



By Dwayne Larring

# Morgan AC-20 Deluxe Amp



When my love affair with the guitar began some 20 years ago, most of the bands that I loved and felt a connection with had something in common: the guitar sound that I heard was aggressive, yet refined. It would roar like a wild, untamed animal, yet have a gentle purr at the same time. I soon found out that the sound I was falling for was that of the Vox AC-30 amplifier and the EL-84 tubes that it uses. Over the years I have owned many amps in my search for that sound that I heard in my head. Some of the brands include Vox, Matchless, Fender, Marshall, Mesa Boogie, and Divided by 13, just to name a few.

Let me introduce you to Joe Morgan and **Morgan Amplification**. Joe is fairly new in the “boutique” amp scene, but has quickly gained respect and grown to become one of the most successful and talked about names in a market that is, if anything, flooded with amp builders fighting to make a name for themselves. I’d like to give you the lowdown on an amp that has (with good reason) become one of his most successful models – *The AC-30 Deluxe*.

## Specs

The amps are all hand built and wired one at a time by Joe himself. It is a 20 watt, cathode biased, class A amp with a switchable 12AX7/EF86 preamp. It utilizes a GZ34 rectifier, Sozo capacitors and **Mercury Magnetics transformers**. The controls on the faceplate include Gain, Cut and Power Level knobs as well as Normal/Brilliant and Bright switches. The Power Level

knob acts as a master volume, but it does so by adjusting the voltage to the power tubes, taking you from 20W down to 1W without losing the tonal qualities when you turn down the volume. This amp is available as a head or as a combo. The combo comes stock with a classic Celestion Blue speaker. The cabinets are made of 13 ply voidless Baltic Birch and are handmade by a master cabinetmaker who has worked previously in the Fender Custom Shop.

## My Experience

One of the first things I look for in an amp is: does it make all my guitars sound like themselves? I have owned amps in the past that have had such a distinct sound that they were more like the amp than the guitars that I played through them. Let me just say this: the *AC-20 Deluxe* loves guitars! I started by plugging straight into the amp, and then began playing with the knobs and switches. The first thing I noticed was that there isn’t a bad sound in this thing. It was like I was able to take a tour through the history of Vox amps. I was able to get tones that ranged from the classic, smaller sound of an AC-15 all the way through to the big, warm tones of the “normal” channel, and the shimmery tones of the “brilliant” channel on an AC-30. All of this was on the 12AX7 channel. When I switched over to the EF86 channel things started to get even more exciting! Remember when I referred earlier to that “sound” that was like the roar of an untamed, wild animal? Well, I found it! If you’re not familiar with the sound of an EF86 you could just consider this the “more” switch. You can really feel the low-end bolster up and the highs get more chirpy and chimey, as well as a defining of presence and punch in the mids. Factor this in with the fact that you still have the tonal variations of the Normal/Brilliant and the Bright switches, and you really have a versatile beast on your hands.

The real test for me comes when I plug in my pedal board. I dial up a basic tone that is clean when you play with a light touch and that starts to bark at you when you dig in. This posed no problems whatsoever for the *AC-20 Deluxe*. I also like to use boost pedals to achieve different levels of distortion/overdrive. When I tested this out this configuration, I was very pleased with the way that the amp handled the

stacking of the gain stages that ranged from clean boost, to overdrive and crazy fuzz. I never got the feeling that it was too much for it to take.

The real kicker and deal sealer for me is the “Power Level” control. You may think that it is just a good master volume but in fact, it is way, way more. It is actually a built-in Variac (voltage regulator) that controls the amount of voltage the power tubes receive. When it is wide open it is running at the full 20W. As you start to turn it down, the wattage of the amp drops and your volume decreases. What’s so special about that, you ask? Well let me tell you. With this feature you are able to dial in your tone, and then control the output volume without changing that tone! By decreasing the voltage, the tubes still act and sound the same, just at lower or higher volumes. This is absolutely genius, and in my opinion, one of the most useful features ever to be put in an amp! Now you won’t have to deal with the soundman wanting to take your amp off the stage, or having to turn your amp down to the point where you completely lose all of your tone!

## Conclusion

If you are looking for a real amp that sounds amazing, is hand built, versatile, and won’t break your bank... this is the one! Top that off with the fact that you have the choice to order this as a combo or a head, and have many different colors to choose from to find the perfect one that’s just right for you! Overall, this amp is a winner!

**Morgan Amplification AC-20 Deluxe**  
1x12 combo with Celestion Blue – Retail \$1,900.

[www.MorganAmplification.com](http://www.MorganAmplification.com)



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