

GEAR Bench Test



Line 6 Spider IV 75

TESTED BY MICHAEL ROSS

What's Your Take?

Post your own review—or challenge ours—in the GP Forum.

guitarplayer.com

IT'S SAFE TO SAY THAT MODELING AMPS ARE HERE to stay. Purists may protest, "There ain't nothin' like the real thing baby," but more and more players are finding that the versatility of these

amps sufficiently compensates for the ever-diminishing differences between, for example, a modeled Fender Deluxe and the original hardware version. Much of the credit for this shrinking sonic gap belongs to Line 6, a company that has been improving the technology of modeled amps, effects, and even guitars with every new software update. One of their latest releases, the Spider IV 75, benefits from over a decade's worth of R&D by the Southern California-based company.

The Spider series of amps sports inexpensive, gig-worthy models lacking some of the flexibility and full-featured might of the company's Flextone and Vetta series. Though more basic than those upscale lines, the Spider IVs still run pretty deep, feature-wise. The amp-selector knob scrolls through eight amp style settings: Clean, Twang, Class A, Blues, Crunch, Hi-Gain, Metal, and Insane—each offering a "Red" and "Green" version for a total of 16 amp models. A trio of effect controls provides three choices of effects each, which are labeled on the faceplate. After selecting one of the effects, turning the Preset select knob accesses three more "hidden" settings for each effect. The

SPECS | Line 6, (818) 575-3600; line6.com

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| MODEL | Spider IV 75 |
| PRICE | \$499 retail/\$299street |
| CHANNELS | Four |
| CONTROLS | Amp type, Drive, Bass, Mid, Treble, Channel Volume, three Effects Type controls, Reverb, Master Volume, Manual, Channel Selectors, Tap Tempo, Quick Loop. |
| POWER | 75 watts |
| TUBES | None |
| EXTRAS | 300+ presets by 50 world-famous bands and guitarists |
| SPEAKER | 12" custom Celestion |
| DIMENSIONS | 19 ¹ / ₄ "H x 20 ³ / ₄ "W x 11"D |
| WEIGHT | 36 lbs |
| KUDOS | A wide variety of realistic amp and effects tones at a comfortable price. |
| CONCERNS | Master volume lacks a smooth gradation. |



name of the alternate effect comes up on the LCD screen when you toggle the Preset knob. For example if you select the position labeled Phaser on the modulation effect knob, you can use the Preset knob to toggle to a Uni-Vibe effect. Choosing the labeled effect lights up a green LED, which switches to red as the alternate effect is chosen. Once you get the concept, it is pretty simple to choose your combination of three simultaneous effects (plus Reverb).

Adjusting parameters for effects and amps involves pushing in the Preset knob to enter edit mode, and a fair amount of scrolling through pages using the Preset knob and a four-way arrow button. I found that I could shorten the process by employing the factory presets as a starting point, though not the generic ones—those seemed more for showing off the effects than for real-world use. Instead, I used the presets Line 6 has taken pains to offer based on either popular songs (arranged by decade), and those programmed by session players like Albert, Lee, Peter Anderson, John Jorgenson, or members of bands like the Deftones, Meshuggah, and Minus the Bear. As original as we all like to feel, many of our sounds are, at best, variations on ones already used and these presets presented a plethora of prime starting places for me to begin my personal tweaking.

I was impressed by how tones based on “The Wind Cries Mary” and “Roxanne” instantly evoked those tunes. In addition to providing plenty of recreation room fun for the amateur picker, these presets will prove invaluable for the pro session player when the producer says, “Give me that U2 sound—now!” Just dial up the “StreetsNoName” (sic) setting and tweak from there.

Plugging in a Fernandes S-type guitar with DiMarzio Virtual Vintage pickups, I was reminded once again that amp modeling has come a long way since I reviewed the first Line 6 modeling amp for this magazine in 1996. As realistic as the sounds have become, it is the feel that has vastly improved over the last few years. This is largely due to the dynamic

response of the models. The clean sounds are not only warm and tube-like, but even at their cleanest settings they evidence a sag that screams real amp. I was quite comfortable playing blues licks, even on the most pristine settings, as the Spider never failed to respond to my attack variations. Backing off the guitar volume cleaned up the crunchy settings, and that difficult-to-emulate slight breakup sound, just on the edge of distorted, has finally been nailed. You will no doubt prefer some amp and effect replicas to others, but all the essentials from clean to concussive are at bare minimum acceptable and, at best, rival boutique tones. One disappointment was the weird taper of the Master volume control, which stayed very soft up to nine o’clock, at which point it jumped suddenly to very loud and only got marginally louder after that.

If you want to make maximum use of the Spider IV on stage and/or wish to use the built-in Quick Loop looper, you will need a foot controller. If you play the same set in the same order every night, the Line 6 FBV Express MkII (\$139 retail/\$79 street) will let you step through your presets, as well as control the pitch shifting and wah effects. The FBV Shortboard MkII (\$279retail/\$199street) adds an LCD, a tap tempo button, instant access to four presets (also accessible on the amp), and more. The full on FBV (\$599retail/\$399 street) ups the ante with more functionality and an extra on-board expression pedal, but it is unlikely that you will want to pay more for your controller than you did for the amp.

For the tone purist who plays pretty much one style of music, modeling amps will probably not cut it—all other things being equal, a real Marshall will always sound better than a modeled one. But being able to access everything from twang to metal can be a joy for the bedroom player and a valuable tool for the road dog or session cat who require that sort of versatility for their gigs. For modeling fans, the Spider IV 75 provides a wealth of dynamic, realistic tones and effects in a compact, easy-to-use, and affordable package. 📺

A close-up of the Spider IV 75's front-panel controls.

