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# Guitar

**& BASS**

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**Electric  
Guitar  
Buyer's  
Guide**



**On test:** Shine & Vintage guitars, The Valve Amp, Keeley pedals, Avalon & Faith acoustics...  
**Bass:** Geezer Butler speaks out, Spector bass, Genz Benz amp, John Paul Jones workshop...

If you've a tidy sum to spend on an all-tube head or combo and you fancy staying European, then say 'ciao' to a new amp range from Italy. Dave Petersen samples the 50W version...

# The Valve Amplifier

## 2-50-2 50W Combo

**T**he Valve Amplifier company's term, valve amplifiers are the progeny of a hi-tech electronics manufacturing company, TBE Electronics of Bologna, Italy, and Galeazzo Frudua, one of Italy's best-known luthiers. The range, introduced to the world at Frankfurt last year, consists of two models – a three-channel 100W head and a two-channel 50W unit – but both are available as a head-and-cab or combo, and there's a selection of four types of speaker cabinet. Of these, the 50W 2x12" combo would seem to suit the practical requirements of the large majority of players, although the single 12" version also looks pretty handy.

Styling is a mix of austerity and elegance, with the boldly-designed badge making an effective contrast to the simplicity of the rest of the unit. All controls and functions are where you'd have put them yourself, with the possible exception of the rear-panel Mains and Standby switches. However, there's plenty of precedent for that.

Cabinet construction and finish is well up to the standard you might expect from the choice of name, and 18mm plywood and well-executed covering work on some difficult-looking contours are a sign that trouble has been taken. The chassis design is technically elegant, too, but has used aluminium as its basic material, which in the sample we tested had distorted at one of the bolt

fixings due to heavy handling. A word with Steve Hughes, the UK distributor, confirmed that main production is to be changed to steel chassis, which should help to eliminate this problem.

Electronically, the amp is built on a big double-sided PCB, with a smaller one for the power valves. The valves are hung bat-fashion, but there's no cooling fan, which could cause an alarming thermal build-up. However, after two hours' continuous running, with a fair bit of loud play, there was no sign of trouble from this direction.

The heat-dispersing quality of aluminium is well known, and that's more than likely the main agent here.

Bench tests confirm a clean limit well in excess of the rated 50 watts, with good composure in the important margin area as the amp transits into saturation. Oddly, it measures better in the full-power mode in this respect than in the 'More Harmonics' low-power mode. This may be due to the use of a common output transformer configuration for both modes, which is not theoretically ideal but doesn't seem to bother anyone very



## FACTFILE

### THE VALVE COMPANY 2-50-2

**Description:** 50W valve combo with channel switching, spring reverb, and two Celestion Vintage 30 speakers

**Controls:** Clean channel: Volume, Treble, Middle, Bass. Drive Channel: Gain, Volume, Treble, Middle, Bass. Both channels: Reverb. Rear panel: Presence, Resonance

**Features:** front panel Clean/Drive selector with LED Drive indicator. Rear panel has an output mode selector (30W triode/50W pentode). Channel select footswitch, extension speaker jacks, effects loop send/return with Level adjuster and Series/Parallel selector

**Valves:** two EL34 output valves, three 12AX7 preamp/driver valves

**Dimensions:** 67cm wide, 54cm high, 30cm max depth

**Weight:** 26kg

**Info:** [www.the-valve.com](http://www.the-valve.com)

**Contact:** Steve Hughes  
☎ 01925-268417



**Rear panel** The Resonance and Presence knobs set the overall depth and high-end capability

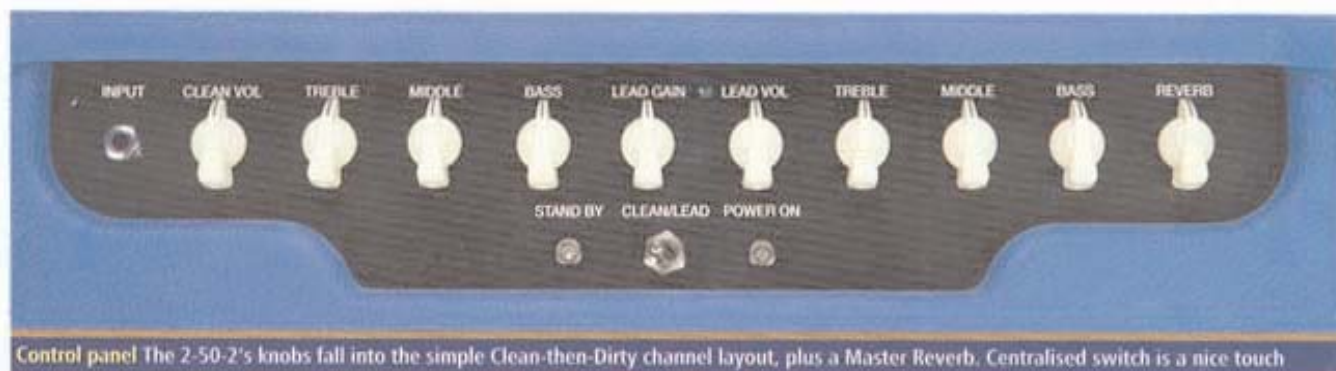
much. Other well-known makers have done much the same thing, and in practice things worked out rather differently... as we found later.

## SOUNDS

After the recommended minute of warm-up, the amp powers up with a commendably quiet noise-floor and virtually no hum. This is always a good sign, as hum seems to be the perceptible

blues playing, Robert Cray-style. Once this was dialled in, it stayed. The 2-50-2 could also achieve extreme volume without losing this overall clarity. Further tests with a Les Paul didn't alter our perception of Twin Reverb-like power capability with better midrange definition.

Fortunately for those who lean towards grittier-sounding amps, the Power Mode switch succeeds in changing this signature to one much more like an early Marshall 50, with improved saturation



**Control panel** The 2-50-2's knobs fall into the simple Clean-then-Dirty channel layout, plus a Master Reverb. Centralised switch is a nice touch

## Tests with a Les Paul didn't alter our perception of Twin-like power with better midrange definition

side of deeper-seated problems in amps that are afflicted with it.

With a standard Strat, the Clean channel offers rehearsal levels at about 4/10 on the Volume pot and full performance levels at around 6. The tone circuit is effective in the same way as older models by Fender, offering a good spectrum of colour within its range. To get more extreme coloration, you could resort to the rear panel Presence (for more highs) and Resonance (more lows). These are much more than afterthoughts in the 2-50-2 – they're capable of changing the dynamic behaviour of the amp in a very useful way, and were much used in our tests, the Resonance pot in particular warming things up very nicely.

The basic signature is extremely clear with excellent projection. The reverb enhances this considerably, with good if not excessive depth and a quality that would lend itself to the cleaner side of

characteristics and sustain, although the amp still has good bottom-end composure. This setting is probably the one guitarists will opt for under most playing conditions, as there's still plenty of volume, but the amp is more elastic and touch-reactive at practical levels.

The Drive channel switches in nice and quietly, and the immediate impression is

of a valve-flavoured version of the Tube Screamer sound. It's altogether less aggressive with any given combination of control settings than other makers' versions of the same idea, and many players will find it pleasing and practical. On the other hand, it won't be a first call for metal shredders, as it doesn't offer the fluid sustain and deeply contoured boom-and-scratch chord sound favoured in this sort of work. The 2-50-2 in this mode likes the blues/blues-rock idiom, and once it's cooking it's a matter of persuasion to get it to leave... not that you'd really want it to.

## VERDICT

The Valve Amplifier's literature makes some ambitious claims, and since the 2-50-2 certainly isn't the lowest-cost amp in its category, we were naturally alert for any imperfections. However, I'm happy to say that these confident claims are for the most part supported by the actual on-test behaviour of

the amp. It's naturally big, loud and clear, but if you take the time to explore its considerable adaptability you'll find it can also offer the reined-in compression and elasticity of a smaller unit being pushed hard. Try one, if you can find it – it's a genuinely worthwhile experience.