

Epiphone®

news

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Guitar Player Reviews The Epiphone Valve Special



Be sure and check out the August 2005 issue of [Guitar Player Magazine](#)! Darrin Fox reviews the new Epiphone [Valve Special](#) amplifier on page 142. Here's a sneak peek at the review.

Epiphone Valve Special

By Darrin Fox | August 2005

When it comes to a company invoking its storied past, few have as much history to draw upon as Epiphone. Largely known for its beautiful acoustic archtops, Epiphone didn't enter the amp biz until it offered the Electar 1x8 combo in 1935. Housed in a suitcase (that's right), and sporting the ability to run on both AC and DC current (many parts of New York City still ran on DC back then), the

Electar was eventually joined by classic models such as the Century, Zephyr, Kent, and Dreadnought. Although Epiphone's new line of all-tube amplifiers isn't necessarily based on any of these tone machines from the past, it does offer price points that turn the clock back to the Eisenhower administration. The Valve Special also has two siblings: the five-watt, 1x8 Valve Junior (\$120 street), and the 15-watt, 1x12 Valve Standard (\$400 street).

The first thing about the Chinese-made, single-ended, class-A Valve Special that hit me over the head was its straight-up, cool retro look. The offset basket-weave grille is an eye-catcher with its slick-looking white piping. The construction of the MDF (medium density fiberboard) cabinet and the cleanly applied vinyl covering are also a cut above most amplifiers in this price range.

The control panel offers Treble, Mid, Bass, Master Volume, and Gain knobs. To tap into the Valve Special's effects, you simply click the DSP control to whatever you want from a menu of four Chorus, four Flanger, and eight Delay presets. There is also a dedicated Reverb knob. There's no mix control, and no user tweakability—save for a level adjustment on the digital reverb, and a DSP Mute button on the front panel that bypasses the effects entirely. The mute feature is footswitchable, though the footswitch (\$20 street) isn't included.



Epi Tones

To delve into the Valve Special's tones, I plugged in a variety of guitars, including Fender Strats and Teles, and a Gibson SG. With my Tele, the Valve Special put forth honky tones with a glut of corpulent midrange froth. Very nice. These tones inspired me to dig into bluesy single-note lines with zeal, as they sustained for days, and had a pretty formidable mean streak.

For clean textures, however, the Valve Special wasn't as inspiring. With the Master Volume wide open, the tones stayed reasonably focused and clear, but I couldn't dial in any shimmer or sheen—even when I cranked the Treble and dumped the Bass. (The lack of high-end sparkle is a trait of single-ended circuits.) Keeping the Gain control halfway up was key, too, as higher settings elicited frazzled, ragged treble frequencies. Still, for fans of low-wattage raunch, these unrefined tones could be extremely useful—especially in the studio, where their nastier character would bring some attitude to a track.

But as much as I dug the Valve Special's pointed, small-amp sound, I couldn't help but wonder if its speaker might be holding back some tone. To find out, I

plugged a cabinet loaded with a single Celestion Blue 12 into the Extension Cab jack. Not surprisingly, this definitely made the Valve Special sound bigger, more complex, and more dimensional. More telling, however, was when I disconnected the Valve Special's internal speaker, and connected the amp to an open-back cab loaded with a 10" Jensen Neo 10-100 speaker. What I heard was a significant improvement in treble response, volume, and overall fidelity. Suffice it to say that with some of the money you save on the Valve Special, you might want to consider a speaker upgrade.



Epiphone Effects

Of all the Valve Special's effects, I found the reverb to be the most useful, as it bolstered the amplifier's small tones with a warm, organic spaciousness. However, if you want to switch it off via a footswitch, you're out of luck, as this is not an option. The chorus and flanger presets provide enough chewy wash to satisfy players looking for a quick and easy modulation fix, and the eight delay presets—which go from a vibey slapback to longer delay trails—are a welcome addition. However, all the effects—particularly the chorus and flanger—brought with them a healthy amount of background hiss. (For the record, Epiphone says it has dealt with this issue, and that future production models will not have this

problem.)

Epi-logue

The Valve Special's ridiculously low street price makes it easy to add some small-amp flavor to your tone arsenal. Plus—and this does matter—the Valve Special looks cools. There aren't many amps in its price range that flaunt such hip cosmetics. Sure, the Valve Special has a few limitations, but its rock-bottom price makes them a lot easier to swallow.

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