



Laney Lionheart L5T-112, L20T-410, L20H & LT-212

£549, £799, £449 & £449

Laney's 40th anniversary coincides with the launch of a brand new Lionheart range. The best Laney amps ever? by Nick Guppy

Forty years in any kind of business is an anniversary worth celebrating, particularly when we're talking about one of Britain's most respected amp builders. It seems incredible that time has passed so quickly, yet here we are with founder and CEO Lyndon Laney celebrating four decades and still going as strong as ever. Always independent, Laney amps combine interesting features with maximum value for money and the new Lionheart series looks set to follow in the same tradition, combining a snappy retro style with vintage Class A sounds for a package that looks very tempting.

The range consists of a 20-watt head with matching 2 x 12 cab, a 20-watt

4 x 10 combo and a juicy single-ended five-watt 1 x 12 combo. We couldn't wait to dive in and see what tones the new Lionhearts were hiding behind those smart speaker grilles.

All Lionheart amps share similar build quality and features – it's the power stages and speaker combinations that are different from one model to the next. Laney's build quality has always been top notch, and the new range is no exception, with sturdy marine-grade ply cabinets covered in a distinctive blue basketweave vinyl, set off by a double row of white piping. A tough speaker grill combines beige with blue accents to complete a very vintage and typically British look that hangs

together really well. Thanks to some neat custom pieces of hardware, like the tilt-back mechanism and locking studs for the head/cab combination, there's none of the usual 'parts bin' look that afflicts many British designs.

It's also really gratifying to see that both the 4 x 10 combo and the 2 x 12 cabinet get a solid pair of side-fixed grab handles as well as a tough leather carrying handle on top. Carrying heavy boxes single-handed has never been a very clever idea – it really is no fun playing guitar with back pain or a sprained wrist and we've been pointing this out for many years, yet many manufacturers still think it's okay for the averagely unfit guitarist to dead-lift 30kg or more with one hand, let alone



LANEY LIONHEART L5T-112, L20T-410, L20H & LT-212 £549, £799, £449 & £449

GUITAR AMPS CD TRACKS 4 & 5



LANEY L5T-112 COMBO

PRICE: £549
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: All-valve single channel, single-ended Class A with solid-state rectification
OUTPUT: 5W RMS
VALVES: Three ECC83/12AX7 preamp, one EL84 power amp
DIMENSIONS: 420 (h) x 559 (w) x 250mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 19/40
CABINET: Birch ply
LOUDSPEAKERS: One Celestion G12H Heritage
CHANNELS: One with switchable drive section
FOOTSWITCH: Dual latching footswitch (included) toggles drive and reverb
CONTROLS: Clean volume, bright switch, drive level and volume, bass, mid, treble, reverb and tone
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Effects loop (parallel fixed level), spring reverb, integral tilt mechanism
OPTIONS: None
Headstock Distribution
0121 508 6666
www.laney.co.uk

LANEY L20T-410 COMBO

As L5T-112 except...
PRICE: £799
OUTPUT: 20W RMS
VALVES: Three ECC83/12AX7 preamp, four EL84 power amp
DIMENSIONS: 636 (h) x 559 (w) x 285mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 30.5/66
LOUDSPEAKERS: Four Jensen P10R

walk and negotiate doorways, stairs and the like while carrying this load. Well done Laney for doing something about it!

The Lionheart electronics sit inside a tough, open-ended steel tray chassis that is more than adequately supported by bolts on the top and side of the amp cabinet. There's one sturdy double-sided PCB that holds most of the circuit components, while the valve bases and transformers are chassis-mounted and hand-wired. There's actually a fair bit of hand-wiring and soldering and it's all been very neatly executed. Both 20-watt chassis feature a donut-shaped toroidal mains transformer, which is something of a Laney trademark; we know of no other amp builder who routinely uses toroidal transformers in valve-based equipment. The main benefit of a toroidal mains transformer is that it has a much tighter magnetic field, which translates into less hum being picked up by the average guitar. They need to be used with care though, as they generate a big surge at switch-on, which can put a hefty thump into a loudspeaker.

The Lionheart's smart chrome control panel is easy to navigate: essentially we're looking at a single-channel design with a footswitchable drive section. Next to a pair of hi and lo gain input jacks you'll find the clean volume control with a bright switch, followed by a pair of knobs that set the amount of drive and the drive volume level. There's a conventional three-band EQ section with global controls for reverb and presence, this last one is called 'tone'.

On the rear panel you'll find speaker outlets, a pair of sockets for the effects loop and a jack for the footswitch that controls the drive and reverb functions. It's all straightforward stuff, but nicely executed, with hardware and components several grades better than you'd normally expect to find on an amp in this price bracket. Overall, the Lionhearts look the business; they're not only tough but stylish too, and should easily last the course for regular gigging use.

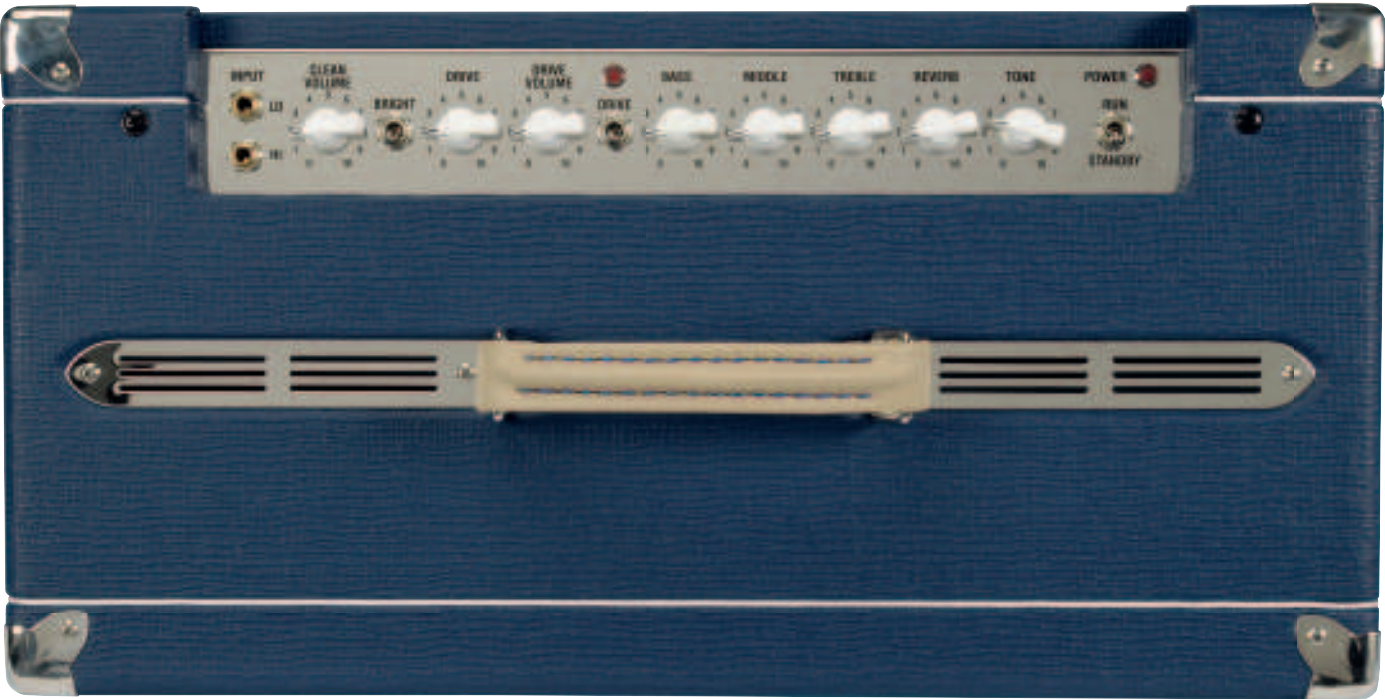
SOUNDS: All Laney's have a quite distinctive family sound that sets them apart from other makers, and to a point

L5T-112 COMBO	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
■ WE LIKED See L20H	
■ WE DISLIKED See L20H	

the Lionhearts fit in with this. However, the combination of Class A power stage and premium loudspeakers adds an extra dimension of tone that really catapults these amps into an altogether different league.

Something that Laney mentions in its literature is that many modern guitar players are fixated on preamplifier gain while the 'real' sound of a vintage valve amplifier is more to do with output-stage clipping. Guitar players who used old non-master volume amps learned how to control the available distortion and tones simply by varying the guitar's controls and hitting the strings harder or softer. This is something Laney calls the 'black art', and while that's maybe adding a little too much mystique to what is a basic technical approach, we'd certainly go along with the





The L20T-410
combo features four
Jensen P10R
speakers

All the amps are well made and designed to handle the knocks of everyday gigging and they sound superb – way better, in fact, than you’d expect for the price

L20T-410 COMBO	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
■ WE LIKED See L20H	
■ WE DISLIKED See L20H	

→ sentiment that the interaction between guitar and amplifier isn’t as important today as it used to be to many players – the pervasive nature of digital distortion modelling has made it almost too easy to get a good sound these days. Back in the early seventies, however, things were very different and the combination of guitar and amp was all-important. Like all other amps, Laney’s back then were simple unsophisticated circuits that needed to be wound up if you wanted to overdrive them, and as everyone was using 100-watt heads with 4 x 12 cabinets that meant seriously loud volume levels.

However, if you want to hear how it used to be done without making your ears bleed, the larger Lionheart’s 20-watt quad EL84 power stage is perfectly sized to really hear the effects of power amp clipping as opposed to preamp distortion. It’s certainly loud but not stupidly loud, with just the right amount of clean headroom to fit in with an averagely loud band. The clean channel is bright but not edgy, and has a powerful mid-

range, while flipping to the drive section adds a nicely judged dose of preamp gain, with more than enough range to get even the weediest of single-coils into Santana territory. However, back off the gain control, wind up the master volume, and the Lionheart’s dynamic range expands to fill a much bigger space than you’d ever expect a mere 20-watt amp to handle. Pushed really hard, the sonic punch and clarity of either the head or the 4 x 10 combo is truly excellent, and it’s when the amps are being used like this you can really hear the different character of the loudspeakers.

The quartet of P10R Jensens fitted to the large combo gives this amp a serious mid-range punch with a fairly aggressive edge, while the pair of Celestion G12H loudspeakers in the LT-212 extension cabinet offer extended bass response with a characteristically syrupy mid-range and sweet treble. It’s really hard to choose between these two combinations, they both sound superb.

The little single-ended L5T-112 also features one of the premium Celestion G12H loudspeakers, and while this amp may not have quite as much headroom as the 20-watters, it can easily take on live gigs if you connect it to an extension cabinet. At lower levels, the simplicity of the L5T’s circuit adds a warm and very dynamic feel that is going to make this a must-have addition to any studio player’s



The dual latching footswitch toggles drive and reverb

LANEY L20H HEAD

As L5T-112 except...
PRICE: £449
OUTPUT: 20W RMS
VALVES: Three ECC83/12AX7 preamp, four EL84 power amp
DIMENSIONS: 250 (h) x 559 (w) x 250mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 17/36
LOUDSPEAKERS: No
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Effects loop (parallel fixed level), spring reverb
OPTIONS: Matching Laney LT-212 speaker cabinet (£449, as reviewed) loaded with two Celestion G12H Heritage loudspeakers and incorporating tilt-back mechanism

The rivals

Marshall DSL401	£449
Peavey Classic 50 410 combo	£829
Fender Blues Junior	£449

Marshall's DSL401 is a best seller and it's easy to see why when you plug one in. It's a fully featured amp that blasts out around 40 watts from its quartet of EL84 valves and has the classic looks and tone you'd expect from a Marshall at a still competitive price. There aren't that many 4 x 10 combos on the market but Peavey's Classic range includes one and it's a corker, although Laney's L20T-410 still has the edge. Fender's Blues Junior is a basic-but-good sounding valve combo that harks back to the days of the tweed Champ. It has the tone and looks but again, in terms of features and range, the Laney L5T-112 is superior.

L20H HEAD/LT-212 CAB	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
■ WE LIKED Superb vintage build quality and looks on the inside and out; classic golden Class A tone; vintage or modern sounds; great value	
■ WE DISLIKED Almost impossible to find fault with this range	

→ armoury. As with the larger amps, the L5T can sound vintage or modern, depending on how you use the preamp controls – back off the gain, wind up the master and you're cooking up serious retro sounds that demand you interact more with the amp, digging in hard for extra bite or backing off to clean up. Conversely, you can wind up the drive section for a dose of serious front-end gain and the Laney responds in kind, giving you all the harmonic squeals and overtones you'd expect from a modern high-gain amp.

Verdict

Beyond any doubt, the new Lionheart range is a very significant addition to Laney's catalogue. All the amps are well made and designed to handle the knocks of everyday gigging and they sound superb – way better, in fact, than you'd expect for the price bracket they're aimed at.

While they aren't the cheapest amps out there at the moment, the Lionhearts offer serious tone that's often difficult to find in other amps that cost over twice as much. That's why we think they represent excellent value for money. Aimed at the average working musician, we believe anyone who plugs into one of these is going to get a very pleasant surprise at just how much tone you get for your money.


They're easy to use and most players will get a great tone out of them in seconds without needing to refer to the manual, which incidentally is small but well-written with a lot of useful background info, block diagrams and so on. Sonically, we think your only problem will be deciding which one to go for. We tended to favour the head



with its twin G12H-loaded cabinet, which had a wider tonal range and a smoother more defined bass response. However, if you play in a band that packs a lot of different sounds into a relatively narrow spectrum – keyboards and two guitars, for example – then the Jensen-powered 4 x 10 combo could well be right up your street. This cabinet configuration has a more focused and punchy mid-range response with a slightly edgier treble. It's guaranteed to scythe through a mix with plenty of authority, and don't let the modest 20-watt power rating put you off – this is a loud amp with more than enough clean headroom to sit alongside a typically noisy drummer and still get your point across.

The single-ended L5T-112 combo is going to find a lot of friends in the studio – it delivers all the right sounds at controllable levels and is electrically very well behaved, with only the slightest hum and virtually no hiss. The Celestion G12H driver is superb, and

while you can get good results by going down the usual route of SM57 up against the cone, there's enough range here to handle more subtle mic'ing techniques, like using condensers at medium and long range for a more ambient feel. Used like this, the L5T's trick is that it doesn't sound like a small cranked amp – the resulting tones are huge and need very little EQ or compression to sit in the mix just right.

Overall this is a great new range from one of our most respected amp builders, and let's not overlook the fact they're made right here in the UK. Put some heart back into your playing – you must try these! 

Laney L5T-112 combo	
Guitarist RATING	★★★★★
Laney L20T-410 combo	
Guitarist RATING	★★★★★
Laney L20H head/LT-212 cabinet	
Guitarist RATING	★★★★★