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## SESSIONMASTER VINTAGE BASS

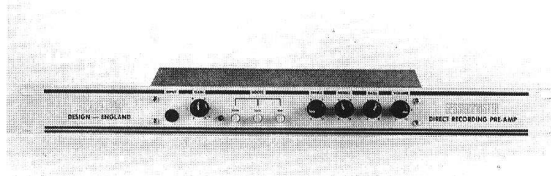
Stuart Ward's British made products – notably the direct recording guitar preamp – are gaining a nice little niche in the recording market. Specially designed for the home recordist you'd be very wrong to pigeon-hole this as a 'bedroom demo only' product. Steering clear of expensive marketing and distribution strategies the Sessionmaster product is primarily designed to deliver excellent sounds, direct to tape, in a hassle free manner.

This bass preamp is a deceptively simple single height rack, powered by an 30V mains supply. Stuart admits that the solid state circuitry is based closely on the Fender Bassman, the valves replaced by ICs, and is housed in a small, virtually half rack width, light metal box with rigid full width front panel. The grey facia of the pictured sample has now been replaced (as on all Sessionmaster products) by a more Rock n' Roll black front.

We have a single front panel input with two rear outputs – all 1/4" jack – one recording compensated for connection to desks, PAs or hi-fi, the other normal output for hooking up to guitar or bass power amps or to provide a brighter tone on tape. Both outputs are low impedance, line level.

The gain control affects the basic tone of your input signal. Lower settings are clean, full on settings encourage a little valve-like crunch. Three passive tone controls – treble, middle and bass – provide overall EQ while volume affects output level. Three push button boosts – gain, bass and mid – provide further tone

## ClassicBass DIRECT RECORDING INTERFACE



Sessionmaster Vintage Bass preamp

shaping. The gain boost offers slightly more crunch with a different, more saturated, slightly darker character. Bass boost adds a lot of low end and midrange an attacking throaty boost character and a little low end warmth too.

### ● sounds

The first impressive thing was that, without any instructions, using the Vintage Bass is dead simple. Initially with the gain set around halfway, the boosts out and EQs on half, the bass tone is smooth and true to the DI'd bass's character.

Okay, so most of you DI your bass anyway – why do you need this preamp? This is where the Vintage Bass is rather neat; apart from acting like a DI box, the tone options can create a very wide range of quite classic bass voices. Push in that bass boost and you have a lot – don't forget to reduce the volume – of roomy low thudding bass. A little more definition? Push in the midrange boost and it's there. A bit of slightly fuzzy speaker break up? Increase the gain and I was sure I was listening to a bit of speaker rattle!

Seriously, this is a dead simple unit. It's got all your clean open tones and there's plenty of headroom for attacking slap and pickup styles (turn down the gain, bring up the volume). It 'breaks up' very naturally too, and if you set the gain just right and add the bass boost you'll get a slight farty crunch on the low strings only. With the gain boost out its quite hard to distort the unit, but pushing it in gives a little more natural compressed crunch. If

you have the luxury of two tracks one can be you straight DI the other a slightly corrupted 'amp'd' tone from the Sessionmaster.

Above all, I like the natural tone of the unit – the way it reacted to different bass guitar levels and active EQs. Although obviously the Mk II guitar preamp is recommended you can use this Vintage Bass for those often hard to get slightly coloured clean tones. That's one of my favourite sounds on the Soldano and I compared that sound (achieved by running the preamp through a Palmer speaker simulator) with the Vintage Bass and I'd be lying if I said there was any massive difference. When you consider this unit costs £149, and the Soldano/Palmer set up is nearer £800 it's certainly food for thought!

### ● the verdict

The Sessionmaster scores highly on price versus tonal quality. Though it can be used as a live preamp it's clearly more suited to recording and, if that's your bag, it has to be money very well spent.

Dave Burrluck

The ClassicBass and Classic Steel variants, which may still be offered for sale secondhand on occasions, were just hand modified SessionMaster preamps made to customer order only.

They were £179.00 when new.

Three monster guitarists and a humble amp designer... I must be dreaming?

