

Celestion Heritage Series G12M & G12H speakers £85 & £89

Two classic speakers are here in reissue format. Are they as good as the originals? by Dave Hunter

The rivals

Eminence Private Jack/
The Governor £52/£57
Jensen C12Q/C12N

£45/£58

Fane AX.12.75
AX.12.100 £55/£62

Eminence's excellent new US-made Red Coat series encompasses a number of British-flavoured speakers, and the Private Jack (50W) and The Governor (75W) models are its closest takes on the G12M and G12H respectively, with sonic characters modelled on the great Celestions. Jensen's Italian-made Vintage Ceramic C12Q (30W) and C12N (50W) offer relative degrees of early/late break-up low-end firmness, while the British-made Fane options are perhaps somewhat generic of character, but are sturdy, well-made, efficient and great sounding

As much as tone purists are constantly raving about the sonic superiority of Alnico magnets, it can be easy to forget that two of the best-loved guitar drivers in rock history – the Celestion G12M 'Greenback' and G12H – carry ceramic magnets rather than Alnico. Any guitarist who has had the pleasure of playing through a set of originals from the late sixties or early seventies will know the glory of these speakers, and will probably be aware that the standard Classic Series G12M-25 and G12H-30, good as they are, don't yield quite the same results. Now Celestion has reissued replicas of these two speakers built as close as possible to the original specs, using notes that were rediscovered during a recent factory move. At first glance – and blast – both are impressively close indeed. We tested these speakers with a range of guitars and amps, in both closed and open-backed cabinets.

G12M 'Greenback'

The Greenback, or model G12M, is arguably the most famous rock speaker of all time, thanks in part to its appearance in sets of four in the Marshall 4 x 12 cabs that helped set the standards for classic rock tone nearly 40 years ago. The original Greenbacks had fairly low sensitivity ratings of 96dB and low power-handling capabilities of 20 watts RMS (both of which were reasonable in the mid-sixties), and therefore needed to be used in fours to handle the full fury of

even a 50-watt Marshall head, while a pair in a Bluesbreaker combo really took a pounding. Note that, originally, this speaker was designed as an affordable version of the highly prized Alnico-magnet G12, to be manufactured in quantities for OEM supplies. It just happened that the things also sounded bloody good. The Heritage Series G12M has the same specs as the original, which puts it 1dB

and five watts shy of the Classic model G12M respectively. If it seems like this makes it an inferior speaker on paper, purists will already realise it's a change in the right direction: alter any aspect of a speaker – in an effort to improve its efficiency, sturdiness, or whatever – and you alter its tonal character.

Looks-wise, this speaker also captures the essence of the Greenback's glory years. It carries the



Both speakers offer great value and authentic vintage tones

Thames Ditton manufacturing address of the hallowed pre-Rola Celestions on a sweet-looking vintage-style label affixed to the green plastic magnet cover. These two Heritage speakers are indeed still made in England, as are the more recently introduced G12-65 and the Alnico Blue, although the rest of Celestion's guitar speaker line now emanates from China. Structurally, it will look entirely familiar to anyone who has ever taken the trouble to prise the back off a battered old 4 x 12. The sturdy, stamped metal frame has stayed with Celestion through the years, but those solder-only connection tabs complete the attempt at absolute accuracy (yep, you can't just hitch your clip-end speaker leads to them, and will need to fire up the old soldering iron).

SOUNDS: The Classic Series G12M is an excellent sounding speaker, but this new Heritage model is just creamier and throatier enough to elevate it into another class. It has got real grit and bite in the mid-range, without so much of a hump there as to make it nasal or boxy, and it oozes the sort of juicy texture that really makes a rock lead player want to dig in and run with it. The lows are a little soft – as ever – but are really round and pleasing too, and capped by sparkling highs. In short, this is gorgeous stuff.

G12H

The original G12H was derived as a heavy duty version of the Greenback, which became desirable towards the end of the sixties as rock shows required increased volume levels and players developed a taste for bigger, firmer sounds overall. Heavy is indeed the word – the 'H' in its name is short for 'heavy magnet' – and this driver carries a 50-ounce ceramic magnet that's nearly a pound heavier than the one on the G12M, although both are concealed beneath identical green plastic covers. The bigger magnet and a few other structural changes make this a bolder, louder speaker, with a firmer low end in particular. The G12H has a 30-watt RMS power handling rating, 100dB efficiency, 55Hz resonance frequency and a 55-5,000Hz frequency range (the latter two stats on the G12M are 75Hz and 75-5,000Hz respectively).

SOUNDS: This 'low resonance' version of the G12H was designed as a dual-use speaker for guitar and bass amps, but it really made its mark with heavy rock lead players, and one Jimi Hendrix in particular. If you want to slug your

G12M	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** Creamy classic-rock tones; vintage look
■ **WE DISLIKED** Nothing

audience rather than caress them, this is the speaker for you. It is bold, muscular and articulate, but with a pleasing, nuanced texture once it has begun to break in. On that subject, it's worth noting that breaking in can take a little longer than with some contemporary speaker designs. Note that, aside from the tonal changes, replacing G12Ms with G12Hs makes any rig much, much louder. Aside from the increased oomph provided by the firmer lows, that added 4dB efficiency equates to cranking your volume knob a couple of ticks. The G12H's slightly harder sound might not be as instantly appealing to some ears as the G12M's plummy delivery, but it's a hard speaker to beat in a full stack for real rock power with a vintage edge.

Verdict

Buying vintage speakers can be fraught with pitfalls: good examples are expensive, and if they sound "just right" now – that is, thoroughly broken in and aged to sonic perfection – you can bet they won't stay that way forever. We feel both of these Celestion Heritage Series speakers offer a marvellous means of attaining the look, feel and sound of two of the greatest vintage speakers of all time, with the new-gear promise of some longevity and consistency of tone over the long-haul. All of this is

achieved only after adequate break-in, of course, but put in the hours required to loosen up these drivers and you will craft yourself some succulent tones.

The G12M Greenback might be more immediately appealing to some

players, but the firmer and more powerful G12H is actually more adaptable to contemporary playing and sounds. It makes an outstanding choice for modern rock and electric blues playing in pairs in a 40W to 60W 2 x 12, or in a closed-back 4 x 12 in a bigger rig. Note that both of these British-made speakers are more expensive than Celestion's mid-level Classic Series models, but not as pricey as many boutique speakers from the likes of Tone Tubby, or Celestion's own G12 Alnico Blue. As such, they offer impressive value and an accurate taste of the golden age of rock guitar tones.

Above: the G12M has the subtler delivery of the two
Below: the H in G12H stands for heavy magnet

G12H	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** Kicking lows and punchy, aggressive lead tone
■ **WE DISLIKED** Slightly hard sound before thorough break-in

And don't think of these as companions for Marshall amps only: we got great results with a single G12M in the open-back cabinet of an 18W vintage tweed Fender Tremolux, and a pair of G12Hs sounded stunning in a TopHat Club Royale 2 x 12 combo too. **G**

Celestion G12M

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Celestion G12H

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

CELESTION G12M

PRICE: £85
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: 12-inch ceramic driver
POWER RATING: 20W RMS
IMPEDANCE: 8ohms or 15ohms
MAGNET WEIGHT: 35oz
VOICE COIL: 1.75-inch
SENSITIVITY: 96dB
FREQUENCY RANGE: 70Hz-5kHz
Celestion
01473 835300
www.celestion.com

CELESTION G12H

As G12M except...
PRICE: £89
POWER RATING: 30W
MAGNET WEIGHT: 50oz
SENSITIVITY: 100dB
FREQUENCY RANGE: 55Hz-5kHz