

## GEAR



# Magnatone Super Fifty-Nine MK II Combo

TESTED BY BARRY CLEVELAND

**APTLY DESCRIBED BY ITS MAKERS AS** “an American amp with a British accent,” the Super Fifty-Nine MK II has as much to do with classic English amplifiers as it does with the legendary “Mags” built in America during the ‘50s and ‘60s. Whatever its ancestry, however, this is one stunning combo. Aesthetically, the Super Fifty-Nine is quite dapper with its elegant Black Levant covering, made of 100-percent cotton book-binding material, and silver grille with white piping—while the illuminated lettering on the front panel (using nine incandescent bulbs)

provides additional pizzazz. (A limited-edition cream “Perfectamundo” version is also available.) Inside this hand-wired beauty are top-notch components and a pair of TAD EL34s serving up 45 watts via a Class AB push/pull configuration. The overall workmanship is solid, tidy, and meticulous.

Unique to Magnatone amps is the Varistor Pitch Shifting Vibrato (so named because it employs variable resistors, and Magnatone uses varistors made of silicon-carbide minerals as they did when they patented this Vibrato

circuit in 1956), a true vibrato circuit that modulates pitch rather than merely being a mislabeled tremolo circuit that simply modulates volume. The sound is quite, um, “vibey,” though not overblown, imparting appreciable sonic wiggle without inducing queasiness even at maximum intensity.

Conventional tremolo effects may also be had at the flip of a switch, ranging from barely noticeable amplitude oscillations to penetrating pulsations. Whichever wobbler you select may be switched in and out remotely using the





included two-button footswitch (a blinking light shows speed of effect), with the modulation speed controlled with an optional expression pedal. Both effects are spectacular.

While swooning to the super-groovy vibes, however, I kept attempting to reach over and crank up the reverb—but, alas, the Super Fifty-Nine left me as dry as it did high. Why Magnatone elected not to include an equally lush tube-driven spring reverb is baffling, especially when even the excellent effects loop is tube buffered. (Note that Magnatone offers tremolo, vibrato, *and* reverb in their Traditional Collection amplifiers.)

The Super Fifty-Nine's four inputs are reminiscent of those found on classic Marshall, Hiwatt, and other British amplifiers from the '60s and '70s (two Normal and two Bright), and if you really want to go old-school, they are bridgeable with a patch cable. Each channel has a distinctive personality and bridging them provides some additional oomph and tone-crafting capabilities—though the superbly voiced Treble, Mid, Bass, and Presence controls provide sufficient flexibility to navigate nearly any

musical situation. The gain staging, too, is brilliantly implemented, allowing you to dial up tones from crisp and clear to tantalizingly toothy to plump and nasty—all with the responsiveness of a finely tuned sports car. Whether playing a 1969 Gibson Les Paul Custom, a Fano Standard SP6, or a PRS Custom 24 Brazilian, I was able to coax a remarkable variety of sounds from the Super Fifty-Nine, and then finesse them to perfection by making minor adjustments to the controls. The amp can also get loud when appropriate, and cranking it way up accesses yet another layer of tonal possibilities as the power tubes contribute their own muscular grind to the mix.

The Super Fifty-Nine MK II is a tremendous amplifier. It embodies some key characteristics of storied amps originating on both sides of the Big Pond, while at the same time bringing something fresh and exciting to the party. This new generation of Magnatones was developed with input from Billy Gibbons and other 6-string luminaries, and one was recently spotted nestled in Jeff Beck's live rig. How much more validation does a reasonable person require? 🍺



#### SPECIFICATIONS

### SUPER FIFTY-NINE MK II COMBO

(also available as a head and 2x12 speaker cabinet)

CONTACT	<a href="http://magnatoneusa.com">magnatoneusa.com</a>
PRICE	\$2,599 street
CHANNELS	2
CONTROLS	Normal Volume, Bright Volume, Master, Treble, Mid, Bass, Presence, Speed, Intensity, 8/16Ω switch
POWER	45 watts
TUBES	Four 12AX7s, two EL34s, 12DW7, GZ34 rectifier
EXTRAS	Tube-buffered effects loop. Remote Speed Pedal jack, Expression pedal jack
SPEAKER	12" Warehouse ET90 British Invasion 90-watt
WEIGHT	65 lbs
BUILT	USA
KUDOS	Inspiring tone. Super responsive. Snazzy looks. Superb workmanship.
CONCERNS	Cries out for reverb.