



FRETS



Seymour Duncan

ACTIVE MAG ACOUSTIC PICKUP SYSTEM

TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

BACK IN FOLK music's heyday, one of the most popular ways to plug in an acoustic guitar was with a magnetic soundhole pickup that used a mounting system designed to hold the pickup securely under the strings without damaging the instrument. Acoustic-electronic technology has grown exponentially since then, and onboard systems with undersaddle piezo pickups have become prevalent. Even so, many instruments don't come stock with piezos. For that matter, there are many reasons why a soundhole pickup remains something every acoustic player should own.

While the market for soundhole pickups has traditionally been dominated by passive designs that offer little or no tone adjustment capability, venerable pickup manufacturer Seymour Duncan has a powerful new option available in the form of the Active Mag, an active pickup that includes integrated volume and tone controls. Our test gear for this review included a few different steel-string Martins and Taylors running through an AER Compact 60/3 TE acoustic amp and a Fender Super Champ.

The Active Mag is relatively small and light, which makes temporary installation

easier than it was with the larger, clunkier models of yore. Simply slide the device into the soundhole and use a screwdriver to clamp down around the edges. The hardware is sufficiently padded to prevent it from marring your guitar's finish. Rather than a bulk nine-volt battery, the Active Mag is powered by a pair of CR2032 batteries unobtrusively tucked away on its underbelly. For temporary installation, the supplied 1/4-inch cable extends out from the soundhole and needs to be connected to a longer cable to reach an amp (an integrated strain-relief loop is included to secure the cable), but the pickup can be permanently installed if you're willing to drill a hole in your guitar and hardwire the endpin jack.

The Active Mag's ample headroom and power were immediate attention-getters, and its hum-cancelling stack design means it operates with little-to-no audible hum. Unlike so many flat-sounding soundhole pickups, the Active Mag has a dimensional tone, and a huge range of volume and brilliance can be dialed in via control knobs conveniently located at the edges of the pickup. The high-end shimmer and overall responsiveness were most impressive, and the adjustable

SPECIFICATIONS

Active Mag

CONTACT seymourduncan.com

PRICE \$169 street

CONTROLS Tone, volume

POWER REQUIREMENT Two CR2032 batteries (not included)

BUILT USA

KUDOS Powerful, lively, responsive, and quiet. Simple yet flexible

CONCERNS None

pole pieces facilitate precise control over the tonal balance from string to string. The Active Mag arrives with the first and second string's pole pieces tucked far inward, and if that seems odd, it won't once you try raising them: Unwound strings are much hotter than wound strings.

If you've always thought soundhole pickups made acoustic guitars sound like cheap electrics, with a dull, inflexible tone, Seymour Duncan's Active Mag could change your mind. It sounds lively and offers tonal flexibility. Even if your instrument already has a piezo system, the Active Mag can complement an undersaddle piezo's brighter tone and make using an electric amp a viable option, especially in combination with an acoustic amp. For example, I ran a Taylor guitar's onboard electronics through the pristine AER acoustic amp and used the Active Mag to feed a tube-driven Fender Super Champ, and the resulting sound was huge! What's more, the Active Mag can also serve as a handy, robust backup to more temperamental onboard pickup-and-preamp systems. As usual, the folks at Seymour Duncan know what they're doing. Give the Active Mag a go. 🎸