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May the tone be with you

CATEGORY ARCHIVES: MODERN AMPS (1980+)

## The Vibro-King will tear the place apart

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Based on a request from fenderguru friend Samantha we will do a little review of the Fender Vibro-King. We won't list all the simple product facts that you can google yourself, but give you our opinion of the flag ship of Fender amps.

The Vibro-King is a dual 6L6 amp that produces 60w at 2 ohms. Getting 60w from a pair of 6L6 requires a high plate voltage and big power and output transformers. The power transformer is enormously large resulting in an amp weight of 32-33 kgs. With the right/wrong speakers in this amp it can weigh 40 kgs. You don't want to go there.

3x10" speakers are able to deliver both sparkle and punch. And you'll have tons of it from this 60w amp. But you won't get 60w out of this amp unless you hook it up with an 8 ohm extension cabinet. You see, 3x10" with 8 ohm speakers gives a total impedance of 2,67 ohms. Adding another 8 ohm speaker in parallel reduces the speaker impedance to 2 ohms. One more speaker is 1.6 ohms. You will get the most power from this amp with a 2 ohm load where the power tubes see the correct/ideal speaker impedance, for example by using a 1x12" @ 8 ohm extension cabinet. A 2x12" is also nice and will give you more spread even if not as loud in decibels.

Changing the speakers in the 60w 3x10" Vibro-King will have a dramatic effect, as with other 3-4x10" amps like the Super Reverb. Highly efficient speakers can make the amp twice as loud and punchy. We'd be careful with the weight though. You will grow tired of the amp much faster if it weighs 40kgs. This amp came originally in 1993 with the vintage style blue Eminence Alnicos, and after that Jensen P10r followed by different sorts of speakers from Celestion. Changing the speakers is an easy move for Fender to attract new and old customers again by altering the tone a little bit and calling the new model for "Anniversary model" etc. We find that the original blue frame Eminence give you more of a brownface tone while modern and louder speakers, (like the Weber 10a125/f125) points you into a more scooped blackface direction. We have found some of

the best modern Jimmie Vaughan and Robert Cray tones with the blue frame Eminence Alnicos in this amp (maybe also with the Jensen P10r). The tone is very direct, snappy, responsive and you will hear all the trebly details from your fingers and strings. This tone is not for beginners but for those with a serious attitude for tone. If you are into more rock'n roll, or a fat, chunky clean sound, you should go for other speakers with more low end.

Players seem to either love or hate the Vibro-King. If you're not into reverb or tremolo you can steer away from this amp. 56% of the controls on the faceplate is about reverb and tremolo. The reverb has the same controls as a Fender standalone reverb unit offering a wide selection of reverb tones. Personally we like to reduce the tone and mix and go for a longer dwell. The tremolo can go really deep and slow, more than you might be used to with the blackface and silverface Fenders.

The fat boost is a cool effect, in our humble opinion. It comes with a footswitch and boosts the mids a little bit. If the amp is set in its sweet spot the Fat boost will allow you to switch between a clean tone for rythm and a cranked tone for solos and lead. For some this eliminates the need for a boost pedal on your pedal board.

The tone controls behave differently from the blackface and silverface Fender amps due to a very different tone circuit design. If you turn the tone knobs all down to zero you lose all the volume. This does not happen for the blackface and silverface amps. This can give you two very different tone strategies:

- Low volume and high/maximum EQ settings → A brownface tone with lots of preamp gain even at low volumes.
- High volume and low EQ settings → A clean, scooped blackface tone. Little/no preamp gain.

Summarized, if you haven't yet played the Vibro-King you have missed an exciting experience. We won't guarantee that it is the amp for all of you, but for some it can be THE Fender amp for all your needs.

Gary Clark Jr plays a Vibro-King! With humbuckers he gets a serious distorted blues tone from it. There is a youtube clip where he and John Mayer appeared on a Rolling Stones concert jamming on Freddie King's Going down. John Mayer has his signature scooped, mellow strat tone. Then comes Gary Clark and tears the place apart. Haha.. we really like what Gary Clark jr does here. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5stFeNMqnuo>

Have a nice weekend. And may the tone be with you all.

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