



# GEAR

## REVIEW



# CLASSIC LOOKS, MODERN FUNCTION

## The Carvin PB4

**T**rends come and trends go, but tradition stands the test of time. And while Carvin's designs stand quite well on their own, thank you, face it: There are those other more "familiar-shaped objects" out there that players naturally gravitate toward. Carvin's PB basses are intended to accommodate these folks.

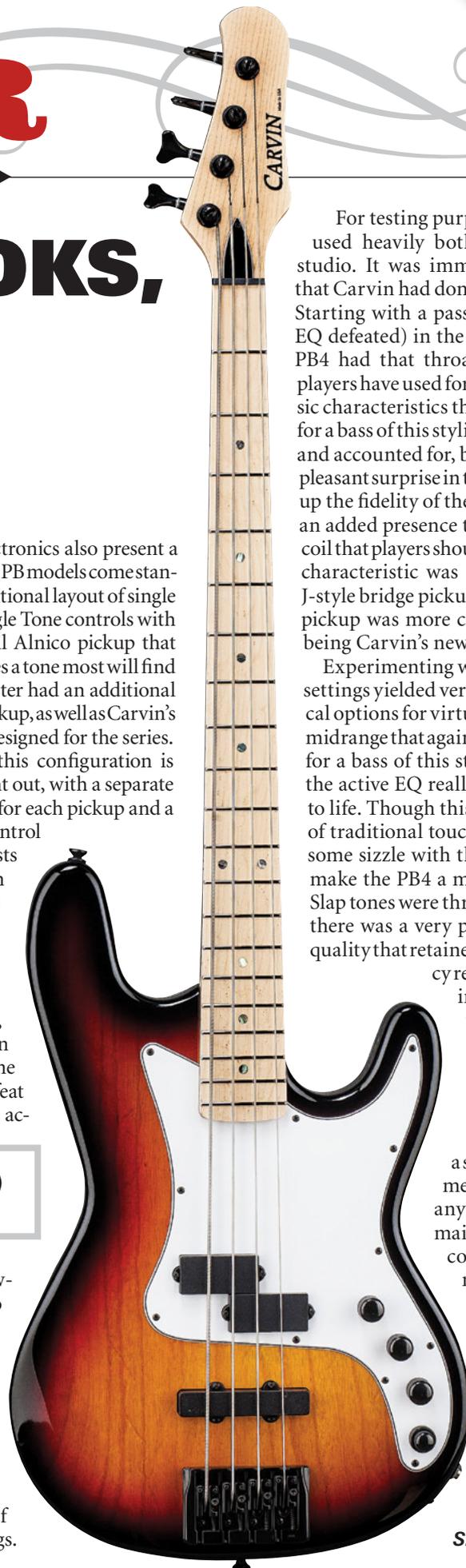
While Carvin PB basses are an obvious nod to the classic Precision Basses that have been around since the 1950s, these are not your grandfathers' P Basses. Carvin has expertly crafted a traditionally inspired instrument while making it their own with plenty of modern functionality. Like all Carvin instruments, PB basses are customizable to accommodate the player's wishes. Custom tops, finishes, and wood choices are all part of Carvin's standard operating procedure (the PB basses come in both four- and five-string models).

The four-string PB4 offers a blend of vintage and modern specifications. In standard form, it's constructed with an alder body of decent weight and is available in a choice of eight solid-color finishes (along with dozens of optional color upgrades). The tung-oiled maple neck has a very comfortable 14" radius fingerboard. Rosewood and dot inlays are standard, but, again, Carvin offers an array of options, including maple fingerboard and block markers. The PB4 has a nice, blended neck profile to accommodate fans of vintage-style P necks, but is still fast enough for fans of Jazz Bass necks. The PB4 also keeps with tradition with its 20-fret neck and Carvin SB-style headstock. A sculpted heel adds to the overall comfort of the PB4, which balances extremely well.

The PB4's electronics also present a world of options. PB models come standard with a traditional layout of single Volume and single Tone controls with an SCP split-coil Alnico pickup that gives the PB series a tone most will find familiar. The tester had an additional J-style Alnico pickup, as well as Carvin's active preamp designed for the series. The layout for this configuration is very well thought out, with a separate Volume control for each pickup and a master Tone control that traditionalists will love. From there, additional active Bass and Treble controls are added to tailor the overall sound. Finally, a push/pull on the front Volume knob adds a defeat function for the ac-

tive EQ, allowing the player to quickly change between vintage and modern sounds. There's even an internal trim pot to help tweak the output levels of these two settings.

Price: \$1,899 (list/base); \$869 (street/base)  
Info: [www.carvinguitars.com](http://www.carvinguitars.com)



For testing purposes, the PB4 was used heavily both live and in the studio. It was immediately apparent that Carvin had done their homework. Starting with a passive setting (active EQ defeated) in the neck position, the PB4 had that throaty midrange that players have used for decades. The classic characteristics that need to be there for a bass of this styling were all present and accounted for, but there was also a pleasant surprise in that Carvin opened up the fidelity of the pickups – there is an added presence to the Alnico split-coil that players should enjoy. The same characteristic was found in Carvin's J-style bridge pickup, though the neck pickup was more closely scrutinized, being Carvin's newer item.

Experimenting with all of the PB4's settings yielded very usable and musical options for virtually any style. The midrange that again needed to be there for a bass of this style was there. But the active EQ really brought the PB4 to life. Though this bass offers plenty of traditional touches, Carvin added some sizzle with their EQ voicing to make the PB4 a modern workhorse. Slap tones were through the roof, and there was a very pleasing piano-like quality that retained enough frequency response to sit nicely in the mix. There was also plenty of headroom to the preamp to be heard regardless of the situation.

The Carvin PB4 is a spectacular instrument capable of being any gigging bassist's main workhorse. It can cover virtually any musical style with ease and still leave room to expand. The tone is traditional and then some, and the craftsmanship is on par with Carvin's historical best.

—Sean O'Bryan  
Smith