

SEYMOUR DUNCAN

POWERSTAGE 170

REVIEW BY **JAMIE WOLFERT**

STREET PRICE **\$399.00**



I am delighted to announce that solid-state is officially cool again. You see, modern class-D solid-state technologies have created a revolution in the amplification world, one that is presently poised to take over the pedalboards of guitar players everywhere. This technology has made it possible to design and manufacture ultra-powerful, ultra-portable solid-state instrument amplifiers that are so compact as to be only slightly larger than the average stompbox enclosure. For those among us who have ever dreamed of fitting their entire rig on a small pedalboard, I am here to say that the dream is

officially real. As evidence of this phenomenon, I provide the new Seymour Duncan PowerStage 170.

The Powerstage 170 is a sleek, no-nonsense 170-watt solid-state power amp that measures just a hair over five inches square, is a little over two-and-a-half inches tall, and weighs about two pounds. It has a single quarter-inch mono instrument input, and a single quarter-inch cabinet output rated at between four and eight ohms. Atop its handsome brushed silver enclosure is a three-band equalizer and a single large master volume knob. On the rear of the unit is a small, silent fan to keep it humming

along at a safe operating temperature, as well as a removable three-prong power cord and a power switch. The Powerstage 170 is handsome to behold, simple to operate, and gives the impression of extreme ruggedness.

Many modern solid-state amps make ideal platforms for players that get their sound primarily from pedals, modelers, or outboard preamps, and clearly this is what Seymour Duncan intended for the Powerstage line. I have been happily using a different manufacturer's compact power amp in exactly this way for a few years now, so I was eager to plug in the Powerstage

and see what it could do as a sort of blank sonic canvas for effects. I ran its output into an eight-ohm, 2x12 cabinet loaded with Celestion V-type speakers, and I used a variety of dirt boxes as well as several delay, modulation, and reverb pedals. I also used it at a variety of different output levels, from whisper quiet to near maximum output (which is very loud, by the way). For guitars I used a mid-nineties Fender Jazzmaster and a humbucker-equipped Tele copy.

The first thing I noticed with the Powerstage is that, with all the EQ controls set at unity, the high end was rather muted. Even with a really bright Jazzmaster bridge pickup it still sounded dark. Cranking the treble up to about 3:00 on the dial solved this problem and sounded much more open and natural. With the darker humbuckers in the Tele, I had to have treble up nearly all the way to get a properly sparkling base tone. That said, though, the cleans were ultimately very dynamic and pleasing, and the EQ section sounded really sweet, offering quite

a bit of sculpting capability with 13 decibels of boost or cut for each frequency range. The overall sound exhibited a neutral characteristic that practically begged to be punched and kneaded with dirt.

In pursuit of this goal, I hit the front end with everything from a gentle germanium push to high-gain crunch, and the Powerstage handled it all very admirably at a wide range of output volumes, accurately representing the voice of whatever box I ran into the front of it. I find that germanium drive and fuzz effects are especially well-suited to solid-state amps, offering a bit of the squishy funk that an old tube amp might give you, and this proved to be true in the case of the Powerstage as well, as it sounded particularly good with germanium-based pedals.

Solid-state amps have always been great for players that use a lot of modulation and ambience effects, and Duncan's tiny firebreather is indeed well-suited to this task. Of course, there is no effects

loop, so everything goes straight into the front, but this is a feature I personally did not miss in the slightest. Chorus and flange sounded clear and warm, and even the most over-the-top delay and reverb presets did not get truncated or turned to mud in the mix. The Powerstage 170 is, in short, a superb amp for all kinds of effects stacking, with more than enough headroom and clarity to handle even the most mangled, convoluted signal chain.

WHAT WE LIKE

The Seymour Duncan Powerstage 170 is elegant, affordable, ruggedly built, and fits handily on a pedalboard, making it ideal for anyone that travels out of town a lot for gigs, or is just sick of lugging heavy amps around. It's also ideal for players that get their tones from pedals, preamps, or modelers, and just don't need big, complicated, failure-prone amplifiers anymore.

CONCERNS

It was unusually dark sounding with all EQ controls at unity, though this was easily remedied by turning up the treble knob to about 3:00.