

EBS ValveDrive

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Unlike many other tube equipped preamps and pedals, ValveDrive uses a high voltage tube, so there are no short cuts using lower power. The voltage is changed from the 12 Volts of the power adaptor, to around three hundred Volts to get the tube to work properly.

Valve Drive is very easy to use. Using five knobs for gain, bass, mid, treble and master volume it works just like an ordinary amplifier. Dual foot-switches control pedal bypass and the Vintage function respectively. The latter gives a smoother sound with less treble. Distortion sounds range from almost clean to all-out searing distortion and everything in between. The overall character is warm with relatively fine grained distortion. In my opinion, semi-distorted sounds are the most fun, when the distortion itself is in the background. Settings like this will make most amps sound more lively.

The controls are intuitive and it is almost impossible to get a bad or strange sound. With all controls set at 12 o'clock, the sound is full, pleasant, and very tubelike. Like BBE's Max-T you must be aware of how the tone-controls work. The filter section is passive and works a lot like an old Fender Bassman amplifier, which means that with all controls turned counter-clockwise, no sound will be heard. For a flatter response the mid control should be full up, with bass and treble set lower than 12 o'clock. If used with a warm-sounding tube amp, this setting is a good starting point for further tweaking. To get a cutting sound maximum mids is not enough, you must also use a bass setting closer to zero. The treble control can then be set to our own liking.



The tone control frequencies are well thought out and the filters are very effective once you know their function. I find it easy to start at zero and carefully increase the controls a bit at a time, to build the sound from scratch. It is quite easy to get a meaty slap sound with a Jazz Bass. Pastorius-like growl is not for this pedal, but it can help you get almost any tube-like sound.

To get useful sounds in combination with a tube amp you have to do more serious tweaking. However, it makes sense that EBS designed the eq-section to work best with either transistor- or hybrid amps, like EBS own line. I think this pedal works best with basses and amps needing warmth and a little distortion.

When I tried it with old tube-amps like Ampeg or Sound City the sound got a bit too smooth, even with distortion. To cut through in a band you will need more bite. Using a transistor amp is completely different. ValveDrive adds warmth and muscles to the often harder, drier sound of transistors.

The Vintage switch is great for transistor amps but it can get too smooth when used with a tube amp. I got the best results dialling in a normal sound with the Vintage switch enabled, using the switch to get a more modern cutting sound.

All connections plus two switch buttons are located on the back panel. The first button sets the input gain for basses with different output signals. The second switch determines if the main footswitch will mute the signal, or function as a bypass switch for unaffected sound. Valve Drive should not be considered just a distortion pedal. In my opinion its biggest strength is adding tube-like warmth to any sound, regardless if distortion is used or not.

Conclusion

EBS Valve Drive can work wonders with dry, hard transistor sounds. If you already have a big and warm bass sound you have less use of this pedal. The tone controls are easy to operate, but it is easy to misunderstand how to get a neutral and uncolored sound. Most tone controls will yield a neutral sound at 12 o' clock, but the ValveDrive gives a smoother woolier sound using this setting.

Facts: EBS Valve Drive

- Tube based preamp/distortion pedal
- Gain, master and a 3-band eq
- Foot-switches controlling Bypass and Vintage functions
- Additional switches for Input Gain and Mute
- 1 Svetlana 12AX7
- 135 x75 x165 mm