

SOUNDRoom 

## Carvin PB5

BY ED FRIEDLAND

**DESPITE THE HEALTHY INNOVATION,** development, and advancement we electric bassists have seen in the instrument-building world, in many players' minds, there are still two basic flavors to choose from: P and J. But while these two letters will forever be associated with the creations of Leo Fender, virtually every bass manufacturer in the world has its own version of the hallowed duo. Some are dead-on copies, while others look for ways to refine or personalize the design. Carvin enters the P-Bass race with its new PB5 and PB4 instruments. By offering a staggering number of factory options, Carvin may have created the most customizable P on the planet. But does it sound like a P?

Yes. At first plug-in, there is no doubt where this instrument's sonic palette is centered. Carvin's SPC split-coil Alnico V pickup sits right where it should to create the classic tone signature—just add an ash body (as reviewed) and a bolt-on maple neck, and you're on the road to P-town. As an interesting part of this review, I configured the instrument using Carvin's online ordering system, which made choosing from the many possibilities very manageable. I'm fairly traditional-minded about my P's, so I went with straightahead choices: ash body (lightweight requested), maple neck, P pickup only (P/J and P/HB options are also available). But

I also wanted to trick it out a little, considering the many options. About as radical as I got was an ebony fingerboard with abalone diamond inlays, Carvin's 18-volt active preamp, and a smoking-hot Radiation Green paint job with matching headstock, which earned this beast its nickname: Godzilla. The Carvin locking bridge (which gives you the option to string through the body) and the lightweight, 20:1-ratio enclosed-gear tuners complete the hardware package found on all Carvin bolt-on instruments. This particular bass received chrome hardware, though gold or black are available, and a three-ply black pickguard seemed complementary. The string spacing is essentially standard 4-string spacing, but with five strings—it makes the right-hand compartment feel familiar, but larger. This tapers down to a very comfy nut width, while the neck has a shallow "C" profile that feels sleek and fast. The 14" radius gives the fingerboard a more modern feel, and the 22 medium-jumbo frets were installed and finished perfectly. Selecting a light piece of swamp ash, Carvin delivered a 5-string under eight pounds.

Given that much of my workload is managed by one type of P-Bass or another, I was first interested to see how well the PB5 fit into my staple diet of Austin-fried country/rock gigs. While I

am biased toward passive P's, on an outdoor trio gig—sans sound reinforcement, with slide guitar and drums—it was mighty nice to have that EQ fattening up the low end (if only it weren't 40 degrees). On several indoor occasions, I went back and forth between passive and active modes, and found the passive tone to have the characteristic midrange bark that I rely on, but with a little more clarity on top. The blade magnet design of the SPC gives the pickup a more even response across the strings, and contributes to the modern side of the PB5's personality. Passive mode is accessed via the push/pull pot on the passive tone control, which acts as a traditional lowpass filter even when active mode is engaged. I found this helpful for dialing in a more traditional tone when in active mode. In addition to atomic low end, with a simple twist of the treble control I discovered that Godzilla can spray fire, as well. The highs are super sparkly, and the cutting power is something to be appreciated when you need it. For slap or aggressive pickstyle,

the treble boost brings the PB out of the shadows, but with the EQ cut and passive tone control, the highs can be removed completely when you need the type of bass tone that induces involuntary spasms.

I confirmed for myself that the PB5 would function like any of my other P's, but how would it work as a 5-string? Happily, the PB5 has a killer B string that receives ample coverage from the pickup, and has a tight, defined acoustic response that makes it very playable, even in the higher positions. There was a time when you had to go with a premium boutique build to get this kind of B string at 34" scale, but Carvin seems to have figured this one out a long time ago. The PB5 can produce a wide range of tones from the P-Bass spectrum—from thumpy Jamerson to grindy Entwistle, and it manages to "look right" without being a cookie-cutter copy. Carvin's overall fit and finish is top notch, and with the savings of dealing directly with the factory, you can step into a U.S.-built 5-string under a grand. Pretty sweet. **BP**

### SPECIFICATIONS

CARVIN	<p><b>PB5</b>            Direct \$839 base, \$1,178 as reviewed            Pros Pure P tone, killer B            Cons None  <b>Bottom Line</b> With a myriad of wood choices and pickup configurations available, the PB5 can be almost any bass you want it to be, but its heart is precisely P.</p>
	<p><b>Contact</b> carvin.com</p>
SPECS	<p><b>Construction</b> Bolt-on  <b>Body</b> Swamp ash  <b>Neck</b> Maple  <b>Fingerboard</b> Ebony  <b>Fingerboard radius</b> 14"  <b>Frets</b> 22 medium-jumbo  <b>Bridge</b> Carvin locking  <b>String spacing at bridge</b> .75" (19mm)  <b>Tuning keys</b> Carvin Premium 20:1  <b>Neck width at nut</b> 1.75"  <b>Scale length</b> 34"  <b>Pickup</b> Carvin SCP Alnico V  <b>Preamp</b> 18-volt, concentric bass/treble boost/cut  <b>Controls</b> Volume, passive tone (push/pull passive mode), bass, treble  <b>Weight</b> 7.8 lbs  <b>Made in</b> U.S.A.</p>