

# MODERN VINTAGE

## MVP4

What does 'Modern Vintage' mean, anyway?  
Ace luthier Rob Elrick knows; ace bass-tester Stu Clayton finds out

Sonata Marketing  
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\$1499

There's no shortage of new instruments that build on Leo Fender's classic designs, but the recently launched Modern Vintage basses have certainly caught our attention. Developed with the assistance of master luthier Rob Elrick, this South Korea-built range aims to evoke those classic designs while incorporating updates and improvements that retain the sound, look and feel of the instruments that inspired them. MV currently offer Jazz and Precision-inspired instruments, and we elected to put the latter through its paces.

### Build Quality

The MVP4 was inspired by a 1962 Precision bass, and with the exception of the torrefied - roasted, in other words - maple of the neck and headstock, that's exactly how the bass appears. With an Olympic White finish over an alder body, dot inlays and a four-ply tortoise shell pickguard, the vintage vibe is present and correct.

However, the updates to the original become evident as soon as you pick the instrument up. It's lighter, with reduced headstock dive thanks to the Hipshot Ultralite Clover Key tuners, and the neck has a significantly slimmer profile. The vintage small nickel frets and bridge saddle screws, in place of modern allen key adjustments, also reinforce the vintage vibe, although that is offset by the easy-access dual-action truss rod. In short, old and new sit comfortably next to each other here.

Build quality is exceptional across the instrument: the slim neck is beautifully smooth and easy to get around, and the fretwork is faultless. A quick peek under the hood reveals simple and neat wiring using cloth-covered wires, all of which are cut to the correct length, with no excess. Overall, the instrument has been finished to a high standard.

### Sounds and Playability

Plugged in, the MVP4 has a naturally warm, resonant tone with excellent sustain. Although in theory the P-Bass configuration of only a simple volume and tone control is limiting, in reality it's surprisingly versatile if you remember that tone starts with your hands. With the tone rolled off, I find that the custom-wound 'split P' hum-cancelling pickup offers a very satisfying range when picking hand placement is brought into the equation.

Plucking close to the neck results in a fat, warm tone that evokes serious Motown vibes, and moving towards the middle of the



instrument opens the sound up, adding a little more clarity, while picking close to the bridge brings yet more bite. This simple technique for altering tone is effective on any instrument, of course, but I was surprised at the sheer breadth of variety available here, with the pickup reacting to subtle position shifts exceptionally well.

Adding the tone control into the equation naturally takes the instrument into a whole other realm, of course, naturally offering up a bright P-Bass-like punch. With the tone control on full, the instrument responds to slap playing admirably: it's not a modern slap tone by any stretch, but it's got the thump and grind that makes the P-bass so unexpectedly great for the technique.

Wielding a pick results in an equally enjoyable sonic experience, with an open tone control resulting in perfect rock or pop-punk tones. Rolling back in gradual increments adds further options, of course. Overall,

the MVP4 is a versatile instrument, particularly with regard to the way it responds to differing playing positions. There's certainly a lot to work with here if you know how to get the best out of it.

In terms of physical playability, the instrument doesn't disappoint. I love playing a Precision as much as the next bassist, but I'm far happier with a slimmer neck profile than those traditionally offered. In that regard, this bass is very satisfying to play, with vintage tones bursting forth from an instrument that is, for me, far more comfortable to navigate. Again, the coming together of old and new has been executed extremely well here.

It should be noted that the Modern Vintage basses do not ship with a case of any kind, with the company noting that they have opted not to force the customer to pay for one, when it's likely that he or she will already own a case. As someone with an attic full of instrument cases, I can see some logic here... MV cases are available as a separate purchase should the customer want one.

### Conclusion

Retailing at \$1499, the MVP4 is no casual purchase, but we've been impressed enough to highly recommend trying one. As I noted at the beginning of this review, if you're looking for a modern, Fender-inspired instrument, there are a plethora of options out there, but the MVP4 is certainly among the finest of them that I've played. The instrument has clearly been conceived by a team that has a passion for the original, but which also knows just where to make small tweaks and modifications that make sense. Dare I say it, I think that Leo would approve. ■



## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

**Price** | \$1499**Made In** | South Korea**Neck** | Torrified Maple**Body** | Alder**Neck Joint** | Bolt-on, four bolt attachment**Frets** | 20**Pickups** | E1 x custom-wound hum-cancelling split pickup**Controls** | Volume, Tone**Bridge** | Vintage style bridge with steel saddles**Hardware** | Hipshot Ultralite Clover Key tuners**Weight** | 3.9 kg / 8.5 lbs**Case/gig bag included** | No**Left-hand option available** | No

## WHAT WE THINK

**Plus** | Classic vintage looks, sensible modern updates**Minus** | Nothing**Overall** | A very affectionate update to a classic

## BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY



SOUND QUALITY



VALUE

