

# Tube of Delight

## EBS ValveDrive tube preamp pedal

By **Jae Ko**

**B**ASS OVERDRIVES have long been the bane of my existence. As I've admitted in the past, I'm a recovering guitar player, and for those of my ilk, overdrive/distortion pedals, high-gain preamps, and power-amp overdrive are akin to sonic catnip. Bring me a pile of fuzzboxes, and I'll show you a guy who'll gladly jump through hoops of fire to have a crack at them.

But as a bassist, I've been stonewalled by such devices time and again. That's because of my solid-state amp rig, which is lightweight and easy to gig with but unfortunately doesn't mesh well enough with my transistor guitar pedals to produce the organic, synergistic kick that I'd get if I were playing one of those six-string things.

Luckily, the folks at EBS feel my pain, and although they already have the capable MultiDrive solid-state overdrive pedal in their lineup, they also know that sometimes—at least for some of us—only a tube will do.

### NORTHERN LIGHTS

Powered by a single Russian-made Svetlana 12AX7, the ValveDrive houses its fire bottle in a rock 'n' roll-approved chrome cage. I'm a sucker for a tube's eerie filament glow, and I love the fact that EBS augmented that glow with a hidden LED for further dramatic effect. It looks pretty freakin' cool on a darkly lit stage. Another thing I like about the ValveDrive: Unlike some other tube-loaded overdrive boxes, it isn't the size of a buffalo, which means that it can fit snugly onto my cramped Pedaltrain Jr. pedal board with a minimum of fuss.

On the top control panel, you've got your typical volume, treble, middle, bass, and gain knobs, and along the front edge



are the voicing and on/off stomp switches. The knobs are thoughtfully recessed into the pedal, so an errant kick won't push your settings all out of whack. Around back, there's the active/passive button, as well as a handy mute control that allows the on/off switch to either mute your sound or simply bypass the effect.

The ValveDrive offers two footswitchable voicings: Vintage mode provides a smoother, warmer feel, while Modern mode boosts the upper mids for a more fervent rock tone. EBS is also promoting the ValveDrive as a "preamp" pedal, and in Vintage mode, with the gain set very low, I did indeed coax some sweet tube preamp tones from my favorite solid-state rig. Used in conjunction with an MTD 635, an Aguilar AG500 head, and a pair of Epifani UL112s, the ValveDrive enhanced my sound with a luscious gloss.

But come on—luscious gloss? Is that why I'm reviewing this pedal? Hell, no! Running from my trusty Lakland Bob Glaub P-Bass into said Aguilar/Epifani combination, the ValveDrive rages like a boatload of mad Vikings. Switch to Modern mode, whip out some *Misfits* riffs, and it's time to search and destroy! Pull back the gain, up the bass knob, and switch over to Vintage mode for a thickened growl that flat-out rips with a pick.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

I've found the overdrive pedal for me. (Cue emphatic "Yes!") Not only can it add some subtle gloss and rich tube character to my solid-state rig, but with a twist of the gain knob, it'll set the whole thing on fire, figuratively speaking. If valves turn you on too, the ValveDrive surely will be up your alley. ■

**THE DEETS**

**LIST PRICE**  
\$399

**MANUFACTURER**  
EBS, distributed in North America by Musical Distributors Group, 9 Mars Court, Boonton, NJ 07005; (866) 632-8346; ebssweden.com