

# BASS<sup>®</sup> PLAYER

## SOUNDROOM

REEVES • MARTIN • TRAVELER



## REEVES Custom 225



BY JONATHAN HERRERA

**WHILE MOST AMP COMPANIES TRY TO OUTGUN** each other with innovation, Reeves Amplification is unabashed about its design mission: Mimicking the distinctive circuits and rugged quality of vintage Hiwatt tube amps. Dave Reeves founded Hiwatt in England around 1968, a particularly fortuitous time to go into the high-gain guitar amp business. After being “made redundant” from audio-electronics firm Mullard (whose tubes still make audiophiles tingle), Reeves, with the help of partner Harry Joyce, decided to focus on building guitar amps for England’s new generation of rockers, many of whom liked to play loud and abuse their gear. Hiwatt amps quickly earned a reputation for unprecedented reliability and distinctively loud and crunchy tone, earning favor with the U.K.’s rock & roll in-crowd, including members of the Who, Jethro Tull, Pink Floyd, and the Moody Blues. Reeves died in 1981, and the brand has since survived under various owners, but many still consider the early Hiwatts among the best-built tube amps ever.

Best-built is not a bad starting point, and Reeves Amplification makes amps that are remarkably similar to Hiwatts. (The company’s name is an homage to Dave Reeves—Reeves Amplification is run by Bill Jansen.) That means each features high-end components and exquisite wiring and assembly. The Custom 225 is not a direct replica of a Hiwatt circuit (it’s similar to the Hiwatt DR201), but its debt to the classic designs is obvious. Sliding out the chassis (a treacherous affair, given the transformers’ heft) reveals eye-poppingly fab construction. Like early Hiwatts, Reeves places most components on two turret boards, thin insulated platforms with rows of metal “turrets” running along each edge. Turret boards not only look super cool, they make it a cinch to diagnose malfunctions and replace components. The Custom 225’s “lead dress” (wiring scheme) is near perfect, with placement to prevent parasitic crosstalk (in high-impedance circuits, parallel wires can leak signal into each other) and short interconnects with clean right angles where appropriate.

The amp gets its juice from a stout, well-filtered power supply. Reeves uses high-end Heyboer transformers in the power supply and output section. Like the original Hiwatts' Partridge transformers, the Heyboers have unusually wide frequency response for a musical instrument application, thus contributing to the amp's unique sonic signature. Power comes courtesy of four KT88 tubes, with total dissipation of around 225 watts at 8 $\Omega$ . The preamp is a simple design, with a unique tone stack that is flat-ish when the knobs are at 12 o'clock and a typical PRESENCE control for high-end treble response. Bass-friendly features include the input-gain-adjusting ACTIVE/PASSIVE switch and a smooth-sounding DI output driven directly off the output transformer for extra tubey-ness. The Reeves' front-panel layout is simple, effective, and unmistakably Hiwatt.

#### YUMMY!

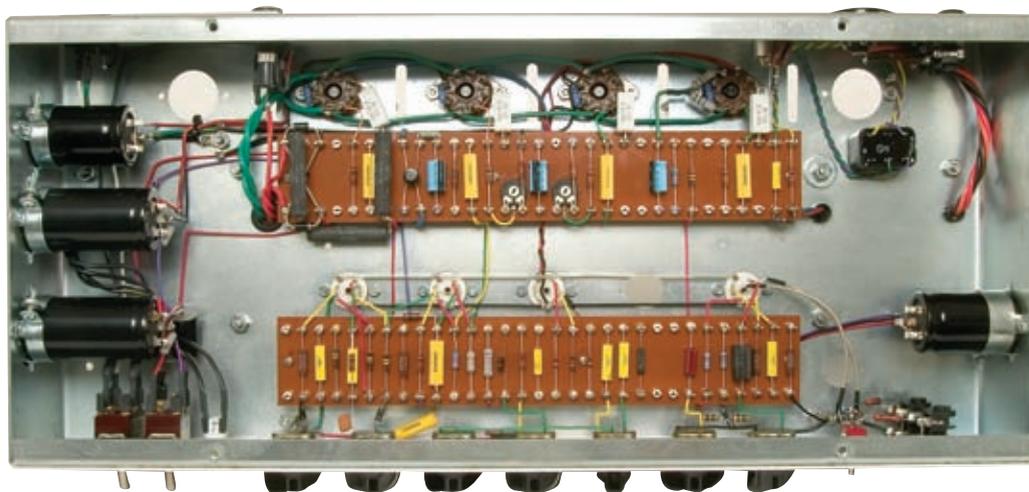
Reeves does not make any bass cabinets. Acknowledging this, the company thoughtfully designed a case perfectly sized for pairing with its obvious mate: an Ampeg SVT or other 8x10 cabinet. The heavy amp is a bear to hoist, but that's the admission ticket for high-power tube tone. For testing, I paired the head with a few big 8x10's as well as 1x12's and 2x10's. Tube amps are sensitive to speaker-cabinet impedance, unlike solid-state heads. The Reeves includes a switch for proper matching, but the 4 $\Omega$  position was inoperable in our tester.

The Custom 225 is deliciously creamy and dynamically colorful in classic tube tradition. It seems quicker at low-to-medium volumes, where its buttery midrange



and mellow top do nothing to clutter up-tempo walking lines or bubbling funk grooves. As its volume was increased, I found the amp a tad slower on the uptake, but it was still resoundingly stout and authoritative. It also seemed to love being pushed into clipping, either by digging in hard to make the preamp cry or dialing-up the MASTER for full-on power-tube dirt. On a little home-studio demo, the DI was truly warm; it'd be interesting to combine it with the amp's miked sound in a studio.

Tube bass amps don't get much more luxurious than the Reeves, but the luxury comes by way of sonically beneficial high-end components and nearly flawless construction. Relative to solid-state heads, the 225 is expensive, but when stacked against its all-tube competition, it's not so bad, and it delivers big-time. **BP**



The wiring was absolutely stunning, as one should reasonably expect from a \$2,500 amp.

#### REEVES CUSTOM 225

**Direct** \$2,500

**Pros** Beautiful construction from high-end parts; gorgeous thick tone that doesn't mind being impolite.

**Cons** 4 $\Omega$  output-transformer tap didn't work.

**Bottom Line** Boutique tube tone in the grand British tradition.

#### CONTACT

[www.reevesamps.com](http://www.reevesamps.com)

#### TECH SPECS

**Input impedance** 1.2M $\Omega$

**Tone controls** Variable boost/cut @ 60Hz (BASS), 700Hz (MID), 1.8kHz (TREBLE)

**DI output** Transformer-driven balanced XLR

**Power amp topology** Class AB

**Tube complement** 12AX7 x 3; 12AT7 x 1; KT88 x 4

**Power supply** Linear with solid-state rectifier

**Power output** 225 watts @ 8 $\Omega$

**Weight** 62 lbs

**Made in** U.S.A.

**Warranty** Five years parts and labor; 90 days on tubes