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Peavey ValveKing VK112 combo



With features you won't find on some models costing twice as much, Peavey hasn't undercut the competition, it's comprehensively blown it away

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Peavey ValveKing VK112 combo £349

Peavey's awesome ValveKing range is great news for everyone – apart from other manufacturers, that is by Nick Guppy

It was only a matter of time before one of the major players in guitar amplification weighed in with a Chinese-made product and Peavey's new ValveKing is the amp range that everyone's been talking about. Combining cool boutique-inspired

features with pricing that will make almost every other amp manufacturer wince, the ValveKing has generated more than interest. So, apart from the price tag, what's all the fuss about? Let's take a look at the ValveKing VK112 combo and find out.



The ValveKing range is designed in Meridian, USA, but made offshore in China. As we've recently seen with other Chinese-made products, this is no longer something that should be viewed with disdain or doubt – yes it's built to a price, but the standard of construction is still what we would expect from Peavey.

The cabinet is neatly clad in tough black vinyl with metal corner protectors, and a smart silver check grille-cloth covers the ValveKing's special 12-inch loudspeaker. The electronics are contained within a sturdy open-tray steel chassis on four printed circuit boards – one large PCB holding all the main preamp and power supply components, another for the VK112's pair of 6L6 output valves and 12AX7 driver, with two smaller boards for mains and rear panel connections. These boards aren't through-plated, but they're robust and well-supported on metal standoffs – internal wiring is minimal and neatly routed, while the valve bases are all chassis mounted, which makes replacement easier. At this price it's a good standard of construction that inspires confidence.

The ValveKing's front panel is easy to navigate. There's a pair of high and low sensitivity input sockets feeding two channels with separate three-band EQs. Next to the clean channel's single volume control are a pair of

PEAVEY VK112 COMBO	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

- **WE LIKED** Great range of sounds; unbelievably low price; texture control adds considerable versatility
- **WE DISLIKED** A little over-gained for some; reverb could do with some taming

pushbutton switches for toggling the amp's bright function and changing channels, while another pair of buttons next to the overdrive channel's gain control operate preset distortion and volume boost functions that can be used separately or together as required. The front panel tour finishes with a pair of jacks for the series effects loop and a master level control for the short Belton reverb spring.

However, the ValveKing's real secret weapon is around the back in the shape of a knob Peavey calls the texture control. This is a new patent-pending feature that simultaneously varies the power stage's sensitivity, response and 'break-up' point. With the texture control set fully clockwise, the ValveKing is working in normal push-pull Class A/B operation. Then as you rotate the control anti-clockwise, one half of the output stage is progressively subtracted from the circuit, while the driver valve's gain is increased and its



The ValveKing's speaker is a special design 1 x 12

low frequency response altered to complement the change from odd to even-order harmonic emphasis. At fully anti-clockwise, the ValveKing effectively transforms from push-pull class A/B to single-ended Class A, with around 60 per cent less output power and a completely different character. This clever feature can be fine-tuned with a resonance switch that varies low frequency response by altering the amp's damping factor. The rear panel is also home to a handy extension speaker jack and a socket for the footswitch, which changes channels →

The rivals

Vox AC30CC 1 x 12	£649
Randall RG50TC 1 x 12	£499
Marshall DSL401 1 x 12	£539

Vox's AC30 Custom Classic range has cool styling with some neat boutique features, but this Chinese-made AC30 is comparatively pricey and its somewhat narrow tonal range means it's most likely to suit Vox enthusiasts. Randall's RG50TC was a strong performer in our recent review and sounds superb – it's easily capable of out-classing some amps that cost twice as much, however the ValveKing's pricing means the Randall doesn't look as good as it did in the value for money stakes. Marshall's stalwart DSL401 has been the beginner's first choice for many years, but is now looking decidedly tired and overpriced in this very competitive sector of the market. If you want the Marshall sound and badge then it won't disappoint, but there's a lot more choice now and the impact of Chinese-made pricing can't be ignored



PEAVEY VALVEKING VK112 COMBO

PRICE: £349
ORIGIN: USA designed, Chinese built
TYPE: All valve two-channel Class A/AB combo with solid-state rectification
OUTPUT: Variable from approx 30-50W RMS
VALVES: Three ECC83/12AX7, two 6L6 power amp
DIMENSIONS: 460 (h) x 540 (w) x 260mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 21/44
CABINET: MDF with ply baffle
LOUDSPEAKER: One 12-inch Peavey ValveKing special design
CHANNELS: Two
CONTROLS: Clean channel: volume, bass mid, treble. Overdrive channel: gain, volume, bass, mid, treble, master reverb level.
FOOTSWITCH: Two-button footswitch changes channels, toggles preset volume/distortion boost function on overdrive channel
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Bright switch, footswitchable volume and boost presets for overdrive channel, series effects loop, texture control (varies power stage from Class A/B push-pull to Class A single ended), tight/loose resonance control, extension speaker jack (disconnects internal driver)
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: The 100-watt ValveKing VK212 combo also includes variable resonance and presence controls for just £449, while you can have the ValveKing VK100 head for just £349 with a matching VK412 cabinet for £249 – that's a 100W half stack for under £600.

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→ and activates or defeats the boost functions preset on the front panel.

SOUNDS: Switched on, the ValveKing is quiet and hum-free – always a good sign. The clean channel has a warm, rounded character that's especially friendly to single-coil guitars – we got the best results with all three tone controls set around the halfway mark. The bright switch really works, so if your axe has mid-range-heavy humbuckers you'll approve of the extra twang this feature injects. Push the clean channel's volume control beyond the halfway mark, add a little reverb and you'll get a smooth overdrive that's good for blues or country soloing and easily controlled from the guitar. Back off a little and it cleans up nicely for chords, or push it up for lead breaks.

Distortion fiends won't be disappointed with the ValveKing's USA-flavoured overdrive channel. Even without using the boost feature there's a ton of filth on tap, while engaging it will take even the weediest of pickups into almost endless sustain. Some players may even find this channel slightly over-gained. It's still great fun to play unaccompanied with extreme distortion, however, in a live band context there's some loss of

definition with the controls maxed out. But apart from a few very expensive exceptions, almost all ultra-high gain valve amps do this and it's one reason why many metal players use solid-state for their overdrive requirements.

It doesn't detract from the great sounds that can be pulled from the ValveKing using more realistic control settings. We actually found the best results with the gain level set to around 4. At this low-ish setting the ValveKing is still far from restrained, with plenty of bite and sustain to satisfy for ripping blues or rock solos, while the boost and

volume presets add the versatility of a three-channel set-up without any of the complication. You can use the unboosted sound as a powerful crunch channel, then hit the footswitch for extra distortion, volume or both to punch your

solos through the mix. The texture control is very powerful and at gig levels it makes a profound difference to the way the ValveKing responds – you can really hear the change in headroom as the knob is turned, along with the shift in character from class A/B bold and punchy to thick and compressed Class A. Combine this with the resonance control and you've got a lot of tone that stays useful from almost bedroom level up to indecently loud –

The texture control is very powerful and at gig levels it makes a profound difference to the way the ValveKing responds – you can really hear the change in headroom

easily enough to cope with small to medium no-PA gigs.

The reverb level's range is more than most people will need and, while it tended to get a little splashy at higher settings on both channels, at around one quarter it adds a nice halo to single notes and chords.

Verdict

The ValveKing is a great design from Peavey with some unique features that not only set it apart from the crowd but also make it an amp that new players won't quickly outgrow. Experienced players and professionals should also make a point of checking this amp out: it's solidly built, versatile and quick to dial in, and the low noise threshold makes it equally handy in the studio, where the Class A end of the texture control's range can be used to get blistering hot overdrive at fairly painless volume levels. And, if any more persuasion were needed, there's the price. At just under £350 for this 1 x 12 combo version, Peavey hasn't undercut the competition, it's comprehensively blown it away. Remember, this is an all-valve amp with features you won't find on some models costing twice as much. It's brilliant value for money and, for the moment at least, we reckon the ValveKing is easily the best entry level valve amp money can buy. **G**

Peavey ValveKing VK112

Guitarist RATING



Fans of distortion will certainly not be disappointed with the ValveKing's overdrive channel