

# Great

ROUNDUP

Ampeg

GVT5-110, GVT15H, and GVT52-112

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON





### THE RECENT INTRODUCTION OF GUITAR AMPLIFIERS

from Ampeg signals the company's desire to expand on its solid reputation in bass gear, and give guitarists amplification options that are different than anything else on the market. Ampeg certainly had its share of guitar glory back when the Rolling Stones and many other groups roamed the world with an Ampeg backline, but instead of recreating storied models such as the V4, VT-22, and Reverberocket, Ampeg has instead launched an all new line—one that borrows from the past cosmetically, as well as in its implementation of a Baxandall EQ circuit. The main difference here is that Baxandall-style tone controls function more independently on their relative frequency bands and don't "interact" in the same manner that tone controls do on Fender, Marshall, Mesa/Boogie, and the vast majority of other amps.

The Baxandall factor is an important aspect of the Ampeg GVT5-110, GVT15H, and GVT52-112 models—it's a big part of why they have such a signature sound. In other regards, however, these amps follow a more conventional path in their use of 12AX7s in the preamp section, 6V6 or 6L6 output tubes, and solid-state rectification. Other details common to the new series include plywood cabinets, Celestion speakers, half-power/standby switches, and rugged PCB circuit layouts that use board-mounted pots, jacks, and tube sockets.

## ROUNDUP



The Ampeg GVT112EW speaker cabinet that we also tested with these amps is a unique closed-back type that features Ampeg's classic Portaflex double-baffle design. We ran the GVTs though a GVT112E 1x12 cab (\$249 street), the slightly smaller, non-Portaflex version, as well as a Bag End S12B ported 1x12 cabinet, which is another very efficient closed-back design. Our test guitars included a G&L Korina ASAT Classic, a Gibson '59 reissue Les Paul, and a PRS SC-58. Lastly, a Dunlop Joe Bonamassa Signature Fuzz Face was also plugged in occasionally to sample how the amps sounded with pedal-generated distortion.

### GVT5-110

The smallest model in the GVT series, the GVT5-110 is a 5-watt 1x10 combo with a simple complement of Volume, Treble, and Bass controls. The amp is heavy for its size and power, which is primarily a result of solid construction and a 10" speaker. For reference, my 5-watt Fender Vibro-Champ weighs about nine pounds less.

The GVT5 doesn't have much front-end gain, so getting grind tones from it requires that you crank it up to get the 6V6 cooking. The maximum volume at the five-watt setting is on par with most small tube combos of similar power, but if you

## SPECIFICATIONS

**CONTACT** Ampeg, (866) 858-5832; ampeg.com

### GVT5-110

**PRICE** \$559 retail/\$399 street

**CHANNELS** One

**CONTROLS** Volume, Treble, Bass

**TUBES** One 12AX7 preamp tube, one 6V6GT power tube, solid-state rectification

**POWER** 5 watts, class A

**EXTRAS** 1x16Ω, 2x4Ω, and 2x8Ω speaker outs. Half-power switch

**SPEAKER** Custom designed Celestion Tube 10

**WEIGHT** 26.4 lbs

**BUILT** South Korea

**KUDOS** Quality construction. Classic look. Good tonal range.

**CONCERNS** None

### GVT15H

**PRICE** \$699 retail/\$499 street

**CHANNELS** One

**CONTROLS** Gain, Treble, Middle, Bass, Volume, Reverb

**TUBES** Two 12AX7 preamp tubes, two 6V6GT power tubes, solid-state rectification

**POWER** 15 watts, class A

**EXTRAS** 1x16Ω, 2x4Ω, and 2x8Ω speaker outs. Half-power switch. Footswitchable true-bypass effects loop. Spring reverb.

**SPEAKER** N/A

**WEIGHT** 26 lbs

**BUILT** South Korea

**KUDOS** Quality construction. Classic look. Tough sounding and dynamic.

**CONCERNS** Footswitch for reverb and effects loop not included.

### GVT52-112

**PRICE** \$1,049 retail/\$749 street

**CHANNELS** Two

**CONTROLS** Gain, Treble, Middle, Bass, Volume (Channel 1). Gain, Treble, Middle, Bass, Volume (Channel 2). Reverb, Master

**TUBES** Three 12AX7 preamp tubes, two 6L6GT output tubes, solid-state rectification

**POWER** 50 watts, class AB

**EXTRAS** 1x16Ω, 2x4Ω, and 2x8Ω speaker outs. Half-power switch. Footswitchable channel select and gain/level boost. Footswitchable true-bypass effects loop. Spring reverb.

**SPEAKER** 12" Celestion Seventy/80

**WEIGHT** 52.2 lbs

**BUILT** South Korea

**KUDOS** Quality construction. Great clean-to-mean range on the clean channel. Tons of sustain on Channel 2.

**CONCERNS** Footswitch for reverb and effects loop not included.

## MORE ONLINE



- Get more details on the GVT5-110
- Read more about the GVT15H.
- Further explore the GVT52-112.

Get these links and more at [guitarplayer.com/holiday2011](http://guitarplayer.com/holiday2011)

## ROUNDUP



The GVT112EW cabinet features Ampeg's Portaflex double baffle design.

need to wail with even less aural impact, the half-power setting cuts the loudness significantly.

Finding the right EQ setting for different guitars requires a bit of experimentation, as the GVT5 doesn't respond quite like a classic five-watt tube amp. Part of this may be due to there being no flat setting with a Baxandall EQ. No matter where you set the controls, there's some tone-shaping going on. Still, it's not difficult to get happening sounds in the clean to mildly overdriven ranges by adjusting the Bass and Treble controls until the balance is right for a particular guitar.

For pure distortion, my preference was to back off the volume enough to get a relatively clean sound that could be propelled



The GVT112E is a more compact, non-Portaflex cabinet.

nically into the grind realm with the Fuzz Face. The response was also noticeably smoother when the GVT5 was driving the GVT112EW cabinet, which isn't surprising considering

the difference between a single 10" in an open-back combo and a 12" Celestion Vintage 30 in a double-baffled closed-back cab. The deep, clear response of GVT112EW is impressive, and the GVT5 definitely sounded louder and badder through it.

Bringing the Ampeg mojo into the pint-sized domain, the GVT5-110 has a nice affinity for pedals, and would be a great choice for studio work or for low volume rehearsals and practice.

### GVT15H

Tube amps in the 15-watt range have become increasingly popular due to their small size, modest weight, and ability to deliver enough volume for live gigs. The GVT15H delivers on all fronts, although at 26 pounds, it is more than double the weight of a Mesa/Boogie TA-15. The GVT15H steps things up with a dual-6V6 output stage, spring reverb, and a 3-band EQ. Here, too, the Baxandall circuit's isolated response between the controls can be a little confusing at first for those used to more interactive tone stacks. The Ampeg's tone controls are indeed passive, but they feel active enough that once I found settings that worked for a particular guitar, I tended to want to leave the controls set where they were.

The GVT15H has a lot more gain and headroom than the GVT5, and the addition of a Middle control makes it a lot easier to get good overdriven sounds. In fact, once you get everything set, this amp's raw, slicing distortion is a blast to play—especially in the half-power mode, where you can more easily push the output stage into distortion. This model delivers the feeling of playing an old-school amp—single-note lines jump out with a fat, mean response and chords kerrang with a Hiwatt-like authority. Turn down your guitar and the tones clean up well for rhythm playing. And here's where the reverb also shines with its airiness and smooth decay characteristics.

The GVT15H's spirited tones and excellent touch sensitivity make it an ideal rock amp for smaller venues, and a good candidate for blues, country, and anything else that calls for a lower-powered amp that can kick out tough tube tone.



## ROUNDUP

### GVT52-112

Well equipped for stage use, the GVT52-112 sports two independent channels, reverb, and a series effects loop that operates on both channels. The 6L6-powered amp also has a boost function that can be activated on either channel. As with the other models in the GVT line, the GVT52-112 has a half-power setting on the 3-way Standby switch. Toggle it up from the center position for 50 watts, and down from center for 25 watts. The indicator light also changes from red to green when the amp is taken off standby.

The channels can be selected via a front-panel switch or with the included two-button footswitch (which also turns the boost on and off). **With Channel 1 active, the GVT52-112 responds somewhat like the GVT15H, offering good clean tones at lower gain settings and morphing easily into grind as you wick up the gain. With more wattage on tap, however, the GVT52-112 has greater clean headroom, and is also much louder and punchier. Adding some reverb to the clean channel made the tones sound buoyant and open, while turning up the 'verb with the gain cranked past halfway and the Volume control dimed yielded a cool surf sound with a slicing edge. Using the Fuzz Face on channel 1 further pushed the amp into the kind of heavily saturated tones that '70s-style rockers would dig.**

Designed to cover the span from hard rock to shred, Channel 2 has a wide gain range, lots of sustain, and good dynamic sensitivity. Metal players might

be frustrated by the EQ's inability to dial into the "scooped" zone, though, and I also found it difficult to tame a high-frequency edge that was most noticeable when the Gain knob was cranked to one o' clock or higher. A presence control to attenuate treble in the power stage would probably be helpful, though rolling the Gain control down to a little below halfway helped to subdue the top-end sizzle while still providing a good amount of sustain. Using the 25-watt setting also allows you to push the amp harder to

take advantage of power tube distortion, which enhances the harmonics and compression as the 6L6s start to sweat. And if you still need some extra oomph to lift your lead above the mix, kicking on the boost (which works on both channels) jacks the gain and volume up significantly.

**The GVT52-112 offers the most sonic flexibility in the GVT line, and its abundant power makes it well suited for live gigs. If you're looking for a channel-switching 50-watt combo that puts both classic- and modern-style sounds under your fingertips, you should give the GVT52-112 a try.**



**All the GVT series amps feature rugged PCB construction. Here's a peek inside the GVT15H.**