

6550/KT88 Test Reports 1998

INTRODUCTION:

OBJECT OF THE TEST

The Ampeg s.v.t is the rolls royce of bass amps. Which over 30 years has not even been equalled. Therefore to fit low quality 6550 is not only a waste of peoples time but also a waste of your money. A watford valves we only sell matched and tested 6550a.

EQUIPMENT USED

The amplifiers used were: Ampeg S.V.T 1988 LTD head & S.V.T 8 x 10 cab.

Bass Guitars used where a 1978 Fender Precision, 1981 Zemaitis custom & 1983 Zemaitis fretless custom. Musicman Stingray with extra mid boost.

Stability tests where carried our at negative grid 40 vdc with plate and screen run at 500 volts.

In the S.V.T 700 volts anode with 375 screen where typical operating values.



HOW WE TESTED:

TESTING

All valves undergo a controlled burn in process at high voltage which is done in our own labs.

The valve will undergo 6 changes in grid bias with each stage monitored. We check heater continuity both hot and cold, we test cathode heater insulation and then check for gas.

The valves that get through are then tested and matched at two different bias setting to ensure conformity on a digital tester(or a.v.o 163 if you prefer) on

anode current and transconductance. The digital tester has an accuracy of plus or minus 1 m/a.

The test is concerned with working musicians who play the amp for a living. Therefore valves such as the Svetlana 6550B & B3, Chinese KT88 & 6550 which have had problems such as instability and arcing and the E.I KT90 & 99 which are not a true 6550 and in my opinion sound awful in the S.V.T have been excluded.

GENERAL ELECTRIC 6550A U.S.A

The G.E is really the only valve to fit if you require that trade mark Ampeg growl. The valve is well balanced and has that famous G.E larger than life tone. What really make this valve kick in the S.V.T is rich gritty midrange response. This makes the amp snarl and produces a great vibrant tone at all volume levels. Top end is smooth with a nice rich ring. The build quality is superb as you would expect whether they are G.E logo or M.P.D.

SVETLANA 6550C RUSSIA

We where the first company to market the 'c' variant in the U.K and have fitted these to countless S.V.T's. Electrically the valve is bullet proof very stable at high voltages. The bass response is very deep and solid. The valve has a relaxed refined presentation. The rich Ampeg growl however is lost when compared to the G.E or the Sovtek. Top end is sweet and the valve never seems to ever get hard on the ears.

SOVTEK 6550WE RUSSIA

Bass response is not as deep as the Svetlana which I did not think was bad. Electrically the production batches are not as close as Svetlana therefore close matching is required. What this valve does have is that raw mid range response that is a must in S.V.T. the

Sovtek makes you want to play. The sound in my opinion is not as crisp or as controlled the G.E. what the valve lacks in refinement it makes up for in attitude. The valve did have a hint of distortion which I really liked at the top end.

TESLA/JJ KT88 SLOVAKIA

The valve bass response was deep and punchy, same Svetlana depth but had more punch. The mid response was smooth and refined. The snarl of the G.E which I love was recessed and lost a little but it was better than the Svetlana in this department, but then no valve I have heard compares to the G.E in this area. The balance of this valve is first class and this is the best current k.t.88 bar none (I await the Svetlana).

G.E.C KT88

These have become rare and very expensive but I just had to include it. The biggest difference this valve makes is that its placement is perfect. Every little buzz or rattle is reproduced. The sound staging is big and the amp sounds fully in control at all volume levels. I prefer the G.E for the growl, twang and the in your face sound. The G.E.C KT88 are simply superb and sound awesome in the Ampeg S.V.T.

CONCLUSION:

If you want the classic Ampeg sound that has powered endless tours then it must be the G.E. The G.E mid range kick is what makes the sound so distinctive. When pushed really hard the valve gives a super fat compression which is very responsive to playing dynamics. The top end response is clear, clean and full with no harshness when slapped.

The Svetlana at first gives the impression of more bass but I feel it is just deeper than the G.E. The valve is very well balanced and this may account for the loss of the classic Ampeg sound.

That is the only fault I can find with this valve which for all other applications is superb.

The Sovtek is in my opinion the second best simply because it retained the G.E midrange and aggressive approach. The bass response is not as deep or as extended when compared to the Svetlana. The Sovtek does have the urgency and fast attack which is why I feel it is Number two.

The Tesla KT88 is a Superbly balanced and refined valve. Svetlana bottom end with G.E style punch. The mid range is sweet and it did lose that honk which I love. This is why the Sovtek has come in at number 2. For audio I rate this at number one as it is really one of the best new valves to be made in almost 30 years.