

59 Bassman - The Reissue vs. The Real Deal

Cosmetically, it looks just like the real deal with the exception that the tweed doesn't come laquered. I've heard of several people either having this done or doing it themselves with good results though. Also, if you spin it around and look in the back you'll notice that it's not equipped with bluebell jensen alnico's. But the Fender reissue alnico's are still decent speakers.

But the real test is plugging it in. I actually A/B'ed mine with the real 59 bassman that I now own. And these were the results...

Many of these (including the one I bought), come with a solid state rectifier installed. I noticed right away that the amp was a lot harsher on the treble side than the real thing. It also didn't have the touch sensitivity of the real 59 Bassman.

So the first change was to put a real 5U4GB into the amp and rebias. (Yes I know the original's came with GZ34's, but this is what the tube chart called for and I was afraid that the extra heat from a GZ34 might cause a problem with the PCB and or tube socket).

This one change made a TREMENDOUS improvement to the tone of the amp. It gave it some of the characteristic rectifier tube sag and touch sensitivity that was missing with the SS rectifier.

But the amp still had the icepick highs when the treble was turned up too far and overall it was still harsher sounding than the real 59. So the next change was to retube the amp with NOS RCA blackplates 6L6's and rebias again. Again I followed the tube chart, so instead of using original equipment 5881's like the real 59, I used 6L6's like the tube chart calls for. Again the 5881's generate a little more heat than the 6L6's and I was afraid they might cause problems.

This change helped toward smoothing out some of the harshness I was hearing before. The original Fender rebrand tubes were of unknown origin.

Then the remaining preamp tubes were again the Fender rebrands. So I swapped those out for RCA blackplates. And in this instance I did deviate from the tube chart. I swapped the last tube for a lower gain 12AY7 like the original called for to hopefully soften up the harsh high end I was hearing.

The change did help with the overall harshness, but the treble still has to be dialed in carefully to avoid the icepick in the ear highs.

In summary, A/B'ed with the "no soldering iron" mods that I added to the reissue. The real 59 bassman is still a warmer sounding amp, it breaths more at stage volumes, and the added touch sensitivity difference of the real 59 is very apparent.

But on the side of the reissue, it costs about a sixth of what a real one would cost. And with a few simple tube changes it can be made into a very nice sounding amp that has tight bottom end, good midrange, and good overdriven tone. And as long as the treble isn't dialed too high, it can be set to a decent approximation of the real thing.

So I'd say to all you blues'er's out there with a limited budget, the 59 Bassman Reissue is definitely a worthy addition to your rig.