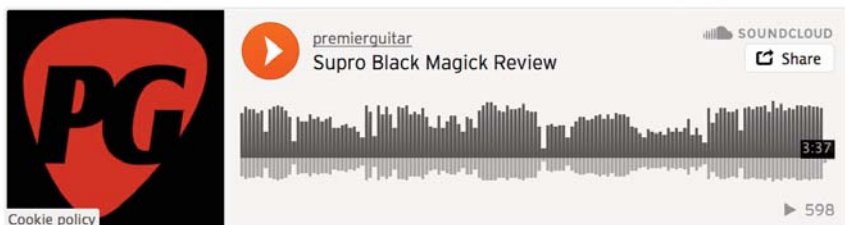


PREMIER Guitar

Supro 1695T Black Magick Review

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It's one of guitar-dom's eternal debates: Which exact Supro amp model did Jimmy Page use on early Zeppelin albums? Consulting the books, listening to the experts, and reading countless online threads lead me to one inescapable conclusion: I don't give a crap.

It's not for lack of Zep love—I'm as rabid as the next fan. But does anyone seriously believe that young Pagey would have sounded one iota better or worse on any late-'50s Valco-made amp?

He certainly would have sounded great on the resurrected Supro company's new 1695T Black Magick combo. (Nice Crowley allusion, by the way. What a difference a "k" makes!) This feisty 1x12 combo hits all the marks associated with those cheap-but-chic vintage Valcos. (Valco-made amps were sold under the Supro, Oahu, Airline, and National brands. Valco also built amps for Kay, Gretsch, and Harmony.)

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Partial '50s Flashback

Black Magick is a kinda/sorta replica of the type of amp Page is likely to have used. A clone, it ain't. It employs a modern circuit board populated with standard-issue components. The cabinet is plywood, not timber. A 12" speaker replaces a period-correct pair of 10s. (At least one of Page's Supros was modded that way). There are some departures in the circuitry as well—and they're changes for the better.

The build quality is solid. The amp's tweedy "black rhino hide" tolex covering, gold faceplate, and retro knobs embody that mid-century Sears & Roebuck aesthetic.

But what really counts are those Supro sounds—and Black Magick nails them. At low volume, tones are warm yet sparkly, especially when you activate the simple-but-sweet tremolo circuit. It's an engaging and hypnotic timbre. But goosing the gain yields a distortion character that's neither Fender, Vox, nor Marshall.



Black Magick's tones are gritty and tough, with aggressive upper-mid presence. That spectral spike is perfectly positioned to emphasize pick attack, which keeps parts defined even at high-gain settings. You'd never call the distorted tones smooth or sweet. The adjectives that spring to mind are "cheap" and "snotty"—and I apply those words in the loftiest, most complimentary punk-rock sense. This is the sound of pure attitude.

No-So-Big Bottom

Part of the Supro sound has to do with what *isn't* there: beefy bass. One aspect of Page's studio genius had to do with crafting sonic space for each instrument. The lack of heavy lows is one reason Bonham and J.P.J. sound so frickin' huge. Also, Supro gain is far from extreme. (Countless novice guitarists a bit too enamored of amp gain have been taken aside by more experienced players. "Listen to Zeppelin," they're advised. "The guitars are less distorted than you think.")

A pair of 6973 power tubes provides 25 watts of power. They overdrive easily, producing their signature grind at relatively modest volume. That makes Black Magick an excellent studio and practice amp. It's also loud enough for small club gigs provided you don't need pristine clean tones. And, of course, Black Magick could slay on stages of any size with proper sound reinforcement.

Welcome Departures

You can summon heavier-than-expected gain from Black Magick by jumpering the two channels—without a jumper cable. Plugging into input 1 configures both preamps in parallel. Plugging into channel 2 (or channels 1 and 2 in series) yields the traditional gain structure. Maxed-out distortion tones retain punch and power. Players can also connect an A/B switch and toggle between channels—one set dirty and the other not so dirty.

The two channels sound similar. When using both preamps simultaneously, a hot setting on channel 1 and a modest setting on channel 2 sounds pretty much the same as a hot channel 2 and a cooler channel 1. Both channels share the trem circuit, which you can activate by footswitch (not included). The channels also share a single-knob tone section. This minimalist EQ is more versatile than you might expect. It doesn't just nix highs—lower settings also magnify the bottom end. Every possible setting is cool and useful.

The Verdict

Despite its modern parts and build techniques, Black Magick easily conjures those gritty-cool Eisenhower-era Valco tones. The clever input wiring and versatile tone circuit are improvements on the original design. At \$1,499 street, Black Magick is a bit pricy for a modest circuit board/plywood combo. But players enamored of classic Chicago blues and early Zep will surely be spellbound.

Watch the Review Demo:



Ratings

Pros:

Killer vintage Valco tones. Solid build. Deceptively simple tone control. Sweet tremolo.

Cons:

Not cheap for a small circuit-board-and-plywood combo.

Tones:



Ease of Use:



Build/Design:



Value:



Street:

\$1,499

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