

PEAVEY 3120



Words: Hayden Hewitt

PEAVEY

3120

SRP £1,182.00

All prices incl VAT

CONTACT:

Peavey Europe Ltd

T: 01536 461234

W: www.peavey-eu.com

WHAT IS IT?

A versatile and very powerful 120 watt tube guitar amplifier with three separate switchable channels and the facility to swap 6L6GC output tubes for EL34s, enabling a wide choice of tones and textures.

WHY SHOULD I WANT ONE?

The 3120 is something of a 'one stop shop' for the guitarist looking for a flexible-sounding head that can easily cope with life on the road. The switchable output tubes let the user fine-tune the amp's character between a typical hard-hitting 6L6 'American' attack or the EL34's softer but no less effective British accent. Peavey's five year warranty is also very tempting and adds considerably to the amp's value.

With three separate channels and a power amp that works equally well with 6L6GC or EL34 output tubes, the Peavey 3120 packs an iron fist into a velvet glove...

One could never really accuse Peavey of being shrinking violets when it comes to the high gain amp market. Indeed the 6505 (5150 in its earlier guise) is practically a benchmark when it comes to sonic aggression. However, it seems Peavey decided there was room for another high gain amplifier in the range and duly gave us the 3120, a three-channel tube-driven head with ability to run on EL34s or 6L6GC output tubes depending on the players personal preference. Given Peavey's reputation for building some of the best high gain guitar amps in the business the 3120 has a lot to live up to: is it an easy going all rounder or a raving psychopath that wants nothing more than to kick your teeth down your throat?

The first thing that impresses about the 3120 is the clean layout. Peavey has avoided having millions of controls that sprout from the amplifier like mushrooms in a dark cupboard; instead you get a concise layout that still provides ample scope

to shape your clean and overdriven tones. Smart-looking chicken head knobs proliferate throughout and the dedicated three-band EQ, volume and gain controls for the rhythm and lead channels necessitates a space saving 'over and under' control layout, while the clean channel sports its own dedicated volume control and separate three-band EQ. A single master volume control dictates the amp's overall output and a channel selector switch primes the amp to interface with the included footswitch when the channel switch on the front of the amp is set to the lead channel. Add the power and standby switches and that's your lot apart from a posh amber status LED that lets you know that you're locked and loaded.

Triple threat...

Cosmetically the 3120 screams 'serious business!' Finished in black tolex the 3120 features a black, hexagonal mesh grille at the front that reveals the glowing power valves in all their glory when the amp is

fired up. However, this amp conveys the austere but threateningly functional feel of a purpose built weapon; forget fancy internal lightshows or flashing LED's - the brass coloured Peavey oval logo sat above the grille is the only nod to anything remotely approaching a cosmetic nicety.

The 3120 comes from the factory fitted with four EL34 power valves and a quartet of 12AX7 pre-amp valves but if your tastes run to the tighter tone of 6L6GC's, the 3120's power amp instantly switches to accommodate the different tubes without needing recourse to an amp tech. What are the benefits of this? Well, the difference in sound between EL34's and 6L6's is so subjective you would be better off discussing the benefits of atheism with the pope than to discuss this with another guitarist, but to put it in a nutshell the two types of valve have different distortion and EQ characteristics. EL34's are normally associated with having a little more

bite, an earlier break up and a more pronounced upper mid hump compared to 6L6GCs, which have a slightly wider frequency response with more emphasis on low end. Consequently 6L6s tend to sound a touch harder and tighter but much depends on the pre-amp characteristics, so it really is a case of suck it and see.

It's worth noting at this point that whilst the 3120's tube-switching facility is a superb great idea it's still very important to keep the tube's properly biased so that the amp will sound at its best. With no self-biasing circuitry on board the 3120 includes standard bias testing terminals and Peavey rightly point out that once you change the output valves any further maintenance is strictly the domain of a qualified amp tech. It cannot be overstated that valve amps can harbour potentially lethal current inside so it's no place for amateurs to be poking around with a rusty screwdriver.

The rear panel includes the amps effects loop Send and Return jacks, accompanied by a return level control. The effects loop is actually foot switchable, meaning you can bring in all your delicious delays and reverbs at key points during the song and the effects loop level control also doubles as a handy boost knob. Even with no effects in the circuit, cranking up the loop's output via the level knob and kicking in the loop with the footswitch has the same effect as an extra boost channel.

One of the great advantages of any separate amplifier head is that they are compatible with a huge variety of speaker enclosures and the 3120 duly includes 4 ohm, 8 ohm and 16 ohm speaker output jacks; plus a line out with an adjustable output and footswitch socket. By affecting the amount of movement your speaker cone will undergo, the mysterious damping switch is the 3120's secret weapon. There are three settings - Tight, Mid, and Loose - and your ears will tell you which

setting best suits your tone and playing style. It is worth pointing out that the 'loose' setting has

the effect of noticeably boosting your volume at no expense to the power amp and has the most dramatic effect on the amp's physical presence on stage.

Tone to the bone...

The 3120's clean channel is the first pleasant surprise as far as tone is concerned. The three-band EQ is very effective, even small changes alter your tone considerably and the sensitive intro to your latest heavy metal opus is well within reach. Simple, clean, and concise, the clean tones yield an impressively broad range of tones; single coils allied with medium volume and a good amount of mids really chime with a slightly sharp edge. Shift the midrange up a touch and a warm, slightly more jazz-like tone spills out with single note runs sustaining nicely without losing definition on chords. Crank up the channel volume towards the

upper reaches and the subtle break up recalls a 70s style overdrive but with the modern edge that is part of Peavey's signature sound.

Another added bonus is just how pedal-friendly the clean channel is. This might sound like an odd statement but whilst not all amps really gel with overdrive pedals the 3120 seems to render them perfectly. My old TS9 Tube Screamer sounds great with the 3120; its slight clip adds those characteristic boxy-sounding mids whereas a more

aggressive Black Star HT-Dist pedal produces a lovely throaty roar that I couldn't stop playing with for hours, especially with the 3120's excellent EQ on hand to help carve out some great tones.

Switching to the amp's rhythm channel is where the 3120 begins to show its teeth. With the gain set below one (no, really) you can just about nail a biting vintage rock tone with enough dynamic range to almost clean up completely when you back off your guitar's volume control. Moving past the first notch on the gain pot sees the gain increase exponentially, quickly manoeuvring through hard rock, trad metal, and thrash until sheer brutality is the name of the game. The depth and versatility of the rhythm channel is wonderful to play around with, you can easily go from your favourite crunchy AC/DC riffs to playing a

After all, the last thing you really need is even more gain, isn't it? In this case what Peavey has done is to voice the lead channel slightly differently, especially around the mids which seem to have an overall rounder tone. In fact you can simply add a touch of volume boost by cranking up the FX loop level control for extra kick via the footswitch and you're good to go. As with the rhythm channel the EQ seems very dynamic, allowing for considerable shaping. With the gain set low and using single coil pickups you get a very nice woody bark whereas switching to humbuckers and winding up the wick sees you enjoying a seemingly endless supply of warm liquid sustain; perfect for the old legato.

The lack of a presence control is our only real criticism that we can level at the 3120; and is an omission



Total control: All three channels offer plenty of scope for shaping great tones.

Monolithic slabs of chunk and chiming harmonics are freely available...

drop A-tuned riff 'o doom all with the twist of a few knobs. The gain never seems to completely swamp what you are playing and the bass response is excellent, staying tight and focused even with the damper switched to 'loose'. The monolithic slabs of chunk don't compromise harmonics, which are freely available practically everywhere on the neck.

With all that gain and thunder on tap you could be forgiven for wondering what on earth the lead channel could add to proceedings.

that I don't really understand. There were times where I would have really liked to reduce the treble but still keep some 'hair' in the tone and a presence knob would be ideal but maybe Peavey's decision not to include a presence control was influenced by the tonal variety presented by the three-channels?

That said; if you are in a hard rock or metal band and need a flexible amplifier that is seemingly built like a tank I honestly couldn't recommend the 3120 any more highly. With Max Cavalera from Soulfly having signed up as an endorsee the 3120's brutality credentials are securely nailed to the mast but there is so much more to the amp than murderous filth. The three channel set up is perfect because it negates the need for external distortion pedals and whilst the amp's distinctly modern voicing means that the vintage tones you heard on your dad's Eric Clapton records might remain elusive, this amp isn't trying to be anything other than a contemporary hi-tech tube amplifier and at the end of the day it hits the target spot on. **PM**



Gear in the rear: The back panel grille guarantees a constant flow of cool air.