

PEAVEY ELECTRONICS CORPORATION

THIRTY-ONE YEARS OF “STAINLESS STEEL” AMPLIFICATION

By Mike Brown

Although Peavey has been manufacturing amplifiers for over 40 years, it's hard to believe that it's been 31 years since we began manufacturing steel guitar amplifiers. In 1974, the legendary Peavey Session 400 and LTD 400 amplifiers were first designed for steel guitarists. The Session 400 amplifier featured a 15" JBL speaker and was rated at 200 watts. I frequently receive calls from steel guitarists who still own original Session 400's, and they are to this day enthusiastic about the sound of their prized amplifiers. Once steel guitarists and fiddlers play through these amps, they "hold on" to them for many years. Pros and "weekend warriors" recognize the Session and LTD models as being the amplifiers by which all other competitive steel amplifiers are judged. It seems that a lot of folks remember "the vintage sound", and this is what they pursue when buying new amplifiers and instruments that are introduced every year at the various shows and conventions. There is nothing wrong with this, as the vintage "sound" is here to stay. Peavey® Electronics agree that vintage amps were very good, quality made products: but we also believe that the best in performance and sound is yet to come. Therefore, we strive to present new ideas and features through the new products that we continuously introduce.

Through the years we have introduced such new features as pre-EQ patch loops, mid frequency and shift controls and the string effect. Effect processors (such as the Peavey Profex II, Profex, Tubefex and the TransTube Fex), as well as other digital effects, have also been introduced and used by many steel guitarists. When designing and developing a new amplifier, the most important quality requirement is that it sounds good and is voiced properly for the instrument that it will reproduce. We've always believed this at Peavey, and this is how we approach building amplifiers. If it doesn't sound good, there is no need to build it. We also want to develop products that the consumer can use on the road or in the studio. This formula has worked well for us for many years. Below is a brief overview of the products we have introduced and manufactured for the steel guitar since the early seventies.

As mentioned earlier, our first steel guitar products were the Session 400 and LTD 400 amplifiers. Both models came equipped with a 15" JBL speaker, produced 200 watts and were voiced specifically for steel guitar and fiddle applications. Needless to say, these two models established their own place among musicians in the country music industry. The little brother to the Session 400 (little in size, not in power) was the LTD 400. Many musicians are still using these vintage amplifiers even today.

Our next steel guitar amplifier was called the Session 500, which was the "Cadillac" of all steel guitar amps. This amp featured a 15" Peavey Black Widow

speaker and was designed to produce 300 watts at 2 ohms and 250 watts at 4 ohms. Packed with features such as a phase shifter and string effect, which emulated a fiddle voicing when using the steel guitar and spring reverb. This model also introduced the newly designed pre-EQ volume pedal patch point, which is a feature we continue to use today in the design of our newer steel guitar amplifiers. This “pedal patch” is an insert point in the circuit right after the first gain stage that would allow the player to plug in the volume pedal and maintain a reverb or effect “tail” when the volume pedal was decreased. Also, by using this “three cable hookup”, an instrument cable can be plugged directly from the output of the instrument straight to the input of the amplifier, thus eliminating any signal degradation which is sometimes caused by using a “potentiometer” type of volume pedal (ref; “The Pre-EQ Patch” at www.peavey.com). When the volume pedal is at its “back” position, the reverb would continue to ring out and does not shut off when the volume is turned off. This is a feature we continue to include in our steel guitar amps today, and it has worked well for its intended purpose. We also included a variable crossover section, which would allow the player to use an additional power amp and cabinet so the system could be bi-amped. The Session 500® had a very flexible patch panel on the back of the amplifier. There was even an XLR transformer balanced output that could be connected to a mixing console or recorder input. The Session 500 was originally shipped with a hand controller that clipped onto the leg of the steel guitar for defeating and activating the reverb, string and phase shifter effects. An optional footswitch for the same functions was offered at that time as well. Although the Session 500 was originally introduced in a short version cabinet, it was later modified to a taller cabinet in order to accommodate a modular style construction. This amplifier weighed more than any other steel amp that we made during that time. Nonetheless, the Session 500® is still referred to as the “Cadillac” of steel guitar amplifiers as far as features and power was concerned.

In the early 1980's, we introduced a new line of amplifiers called the City Series. In this series, we offered two steel amps, i.e.; the Vegas 400™ and Nashville 400™. Both of these models were rated to produce 210 watts at 4 ohms. The Vegas 400™ featured two independent channels that allowed for the use of a steel guitar in one channel and a fiddle or guitar in the second channel.

The Nashville 400 has been our most popular model to date and was in production for eighteen years. It was available in a small size cabinet and was capable of producing 210 watts at 4 ohms. Up until 1985 we used a 1502-4 ohm Black Widow speaker in this version. It was later changed to the “revoiced” 1501-4 ohm version. This legendary model is still requested by many steelers who make their living “on the road.”

During the early 1990's, the popularity of separate component systems among steel guitarists was at peak popularity. Peavey® processors like the Profex II™, Tubefex™, Transtube™ processors combined with a DPC™750, 1000 or 1400X

power amplifier allowed for a more portable setup. But most importantly, the total weight of the system was reduced and could be carried separately.

The Session 400 Limited was also a very popular model with many players. In 1995, we decided to use the 1501-4 ohm shallow basket paper cone in both the Session 400 Limited and the Nashville 400. The remainder of the Black Widow and Scorpion speakers used in other Peavey amps were designed with Kevlar impregnated cones, which withstood the distorted, overdriven characteristics that the 6 string electric guitarist prefers.

As mentioned earlier, we strive to improve the features and sound reproduction from each Peavey® amplifier model that we introduce. In mid 1999, we improved the equalization circuit of the Nashville 400. This voicing enhanced the low frequency response and smoothed out the midrange frequencies of the equalization circuit without endangering low frequency speaker failure, or “bottoming out.” Soon afterwards, steel guitarists began to send their chassis’ to the factory for a permanent circuit modification to their Nashville 400. This modification kit is still offered today. At that time, all Nashville 400 amps began shipping with this circuit modification at no charge to the customer. However, modification kits for several Peavey® steel amps are now offered through the Peavey® dealer network and from the factory parts department. The 1501-4 ohm Black Widow shallow basket speaker was revoiced during the first quarter of 1995 to sound like the old JBL that was first used in the 1970’s Session amp.

Peavey® Electronics is known for introducing many new ideas and innovations through our products and we continue to be the leader in steel guitar amplification. In 1999, Peavey® endorser Jeff Newman and Hartley Peavey put together a Nashville, Tennessee jam session that featured the world’s top steel guitarists. At that time, Peavey® Electronics engineers had completed two new steel guitar amplifiers that featured a 300-watt power amp with a switching power supply, a completely redesigned all wood cabinet and the 1501-4 Black Widow “shallow basket” speaker. Although both of these new models included all of the above features, they were distinctly different amplifiers. The Nashville™1000 featured a tone modified analog preamp and the Session 2000 featured the first-ever programmable digital effects preamp. This was another first for steel guitar amps! The Nashville™1000 featured rotary controls for volume and tone adjustments and the Session™2000 could be controlled via midi. The programming capabilities of the Session™2000 amplifier are too numerous to list within the scope of this article. To date, no amplifier manufacturer has come close to designing an amplifier of this magnitude.

For many years the fifteen-inch speaker was considered to be the optimum choice in reproducing the wide range frequencies of the steel guitar. However, as speaker technology progressed, so did the design of Peavey™ steel amps. In 2003, Peavey® engineers used their thirty-one plus years of steel guitar amp design to create what many steelers said “couldn’t be done”, ie; design a steel

amplifier using a twelve-inch speaker. However, improvement through research and development is the method normally used to advance the performance and features of a product. Hartley Peavey and our engineering group took this as a challenge and shortly thereafter introduced the Nashville™112 amplifier. Originally, the intention of introducing a model such as this was to offer a low powered small rehearsal amp for the many players who never perform anywhere other than their home. That was our intentions. However, the results were much more defined than our original thoughts were of this amp. This small forty-two pound amplifier literally blew our competition out of the water. To be honest, its excellent performance and sound even caught our engineers by surprise! The Nashville™112 is rapidly becoming the standard of the industry for steel guitarists and fiddlers all over the world. Rated to produce eighty watts of power into its 12" heavy-duty speaker, this "little" 42-pound amp handles many applications that were once thought impossible.

Since those early days in 1974, our steel guitar artist program has shown impressive growth due to the fact that we are the only company that has met the needs of the steel guitar community for over 30 years. Peavey®Electronics has consistently introduced products for this "tight knit" group of musicians, which include the world's top players.

As you can see, our steel guitar amplification program has been very aggressive. We have designed and manufactured more steel guitar amplifiers than any other company in the world. We believe that we are on the right track, but should players have any particular features that they would like to see in a Peavey amplifier design, we invite them to send their suggestions to us here at the factory for consideration. Please submit them to;

Peavey Service Center
Attention; Mike Brown
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You can also fax a message to me at (601) 486-1361 or E-mail at mikebrown@peavey.com. Should you have any questions concerning Peavey gear, please consult with your Peavey dealer or contact me here at the factory by calling toll free in North America at 1-877-732-8391, ext. 1180. Input and suggestions for future products are welcomed.