



Guitar Player

Magnatone SUPER FIFTEEN

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

COMPARED TO THE majority of boutique amplifiers, Magnatone stands out with such adventurous models as the Panorama and Twilight Stereo, both of which feature true stereo vibrato and the Double V, with its dual monolithic power amps. However, it's the Master Collection — which includes the Super Fifty-Nine MKI and MKII amps — that has inspired players like Billy Gibbons and Jeff Beck, and new additions to the line include the Super Fifty-Nine MKII and the Super Fifteen on deck here.

The smallest in the series, the Super Fifteen is nonetheless a stately amp that features solid-wood cabinetry with nickel-plated brass vents and a neatly applied covering made of 100-percent cotton textile in Black Levant color. White piping and off-white woven grille cloth, along with a logo that's illuminated by nine incandescent bulbs, make for one classy-looking combo. As with all Magnatone amps, the Super Fifteen comes with a protective cover made of



The Super Fifteen 1x12 combo (above) and head (below)

Rolls-Royce convertible top material.

Magnatone didn't overlook its ergonomics either. The brushed-aluminum panel's control labels are oriented so that you can read them when standing in front of the amp, and the custom-made knobs sport white lines that make it easy to see their settings even in dim light. At 37 pounds, the

Super Fifteen is an easy carry.

The attention to detail extends to the interior, which is exposed after removing 11 stainless-steel machine screws on the back panel. Inside the thick, cast-welded aluminum chassis we find hand-wired components on a glass-epoxy board with chassis-mounted pots, jacks, switches, and a DIN outlet that provides 6.3 volts for the lighted logo on the optional Magnatone 1x12 extension cabinet (\$599 street). A smaller board holds the rear-panel jacks and speaker-emulator pot, and the tube sockets are also board-mounted and double-reinforced to the chassis for enhanced stability. All told, the interior design and execution of this amp, which was designed by Magnatone engineering chief Goid Khan, looks road-worthy and easy to service.

With 15 watts driving into a Magnatone 12-inch speaker (custom-made by Warehouse Guitar Speakers), the Super Fifteen is loud enough for gigs and has abundant clean headroom. Driven with a Telecaster or a Les Paul, it wasn't unlike playing through a Fender



Deluxe when I kept the gain on the low side and cranked the master. The Super Fifteen has much more gain potential, however, and can easily steer into stout overdrive with single-coils. Its bright, gutsy sound leans in a British direction, and while the EL84s in the power section suggest Vox-like characteristics, that's really not the case here.

One of the reasons for this is that the Super Fifteen's output tubes are configured in fixed bias Class AB. Besides letting the EL84s run cooler and extending their life, this also gives it a lighter response, something you can feel in the amp's muscular delivery. I found it more reminiscent of my 1969 Marshall P420, although the Super Fifteen's three-band EQ and presence control provide way more tone-shaping power than the vintage Marshall's single tone knob.

Running the Super Fifteen with the master set high enough to get the output tubes cooking is the way to go for the best tone and dynamic response, whether you're aiming for a fat, twangy country sound or crushing rock grind. But even with the gain control pegged and the master set low, I could get plenty of grind at reduced volume without compromising picking dynamics or responsiveness to guitar volume changes.

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You can also disconnect the speaker and plug headphones into a dedicated jack for silent practicing, and the nice thing here is that the amp can be run flat out while using the emulator volume knob to adjust levels through the phones. The emulator circuit delivers a good representation of the amp's core sound, and it includes a separate 1/4-inch output for sending a line-level signal to a DAW or P.A. console. These handy features definitely set the Super Fifteen apart from many other tube amps of its class.

Since the Super Fifteen doesn't have reverb, I patched digital pedals from EHX and Source Audio into its effect loop with excellent results, although it sure would be nice to have an onboard spring 'verb.

Magnatone's attention to detail extends to the Super Fifteen's thick, box-welded aluminum chassis and hand-wired components on a glass-epoxy board.

This amp also takes well to distortion and modulation pedals driving into either of its guitar inputs. Bottom line: The Super Fifteen is a class ride for anyone seeking a toneful 1x2 tube combo, and one that's competitively priced for a U.S.A.-made amp with boutique amenities and then some. **A-**

SPECIFICATIONS

Super Fifteen

CONTACT magnatoneusa.com

PRICES 1x2 combo, \$1,999 street; head, \$1,759 street

CONTROLS Gain, master, treble, mid, bass, presence, speaker emulator (level control on user panel).

EXTRAS Effects loop, main and extension-speaker outputs, line and headphone outputs, built-in speaker emulator for silent practice and recording, impedance selector (4Ω, 8Ω, 16Ω), DIN jack for extension-cabinet lighting.

TUBES Three 12AX7s, two EL84s running in Class AB fixed bias.

POWER 15 watts

SPEAKER Magnatone Custom 12" ceramic magnet

WEIGHT 37.6 lbs.

BUILT USA

KUDOS Excellent British-style tone.

Well implemented speaker emulator. Sweet look.

CONCERNS None.

