

REVIEWS

The world's finest 300B tubes

The only three letters you need to know

By Jeff Dorgay



If you are a lover of single ended triode amplifiers, no doubt you are familiar with the mighty 300B.

The mightiest of them all are the vintage Western Electric 300Bs, and then if you can find them, the reissued WE 300Bs that came out around 2005 or so. Only a few pairs of these were made and then the "new Western Electric" fell back into obscurity. I had a pair of *those* and they were pretty incredible, and I did spend some time with the NOS models when I had my WAVAC monoblocks. Never should have gotten rid of those. Oh well.

Today, the 300B amps have had a bit of a resurgence (and to some, they never went away – just like vinyl) but there are no incredible tubes to power them with. Having listened to more than my share of the current 300Bs, most manufacturers have settled on Electro Harmonix or JJ, because they are available. But don't expect the 50,000-hour tube life of the NOS WE's. Nope, these are 5,000 hour tubes on a good day. Most manufacturers have voiced around the current tubes, but that only

goes so far. If you have the chance to experience the vintage 300Bs, you'll freak out.

The vintage WE's are so smooth, extended, and dynamic, you'll swear you're listening to an entirely different amplifier. However, with these tubes going as high as \$6,000 a pair for an amazing set. And being 60-80 years old, there's still a chance you can pull them out of the box and have them croak. I'm just not that much of a gambler.

Enter EAT

The European Audio Team has their own factory in the Czech Republic, and recently, they've started production on the famed 300B, providing tubes that are a clear cut above the mass-produced items that are available, bridging the gap between NOS and NEW. With no WAVAC on hand, they were kind enough to send me a matched set of four for my Nagra 300B amplifier that is a push/pull design, delivering about 25 watts per channel.

The EAT 300B also bridges the price gap, tipping the scale at \$1,695 per matched pair. Not so bad if you have SET monoblocks, but it gets a bit spendy if you need four of em. Regardless, this is still way less cash out of pocket than the 2004 vintage WE's or the really old originals.

The Sound

Going past the afford/not afford, will my partner kill me/will they not notice part of the decision tree, the EAT tubes provide a substantial increase in performance than the current offerings in the \$500-\$900 pair tubes from "the other guys." And by increase, I mean that the EAT tubes are more neutral sounding than the other current tubes, honestly more extended at both ends of the frequency range.

Where the Nagra has exceptional bass control, due to its massive, tight tolerance output transformers that are wound in-house, the EAT tubes bring a nearly solid state like grip to the lowest frequencies. Using our 96db/1-watt sensitive Pure Audio Project HORN 15 speakers, it's almost as if I've added a subwoofer. Whether listening to EDM/electronica tracks, or Led Zeppelin, the bass line is hitting me more in the chest than the Nagra does with the stock JJ tubes.

An equal level of excitement is had on the upper register as well. Stringed instruments take on a more three-dimensional quality, with more texture. Pick your favorite acoustic guitar piece that you know well, and you will be surprised at how much more real the strings sound while being played, as well as the overtones that hang in the air after the strings have been struck. This is the stuff we all love 300B amplifiers for in the first place and the EAT tubes give you more of it.

In the end

At first the price tag might seem a bit prohibitive, but considering the care in manufacturing that goes into these tubes, I'm going to stick my neck out and bet that the EAT 300Bs will probably last a lot longer than the others. If that's the case, then these are not so much more money out the door in the long run. And if you hate swapping tubes as much as I do, once you've settled on a sound, this will be indeed welcome.

There are so few 300B enthusiasts out in the field that have jumped off the cliff on these tubes, I can't say that anyone's experience backs up my own, yet. I highly recommend their 300Bs, and hope to give the KT88s a spin sooner than later.

North American Distributor:

vanaltd.com

Factory:

Europeanaudioteam.com

A very cool video on EAT's tube production facility:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cd2jMzErw9I>



Previous spotlight: The Devialet Expert Pro 140

Please note that all TONE Audio copy and photography is © 2005–2019 TONE Magazine LLC. The RSS feed provided is for personal, non-commercial use only.

If you are not reading this content in your news aggregator, RSS reader, or direct, then the site you are looking at may be guilty of copyright infringement. If you locate this anywhere, please contact so we can take action immediately.