQ 'exciter' to suit vocals) and a rotary speaker simulation. The effect you want is selected via a rotary switch and applied to either channel via the effects pan and level controls.

The switchable notch filter is another helpful extra designed to cut down feedback and handling noise. The notch control sets the centre frequency anywhere between 50Hz and 6kHz, while the notch Q knob sets the bandwidth between 0.5 octaves and five octaves.

The back panel features XLR DI outputs for both channels and an associated ground-lift switch. An effects loop allows you to hook up some outboard effects, while other features include separate footswitch inputs for either channel that allow you to remotely mute the effects (no footswitches are included in the price), a headphone socket, tuner output and a line output.

SOUNDS

The Shire King SK120 delivers a pleasingly precise and full tone with plenty of depth across the full range of frequencies. This kind of tonal clarity will be hugely beneficial to guitars fitted with under-performing pickups and the separate inputs and comprehensive EQ controls are invaluable in tuning the amp to complement your pickup system.

GBINFO

HEADWAY SHIRE KING SK120

BUILT-IN: Korea

PRICE: £649.95

TYPE: Solid-state acoustic combo

POWER: 120 watts

FEATURES: 2 independent channels: channel 1 with active, passive, high impedance & extra high impedance inputs, gain, high, presence, high mid, low mid & low EQ controls; channel 2 with XLR mic (switchable phantom power), instrument & stereo jack inputs, gain, high, mid & low EQ controls; master volume control; switchable notch filter with frequency & Q controls; 16 Alesis digital effects with level & pan controls; 2 x XLR DI outputs with ground lift switch, headphone, line & tuner outputs, effects loop send & return, 2 x footswitch inputs (effects mute channel 1 & 2)

SPEAKER: 1 x 10-inch woofer, 1 x 3-inch tweeter

DIMENSIONS: 367(h) x 417(w) x 295(d) mm

WEIGHT: 11kg (24lb)

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The ranges of channel 1's five EQ bands overlap in a very musical way that lends the user added control and flexibility, although we found that we didn't need to tinker a great deal in order to produce a well-sculpted and professional-sounding acoustic tone.

The 120 watts of power on offer will certainly be loud enough for most scenarios, but if you do need more volume you could easily run a line out to a second amp or PA system. Background noise remains low, even at higher volumes, though you will need to beware of feedback – this very compact and portable combo can really shift some air! The notch filter is useful in this respect and using this amp as a close stage monitor is a viable proposition, while the mic input, pre-EQ DI outputs and EQ'd line out also make interfacing with PA systems a lot easier.

The wedge shape does an admirable job in projecting the sound upwards towards the performer, but we found placing the amp on a chair or a monitor stand to be a more effective way of elevating the sound.

CONCLUSION

The Headway Shire King SK120 is without doubt a serious contender when it comes to acoustic amplification. The range and versatility of features along with the quality of construction and powerful acoustic tone make for a very comprehensive package that will appeal to a host of acoustic players. **GB**

GBVERDICT

HEADWAY SHIRE KING SK120

GOLD STARS

★ Very comprehensive range of features

★ Quality acoustic tones

★ Plenty of volume

BLACK MARKS

● None

GBRATING

★★★★★