



Peavey Penta Tube Head and Cab



FEATURES

Four EL34 power tubes deliver **140 watts of power**

4x12 cabinet loaded with Peavey's custom-voiced **Penta 75 speakers**

Pentatone switch reshapes EQ and gain for **five different voicings**

Footswitch selects between any two voicings

PRICE

\$1,499.99 (head)

\$999.99 (cabinet)

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ON THE CD



By Douglas Baldwin

When it comes to choosing an amp, guitarists generally fall into two camps: those who seek a simple rig with very few bells and whistles, so that they can forge their own personal sound; and those who want some multi-channeled, multi-footswitched monster to approximate *everyone's* sound. Truth be told, each camp envies the other—and the Peavey Penta might just be the perfect choice for both. Though it may look like it's built for one-toned warriors, the foolproof Penta actually affords players a huge range of sounds with the turn of a knob.

LOOKS The Peavey Penta head consists of a single channel with gain, treble, mid, bass, master volume, and presence controls, curiously laid out from right to left. At far left, the five-

position rotary "Pentatone" switch is labeled with illustrations rather than numbers or names. Not much more is offered 'round back: a pair of speaker outputs, an impedance selector, a foot-switch jack, and a second Pentatone switch. The Penta's offset gold front panel, green vinyl covering, and brown weave grille all telegraph a vintage vibe that is underscored by the minimal knobbery. The 4x12 cabinet is similarly bedecked, giving the impression of a sturdy British workhorse from the late '60s or early '70s.

Construction is firm and neat overall; we found no untidy vinyl corners or loose logo plates. However, the upper left corner of our reviewed model's front panel cutaway was a bit askew. The footswitch was light, and its thin gray cable and molded jack cover would have been more at home in a

beginner's package than in a grand-and-a-half-head. Also, carrying the amp proved tricky, as the bulk of its weight is on one end, causing it to tip uncomfortably when you lift it. Still, none of these details interfered with use or sound.

SOUND The Penta is one surprising five-headed beast. Working the Pentatone switch clockwise, the first (tree) setting produces the cleanest, most "organic" sound. The second (sheriff's badge) setting also keeps it clean, but adds a pronounced high-end goose and a mild midrange scoop. The third (bull) and fourth (cactus) settings are high-gain from the get-go; the bull's emphasis is on a vowel-like midrange, while the cactus has a brighter, more trebly response. The fifth setting, stamped with a mudflap-girl silhouette, is also a high-gain setting; its saturated overdrive has exaggerated bass and treble and a scooped midrange for that roar-and-hiss so beloved by fellows who dig mudflap-girl silhouettes. In short, a virtual history of amp tone is available with the spin of a knob. The footswitch allows you to toggle between two settings (front panel and rear panel) on the fly—it's just too bad there's no lamp to tell you which one's in use. A more flexible switch to access more settings would also have been welcome.

The passive tone controls provide plenty of useful shaping and coloration in every setting. The spiky-clean "cactus" setting could be nudged into hot-and-bothered tweed territory by cranking the gain, and taming its treble and presence controls brought pleasant warmth to a single-coil Yamaha



The Penta head's bare-bones rear panel is as unadorned as the front.

The ported cabinet and Peavey's specially designed Penta 75 speakers complement the amp regardless of volume level.



Pacifica. The “bull” setting transformed both a Les Paul Special and a semi-hollow, humbucker-equipped Washburn HB-35 into butter-churning sustain machines, thanks to the delicious edge-of-feedback lead sound. This setting’s resonant bloom could be dialed in at almost any volume level by simply tweezing the gain and midrange appropriately. “Mudflap girl” was authoritatively bone-crushing and aggressive, but it was also the most tone-dependent, requiring wide swings of bass boost or cut depending on the volume level.

The 4×12 cabinet and the head’s rating of 140 watts clearly mark the Penta as a *loud* performance tool. The custom Peavey Penta 75 speakers remain punchy and accurate at any volume, including the extremely high levels this rig produces. The cabinet’s slim rear port allows plenty of air to escape at lower settings, for better room ambience, yet it still provides enough “pillow” to support the low frequencies at higher volumes.

IS IT FOR YOU? The Peavey Penta is a true diamond in the rough. Although it’s designed for live venues, I found it to be a phenomenal recording tool; it nicely complemented any guitar, and nailed classic tones with a simple twirl of the Pentatone switch. Connoisseurs of definitive tube tone might wish for some more subtle coloration, but for most working musicians this is a bargain amp, capable of grabbing a vast array of sounds and responses with a minimum of work. It’s also a foundation worth expanding on—let’s hope Peavey adds a combo and 2×12 cabinet to the Penta line.

MASSIMO GAMMACURTA

