

# Bring It On Home

Yamaha's desktop amp range goes cable-free and packs in more features than a Swiss Army knife. Can you really use it for home, studio and stage? We find out...

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# YAMAHA THR30II WIRELESS COMBO £535

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## What You Need To Know

### 1 What's a desktop amp?

It's a concept that was pioneered by Yamaha in 2011 with the original THR amps, which were designed to live in a home environment, rather than studio or stage. It's proved to be very successful – several other manufacturers have jumped on the desktop amp bandwagon. Yamaha has strongly supported the THR concept with new models and firmware updates, including the THR100 and THR100HD heads for THR fans who wanted to take their favourite sounds on stage.

### 2 What's VCM?

Virtual Circuit Modeling is Yamaha's patented technology for amp design in the digital domain. VCM recreates digital versions of amplifiers right down to individual component level, enabling designers to model even the most subtle nuances of boutique valve amps.

### 3 What do Hi-Fi Audio and Extended Stereo Technology do for the THR?

The extended range of the THR's loudspeakers means it can reproduce music just as well as guitar tones, while Extended Stereo Technology produces a wide stereo image with way more depth than you'd expect from such a compact enclosure.



Traditionally, many guitarists tended to use two amplifiers: a bigger amp for the stage and a smaller one for the studio. Back in 2011, this status quo shifted when Yamaha spotted a niche for something else. Its concept was built around a third type of guitar amp, not another black vinyl-covered box sat on the floor but a design that could fit comfortably on a bookshelf or desktop with a home-friendly feature set. Thus was born the popular and highly successful THR series, which is still going strong today thanks to new models and firmware upgrades. Despite a growing number of imitators, the desktop amp is something Yamaha has always owned and to underline that the company has made what could be the most significant addition yet in the shape of the new THR Mark II series, which includes wireless and non-wireless 20-watt combos, and the new range-topping 30-watt THR30II Wireless we have here.

With a slightly larger footprint to accommodate its beefed-up loudspeakers, the THR30II Wireless is still roughly the

same size as a four-slice toaster, featuring an injection-moulded black plastic case topped with a one-piece steel control panel and speaker grille. The steelwork is finished in a lounge-friendly cream colour, with a thin aluminium trim and a pair of sunset orange LEDs adding a valve-like warm illumination behind the grille, which protects two full-range 3.5-inch (9cm) loudspeakers in a ported enclosure designed to enhance bass and stereo spread.

The controls look broadly similar to the original THR, with a few significant additions. There are five memory save/recall buttons and a Bluetooth pairing button. The amp selections have been expanded, with three distinct modes for each of the THR's eight voices (which include options for bass, acoustic guitar and a flat response for music playback). The colour of the indicator LEDs helpfully changes depending on the mode: red for classic, blue for boutique, green for modern. The amp controls are reassuringly familiar, with programmable knobs for gain, master volume, bass, mid and treble.



1. The THR30II Wireless has eight different voices, each with three distinct modes, covering everything from pristine cleans to fat crunch and blistering metal leads

2. USB connects the THR30II to a computer for recording and playback as well as editing purposes





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3. The THR30II Wireless's simple LED display shows patch numbers and info for the onboard chromatic tuner, as well as wireless and battery status checks

4. The THR30II wireless features a stereo pair of line outs that hook up to a desk via jack plug leads for PA or recording use



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5. Yamaha's 'third amp' concept focuses on the needs of players while at home. The Wireless iterations of the THR-II amp are also fully compatible with Line 6's Relay G10 transmitter for up to five hours of fully wireless operation

Effects are taken care of by two knobs that vary the mix level and effects type. The modulation effects include chorus, flanging, phasing and tremolo, while the echo/reverb knob gives you a choice of echo, echo mixed with reverb, and hall or spring reverb programs. Two more non-programmable knobs govern guitar and audio output, while a small round LED display shows you the patch number. Next to this display there's a tap tempo button that also toggles the THR's chromatic tuner and extended stereo field functions.

Around the back there's a stereo pair of line outs, which connect to balanced or unbalanced jack plug leads, together with a USB socket and a power socket for the THR's laptop-style power supply. When Yamaha says 'wireless', it means it; the THR30II Wireless is fully compatible with the Line 6 Relay G10T transmitter, while mains power is augmented with a rechargeable battery pack giving up to five hours of unplugged play time. The THR30II's Bluetooth connects to the THR Remote app to enable real-time editing of all the amp controls. The app also accesses extra parameters including a compressor and noise gate, 16 different cabinet emulations and two extra reverb models. There's also provision for adding a third-party Bluetooth foot controller, and you can stream audio to the THR30II Wireless from any Bluetooth-enabled mobile device.

## Sounds

With no alternating current inside its case, the THR30II is remarkably free of background noise. There's just a little hiss at extreme gain and volume settings, but at more sensible levels the noise floor is practically non-existent.

The 15 guitar amp models are extraordinary. Yamaha doesn't use brand names as references, so there are no direct comparisons to be made, but the instruction manual descriptions give you a pretty good



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idea. There's an uncanny 'real' dynamic response – the clean models produce snappy treble and surprisingly full bass, while low- to medium-gain models have a hyper-realistic touch sensitivity that feels just like you're plugging into a classic valve amp. At the higher gain end of the spectrum, you can pile on practically infinite distortion so careful EQ is needed to stop things getting out of control. Fortunately, the THR's bass, mid and treble controls are very precise and smooth.

Bass mode offers three voices specially tailored for the lower octaves, with a choice of condenser, dynamic and valve microphone models in acoustic guitar mode, while the flat/music playback mode gives three different EQ settings. The effects are equally impressive. In super wide mode with a hint of tremolo and spring reverb, the illusion of playing through something much bigger and heavier is very convincing.

The THR Remote app lets you customise the THR without getting bogged down in endless parameters. We like the clean, crisply rendered 2D graphics and intuitive layout, which made editing a breeze. The THR30II's 15W+15W output power is just about enough to handle small gigs, although you'll get the best results using the line outs into a PA – take note that without the power supply plugged in, the THR throttles back to half power to extend battery life.

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### Verdict

Valve amps are great but often limiting in terms of flexibility. They're also heavy things to cart around and, especially where vintage gear is concerned, it's hard to keep them operating in peak condition. Just as digital cameras eventually converted most photographers from film, guitar amp modelling technology is now so good that on most occasions you can have your cake and eat it. It's hard to find anything less than brilliant in Yamaha's THR30II; everything you might want from a home/desktop guitar amp is right here. Being able to plug in and play without the need for leads and mains cables is so convenient, with streaming audio making it a perfect partner for practice, busking and recording.

Today, Yamaha doesn't have this niche to itself any more and there's some strong competition. However, with something to offer all kinds of players, we think the new THR30II Wireless is still there at the top. **G**



## YAMAHA THR30II WIRELESS COMBO

**PRICE:** £535

**ORIGIN:** China

**TYPE:** Digital modelling desktop amplifier

**SPEAKERS:** 2x 3.5" special design full range

**MAX OUTPUT:** 30W (2x15W stereo) on external power, 15W (2x 7.5W stereo) on battery

**INPUTS:** Guitar in, aux in

**OUTPUTS:** USB out, headphones out, 2x line out (stereo)

**DIMENSIONS:** 420 (w) x 195 (h) x 155mm (d)

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 4/9

**CABINET:** Steel/plastic

**CONTROLS:** Amp select, type select, user memory select x5, Bluetooth pair, tap tempo/tuner, gain, master volume, bass, middle, treble, effect select/level, echo/reverb select/level, guitar output level, audio output level

### ADDITIONAL FEATURES:

THR Remote app editing, remote foot controller compatibility, audio streaming via Bluetooth. Bundled with Cubase AI/Cubasis LE software

**OPTIONS:** Custom Yamaha gigbag available for £63

**RANGE OPTIONS.** The 20W THR10II Wireless sells for £469, with the non-wireless THR10II going for £357



9/10

**PROS** Top-quality, market-leading sounds from a deceptively simple interface; wireless functions work perfectly; great THR Remote app

**CONS** It's pricey against the competition; couple of extra finish choices would add to the appeal