

## Head/Piston

*Bierkeller, Bristol*

On a hot sticky night at the Bierkeller, Piston tried hard to raise the temperature even more but failed miserably. The real heat was on at the bar where parched punters were queuing four deep for liquid relief. Piston looked pissed off, their hard, ugly apocalyptic funk failing to entice a single entrance onto the dance floor. Even with this apathy diluting their menace somewhat they still sound deadly, with deranged sax breaks and monosyllabic vocals breaking up the insistent groove carved by bass boss Manfred.

It wasn't their night, but would it be Head's? Yes and no, but mostly no. They certainly look the part. Nick Sheppard is every inch the axe hero, Rich Beales has a towering stage presence - literally in this case as he constantly clambered on the monitors to make sure we could all see that lovely shirt. Even guru Gareth Sager managed to look shambolically cute. But the band's approach didn't seem quite right.

It was (nearly) all high octane overdrive, teetering a bit too often into hard rock territory. Most of the more subtle melodic nuances on the louder album tracks were battered into oblivion and the PA mix itself did no favours to classics like 'Don't Wash Your Hair About It' where Gareth's keyboards should have been much more prominent. The slowest tracks worked the best, with both 'Crazy Racecourse Track' and the poignant 'Me and Mrs Jones' allowing Rich's raw and untrained vocal talent full reign to explore its potential. The gig ended on an upbeat with a suitably boogified version of 'I Can't Stop' which got the hardcore of fans and friends at the front slamdancing.

Those on the fringes seemed less impressed - perhaps, like me, expecting too much after all the hype. With strong rumours of a major deal currently doing the rounds, Head continue to be the band of the moment, but the inconsistency of their live set could still hold them back. (Dave Higgitt)