

Ahead of the P-Pack

Sadowsky P5 5-string

By **Michael Menduno**

MASTER LUTHIER Roger Sadowsky has been building basses and guitars since 1980. He and his team currently build about 200 Fender-style instruments a year, which they sell direct from their workshop in New York at prices ranging from \$3,000 to \$4,500. (Their \$1,800-2,600 Metro basses are made in Tokyo to Sadowsky specs—see the Aug./Sept. 2004 issue of *Bass Guitar* for a review.) About two-thirds of Sadowsky's basses are specially made for clients like the Rolling Stones' Daryl Jones, session legend Will Lee, funkmeister Marcus Miller, and ex-Metallica bassman Jason Newsted. As a P-Bass man ready for a five-string, I knew I had to try a Sadowsky P5.

SPORTING A WOODIE

Sadowsky says that wood is the single most important factor in determining the sound of the instrument, and, accordingly, all of the pieces of the P5 are hand-selected for their acoustic resonance—and my P5 was also drop-dead gorgeous. The alder body is finished in rich, creamy white polyester-based paint, which is set off by the cabernet-colored tortoise pickguard. The 20-fret bolt-on 34-inch-scale neck is made from New England maple, with a Madagascar rosewood fingerboard; both are finished with nitrocellulose lacquer. The bass weighs in at a light 8.47 pounds and balances like a prima ballerina. No neck dive!

In spite of a slightly wider neck, the P5's classic Fender Precision dimensions—1.875-inch nut width and 0.748-inch string spacing—make it instantly recognizable to P-Bass players like me. There's also a sprung bar that presses down the strings just above the nut, which adds downward pressure on the strings as they pass over the nut, eliminates string slippage, and adds sustain. The P5 features custom, 5-string P-style split pickups built for Sadowsky by Seymour Duncan, plus a solid brass Hipshot bridge with quick release tailpiece built to Sadowsky specs, and Hipshot ultra-light tuners.

BIG BAD BOTTOM

The bass came with what Sadowsky calls his standard, medium-action setup—ideal,

perhaps, for tapping and slapping, but I found it challenging for finger-style playing. I like to dig in a bit more, so I gradually raised the saddles a full turn. The result? The P5 feels a lot faster than my P-bass despite the slightly wider neck. What's more, the 34-inch bass offers welcome relief from the increased string tension on 35-inch-scale basses, while its thundering B string sounds every bit as tight as on my 35-inch-scale Lakland.

The 57-year-old bass builder says that, after the wood and pickups, the "Sadowsky sound" is largely a function of his unique, 9-volt, 2-band onboard preamp, which features a stacked bass boost (+13 dB maximum) centered around 40 Hz, and a treble boost (+13db) at 4kHz. As you boost the bass and treble, the preamp attenuates midrange frequencies at about 300 Hz, producing big bottom with little or no boom or muddiness. There's also a vintage tone control with a push-pull, preamp-bypass switch (the passive mode works without the battery) and a volume control.

PAY TO PLAY

I took the P5 to my Friday night classic rock trio gig, where I set my Mesa Boogie 400+ head and 4x10 cabinet flat and dialed up my tone on the P5 preamp. Oh-my-gawd! I cranked up the bass control to about 5 o'clock and blended in a little treble to taste. The result was a huge bottom—let me repeat—a huge bottom end, no boominess, and a growl that would send White Fang packing. Set on passive, the P5 offers the full range of the rich, nuanced sounds that P-bass aficionados have come to depend on, from the deep Jamerson Motown tone to the agro-growl of a Megadeth bassline. And when I slapped that bad boy, the P5's funky twang cut through the mix like Leatherface Sawyer on Red Bull. The bass simply sings; reaction from my bandmates and audience members confirmed it.

BOTTOM LINE

At \$3,550 plus shipping, the Sadowsky P5 requires some serious pre-purchase thought and likely some creative financing, but this beauty is worth every penny. P-Bass lovers who want to move up to a five-string will find the P5 a god-

send; newbies should get ready to kick some serious bottom end. My recommendation? Sell some basses, hock the car, raid the college fund, pimp your drummer, and ante up the sugar. This is one love you won't want to do without! ■

THE DEETS

LIST PRICE \$3,550
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