

# EBS Fafner

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**EBS Fafner is a Swedish challenger among heavy bass heads. The name is from a bloody, ancient Norse legend, where the greedy Fafner slays his brothers and transforms himself into a huge dragon to guard his hoard. Let's see if this amp can live up to its colorful name.**

The EBS Fafner model has been around for some time now. The one I tested is the latest incarnation, and has been updated somewhat. This version has got a balanced line out with ground lift and a pre-/post-switch for tapping the signal either immediately after the gain control or after the filters/compressor, as well as an extra speaker output. Some of the electronics has been updated, too.

## Construction and Functions

This is a so-called hybrid head, which means that it is a tube-charged solid state head. The tube is not placed at the input, though, but comes later in the signal chain to be able to blend with the Drive control. One half of the tube is used for this, while the other half is used for the built-in compressor.

The head is built for a rack and is three units high. The look appeals to me; the chicken-head knobs give it a touch of retro in the otherwise modern design. A red lamp aids the tube that glimmers behind the chromed plate. Cheating? Sure, but it does look cool.

The strong steel casing protects it well, and in a rack it both looks better and is easier to handle. Inside the casing there are two circuitboards, one at the front and one at the back, and the construction looks very reliable. The amplifier part is cooled by a temperature-controlled fan that is extremely quiet.

The input jack is somewhat special. It can supply active basses with power. Then you can spend your time playing instead of wondering how many months it was



since you changed that battery. This does demand a stereo instrument cable, though, and that the battery contact in the bass is short-circuited. The power will otherwise be doubled, which can be desirable with some active pick-ups. This gadget is EBS, to my knowledge, alone to have. The function is activated by a small incision by your retailer.

If we move on to the controlpanel, we can determine that the Gain control has an LED to help dialing in the right input level for your instrument, style of playing, etc. The Compressor knob has an LED showing when the compressor is active/working. The Bright control has its starting position at the far left, and adds on more brightness the further it is turned. Bass, Mid and Treble are zeroed pointing straight up. The Mid is sweepable, and the knob next to it decides which frequencies to cut/boost, from bass to high mid.

The Lo- and Hi-boost push-buttons are not affected by the Bypass switch that disconnects the filters. The Drive control decides how much of the signal that should pass through the tube. The low frequencies bypass the tube unaffected, as it keeps the bass solid. When the Character button is depressed, all frequencies will go through the tube.

The effects loop is serial; all sound passes through the connected effect. A comment here would be that some effects affect the low frequencies in a bad way and that it could have worked better with a clean sound. The speaker outputs has SPEAKON contacts. These are safer at higher effect levels, having a larger contact surface and are lockable, a good choice. A line out is also available for additional external power amplifiers.

## Sound and Handling

With my favorite bass on my stomach I turn up the volume. My first impression is a clear, full and to-the-point sound, useful without even touching the filters, maybe it is somewhat too nice and polished. To get a more personal sound that puts its chin out, you might need to turn some knobs. The Bass control's range is sensible; turning it up gives you an airy, warm, but still firm bass even using a five-string. The Lo-boost button gives a deeper and more compact sound, and is a easy shortcut to get a fuller sound to start with. The B-string became tighter with the button activated than by turning the knob.

The Mid control is the most flexible with it's variable working frequencies. EBS has chosen the frequencies with much care; it works in any situation. Some experimenting will most certainly pay off. It is easy to just turn the knob up, but it can be at least as rewarding to cut away frequencies that sound bad. Turn the Mid level knob to "a quarter to" and try turning the Frequency knob in different positions. It works very well. Even the troublesome low-mid is easily found. The control can also be used to help the bass frequencies.

The Treble knob has a more nasal character than the Hi-boost button, which gives more high-end treble. The Bright control enhances the highest frequencies, and is very effective. Add some here and old tired strings may sound as new again. Some rockers might snort at horn tweeters, but with one of those in the speaker cabinet, the Bright control is really useful. The knob is though, in my meaning, put in the wrong place -Before the Bass filter. It had been easier to work with if all the treble controls had been at the same place.

The filters all are centered at sensible frequencies, completing each other. The function is easy to understand, and it is hard to get lost. The Bypass-switch is nice to have when you want to check your settings against the original sound. If you have an active bass, it might even work to only use the bypass, as the bass' tone controls might be enough, and have the amp's tone controls ready for another bass or style of playing.

Most impressive are the different treble controls. I could get any sound character I wanted by combining the Treble and Bright knobs with or without Hi-boost. Everything from mean and clonky to polished hi-tech and all working well on different basses. The noise level is very low. Highest score for the tone controls. The Compressor works smoothly and is better than most boxes. Its work with smoothing out volume peaks, for example when hitting the strings hard and/or when slapping, is hard to notice. Turned to it's maximum, it does pump somewhat, and with playing with the fingers close to the bridge, it isn't that effective. It works best where it's needed, when using a pick or slapping.

The Drive control is a joker in the game. Here you can get one of the tube amplifiers advantages -the great distortion character. An all-tube head of course has better dynamics, but EBS is very close. Careful settings liven up the sound without adding distortion. Slapping on a Jazz Bass sounded awesome with the Drive knob at 12 o'clock.

The Character button gives the sound some more distortion. No avalanche, but a more gritty character, sounding a lot like the power-amp distortion in an all-tube head. In this mode, the tube's natural compression also increases. Using a pick with distortion and a lot of treble sounded full, but still punched through.

Most sounds imaginable were easy to dial in, and if trend-sensitive bass players only can imagine to use one rack-mounted amplifier, this one works for both hardcore and pop. A small warning for the prettiest

hi-tech sounds, though: they have a hard time punching through the sound carpet from a band playing at a high volume.

Fafner is a powerful amp that can produce some loud sounds. The power amplifier isn't very sensitive to the speaker's impedance. With an ordinary 8 ohm speaker it plays really strong. With four speakers you get the maximum effect, over six hundred watts. This moved a whole lot of air, and I have a problem imagining the situation where that won't be enough. Unless you are at a huge stadium with 60 feet from the end of the stage to the amplifier, of course. But in that case you probably can afford some extra amps.

It's nice to know that all controls are on the front. Anybody who has tipped a cymbal stand when you have been forced to crawl in the darkness behind a rack knows what I mean.

The manual covers more than you need to know and is easy to understand. Some examples for settings are also in it. These give you the possibility to try sounds you'd never have tried yourself. Great!

The test was made with several different basses, active as well as passive. The speaker cabinet was a EBS 410 with a horn tweeter and a EBS 115. The 15" gives a good solid bottom and a thicker sound, while the 410's sound can only be described as clear, uncolored with a lot of treble. The cabinets work very well together. Other speaker cabinets were also tried with great results. The Fafner's awesome treble reproduction invites to use speakers that can go a bit up in the frequencies.

For those of you who read my review of the Mesa/Boogie Buster 200 in Fuzz #10 1998, it might be interesting with a comparison. The amps are of the same caliber, but both sound, function and looks are very different. Fafner sounds prettier and more polished, with a more solid and drier basic sound. Buster is rawer and cockier. The Fafner plays stronger with a clean sound, while the Buster is more dynamic. Both

are awesome amps, and the only way to decide which you like best is to try them both out.

### Conclusion

EBS Fafner is a sophisticated bass head with user-friendly controls and functions. The effective filters and tone controls make the amp multi-faceted. Everything is obvious and easy to understand. The compressor is good, but the Drive control, above all, does some great things with the sound character. The power is more than enough for most occasions. The only thing I miss is a mix control for the effects loop.

Fafner should suit most people, being multi-faceted and well worth its price. That it is relatively small and light doesn't make it worse.

### Fakta

**PRODUCT:** Bass head, tube-armed solid state model

**EFFECT:** 440 W, 1.4 ohm, 620 W, 12 ohm

**CONTROLS:** Gain, compressor, bright, bass, mid, frequency, treble, drive

**VOLUME:** Switches: filter bypass, lo & hi boost, character, line pre/post, ground lift, line out, standby, powerswitch

**TONE CONTROLS:** Bass, mid & treble +/- 15 dB @ 100, 50-1000 & 5000 Hz, Bright -0/+20 dB @ 10 kHz, Hi & Lo boost + 9 dB @ 50 & 8000 Hz

**IN-/OUTPUTS:** Input, balanced line out, 2 speaker outputs (speakon), tuner out, effects loop in & out, line out for external power amplifier.

**TUBE:** 1 x 12AX7

**LOOP:** Serial

**SIZE:** 19" x 133 mm x 296 mm / 19" x 5.2" x 11.7"

**WEIGHT:** 11 kg / 24 lbs

**PRICE:** Talk to your local dealer

**MANUFACTURER:** EBS Sweden AB, Phone:

+46-(0)8-735 00 10, Fax: +46-(0)8-735 00 15

