

The Naylor Super-Drive Sixty

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J. F. Naylor is probably best known for the early-'60s Jensen speaker clones he introduced a few years ago, but the intrepid builder has now ventured boldly into the amp market's icy, shark-infested waters. The Super-Drive Sixty (\$1,549) is a single-channel design that, according to company literature, is "loosely based on classic American and British amplifiers of the '50s and '60s." The Super-Drive produces around 60 watts from its pair of Russian-made 5881 output tubes and features high- and low-gain inputs, a tube effects loop, and a bite switch to augment the gain, master, treble, middle, presence, and bass controls. The Naylor's eye-pleasing, brushed-stainless-steel front panel, angled cabinet tunnel, and cane-wicker accents look hip without excessively milking the faux-vintage cow.

Peeking inside the Super's welded-steel chassis reveals an ultra-clean, Brit-style, point-to-point wired circuit on 1/8" phenolic eyelet board, high-quality imported and U.S.-made components, and chassis-mounted ceramic sockets for the output tubes and the four 12AX7s. We dug Naylor's neat wire routing, precise lead forming, and use of nylon ties to secure the filter caps—not a glob of silly conehead seal to be found! The Sixty's output transformer is selectable for 4Ω, 8Ω, and 16Ω impedances, and its power transformer is compatible with international voltages—but not as a rear-panel function; a trip inside is necessary to re-solder the power-transformer taps.

We tested the Super-Drive through Naylor's 4x12 and 2x12 speaker cabinets. These sharp-looking, semi-open-back cabs are constructed of seven-ply birch and feature cane-wicker grillcloth and white piping accents. (Interestingly, both 16 Ω cabs are loaded with Celestion Vintage 30 speakers. Naylor informs us that they are currently in the process of designing a new speaker series.) The 412 Compact Cab (\$995) is about three-quarters the size of a Marshall 4x12 and features dual rear-slot openings, casters, and old-Marshall-style steel side handles. The 212 Compact Cab (\$679) is smaller than a standard Fender

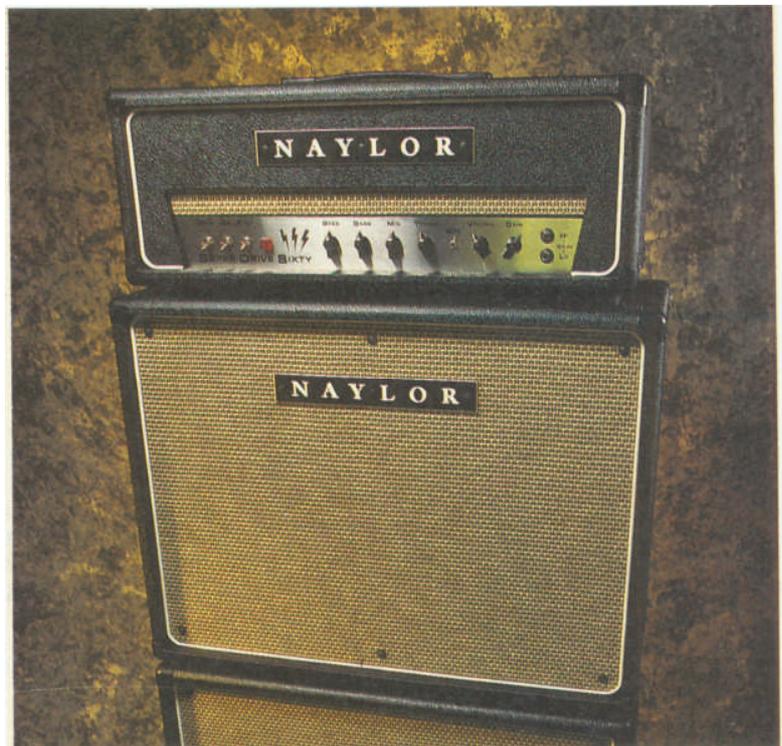
2x12 and has a single rear-slot opening.

Tone Zone. The Super-Drive is a very brilliant-sounding amp with lots of old-Marshall from-Texas presence, sweetness, and grit. To our ears, this amp is a tad bright with single-coil pickups, but humbuckers really benefit from its upper-end zing, slightly hollow midrange, and superb low-end clarity. The Super's low-gain input offers tons of headroom for crisp, super clean playing, but the ballsy high-gain port is where it's at for dynamic feel. Coupled with a desert-island gig rig of a PRS Classic Electric and an Ibanez Tube Screamer, the Super-Drive was a natural for grungy guitar chores—just twirl the preamp and master knobs into full-tilt-boogie position and ride your axe's volume for lead and rhythm. Though the Super-Drive will produce plenty of biting, harmonically rich sustain at almost any volume, we preferred the superior tightness, butter, and dynamics of the low-preamp/high-master settings. The bite switch only slightly affects the amp's bountiful top end, but it's very handy for enhancing the upper-low and midrange detail. (Joe Naylor states, "We've had no problems coaxing SRV-style tones from Strats loaded with vintage-style single-coils. However, for the benefit of those using brighter pickups, future amps will utilize a bite switch that cuts

more treble in the down position.") In the best British tradition, the Super's tone controls are subtle, particularly the mid knob, which has practically no effect whatsoever. (Naylor says, "The effect of the midrange control won't appear as dramatic as some amps because it does not bleed into the treble or bass range. However, the midrange control is quite useful for beefing up note definition or for transparent scooped tones.")

As expected, the Naylor 4x12 sounds bigger and louder than its little brother, but the smaller cab has a certain kick and definition that works well on small club stages. Not only was the Super-Drive and 2x12 a light and compact rig (you can easily lug one in each hand), the pair produced enough volume and punch to cut through bass and drums like a Rambo knife through an overripe kiwi.

The Naylor Super-Drive Sixty is certainly a worthy newcomer to the ever-growing "boutique" amp market. Those willing to plunk down the extra dinero for old-timey tone and classy hand workmanship will more than get their money's worth here. If your lust for fat-bottomed, in-your-face tube tones dovetails with a willingness to live without a great deal of sonic variety, you'll be right at home with this baby.



Big tone meets boutique vibe: Naylor's Super-Drive Sixty.