

6L6GC Bass Amps Test Report 1998

INTRODUCTION:

OBJECT OF THE TEST

To find the cleanest and richest sounding 6L6 for use in bass applications.

EQUIPMENT USED

The amplifiers used was a Mesa/Boogie 400 plus. 70 's Fender Bassman 135 head. Marshall Super bass set up and rebiased with 6L6. Ampeg portaflex fitted with an Altec 15 Inch speaker.

The cabinets used where Ampeg 4 x10 And Ampeg 8 x10.

Basses used where 1978 Fender P Bass and 2 Ernie ball Music man Stingrays With extra mid control.



HOW WE TESTED:

SOVTEK 5881/5881WXT

This is the industry standard which is fitted by Fender, Marshall and Boogie. These were standard equipment in the Boogie under the S.T.R 425 branding. When pushed hard tends to go lose control and can sound muddy. When using the bright voicing on the Boogie it tended to sound fuzzy and brittle. Notes became hazy and lacked definition.

In the Bassman the amp lost it's sound staging and clarity when compared to the original S.T.R387 that where fitted in the amp. The Musicman sounded plummy and slow. The Precision Bass did lose a it's growl to a whimper.

The Marshall sounded Muddy with the whole sound rolled into one. The P bass

was by far the best Performer with this valve.

In high plate volt testing 500 Vdc plate and screen We found some Sovteks Unstable.

SOVTEK 6L6WXT PLUS

The valve differs from the 5881 by having larger plate dimensions and improved grids to allow higher power handling. The valve performed very well in the microphonic tests and has more top end clarity than The 5881. Mid range was a big improvement with the P Bass .The sound characteristics where the same as the 5881 But due to the mid range clarity was a better valve in all the amp except the Marshall & Ampeg where no significant difference was noticed.

SYLVANIA 6L6GC U.S.A

These Sylvania valves which are late 60's early 70's production sounded full and rich. No problems on the high plate volt tests solid as a rock. No problems with microphony. The bass was nice a tight with that classic warm sound associated with Sylvania . The Boogie Pre - amp now started to show how good it really is. Bass was clear and solid. Pull the bright switch and slap bass was a dream. The P bass just growled.

The Fender really benefited as well .Push the deep switch and the bass was nice and clear not boomy. Nice rich balance. The bright switch gave it nice attack with punch and detail.

AMPEG B15-N

Bright full sounding tight and toghther.This amp does like a good valve. Classic sounds where easily available with the P Bass. Deep rich bass with the Musicman. The overall sound was forward sounding with emphasis on the bright side.

The Marshall showed signs of

Improvement in the noise department. The bright character of the Sylvania suited the amp .The treble control could be set half way and it sounded full and balanced. The Sylvania introduced a little grit into the sound giving the Marshall a sweet edge. The Marshall has one sound which is of rock/blues bass.The Sylvania however would be my Number one choice in this amp. The bass does not sound boomy which we found with some of the other valves in this test.The treble is forward but not harsh and the mid range just growled. No annoying hiss.

HARMA S.T.R 6L6GC

This is the best current production 6L6. The glass envelope is made from high quality heavy grade glass made the valve the most unmicrophonic of any we tested. The gold plated grids and special plate alloy gives this valve improved plate dissipation and greater stability ant high voltages.

The valves bass response is deep and Very weighty. This sounded really good in the Ampeg B15-N. This valve had the most bass response of any tested. The Boogie and Ampeg sounded big and rich with that fat bass sound I love.

The treble response is full smooth and creamy with no harsh tizz on slap bass. When pushed hard the valve has a sweet compressed tone. In the Marshall the bass could sound wholly especially if any bass boost was employed. Therefore the bass of the Sylvania was preferred. These are what we not fit to the Amp B15-N

SVETLANA 6L6GC

In all amps the balance was perfect. The tone section of the Boogie could recreate any sound past or present. Bass was crisp and clear but not as deep as the Harma. The sound stage was clear and it sound an amp worthy of the large U.K price tag. With the Boogie/ Sovtek I

Would have passed this amp every time when compared to the Reference Ampeg S.V.T . With Svetlana the Boogie would get into the Frame. Improvements to all amps with regard to clarity was noticed. Microphony was low and at running voltages the valve was stable. A recommended Valve in all amps.

PHILIPS 7581A

This is a military long life 35 watt plate dissipation version of the S.T.R 387 . The bass was controlled mids clear and proud with nice balance. This valve is the cleanest sounding of all the 6L6 types tested. If you require the Maximum Clean sound then nothing comes close to this valve. The biggest improvement was noticed in The Marshall. The mid range response was a little recessed. Which gave the Marshall some more modern tones If you pushed this tube in the Marshall it could sound a little harsh. But in all other amp sounded excellent. We strongly rate this valve for the big clean Fender sound as is a superb valve for bassists to fit.

HARMA SB-6L6

This valve was the real dark horse in this test as it sounded brilliant in the Boogie and Fender and Ampeg. Rather dull with too much break up in the Marshall.

In terms of our funk players who use tranny amps for their popping. The Boogie with these blew away the Trace Elliotts and the Edens. The Mid range snap that seemed recessed with other valves shone through with these.

In the Boogie Loud Volume could be attained without break up . This could be due to the valves having a high head room rating. With the Ampeg Cabs the sound had plenty of cut and punch. A little less maximum power was measured but the mid range honk in the Boogie was fantastic.

The only amp that these were not suited was the Marshall. If you turned the

bass control up It just cluttered the sound. If you did the same with the treble then it would shout out of the speakers. These in all other applications were superb and are now fitted to my Boogie 400 Plus.

CONCLUSION:

There was not doubt that the most powerful and cleanest sounding 6L6 was the Military 7581A Philips. This valve was super in the bassman 135 head as the amp could easily be used at medium size venues and still be heard.

These valve gave a crisp detailed tone with immense clarity with plenty of bottom end clarity.

The Sylvania 6L6GC sounded fatter and more musical than the 7581A but had less power. These I feel are better left for Guitarists as they sounded superb when clipped.

The 6L6WGB is my choice in the Mesa Boogie 400 plus simply because of the classic mid range honk. The Boogie provides plenty of bass and the tone controls are very responsive. With the Philips Installed hooked up to an S.V.T 8 x 10 cab with the trusty Musicman or Precision this had a unique midrange growl. At high volume levels the valves start to add a hint of distortion to the sound which give the music a rich bite.

These I would only recommend in high volume amps such as the Boogie as the Fender and the Marshall Needed more headroom at Club Volume.

Of the current production items the Harma Has more bass and is more detailed than the Svetlana. Both of these are serious valves which will work well in the lower powered amps.