



POWER BARS

Seymour Duncan AHB-1 Blackout active pickups

BY ERIC KIRKLAND

ACTIVE PICKUPS HAVE A specially tuned preamp built into each one of them that influences the pickup's EQ, response and output. This preamp makes it possible for the pickups to consistently generate layers of overtones that most passive pickups cannot, especially in conjunction with high gain and distortion. On the flipside, these preamps generally inject a flavor outside of the guitar's natural sound, often referred to as cold or one-dimensional.

This has left many players to speculate on what tones might be possible from active pickups if they were to also inhere the lifelike beauty delivered by time-honored passive designs. Seymour Duncan handily answers this question with its new Blackout active pickups. Through clever concepts, Duncan's Blackouts are roughly the sonic equivalent of typical active pickups driven by a warm tube overdrive.

FEATURES

AN INDUSTRY-STANDARD black epoxy casing hides the Blackouts' bar-style magnets, which are wide enough to support either vintage or Floyd-bridge string spacing needs. If you're already using active pickups with a three-pin connect system, it won't take more than a few minutes to light a fire into the Blackouts. On the underside of each pickup, you'll see the same three-pin, plug-and-

play-style system. Should you prefer a typical installation, standard wires are also included. What aren't visibly apparent are the groundbreaking balanced inputs that feed the differential preamp. This novel inclusion of audio technology results in far greater dynamics and a 12-to-14db reduction in noise compared to other active pickup designs.

PERFORMANCE

ACTIVE PICKUPS ARE often cited for imparting their own frequency curve, thereby obscuring a guitar's natural tone. The Blackouts, however, seem to supercharge the instrument's tonal quality, imbuing it with a particularly aggressive midrange that sounded not at all unnatural. Neither sweet nor delicate, these ill-mannered heathens belch raw midrange blasts with all the grace of a gassy Tasmanian devil and scream with much the same animalistic emotion and toothy bite. Depending upon the amp I used, the pickups' output sometimes required lower gain settings and a change in the amp's EQ settings to achieve the best tones. Still, their sound was always woody, warm and intensely organic.



**SEYMOUR DUNCAN
AHB-1 BLACKOUT
ACTIVE PICKUPS**

LIST PRICES: single, \$129.00; set, \$248.00

MANUFACTURER: Seymour Duncan, seymourduncan.com

STYLE: Active, humbucking, high output

MAGNETS: Ceramic on bridge, alnico on neck

WIRING: Multi-conductor with battery lead or three-pin quick connect

FEATURES: Dynamic response, Balanced inputs reduce noise by 14db over typical active pickup design

FINISH: Black

Low noise floor helps pickups achieve woody and natural tones.

THE BOTTOM LINE

SEYMOUR DUNCAN'S BLACKOUTS have an exciting and natural sound, qualities I would have never expected to find in active pickups. Chief among their attributes are an explosive midrange charge, searing harmonic grind and an earthy foundation that belie their active nature. ✨

| PRO | CON |
|--|--|
| EXTREME BUT ORGANIC TONE; THREE-PIN QUICK CONNECT SYSTEM | UNIQUE MIDRANGE AND HIGH OUTPUT MAY REQUIRE NEW AMP SETTINGS |