

EBS FAFNER

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-“Talent is the only thing that will earn you more gigs”

-“It’s quite an experience to crank up the amp”

-“Built to last”

We first discovered the unique-sounding EBS-1 Version 2 during our Shoot out of 20 Bass preamps under \$1,000 (Jan/Feb. '95). Our test crew loved it’s innovative EQ system and tube-like tone. The same great sound can now be found inside EBS’s newest product: the Fafner head. This rackmountable “tube armed” amp will appeal to fans of the “piano string” Stanley tone, and its easy-to-use EQ system can sculpt just about any sound.

The Fafner combines both solid-state and tube gain sections with a 440-watt MOSFET power section. The amp doesn’t have separate front-end preamps, though; instead, the preamp uses transistors, while a 12AX7A tube is placed in the signal path after the EQ section. You can then tweak the clean sound with the 3-band EQ filter section, and then you can add tube gain and compression for a touch of grit or balls-to-the-walls grind. This design also allows the dynamics and the low end to be preserved.

The Fafner looks sharp sitting in a rack. Its black-and-chrome face plate adorned with “chicken-head” control knobs offers both modern and vintage looks. Fortunately, the amp is built to last, too; a steel case protects the unit’s innards, and a temperature controlled fan blows cool air across it’s circuit boards and toroidal transformer.



The amp is even easier to use than the preamp. Like most of EBS’s amps, the input jack can be wired to supply ten volts of phantom power for outboard effects or onboard active preamps or pickups. (No more worrying about dead batteries!) A gain knob trims the input level for either passive or active basses, while a single-knob compressor adjusts between soft leveling and hard limiting. (An LED shows when the compressor is active.) This is one of the best built-in compressors we’ve ever heard; it’s very quiet and delicate with the signal.

The Fafner’s EQ is also simple, and it’s very powerful. With the bright knob, you can add a little edge or crank up an LA funk tone. (The bypass switch above this knob insinuates you can bypass the filter, but this button actually turns off the EQ section.)

A 3-band EQ with sweepable midrange is the heart of the preamp. Both the bass and treble sections are of the shelving variety, where a broad range of frequencies are affected, rather than a specific point; the mids, meanwhile, can be swept

from 50Hz (technically not midrange) to 1kHz. For instant EQing, you can use the lo and hi preshaping filter buttons.

The drive knob is where the tube portion of the amp kicks in. Up to 30dB of tube gain can be added by turning this knob to its maximum position. The character button works with drive; when it's depressed, the frequency response stays flat, so the entire bass is overdriven; however, when the button is out, all frequencies below 350Hz are unaffected, so the lows stay tight. The tube adds many different shades of growl and attack; even placing the knob at 1 adds more life to the tone

A master volume controls the overall level the combined signals to the power amp. The power section also features a passive limiter to reduce output distortion. A tuner-out jack is located on the back of the unit; it stays active even when the amp is in standby mode. There's also a mono effects loop for stomp boxes or rack effects.

The Fafner is quite loud for a mono 440 watt amp. (Apparently EBS thinks so, too -the company supplies a package of earplugs in the box!) It's quite an experience to crank up the amp when it's connected to eight 10's. Thumb thumps hits you square in the chest, and pick tones really cut. And you can get a mean 90's slap tone just by cranking the bright knob and hitting the lo boost. Rockers will dig the added balls and grunt of the tube section, too.

EBS does offer a line of cabinets designed for the Fafner, but we were unable to test them with the head. Instead, we tried the amp with a variety

of 4x10's; our favorite combination included an Eden D410XLT, which accented the mids for rock tones, and an SWR Goliath III, whose crisp top was perfect for funk and fusion sounds.

The only improvement I can suggest is to beef up the circuit-board mounts. When we pressed a front-panel button on the test unit, we could see the circuit board flexing under the pressure. Adding plastic tiers underneath the board would prevent it from possibly cracking from stress fatigue. (EBS responds, "We designed the circuit boards to act as a suspension to reduce the risk of acoustical feedback in the tube, especially when the amp is mounted in a rack. Also, the printed circuit board is a plated, double-sided glass fiber-board, which is considered to be the longest-life board ever. So, even if the switches on the front of the amp flex the board, it is a result of the built-in suspension.")

Players of all styles can benefit from the Fafner's power, portability and versatility. Talent is the only thing that will earn you more gigs -but the Fafner will guarantee that you sound great playing all of them.

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The slap amp
Great compressor
Simple, versatile EQ
Lightweight

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Circuit board Flex

