

PEAVEY VYPYR 15, 30 & 75 £85, £159 & £249
GUITAR AMPS

Scale models

Peavey launches a two-fanged attack on the digital modelling amplifier market. Will you bite? *by Mick Taylor*



PHOTOGRAPHY BY NEIL GODWIN



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What we want to know

- 1 What? Why?**
Keenly priced digital modelling combos with huge processing power and a USB digital audio output (albeit not on the 15 and 30). Why? Because Line 6 and Vox sell tons of the things, and Peavey has the clout to take a big part of that market.
- 2 Is there anything new here?**
Peavey is claiming twice the processing power of its nearest rivals, courtesy of 32-bit floating-point SHARC processors, alongside Peavey's TransTube technology for analogue distortion.
- 3 Who's going to buy one?**
Anyone who wants a fully functioned, multi-sound amplifier. Boutique, dream tone machines they're not, but for home use, practice and jamming, you really can't go wrong.

Peavey doesn't do things by halves. The Mississippi-based company's dynamic has always been about providing widely available, quality, affordable musicians' tools. In fact it's hard to turn up a guitar player who hasn't owned, borrowed or been provided with a Peavey amp at some point down the line, with models such as the Bandit and Classic series ubiquitous in gigging and rehearsing circles. So with great gusto, and a reported \$10m investment, Peavey introduces Vypyr: a huge, size-11 step into the world of digital modelling guitar amplification.

You might argue that the big P is a bit late to the game, but having partnered with Damage Control in 2007 – a company that was set up by ex-Line 6 bods – Peavey found it suddenly had access to a mine of modelling know-how. Married with the Meridian giant's considerable experience in the traditional amp market, it was surely the obvious way forward. Let's see where they've ended up...

Vypyr 15, 30 and 75

The new Vypyr range is comprehensive, beginning with the 15-, 30-, 75-watt models that

we have on review, plus a 100-watt stereo 2 x 12 format and, interestingly, 60 Tube and 120 Tube models with valve power stages. There's a standard feature set in terms of amp and effects models on all but the 15-watter, while the bigger amps get USB 2.0 audio out (75, 100, Tube 60 Tube, 120 Tube) and the PowerSponge attenuator (75 and 100).

The review models hail from China to help keep prices down. Cabinets are particle board and almost totally open-backed which, without any valves dangling down and a very space-efficient steel chassis to house the electronics, make it all feel very sparse. The upside is that carrying them is a doddle – they're very light.

Stylistically, Peavey has gone for shaped plastic panels on the speaker grille that say 'bat' more than 'snake' to us. In any case, they are distinctive and fit well with Hartley Peavey's spiky logo – probably the most recognised brand in all of the gigging and performing world. So far so expected for mass-produced Far Eastern amps, but what's really interesting is on the inside, as Peavey is claiming twice the processing power of its nearest rivals. The 32-bit floating-point

SHARC processors take care of the digital side of things, leaving much of the distortion duties to analogue circuitry.

On power up, the LED position markers on every pot dance around like an amp possessed – Peavey is quick to point out this has no practical application other than letting you know its on and, more importantly, attracting people to the Vypyr's charms in music stores. As soon as you plug in, it all stops and you can get down to WYSIWYG business. You can disable the light show if it annoys you, but we like it!

Common to the whole range are 12 digital models of classic and not-so classic amplifiers through the years, each with a 'clean' and 'dirty' setting. The amps modelled range from the expected Fenders, Marshalls, Vox and Boogie Rectifier, through to Krankenstein, Diezel and Peavey's own 6505, JSX and XXX models (download the manual at www.peavey.com if you want a full list and detailed descriptions). Accessing them is a doddle: simply turn the amp 'encoder' as Peavey calls it (we'll stick with knob, eh?) to the model you require and push it to toggle between clean (green LED) and dirty (red LED) modes.

Pushing and holding the amp knob fires up the onboard chromatic tuner: neat. The amp model LEDs tell you what note you're at, the effects knob LEDs go left and right for flat and sharp respectively, then all light up when you're on the money.



12 amp models, each with a clean and dirty setting. This is just the pre plug-in light show

Also common to the whole range is the effects knob, offering 11 selections including chorus, tremolo and a nice slapback echo; also a flanger, phaser, rotary speaker, octaver, envelope filter, reverse delay and the looper function (although you must have a Sanpera foot controller to use that). On the Vypyr 15, there is no looper, so you get a Tube Screamer model instead. Selecting effects is dead easy and you can edit the sounds by pushing the knob in. Once you're in edit mode, the pre-gain and low pots become the two most obvious parameters for your selected effect. So for example, if you have a tremolo effect selected, the editable parameters are speed and depth, just as they should be.

Reverb and delay are also a feature of every amp in the range. In edit mode the mid and high pots give you control over delay time and repeats (there's also a tiny tap tempo function under the effects knob: excellent). The post-gain control adjusts reverb depth. Both effects are easy to use and sound good, if not exactly up there with '65 Twin Reverb or Fulltone Tube Tape Echo: you've no right to expect either at this price.

On every model except the 15, there are additional effects available via the stompboxes knob. These include modelled versions of a Tube Screamer-style overdrive, analogue flanger, phaser and octave generator, fuzz, compressor, ring modulator and more. When selecting one, you're effectively putting a pedal in front of the amp. Editing the stompbox sounds is the same process as the effects, and once you get your head around that, accessing and setting up stompboxes, amp models and effects is quick and easy via the front panel alone. You can then store up to 12 sounds, arranged in three banks of four, and select them via the mini switches under the amp knob. To save your own sounds, simply set them up on the amp, then press and hold one of the preset buttons, just like a car radio as Peavey helpfully points out.

As for using effects together, Peavey says you can have three effects at once on the 15 (one from the effects knob, delay and reverb). On the rest of the range it is five, adding one selection from the stompboxes knob, plus – as long as you've bought either the Sanpera I or II foot controller – wah or the onboard looper. The



It doesn't normally look like this: once you plug in, the LEDs give you what-you-see-is-what-you-get control

looper offers around 30 seconds of loop/record/overdub time, and enables you to change patches/sounds while you're building loops: neat. The Vypyrs aren't designed to be used with other footswitches; instead the bespoke Sanperas enable you to store up to a whopping 400 sounds, and add expression pedal control for volume, wah and other parameters. The Sanpera II is the biggie with the fullest feature set, with two expression pedals. Guitarist had the chance to use both at the official product launch a month or two back. We were impressed with the ruggedness and functionality and, while none were supplied for review, we'd strongly recommend buying one with your Vypyr. Please note: the Sanpera controllers do not work with the Vypyr 15.

Other goodies include a speaker-simulated headphone out on a mini jack, an aux in so you can plug your iPod/whatever in and, on the 75, a USB 2.0 interface enabling you to connect your amp directly to a computer for direct recording. It doesn't need any drivers – just plug it in and your computer should detect it. Be aware, however, that there's no standalone functionality: it needs to be selected as a USB audio device in your recording software. We tried it on a PC using Cubase Studio 4 and after some faffing about getting it to recognise the Vypyr, it does work. If you're not well versed in switching audio devices, routing and monitoring paths in your recording software, however, it will cause you some

The Rivals

Line 6 Spider III 15, 30 & 75 £82.25-£233.83

Line 6 is the market leader in amp modelling, and its Spider III series is the latest evolution of the core line. Has half as many amp models as the new Peaveys, not as many effects and no USB out. Foot controllers are the FBV Express (£86.95) and FBV Shortboard (£269.08)



Vox Valvetronix AD 15VT, 30VT & 50VT £139-£259

In many players' minds, Vox makes the best sounding and feeling modelling amps thanks to its ValveReactor circuit. VT amps have 11 different amp models and 11 effects although more limited preset/switching options. The existing VC12 footswitch is about to be superseded.



Roland Cube 20X, 30X & 60 £119-£219

Roland is the sleeping giant with modelling amps. The Cubes have a very simple top panel and offer a much slimmer set of sounds than Peaveys. The sounds they do have are good, however, thanks to Roland's COSM technology. Footswitching options are limited compared with others: you get only channel switch, delay/reverb and effect on/off.





headaches. We had two guitar journo and two music technology experts on the case and came away deciding the speaker-simulated, direct/headphone output is much less hassle for recording. Using a full-sized jack would make more sense though – mini jacks need adaptors for guitar leads and that puts strain on the socket, so proceed with caution. If you do decide to go the USB route, the main speaker is muted with the headphone out active so you can monitor what you're playing.

Oh, and we should just mention that the master volume goes to 13. Well, it's three louder, isn't it?

Sounds: amp models

In general terms the amps differ as you might expect, sounding progressively bigger, more open and with more headroom as you

up the power rating. The surprise is the 15 which, despite its small cabinet and eight-inch speaker, manages not to sound boxy at all.

While the modelled sounds don't feel or react much like the amps on which they're based, the sounds themselves are very good from a listening perspective. The Dlx (Fender Deluxe) model sounds a little more middly and gainy than the Twn (Fender Twin) model for example; the Rec (Mesa Dual Rectifier) has a more cascaded heavy gain and slight mid-scoop compared with the Plxi (Marshall 'Plexi') model, as you'd expect. To our ears the 6505 model is the pick of the high-gain models, perhaps not surprising as it's Peavey's number one rock son.

The best bit is that you can have all these sounds at micro-volumes. You can be Jimmy Page for a morning, while the neighbours



The little 15-watter easily has enough clout to let those neighbours know exactly what you're doing...

are none the wiser – try doing that with a Marshall Super Lead stack! Turned back up, the little 15-watter easily has enough clout to let those neighbours know exactly what you're doing, while the 75 will just about cut it with a normal two-guitar, bass and drums band. The 30 doesn't have the projection to get through a spirited drummer, but for backing track-based and quieter gigs it'll do fine.

All three manage to hold on to their cleanest tones up to maximum volume, which can be an odd experience if you're used to natural break-up in an amp. If you want more break up, just select the next channel or model. It's all here and it's to Peavey's credit that the quality of the Vypyr's light and medium-gain sounds are infinitely better than digital modelling's first serious attempts a decade or so ago. We should never take that for granted.

Like a lot of modelling amps that sound great at lower volumes, it's all too easy to overdo the bottom-end at medium and higher levels. There's tons of bass so you need to dial a lot of it out to avoid a big woofy mess at performance levels, especially with high gain sounds. And in that respect, ultimate, maximum gain metal does lose tightness and note definition at performance volumes, but it'd be a bit much to expect anything more of the totally open-backed cabinets and modest power ratings on offer here.

The 15- and 75-watt amps on review are very late-stage prototypes and suffer significant background hiss when the master is above three. The 30 is a full production model, however, and is pretty much silent: proof, Peavey tells us, that the noise issue is ironed out in amps destined for stores. A different kind of noise consideration is the somewhat aggressive noise reduction circuitry in the 75-watter that can cut in unsympathetically to decaying notes or light pick touches. There's no such trouble on the 30 or 15, however, and nor will there be in amps destined for shops, according to Peavey.

Sounds: effects

The Vypyr's effects, both stompboxes and post-preamp effects, are generally excellent. A good start point is to try approximating famous tones, so selecting Analog Phase and the red Plxi channel (or 6505 for that matter), for example, puts you immediately in Van Halen mood. In that respect the world is your sonic oyster: whether it's Andy Summers-style delay and modulation, a bit of SRV rotary speaker, sixties surf shimmers or full-on Zakk Wylde shred, the Vypyr does the lot. Whether the TubeScrm model, for example, sounds or feels ultimately like a good Ibanez TS-9 or 808 is academic. What it does is give a swathe of mid-rich, sustaining



drive that you'd associate with a TS-style sound. That instantly right-ballpark factor is true of all the effects on offer.

The XR Wild and X Boost stompbox models are well worth a demo, adding lots of aggression and lively boosted amp feel to proceedings and here, with a medium-gain amp model and a decent guitar, the Vypyr's start to breath a little more, feeling at their most responsive and natural under your fingers. And just try not grinning when playing psyched-out weirdness with the reverse delay, or doubled parts using the octaver: hours of fun.

Verdict

Any guitar amp that really gets the juices flowing among players usually has a heart of hot glass. We're not sure any digital amp has much heart to speak of, but they do have a colossal, Tefal-sized brain that's infinitely more use for jamming, practice and all-round fun – this reviewer would choose a Vypyr 30 for home use over, say, a Matchless DC-30 any day. The amp models give a good flavour of their inspirations as do the effects, and they're all dead easy to access. Value? The effects alone, if you bought separate pedals, would run to thousands.

Better than a Line 6 Spider? Well, Peavey may claim better technology and there are certainly more modelled sounds in the Vypyr, but it'd be a brave person who'd say with confidence that there's much in it tonally. Like the other modelling amps out there – and whatever any of the companies claim – there's still a big gulf in feel, dynamics and projection compared with a quality valve amp for live use. Yet as a practice, rehearsal, home recording and learning-about-sounds tool, you can't go wrong. Tons of good sounds, very affordable. What's not to like? 📺

The Bottom Line

Peavey Vypyr
15, 30 & 75

We like: Huge range of tones; great price; easy to use

We dislike: Need the Sanpera footswitch to use the looper; USB functionality is limited

Guitarist says: Easily up there with the best digital modelling amps. Certain to be popular



Peavey Vypyr 15

PRICE: £85
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Digital modelling guitar combo
OUTPUT: 15 watts
DIMENSIONS: 380 (h) 425 (w) x 235mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 7.5/16.5
CABINET: Particle board
SPEAKER: 1 x eight-inch Peavey 'custom voiced'
AMP CHANNELS/MODELS: 4 'channels' 24 amp channel models (12 different models, each with clean and dirty modes).
EFFECTS: 11 rack models
CONTROLS: Amp, effects, pre gain, low, mid, high, post gain, master
FOOTSWITCH: n/a
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Chromatic tuner, tap tempo, headphone output, aux input
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Vypyr 30 and 75 (as reviewed). The 100W 2 x 12 is £349. There are two valve power amp Vypyr's: the 60 Tube and 120 Tube – prices TBC
Peavey Electronics Ltd
01536 461234
www.peavey-eu.com

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Peavey Vypyr 30

PRICE: £159
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Digital modelling guitar combo
OUTPUT: 30 watts
DIMENSIONS: 450 (h) 535 (w) x 255mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 14.75/32.5
CABINET: Particle board
SPEAKER: 1 x 12-inch Peavey 'custom voiced'
AMP CHANNELS/MODELS: 4 'channels' 24 amp channel models (12 different models, each with clean and dirty modes)
EFFECTS: 11 stompbox models, 11 'rack' models
CONTROLS: Stompboxes, amp, effects, pre gain, low, mid, high, post gain, master
FOOTSWITCH: Peavey Sanpera I (£49) or Sanpera II (£99) floorboards
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Chromatic tuner, headphone out, aux input
OPTIONS: Onboard looper requires Sanpera I or II footswitch
RANGE OPTIONS: See Vypyr 15

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Peavey Vypyr 75

PRICE: £249
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Digital modelling guitar combo
OUTPUT: 75 watts
DIMENSIONS: 505 (h) 590 (w) x 285mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 16.5/36.5
CABINET: Particle board
SPEAKER: 1 x 12-inch Peavey 'custom voiced'
AMP CHANNELS/MODELS: 4 'channels' 24 amp channel models (12 different models, each with clean and dirty modes)
EFFECTS: 11 stompbox models, 11 'rack' models
CONTROLS: Stompboxes, amp, effects, pre gain, low, mid, high, post gain, master, power sponge
FOOTSWITCH: Peavey Sanpera I (£49) or Sanpera II (£99) floorboards
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: 'Power sponge' power attenuator, chromatic tuner, USB 2.0 audio interface, aux input
OPTIONS: Onboard looper requires Sanpera I or II footswitch
RANGE OPTIONS: See Vypyr 15

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



The Vypyr 75 features the power sponge control which decreases headroom in the power amp so tones squash a little more: it works