





PEAVEY 3120

Versatile rock all-rounder or fire-breathing monster with more grunt than a lorry full of pigs? Hayden Hewitt takes a look at the Peavey 3120

Since the launch of the 5150 Van Halen signature head, Peavey has become synonymous with high-gain valve amplifiers. Looking through the current range you will see the 6505 series, Satriani's JSX signature head and now the 3120 – a three-channel, all-valve, 120-watt head.

Unashamedly aimed at the rock and metal market, the 3120 has already attracted the likes of Soulfly noise merchant Max Cavalera (interviewed this month on page 20) and hyperspeed shredder Rusty Cooley. This could well give you the impression that the 3120 is a bit of a one-trick pony, but in a sector of the market not exactly lacking in great amplifiers, Peavey is out to show it can cover a lot of sonic ground with this valve head.

Pre & Power Amp

The front panel is a clear indication of what you are going to get with this amplifier. A clean, uncluttered layout gives you access to three independent channels with individual EQ and gain controls. When it's all too common to find

a wealth of flashing lights, buttons and switches on a modern multichannel amp, this really is quite refreshingly simple.

The cabinet itself follows a 'none more black' design brief. Shrouded in black Tolex, with black corner protectors and a black hexagonal grill, the only relief comes from the gold/brass-coloured lettering and oval Peavey logo, adding further to the whole 'down to business' vibe.

Around the back you'll find the standard complement of two speaker outs (switchable for 4, 8 or 16 ohms) plus some very welcome more advanced features. The effects loop offers level controls for both the send and return, and there's a line out with its own level control and some handy bias test terminals. There's also the rather intriguing damping switch with tight, mid and loose settings, which affects the way your amplifier interacts with the speakers.

Inside, and clearly visible through the protective mesh at the front and rear, you'll see four 12AX7 valves for the preamp and phase inverter, and four EL34s over in the power amp. The 3120 allows you to



The Peavey 3120 is easy to use, with a straightforward, businesslike vibe

swap these power amp valves for the 6L6 variety should you choose to do so, giving you a tighter, less 'British' tonality and a different mid-range character. As ever, make sure you have a qualified amp tech take care of the re-biasing for you because it's never fun to hear your brand-new amplifier eat its own power transformer!

Sounds

As tempting as it is to go straight for the lead channel to see if we can strip the paint from the walls, we're going to start with the clean channel. In the past, clean channels on many high-gain amplifiers had a habit of being something of a disappointment, often sounding one-dimensional and lacklustre. Here the clean channel is a very pleasant and versatile experience.

With the channel volume set below nine o'clock we get a superclean tone even with beefy humbuckers. Each chord is crystal clear and notes pop nicely. If you only use the clean sound for intros or warming up this might be where

you stop looking and call it done. For the rest of us, however, there are some real tonal gems tucked away in this channel.

Winding up the wick to around 12 o'clock adds some beef to single-coil tones, with the neck pickup coming across with a beautiful fullness that makes chord work a joy. With humbuckers, rolling the guitar's volume knob back a touch gives us a rich, bell-like tone that oozes smoothness. Above 12 o'clock, we are rewarded with some wonderful touch sensitivity and dynamics. Rolling through chords and scales we can push the amp into overdrive by simply playing harder, and the break-up never sounds forced or harsh. Turning up the master volume improves things further by bringing in more of the power stage to take off the edges of our tone.

The rhythm channel is where this amp really starts to show its teeth. With the preamp gain set at its lowest we get a pseudo classic-rock tone. We say 'pseudo' simply



The 3120's Rhythm and Lead channels have a huge amount of gain on tap



PEAVEY 3120

Price: £1,208

Built in: USA

Type: 3-channel valve head

Power: 120 watts

Valves: 4 x 12AX7, 4 x EL34

Features: Clean, rhythm & lead channels with independent volume, bass, middle & treble controls, plus gain controls for lead & rhythm channels; master volume control, tight/mid/loose damping switch, effects loop with send & return volume controls, line out with level control, bias test terminals, footswitch input, 2 x speaker outputs (4/8/16 ohms)
Footswitch: 3-button footswitch included (lead/rhythm, clean, effects loop on/off)

Dimensions: 279(h) x 673(w) x 279(d) mm

Weight: 23kg (51lb)

CONTACT DETAILS

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www.peavey-eu.com

GB VERDICT

GOLD STARS

- ★ Outstanding tones from all three channels
- ★ Quietness of operation even when flooded with gain
- ★ It will hurt people if you let it!

BLACK MARKS

- Lack of a presence control

IDEAL FOR...

Anything from rock to full-on metal

GB RATING



because your classic tones will still have the modern sheen that is ever-present in this amp. The 3120 doesn't really do 'vintage' and seems very proud of it.

Push the gain up to as little as three or four on the dial and we are only one turn of the mid knob away from either hard rock or vintage thrash. The gain on tap here seems almost limitless – indeed, pushing it all the way to 10 sees us floating effortlessly on a sea of the stuff, with harmonics screaming out wherever you want.

It's at this point you may notice something else rather odd – the silence. Peavey has included a noise reduction circuit on the rhythm and lead channels that is incredibly effective. Considering the amount of gain available it is almost eerily quiet when you stop playing, yet the circuit never cuts in on your sustained notes, or chops sound off in an unnatural manner.

Considering the insanity that is the rhythm channel, you might be wondering where Peavey could go with the lead channel. The answer is simple. More! The tone on offer has a slightly scooped character here, as if the whole amp has hunkered down ready to launch itself into a violent assault. And it gets very violent indeed. Dialling in a modern metal tone is simplicity itself, and with the damping set to loose, the bass pushed up and the mids scooped slightly, you really are going to be digging into the more brutal areas of the genre.

Even with all this sonic chaos going on, individual notes still retain clarity and precision, and it all still sounds wonderfully musical without dipping into square-edged hardness or sounding forced.

The damping switch, which essentially determines how swiftly the amplifier controls speaker cone movement, might be seen as replacing the resonance control found on other Peavey amps. The 'tight' setting makes everything sound fairly dry and crisp, whereas 'loose' gives the impression of your amplifier being even louder and throws out enough bottom end to make your legs flap, let alone your trousers.

On an amp so well equipped, the only thing we really miss is a presence control, particularly on the rhythm and lead channels, where precise adjustment of the very top end would be useful at higher volumes.

Conclusion

When we unboxed this amplifier, we expected brutality and aggression, and we're certainly not disappointed on that score. But this is also an amplifier capable of covering all the rock bases, with a gem of a clean channel. If we were to find a criticism of the amp it would be the lack of a presence control on the rhythm and lead channels. On occasion we find ourselves wanting to just add a little top-end sparkle to a tone and there was no way of doing so, that is apart from using the damping switch which changes a lot more than just the top end.

For the most part, however, we could live without it, given this amp's abilities. Whether you are looking for a great rock all-rounder or you simply want to erase the facial features of every audience member in the first three rows, you really do owe it to yourself to give the 3120 a whirl. **GB**

ALTERNATIVES OTHERS TO CHECK OUT



Mesa Boogie Triple Rectifier

£2,400

Iconic high-gain madness meets huge versatility. Pricy, but definitely worth it to those with the wonga to throw around.



Marshall JVM410H

£1,028.99

A really versatile amp which aims to capture some of Marshall's most famous tones as well as adding some modern twists to the mix.



Peavey Valve King 100

£422

A lower-priced alternative, with three channels and oodles of gain, though the overall tone is less polished. A great introduction to high-gain stacks.