

EVH 5150-III 50W £910  
GUITAR AMPS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOBY SESSIONS



## EVH 5150-III 50W £910

Not only does Edward Van Halen have a new album and tour ready to go for 2012, he also has a new signature amp. We give his 'cute' 50-watt head a try... *by Simon Bradley*

**A**s Van Halen gear up for a huge US tour this year, it's fitting that we take a look at the latest version of the main man's signature amp.

We've described the genesis of Ed's legendary 'brown' sound on many occasions over the years, so it's a little ironic that this new EVH unashamedly sports a Fender 'F' logo as part of its livery. While Ed has always been a Fender fan, and the 1967 Marshall SLP Ed used to redefine rock guitar tone had Fender Bassman in its DNA, the latter's 6L6 power stage isn't necessarily one you'd expect to provide Van Halen's heavily saturated gain tone...

Tom Wheeler's excellently exhaustive *The Soul Of Tone* book features a revealing quote from Ed himself, as told to *Guitar Player* magazine in 1980. "When I'm at home I use a little old Fender Bandmaster. You get a tube distortion and it sounds really good. I'll tell you, the best sound I ever get is sitting at home playing through that little Bandmaster cranked on 10."

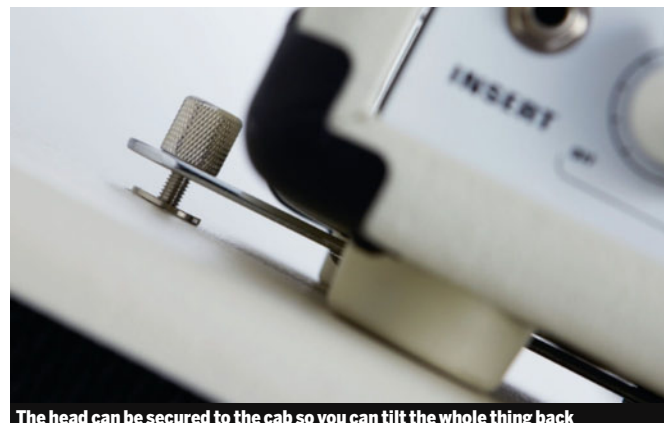
Sixties Bandmasters were rated at 40 watts and the output is one of the headlines with this new EVH III, as it's rated at just

55 watts. What's more, it bears a striking resemblance to not only the Bandmaster but also other Fender Piggyback amp and cab arrays such as the Showman and Bassman.

We've reviewed the amp in tandem with the equally shiny and new 2 x 12 EVH cabinet and, brilliantly in our opinion, the design features a practical method of locking the amp to the top of the cabinet in order

for it to be leant backwards, supported by vintage-style tilt-back legs. This feature first appeared on Showman rigs from 1960 and we love the fact that such an old school feature has been included on what is otherwise a thoroughly modern amplifier. Hook the two metal flanges sited on the bottom of the amp over two thumbscrews fitted to the top of the cab, tighten and away you go.

The style is all Edward Van Halen - from the faux-stripped grille and EVH badge to the internal specification



The head can be secured to the cab so you can tilt the whole thing back

That aside, the remainder of the amp's style is all Edward Van Halen - from the faux-stripped grille and EVH badge to the internal specification. It still offers a super-hot preamp section, here powered by a sextet of 12AX7 Slovakian JJ valves, but the reduced output needs just two 6L6s.

Another major change in spec is that although the amp still offers three channels, clean channel one and the hotter channel two share gain, volume and EQ controls. The incendiary third channel is controlled by its own pots, and there are master presence and resonance knobs too: still no master volume, however. A four-button footswitch is supplied and additional features include a MIDI port, mono effects loop and, of all things, a headphone socket.

The 2 x 12 cab, which is in effect an EVH 412 sawn horizontally in half, is loaded with two Celestion Heritage

### The Rivals

Peavey's 6505+ (£1,380) is close to the original 5150 in all the important respects, while the Marshall TSL60 head (£850) offers three channels chock full of tone. The modern version of the Fender Band-Master, a 40-watt Vintage Modified head (£694.80), employs hybrid technology for a more cost-effective option.



Channel one and two have shared EQ and gain controls – it's not ideal

30s. It's worth mentioning that a 1 x 12 cab is also available, albeit without the tilt-back array and, as a package, the rig looks wonderful: simply check out Ed's backline in the video that accompanies VH's new single, Tattoo, for proof.

### Sounds

The concept of leaning an amp backwards as described is to aid the projection of sound for the player and, when stood in front of the rig, we're sure you'll have no problems whatsoever hearing yourself.

With channels one and two now sharing EQ and gain pots, we found it nigh on impossible to obtain a clean tone with sufficient headroom and sparkle without compromising the sound and feel of the classic VH rhythm tone that channel two does possess. In fact, even adding in the MXR '78 Custom Badass distortion as an additional overdrive pedal doesn't satisfy us. This is a real shame as both the clean and crunch performance on their own are excellent. Peavey's 5150-II amplifier offered a



## Everybody Wants One!

To go with the exclusive review of Eddie's 50-watt EVH-5150 III rig, here's an outline of the currently available guitars that bear the great man's initials

### EVH Wolfgang

Price: from £2,662

The spec of the Wolfie is mooted to be exactly the same as those used by Eddie himself. With dual custom pickups and a double-locking vibrato augmented by the D-Tuna drop D system, this is a serious rock guitar.



### EVH Wolfgang USA Custom

Price: from £3,526

Ed's tribute to the Gibson Les Paul is only available with a hardtail and set mahogany neck. Two nickel-covered Wolfie 'buckers provide the grunt. Don't want to whammy? Try this.



### EVH Wolfgang Stealth

Price: £2,662

This dark Wolfie includes all-black hardware and a matte black finish. Ed has come to love ebony fingerboards in recent times, and as such, this is his current go-to Wolfgang according to the folks at EVH Guitars.



### EVH Wolfgang HT

Price: £2,566

If you fancy a hardtail Wolfgang but can't stretch to the USA Custom model, this 'standard' issue HT is a good bet. Still USA-made, but not with the mega Custom Shop spec.



### EVH Wolfgang Special

Price: £1,042

Where Peavey's Wolfie Special was made in the USA, the EVH equivalent hails from Japan and features a flat rather than arched top to the basswood and maple veneered body. It's very well priced too.



### EVH Wolfgang Special HT

Price: £1,006

This hard-tail Special is the most affordable EVH Wolfie so far. It may provide at least some comfort after another fruitless Ebay search for a £16,000 Frankenstein Replica...





The grille pattern is pure EVH – it's hard not to love it

footswitchable crunch button on its cleaner channel, and maybe that would have been a better option here.

Ed's more modern tone is easily recreated via channel two, and we used both an EVH Wolfgang Custom and a Les Paul Standard in our hugely enjoyable sound tests. Using a guitar loaded with higher-output pickups, such as the Peavey PXD Void, reviewed elsewhere in this issue, did add a little too much harshness at times, but reducing the amp again and upping the output helped smooth things off.

If channel two is 'brown', then channel three – easily the dirtiest of all – is pure black and, again, we're not surprised that an increasing number of metal bands, such as Trivium, are using the 5150 in their backlines. The ferocious gain is a familiar feature here, but the 50-watt output really allows you to crank the amp up and enjoy the benefits of a cooking valve power stage without necessarily causing damage to your hearing.

To our ears, the 2 x 12 cab is a little green and therefore overly toppy at higher gains, but employing both the master presence pot to rein the EQ in and the resonance control to increase the feel of the low end helps enormously.

We also tried the head out with the 1 x 12 cabinet and, although we'd have no complaints bearing in mind the smaller cubic volume and single Celestion configuration, the tone is undeniably smaller and less impactful. Most vitally, it also doesn't lean back.

### Verdict

The mix of 50-year-old Fender design ideals with a thoroughly modern spec and performance is a refreshing one and, with Van Halen gearing up for what is likely to be a very busy year, this 'cute' new version of the 5150 will surely be one many players will be anxious to try out. With earlier incarnations of the 5150 head rated at a whopping 120 watts, and the current Mexican-made 5150-III

pumping out 100, introducing this 50 seems like a no-brainer.

It's a pity the combination of channels one and two into one set of pots prevents you from having both a pristine clean and a 'brown' rock rhythm tone, but channel three remains as gloriously dirty and suitable for metal as ever.

This head and 2 x 12 cabinet cost less than the 100-watt EVH-III head alone. That, along with the manageable output and compact size of the entire rig makes this arguably the most attractive EVH amp package so far. Rock guitarists who hanker after Ed's tone, but need a versatile all-round amp into the bargain, should seek it out right away. **G**

### The Bottom Line

**We liked:** Price; portability; the great rock and metal tones, plus an impressive clean option

**We disliked:** The merging of channels one and two does compromise performance

**Guitarist says:** The most attractive EVH amp rig so far? It's certainly not far off and, the odd concern aside, it's well worth trying out



### EVH 5150-III 50W

**PRICE:** £910.80  
**ORIGIN:** Vietnam  
**TYPE:** Three-channel, all-valve 50-watt head  
**OUTPUT:** 55 watts RMS  
**VALVES:** 6 x 12AX7, 2 x 6L6  
**DIMENSIONS:** 216 (h) x 508 (w) x 304mm (d)  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 11.3/25  
**CABINET:** 20mm  
**CHANNELS:** Three  
**CONTROLS:** Gain, low, mid, high and volume for channels one and two; gain, low, mid and high for channel three. Master presence and resonance  
**FOOTSWITCH:** Four-way EVH f/s included  
**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** Two speaker outputs, impedance selector, mono effects loop, preamp out, MIDI port, headphone input and connectors for locking the head to the cab  
**OPTIONS:** Available in ivory (as reviewed) or black  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** The 100-watt EVH 5150-III head (£1,762.80) and EVH 412 cab (£922.80)

### EVH 5150-III 212ST Cabinet

**ORIGIN:** Vietnam  
**PRICE:** £430.80  
**RATING:** 60 watts @ 16 ohms  
**DIMENSIONS:** 508 (h) x 457.2 (w) x 914mm (d)  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 27.2/60  
**SPEAKERS:** Two 30-watt Celestion Heritage 12-inch  
**CABINET:** 16mm  
**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** Tilt-back legs, mounting posts for amp head  
**OPTIONS:** Available in ivory or black  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** The 1 x 12 version costs £346.80  
**Fender GBI**  
**01342 331700**  
**[www.evhgear.com](http://www.evhgear.com)**

### Test results

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

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★

Van Halen's modern tone is easily recreated, though we found high-output pickups to be a little harsh