

# Power trio





Combining boutique features with a compact and practical format, Peavey's affordable new trio of Mini Heads proves good things come in small packages

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## PEAVEY VALVEKING 20 MH & CLASSIC 20 MH & 6505 MH £540, £595 & £595

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### What You Need To Know

#### 1 What are these mini heads all about, then?

Simple: three identically sized amps from Peavey, based on three very popular and distinct ranges with very different sounds.

#### 2 Which one should we buy?

The Classic 20 MH is Peavey's tribute to those vintage 50s American amps that shaped early electric blues and rock 'n' roll. The 6505 is modern rock and metal, while the ValveKing sits in the middle, with versatile tone to cover almost anything.

#### 3 Any tricks onboard?

Well, there's MSDI: Peavey's 'Microphone Simulated Direct Inject', which provides the sound of a real mic'd up cabinet with a balanced XLR output that can drive any live or studio desk, as well as a speaker defeat switch and ground lift. It's a great way of getting big tone onto a disc or out to a big audience with minimal hassle.

It seems that we guitar players can't get enough of small guitar amps. To underline that, Peavey has just released new versions of three of its most popular heads, in a new series called Mini Heads. The Classic and 6505 have all been redesigned with familiar-looking front panels and cabinet cosmetics, while sharing similar rear-panel features to the ValveKing

Micro head we reviewed a while back, creating a trio of small but very capable amps that are going to be just as handy on stage as they could be for home practice, recording or rehearsals.

Now part of the Mini Head range, the ValveKing 20 combines some serious boutique features at a very affordable price point. Inside its particle-board cabinet,





the electronics are printed circuit-board based, and laid out neatly in typical Peavey fashion. The front panel has a single input jack with controls for clean and lead gain, bass mid and treble, reverb level and master volume. There are buttons for channel select and gain boost, both of which can also be foot-switched. Between these last two is the ValveKing's clever 'Vari-Class' control, which continuously varies the dual-EL84 output stage operation from two-valve Class AB push-pull to single-ended pure Class A. Around the back, there's a speaker outlet with switchable impedance and a three-stage attenuator that varies the full 20-watt power rating down to five watts and one watt. Next to this is Peavey's MSDI output, which provides a balanced out with switchable speaker emulation, speaker defeat and ground lift, as well as a regular 3.5mm headphone socket. There's also a series effects loop, a USB recording output, and provision for a pair of two-button footswitches, to control channel, boost, reverb and effects loop selection.

The Classic 20 MH takes Peavey's long-running and highly regarded Classic series and reworks it for the Mini Head format. Again, we have a single input socket feeding a dual-channel preamp with shared EQ, and controls for clean volume, overdrive gain and master volume (using Peavey's old-style pre and post names), bass, mid, treble and reverb. The internal electronics layout and rear panel are identical to the ValveKing 20 MH, with the same speaker, attenuator, recording and headphones output, effects loop and footswitch functions, and the same dual-EL84 output stage.



1. The ValveKing's Vari-Class control continuously varies the output-stage operating mode from Class AB to single-ended pure Class A, reducing power output, thickening the tone and shifting the dynamic response. It's a unique, patented feature and very clever
2. TSI (far right on the front panel) stands for Tube Status Indicator and it's a handy visual check that your output valves are working okay, and also protects the amp in case of valve failure

Finally, the 6505 Mini Head is based on Peavey's flagship 6505 design, with the same gain structure and similar front panel features. These include separate rhythm and lead preamp and master volume controls, low, mid and high EQ, a bright switch on the rhythm channel, power stage presence and resonance, together with a footswitchable crunch mode for the rhythm channel. Rear-panel features are identical to the other two mini heads, with the same speaker, DI, loop and footswitch functions. Despite having significantly different sounds, all three heads have a similar 'family' look, as the cabinets are all the same size and share Peavey's typically high build and finish quality.

## The Rivals

**Orange's DT30H Dual Terror (£519) is a two-channel version of the Tiny Terror, delivering 30 watts from an all-valve circuit that can be switched to five and seven watts. Blackstar's versatile HT Studio 20 head (£429) features two channels and its Infinite Shape Feature control for the widest possible tonal range. Hughes & Kettner's TubeMeister 18H head (£499) has two channels, a backlit control panel, switchable output power and a Red Box DI circuit. For the money, it's arguably the strongest competitor in this sector**



### Sounds

The ValveKing 20 MH has one feature in particular that sets it apart: Vari-Class. A simple knob on the control panel takes the ValveKing's trick output stage from Class AB push-pull at one extreme to single-ended pure Class A at the other, with every variation in between, going from dynamic punch with a fast attack to smooth compression and a thicker midrange. It's a very versatile amp that sounds great for rock, metal or jazz. There's plenty of gain on tap to suit practically any guitar – you won't quite turn a regular-output Strat into a fire-breathing distortion monster, but you can get quite close. At the other extreme, the ValveKing is capable of some surprisingly lush, fat clean tones that work very nicely

for jazzier styles, especially with a dab of the onboard digital reverb. Teamed with a PAF-loaded Les Paul and running near pure Class A, the ValveKing 20 does a good job of translating the guitar's acoustic warmth and sustain into an excellent vintage jazz tone – the Les Paul guitar is practically synonymous with rock today, but it's worth remembering that Les himself had deep roots in jazz.

Next up, the Classic 20 MH has a more focused sonic palette. There's a punchier midrange and an edgier distortion tone, which team well with the dual-EL84 output stage – making a practically perfect platform for country, blues and classic rock. Dating back to 1991, the Classic range is one of Peavey's stalwarts and the tweed covering leaves you in no doubt as to the genres it's aimed at. Driven with the right guitar, the Classic can go from vintage Allman-era Southern rock to an excellent twang that'll inspire any country picker. Strat players can pull the heavier, Buddy Whittington-type of tone from it just as easily as the clarity of Stevie Ray, while for semi-acoustic players, the Classic is almost purpose-built for rockabilly and redneck jazz. Its frequency range is ideally matched with the P-90 and the slightly brighter humbucking tones of Gretsch's Filter'Tron, perfect for Brian Setzer or Danny Gatton styles, although the 20-watt output stage doesn't quite have enough clean headroom for live use, unless its mic'd up.

The 6505 is even more focused, aimed squarely at modern rock and metal players. It's a bang-up-to-date version of the amp formerly known as the 5150, a popular choice for rock and metal users all over

3. Peavey's Microphone Simulated Direct Interface provides a balanced output to desk or DAW, for live or studio use. It sounds very realistic, and has a handy speaker defeat, headphones socket and ground lift. It's featured on all three heads

4. The USB output is derived from the MSDI circuit and needs no special drivers; just plug in and start recording. The output level is calibrated to work with any attenuator setting and the speaker can be on or off



the world, and not just because of the Van Halen association. This amp's bone-crushing thick distortion is the product of a lot of preamp gain stages and a powerful resonance control that boosts the low-end response. While it has less than half the preamp valves of its full-sized big bro, it still sounds remarkably similar, with the same full bass response and OTT crunch sounds that eclipse most players' notions of a good metal lead sound. The 6505's lead channel squeezes out even more grind and sustain for a superlative rock and metal sound, although like the original, it takes some dialling in to achieve the best results.

All three amps impress with their similar back panel features: the MSDI output sounds quite realistic and delivers a good clean signal to live or studio desks, while the USB connector works faultlessly on our Win7 PC DAW. A good word is due for the built-in reverb, too, which sounds a lot more expensive than it is and easily frees up an outboard digital effect.

**Verdict**

Peavey's manufacturing and design expertise has been fully leveraged with these three heads; they look great and sound very impressive, with power and clean headroom to handle most smaller gigs, and studio-friendly features that make a huge difference when it comes to getting tracks down fast. The price is reasonably competitive, bearing in mind these are all real valve amps and all three heads look and sound anything but bargain basement.

For versatility, the ValveKing rules, with a tone that can easily cover almost any musical base, thanks to its clever Vari-Class control. Metal and modern-rock players should make a beeline for the 6505 with



its huge overdrive capability and lightning pick response, while the Classic is ideal for blues, country, and anything else under the 'Americana' label.

Whichever head you choose, you'll get the same clever rear-panel features, including the attenuator, MSDI and USB outputs, and it's these that give the Mini Head range such wide appeal. From beginner through to experienced pro, there's something here for almost everyone. Small is definitely big! **G**





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- 5. Smartly finished in tweed, the Classic 20 MH has the tone to match its distinctively vintage appearance
- 6. The 6505's rhythm channel has a crunch mode that adds a huge dose of extra filth. This function can be switched remotely if needed, giving nearly three-channel operation
- 7. The resonance control on the 6505's power amp boosts the low-end response



**PEAVEY VALVEKING 20 MH**

**PRICE:** £595  
**ORIGIN:** China  
**TYPE:** Valve preamp and power amp with solid-state rectifier  
**OUTPUT:** Maximum 20W RMS, switchable to 5W and 1W RMS  
**VALVES:** 3x 12AX7, 2x EL84  
**DIMENSIONS:** 185 (h) x 356 (w) x 197mm (d)  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 8/17  
**CABINET:** Particle board  
**CHANNELS:** 2  
**CONTROLS:** Clean volume, pre gain and post gain, bass, mid, treble, reverb  
**FOOTSWITCH:** 2-button LED footswitch supplied; can be used for channel/boost or reverb/effects loop  
**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** 3-position power reduction switch, speaker outlet with 8/16ohm switch. MSDI XLR output with headphones socket, speaker defeat and ground lift. Series effects loop, microphone simulated USB recording out  
**OPTIONS:** None

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**PROS** Very authentic vintage USA sounds, tailor-made for blues, rockabilly, redneck jazz and more

**CONS** A little more clean headroom would make the overdrive channel much more effective



**PEAVEY CLASSIC 20MH**

**PRICE:** £540  
**ORIGIN:** China  
**TYPE:** Valve preamp and power amp with solid-state rectifier  
**OUTPUT:** Maximum 20W RMS, switchable to 5W and 1W RMS  
**VALVES:** 3x 12AX7, 2x EL84  
**DIMENSIONS:** 185 (h) x 356 (w) x 197mm (d)  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 8/17  
**CABINET:** Particle board  
**CHANNELS:** 2  
**CONTROLS:** Clean volume, pre and post gain, bass, mid, treble, reverb  
**FOOTSWITCH:** 2-button footswitch supplied; can be used for channel/boost or reverb/effects loop  
**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** 3-position power reduction switch, speaker outlet with 8/16ohm switch. MSDI XLR output with headphones socket, speaker defeat and ground lift. Series effects loop, microphone simulated USB recording out  
**OPTIONS:** None

8/10

**PROS** A versatile tone with wide dynamic range that can be precisely controlled with Vari-Class

**CONS** Okay, it is cheaper. But the footswitch should be supplied as it is with the other two amps



**PEAVEY 6505 MH**

**PRICE:** £595  
**ORIGIN:** China  
**TYPE:** Valve preamp and power amp with solid-state rectifier  
**OUTPUT:** Maximum 20W RMS, switchable to 5W and 1W RMS  
**VALVES:** 3x 12AX7, 2x EL84  
**DIMENSIONS:** 185 (h) x 356 (w) x 197mm (d)  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 8/17  
**CABINET:** Particle board  
**CHANNELS:** 2  
**CONTROLS:** Rhythm pre gain, bright and crunch switches. Lead pre gain, low, mid and high EQ, rhythm post gain, lead post gain, reverb, resonance and presence  
**FOOTSWITCH:** 2-button LED footswitch supplied; can be used for channel/boost or reverb/effects loop  
**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** 3-position power reduction switch, speaker outlet with 8/16ohm switch. MSDI XLR output with headphones socket, speaker defeat and ground lift. Series effects loop, microphone simulated USB recording out  
**OPTIONS:** None

7/10

**PROS** Great sound for modern rock and metal, tons of distortion and feedback at conversation level

**CONS** Not as much dynamic punch from this smaller power stage means things can get a little indistinct