





FIRST PLAY



**BOSS NEXTTONE STAGE
1X12 COMBO**
£439

WHAT IS IT? A 1x12 40-watt
combo with a digitally-controlled
analogue circuit and extra
functionality



**BOSS NEXTTONE ARTIST
1X12 COMBO**
£615

WHAT IS IT? Slightly larger-
sized 80-watt 1x12 with identical
functions to the 40-watt Stage

Who's Next?

Boss's latest amp range uses Tube Logic technology to emulate multiple valve types. We plug into the Artist and Stage combos

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Olly Curtis

Tech giant Roland has been particularly active on the guitar front in recent years, scoring major successes with the popular Katana series of digital modelling amps and the boutique-killer Waza Craft heads – its first amplifier products to use the Boss brand. The Katanas run side by side with the rejuvenated Roland-badged Blues Cube range, which uses Roland's clever Tube Logic technology, blending digitally-controlled analogue circuits and digital effects to emulate the sound and response of old-school 'tweed' valve circuits. Now, there's a new Boss amp range that takes Tube Logic to the next level, the appropriately named Nexttone series,

The master section is where things get more interesting... with a choice of 6V6, 6L6, EL84 and EL34 valve emulations

1. The six-button GA-FC is an optional extra that changes channels, and toggles tone, boost, effects loop and delay
2. Both Nextone amps have the same control layout, with mostly familiar-looking knobs and switches
3. The output stage selector lets you choose from four different output valve emulations, while the Power Control runs the amp at full power, half power or 0.5 watts, with a standby mode for silent recording

which currently includes the Nextone Artist and Stage combos, both of which we're auditioning here.

The two Nextone amps are smartly presented in black-vinyl-clad ply cabinets, with a distinctive speaker grille cloth and a 'Boss' emblem. The amp features are identical on both models, with the Nextone Stage producing 40 watts, while the Nextone Artist delivers 80 watts into a slightly larger cabinet with a more robust carry handle. As you'd expect, the electronics are PCB based and, with no big components to support, the whole assembly looks tough enough to stand up to regular gigging.

The Nextones have reassuringly normal-looking control panels, with clean and lead channels sharing a regular bass, mid and treble EQ network. The master section is where things get more interesting: alongside presence and master volume knobs, there's a Power Amp Select switch offering a choice of 6V6, 6L6, EL84 and EL34 valve emulations, together with a Power Control knob that lets you run the amp at full or half-power, 0.5 watts or standby mode for silent recording. There's also a simple effects section with controls for delay and reverb, and button switches for boost and tone functions, the latter operating by default as a bright switch on

the clean channel and a mid-boost on the lead channel. Another small switch doubles as a channel changer, but it can select an alternative custom configuration.

On the rear panel, you'll find a headphone and recording output, a line output and effects loop send/return, sockets for footswitches and Boss's GA-FC controller, and a USB socket that carries audio and lets you hook up the Nextone to your desktop editing app. If mentioning the words 'editing app' lead you to suspect there's more under the Nextones' hoods to play with, you'd be right.

The Nextone Editor lets you dig into a lot of extra functionality, which can be tweaked and saved either as a patch in the library, or transferred into the amp where it can be recalled from the custom switch. This can significantly change the Nextone's character. For example, the EQ expands to four bands with fully parametric high and low mids. There are also British and American EQ types, global system EQs, compression, noise gate, three delay types (including Roland's famous SDE-300), a tremolo and three reverb types, which can all be adjusted to taste. Other cool functions include setting the effects loop for series or parallel operation, and a choice of 'air' feels for the speaker-emulated line out.



Feel & Sounds

Both Nextones are electrically very quiet, with practically zero hiss and hum, making them ideal partners for guitarists who spend a lot of time in the studio. The default clean sound is very pleasing, with a sweet treble and a snappy bass that's full and rounded – quite Fender-ish in character and not too dissimilar to a 'Silverface' Deluxe. The lead channel's default sound has more of a 'tweed' overdrive vibe going on, with a toothy, snarly distortion that responds well to pick attack, cleaning up nicely as the volume control is turned down.

While the on-amp controls are intentionally restricted, the editing app gives the Nextone practically unlimited EQ possibilities, making it easy to bend the default sounds to your own taste. The valve-emulating class AB output stage feature changes tone and response to approximate the sound of four popular output valve types: the 6V6, 6L6, EL84 and EL34. There's more of a midrange focus for the 6V6, while the 6L6 extends treble and bass range. The EL84 has a quite compressed feel that evokes the characteristic AC30 grind with some heavy distortion, while the EL34 adds more bass and dynamic range. However, the default valve differences are quite subtle, and when the amp is cranked

On-amp controls are intentionally restricted, but the editing app gives the Nextone practically unlimited EQ possibilities

up they're not so obvious, especially in a live band context. Again, the editing app can make significant changes here, including deep parameters such as bias and sag, and you can save different valve types for clean and lead.

Built-in effects are limited to delay or tremolo and reverb, with a choice of delay and reverb types 'off-amp' that can be tweaked in depth. The Power Control knob is useful for taming the amp's output for home use, with a 'standby' mode for silent recording. At stage levels, the Nextone Artist's 80-watt output makes a significant difference to headroom and clarity, and we'd definitely recommend this model for anyone planning to use a Nextone live, although with monitors you could use either, thanks to the effective speaker-emulated line out.



4. The Nextone features built-in digital delay and reverb, with different types and a tremolo option available from the editing app

5. The Nextone's USB socket can be used to connect directly to a desktop PC for recording, as well as editing and loading custom presets

6. Both amps are 1x12 combos featuring the G12-100 loudspeaker



Verdict

As a standalone amp, the Nextone does well compared to like-for-like competition, with the usual solid-state benefits of reliability, consistency and portability. While you can edit parameters ad infinitum to bring the Nextone's clean and lead channels closer to your idea of sonic perfection, there's only one preset patch on the amp – although that's one more than the Blues Cube, and you can store as many as you want in the editing app library. You can save some parameters per channel, but others are global, including the effects.

7. The Ch (Channel) Select switch also accesses the custom preset, which can be edited, saved and loaded from the Nextone's editing app

At stage levels, the Artist's 80-watt output makes a significant difference to headroom

These things may mark the Nextone down for some prospective buyers. While it isn't a digital modelling amp, we felt its sounds weren't quite authentic and different enough to set it apart from some digital competitors offering more effects and patch storage, with perhaps the biggest competition coming from the Nextone's Katana stablemates. Not everyone wants that extra complication, of course, so if you're after an affordable solid-state amp that sounds convincingly valve-like, with in-depth programmability, the Nextones are certainly worth a look. **G**



BOSS NEXTONE STAGE 1X12 COMBO

PRICE: £439

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Analogue solid-state preamp/power amp with digital effects (delay/tremolo and reverb)

OUTPUT: 40W RMS, switchable to 20W and 0.5W

VALVES: None

DIMENSIONS: 492 (w) x 427 (h) x 248mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 13.5/30

CABINET: Ply/MDF

LOUDSPEAKER: 1x12" Nextone G12-100

CHANNELS: 2, with custom programmable alternatives

CONTROLS: Clean volume, overdrive gain and volume, boost and tone switches, channel/custom patch select, bass mid and treble, delay level, reverb level, master presence, volume, output stage select, power output control

FOOTSWITCH: Standard latching 2-button footswitch changes channels, toggles boost function. Optional GA-FC controller changes channels, toggles tone, boost, effects loop and delay

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: External speaker jacks, speaker-emulated headphones/recording out, line out, programmable effects loop, USB in/out, software editing app

OPTIONS: The GA-FC foot controller costs £92

RANGE OPTIONS: Only the 80W Nextone Artist

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7/10

PROS Quality valve-like tones at an affordable price with in-depth programmability

CONS Not enough variation in the different valve-type sounds; underpowered for live use



BOSS NEXTONE ARTIST 1X12 COMBO

PRICE: £615

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Analogue solid-state preamp/power amp with digital effects (delay/tremolo and reverb)

OUTPUT: 80W RMS, switchable to 40W and 0.5W

VALVES: None

DIMENSIONS: 572 (w) x 475 (h) x 248mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 16/35

CABINET: Ply/MDF

LOUDSPEAKER: 1x12" Nextone G12-100

CHANNELS: 2, with one custom programmable patch

CONTROLS: Clean volume, overdrive gain and volume, boost and tone switches, channel/custom patch select, bass mid and treble, delay level, reverb level, master presence, volume, output stage select, power output control

FOOTSWITCH: Standard latching 2-button footswitch changes channels, toggles boost function. Optional GA-FC controller changes channels, toggles tone, boost, effects loop and delay

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: External speaker jacks, speaker-emulated headphones/recording out, line out, programmable effects loop, USB in/out, software editing app

OPTIONS: The GA-FC foot controller costs £92

RANGE OPTIONS: Only the 40W Nextone Stage

8/10

PROS As with the Stage, quality valve-like tones at an affordable price and in-depth programmability

CONS Not enough variation in the different valve-type sounds; only one programmable preset