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Photography: Simon Lees

PEAVEY MINI HEADS ROUND-UP

Peavey's trio of mini-heads combine handy features for home and studio with a selection of tones fit for any occasion. Spoiled for choice? You bet...



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PEAVEY makes so many different kinds of products today, it's worth remembering that Hartley Peavey started his massively successful empire with guitar amps, and they're still the foundation of the firm's current catalogue. Smaller amps have become increasingly popular over the past decade, and Peavey currently offers a trio of particularly good-looking heads based on larger models from three of its most popular ranges: the 6505, Classic and ValveKing. All three amps share more or less the same dual EL84 output stage and rear-panel features, while the preamp voicings are very different – collectively covering just about every musical need.

The ValveKing 20 MH has Peavey's patented Variclass control, which continuously varies the output valves from push-pull class AB to single-ended pure class A operation, while the Classic 20 MH is tuned to deliver classic 50s Stateside tone. The 6505 MH, on the other hand, is gained to the max for devastating lead and crunch tones that take no prisoners. With identical cabinet dimensions, the three Mini Heads all look as though they come from the same family, even though the cosmetics are very different. Accurately cut particle board cabinets surround immaculately finished steel chassis that contain typically neat printed circuit boards. But do they sound as good as they look?

Smaller amps have become popular over the past decade



All three Mini Heads here are based on larger amps in Peavey's line

PEAVEY VALVEKING 20 MH £540

Maximum versatility

PEAVEY'S highly successful ValveKing range is all about putting boutique-level tone and features into the hands of players at a price that everyone can afford. Of the three, it's arguably the most versatile, and key to the ValveKing 20 MH's expanded range is the patented Variclass control, which was on the rear panel of the original amps, but moved to the front panel when it was re-issued. One simple control knob moves the ValveKing's output stage from 20 watts push-pull class AB to single-ended pure class A and around 10 watts output, with every shade in between.

Beside the Variclass control, the front panel features clean and drive channels with a shared EQ, together with a nifty digital reverb. We like the ValveKing's wide tonal and dynamic range, which goes from punchy fast response to smooth compression and thick but very

vocal midrange. The MSDI (Microphone Simulated Direct Interface) balanced, headphone and USB outputs do a great job of sounding just like a proper, mic'd-up cabinet, making it easy to get great sounds at practically conversation levels, if that's what you need.

At the other end of the volume scale, it's loud enough to handle small gigs and rehearsals, as long as you don't expect crystal-clear clean sounds. There's plenty of gain to produce singing Vai/Satriani-style ballad solo tones from the weediest of single coils, as well as a pretty impressive modern rock crunch, although it's not quite as fast to respond as the 6505. Alternatively, you can swap to the clean channel, plug in a hollowbody jazz guitar and you'll get that typical woody tone with just a tiny hint of drive favoured by many 50s bebop legends, like Wes Montgomery or Barney Kessel. Now, that's versatility.





PEAVEY CLASSIC 20 MH £595

Vintage US amp tone with modern features

THE Classic range is based on the early 1950s tweed amps that inspired Hartley Peavey to pick up a soldering iron. The Classic 20 MH has plenty of its own inspiration, with a sparkling yet ever so-slightly edgy clean sound that flatters single coils and humbuckers, alongside a superb drive channel that's perfect for blues, country and classic rock leads. Plug a decent Les Paul in, and you get superb Southern rock tones, while put a Strat into the clean channel is great for mimicking SRV or John Mayer. Alternatively, pick up that hollowbody again, and the clean channel's hint of an edge is perfect for Setzer-inspired rockabilly.

We wish this head had just a touch more volume available, to add the punch needed for good country picking tones, but plugged into a decent 2x12 with the treble wound

up, the clean channel still nails that Tele twang or Strat quack, with a nice medium response that makes notes jump off the fretboard with minimal effort. The shared three-band EQ has slightly less range than the other two heads, however it's perfectly dialed in, and bass, mid and treble all interact smoothly, with no nasty peaks.

The onboard digital reverb is the same on all three models and sounds superb – easily handling the job of an outboard unit for recording. Speaking of the studio, the three-position attenuator makes it easy to dial in exactly the right amount of power amp drive and the results are very impressive, whether you use a regular mic or the MSDI outputs. It's all wrapped up in the tweed cosmetics, which – like the tone – strike just the right balance between vintage and modern.

PEAVEY 6505 MH £595

Small size, but massive tone and drive

THE 6505 MH is the reduced version of Peavey's face-melting 6505 head, as used by Eddie Van Halen in its previous 5150 incarnation. However, unlike many signature heads, the 6505 took on a life of its own, and has since become the go-to weapon for many modern rock and metal guitar-slingers. Can the mini version possibly deliver the thrust, grind and scream of its big brother?

Despite having fewer preamp valves, the answer is definitely yes. While the 6505 MH sounds great with a single-coil pickup, you need a good throaty humbucker with plenty of mid-punch to really get the best from it. Hooked up with a Seymour Duncan JB, the 6505 MH's lead channel comes alive, with a singing, vocal sustain, balanced midrange and snarling treble. The resonance control works a treat to

accent the bass frequencies, adding a punch that will easily deceive you into thinking this amp is much more powerful than 20 watts. The clever dual-mode rhythm channel can be foot-switched from clean to crunch, for quasi-three-channel operation. Meanwhile, the footswitchable effects loop adds a lot of extra flexibility to all three amps, but the 6505 benefits in particular, where a dab of graphic EQ can really sweeten the midrange for killer solo sounds.

Elsewhere, the attenuator makes it easy to get a cranked up tone at any volume, but don't get too carried away, as the huge gain on tap can easily turn to mush if overdone. Get it right, and practically any modern rock, metal or thrash sound is easy to dial in. Plug into a decent 4x12, and the 6505 MH's 20 watts are loud and proud enough for any small to medium gig. >>>



VERDICT

PEAVEY'S TRIO of mini-heads combine all the modern features you might need on the rear panel, with a tone and look for any player. Metalheads will love the 6505 20 MH's snarling aggression and super-fast pick response, meanwhile the Classic 20 MH is perfectly suited to anything under the

'Americana' label, from rockabilly to blues, classic rock and more. The ValveKing 20 MH's wide tonal range is a perfect do-it-all choice for the modern player, with tons of drive and a great clean tone, too. Most importantly, whichever you choose, the all-valve tones will leave you inspired.

PEAVEY VALVEKING 20 MH £540

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: All-valve head

OUTPUT: 20W, switchable to 5W and 1W

VALVES: 3x12AX7, 2x EL84

CONTROLS: Clean volume, lead gain, gain boost switch, bass, mid, treble, reverb. Variclass and master volume; 3-position power reduction switch

SOCKETS: Input, speaker out w/ 8/16-ohm switch. MSDI XLR output with headphones socket, speaker defeat and ground lift. Series effects loop, USB recording out

WEIGHT: 8kg

DIMENSIONS: [HxWxD]
185 x 356 x 197mm

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| SUMMARY | FEATURES | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| | SOUND QUALITY | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| | VALUE FOR MONEY | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| | BUILD QUALITY | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| | PLAYABILITY | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| OVERALL RATING | ★★★★★ | | | | | | |



PEAVEY CLASSIC 20 MH £595

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: All-valve head

OUTPUT: 20W, switchable to 5W and 1W

VALVES: 3x12AX7, 2x EL84

CONTROLS: Clean volume, pre-gain and post-gain, bass, mid, treble, reverb; 3-position power reduction switch

SOCKETS: Input, speaker out w/ 8/16-ohm switch. MSDI XLR output with headphones socket, speaker defeat and ground lift. Series effects loop, USB recording out

WEIGHT: 8kg

DIMENSIONS: [HxWxD]
185 x 356 x 197mm

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| SUMMARY | FEATURES | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
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| | PLAYABILITY | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| OVERALL RATING | ★★★★★ | | | | | | |



PEAVEY 6505 MH £595

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: All-valve head

OUTPUT: 20W, switchable to 5W and 1W

VALVES: 3x12AX7, 2x EL84

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; 3-position power reduction switch

SOCKETS: Input, speaker out w/ 8/16-ohm switch. MSDI XLR output with headphones socket, speaker defeat and ground lift.

Series effects loop, USB recording out

WEIGHT: 8kg

DIMENSIONS: [HxWxD]
185 x 356 x 197mm

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|----------------|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SUMMARY | FEATURES | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| | SOUND QUALITY | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| | VALUE FOR MONEY | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| | BUILD QUALITY | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| | PLAYABILITY | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| OVERALL RATING | ★★★★★ | | | | | | |

