

LINE 6 SPIDER VALVE MKII 212 £798
GUITAR AMPS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY PHILIP SOWELS

Line 6 Spider Valve MkII 212 **£798**

Guitarist
CHOICE

According to Line 6, “the best of both worlds just got better”. But can valves and digital modelling truly work together to make a great amp? *by Dave Durban*

Upon its introduction in 2007, Line 6’s Spider Valve broke new ground in the unexplored hybrid digital/valve amp market. This fledgling collaboration between Line 6 and valve amp legend Reinhold Bogner quickly propelled the Spider Valve to its position as the pre-eminent hybrid amp. Recently other brands have begun to turn their attention toward this narrow market, most notably Peavey with its affordable, good-sounding and versatile Vyper Tube range, which actually trumped the original Spider valve in many areas – especially with its hands-on feel, range of effects and preset options. Keen not to be outdone, Line 6 has launched the second generation of the Spider Valve and we have the 40W 212 here.

The Spider Valve MkII is one of four amplifier ranges Line 6 currently has on offer and price-wise it sits between the all-digital Spider IV and the pro-minded Vetta II series. However, the presence of valves sets the Spider Valve apart from the rest of the Line 6 roster.

Like the original Spider Valve – reviewed in issue 297 – the MkII is based around a Bogner-designed amplifier, with two-12AX7s in the front end alongside Line 6’s digital modelling technology and two 6L6s for the valve power stage.

Outwardly the MkII seems similar to the original, with its sleek black and chrome look and small Bogner logo – it’s functional, stylish and highly recognisable. The exception comes in the form of a new-look front panel, which houses all of the MkII’s new features and tweaks. Build-wise the cabinet construction has been improved too, with a new three-quarter closed-back

tuned cab that should tighten up the low-end response.

Upgrades to the original include a new manual mode for on-the-fly adjustments and a more amp-like experience; four boutique-inspired mid-gain amp models (Vox AC30 Top Boost, Divided By 13 9/15, Orange AD30 and Diezel Herbert); a 14-second sound-on-sound looper and pitch effects such as Smart Harmony and Pitch Glide. Additionally, each amp model has two gain structures indicated by either an amber or blue LED. So, in comparison to the original Spider Valve, you’re getting those four new amp models, 13 more effects (up to four simultaneously rather than

three previously), 128 user-programmable presets and added flexibility thanks to seven adjustable parameters per effect via the MkII’s Deep Editing software.

On that note, Deep Editing allows further sonic exploration by utilising seven editable parameters, including pre- and post-amplifier routing via a single push of the preset control and, using the four-way navigation disc, access to sculpt your delays, mods, reverbs, pitch effects, boost, gate, volume, loop and set-up with relative ease. Of course, it’s easier to utilise the Smart FX feature for instant, cool-sounding FX without having to tweak the parameters, but

simply entering Edit Mode at any time will allow you to tweak an effect to taste. For example, if a real-world chorus pedal has five control knobs to dial-in a specific tone, Deep Edit mode allows you to alter these individual parameters digitally and assign them.

A new two-line LCD window enables you to scroll through your user banks and presets, see the chromatic tuner interface (activated by holding down the

The Rivals

Peavey’s Vyper Tube 120 head (£549) offers valve and modelling on a budget and we were impressed with it back in issue 329 – there’s also a **2 x 12 combo** (£499).

Bogner’s Alchemist (from £715) shows Reinhold learned a thing or two about built-in digital effects when working with Line 6. Lastly **Marshall’s JMD102** (£920) packs a huge punch, with four EL34s and 100 watts load, blended with 16 digital preamp tones and a healthy array of modulation, delay and reverb effects.





The MkII's look is simple and understated, as befits a versatile gigging tool

tap tempo switch) and get a visual representation of your settings for drive, bass, mid, treble, volume and reverb.

Added to that, with the FBV Express MkII footswitch you're able – via an included USB cable – to download 28 additional Line 6 FX Fusion overdrives, effects or wahs for free. The caveat, of course, is that the FBV Express MkII footswitch is an added extra and will set you back £198,

though with the free updates, computer compatibility and MIDI capabilities it's a more than worthy expense.

Setting up a preset couldn't be easier for what is a highly versatile amp. The easiest route is to work from left to right. First select the flavour of amp, work through the EQ parameters to tweak your sound as you would with a normal amp, then move onto choosing one of three primary

Don't be daunted by the myriad control options – the real fun is in tailoring presets to your tastes

or three secondary FX models using the Smart FX knobs. Then it's just a case of adding reverb, presence and setting the master volume. To save, simply hold down one of the channel buttons for two seconds. But don't be daunted by the myriad control options – the real fun is in tailoring these presets to your own personal tastes.

Sounds

As we've mentioned, the Spider Valve MkII is a massively versatile amp and to emphasise this we've created four diverse gigging presets to see just how much we can squeeze out of the amp.

We kick things off with Line 6's Clean Amber amp model, and as each amp model has two differing flavours, effectively slightly lower and higher-gain, we're going to keep this one squeaky clean.

Plugging in a Fender Stratocaster, the 'clean' model delivers plenty of top-end sparkle and bite combined with a healthy amount of low-end and rich mid-range resonance, which doesn't swamp the quacky nature of the Strat. Imagine a Strat plugged in to a modern AC30CC: clean, shimmery and quintessentially British – it feels surprisingly reactive under the fingers too. To thicken things up, a dash of phaser and smidgen of tape echo is in order, giving proceedings a thicker, wider sound – think Foo Fighters' intro tone to The Pretender.

Next up is Line 6's new Class A Blue amp model, which pays homage to one of LA's most respected boutique amp designers, Divided By 13. Sonically, it possesses the inspired spongy characteristics of a true Class A, valve-rectified amplifier on the edge of sweet





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The small LCD screen enables you to edit your preset parameters



Line 6 Spider Valve MkII 212

PRICE: £797.83
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Hybrid valve/solid-state preamp, valve power amp and digital effects
OUTPUT: 40 watts RMS
VALVES: Two 12AX7 (preamp) two 6L6 (power)
DIMENSIONS: 552 (h) x 679 x 286mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 35/77
SPEAKERS: Two Celestion Vintage 30
PRESETS: 128 user presets organised into four banks of nine, 200+ artist- and song-based presets organised by genre, 20 'smart effects' models (up to four at once), 16 available amp models
CONTROLS: Front panel (L-R): Rotary amp model selector, drive, bass, middle, treble, channel volume, twin 'smart controls' for effects selection, reverb, master, manual mode, presence plus four channel memory buttons, tap tempo (hold to access to chromatic tuner), preset bank navigator, toggle switches for standby and power
CONNECTORS: Quick Loop: 14-second sound-on-sound looper MIDI in and out/thru. XLR output supports two output modes – Performance and Studio; ground lift switch, 6.4mm power amp input and preamp output jacks, 4 ohm (single) or 8 ohm (dual) speaker connectors
FOOTSWITCH: Not included. Footswitch options are the FBV2 (£28.20), the FBV Express MkII (£101.05) and the FBV Shortboard (£198.58)
RANGE OPTIONS: The Spider Valve MkII comes in 40-watt 112 (£645.08) format or HD100 (£762.58) head
Line 6 UK
uk.line6.com

The involvement here of Reinhold Bogner seems to be shifting the focus ever further towards tone and feel

break-up. Indeed, it has a drastically alternative feel, with a throaty valve-like bloom around the note and a not-too-flabby low-end. It's perfect for new-school blues – think Joe Bonamassa – or even the Southern-inspired tones of The Black Crowes.

Switching to the Suhr Guthrie Govan signature reviewed on page 80 and the High-Gain Amber model, it's immediately evident that here we have an increase in attack and the presence of a blasting British Marshall 'Plexi' set ready to rock. It certainly feels tighter, cleaner and chewier in the mid-range than the Clean Amber or Class A Blue models. Adding a blend of phaser, tape echo and a pitch effect gives you Hendrix-inspired tones as well as nicely thickening out the

solos. How many stompboxes would that need?

Finally, we switch to the Metal Blue model and add in as much delay as we dare for that essential mid-eighties metal sound. Here it delivers masses of aggression and liquid sustain and you're never too far from the odd pinched harmonic or ten, but it's brilliant fun and instantly satisfying. On turning the amp up things do get a little shrill, but in general it's a fair nod towards the slick, fluid feel of a Boogie Dual Rectifier.

Verdict

It's certainly an interesting time for the hybrid digital/valve amp market. The involvement here of Reinhold Bogner seems to be shifting the focus ever further towards tone and feel, blended with state-of-

the-art technology delivering intuitive usability and versatility. As obvious an observation as this may seem, it's often the case that the hybrid amp is designed from an engineer's point-of-view rather than a musician's – and this often results in overcooked tones and harsh sounds at gigging volumes.

We are happy to report however that Line 6 has nailed that compromise of good sounds and impressive usability with the Spider Valve. It's also notable that the MkII sounds just as good using all of its 40-watt potential, making it a super versatile gigging tool.

In reality, the point of the Spider Valve MkII isn't to try and trump an all-valve amp at its own game – it's never going to provide the pure experience of plugging into a cooking valve amp – but it can give you a Swiss Army Knife of amp tones, classic effects and real world versatility for what is a very reasonable outlay. **G**



Each amp model has two gain structures, indicated by blue and orange LEDs

The Bottom Line

We like: Valve-like feel; the new mid-gain amp tones; great usability

We dislike: Nothing

Guitarist says: The MkII is a great update to the original Spider Valve formula. Destined to move back to the top of the hybrid amp pile it has an impressive valve-like feel alongside a wide range of excellent-sounding effects and intuitive usability

Test results

Build quality ★★★★★
Features ★★★★★
Sound ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★