



Seymour Duncan SHPR-1 P-Rails

The P-Rails sport an unusual look—which may pose a problem for some traditionalists—but they drop into a standard humbucker slot with no need for modifications. White and cream-colored versions are also in the works.

TESTED BY BARRY CLEVELAND

THE P-RAILS PICKUPS WERE DESIGNED TO COM-bine the distinctive sounds of P-90s, single-coils, and humbuckers into a sort of tonal ménage à trois, allowing you to gig or record with one guitar rather than having to bring three. How successfully they perform will, of course, be largely dependent on the guitar they reside in—in this case we tested them in a Korean-made ESP PB-500. The well-constructed PB-500 is a mahogany instrument with a set neck, a 22-fret rosewood fretboard, a 24.75" scale-length, single Volume and Tone controls, a 3-position pickup selector, and a 3-position mini-toggle for configuring the pickups. It sells on the street for around \$650. The front P-Rail is mounted flush to the bottom edge of the fretboard, the rear about a half-inch from the bridge, and the rail portions of both pickups face each other on the inside.

At the heart of each P-Rail is a full-sized alnico V P-90 with average DC resistances of 7.25k Ω (neck) and 10.20k (bridge). Alongside the P-90 is a single-coil alnico V rail with average DC resistances of 5.60k (neck) and 8.56k (bridge). While that approximately 1.60k difference isn't theoretically optimal for hum cancellation purposes, in practice it works out just fine.

Depending on how the four leads from each pickup are wired, and the number and type of switches used, lots of variations are possible from a set of two P-Rails. In our review guitar, the single mini-toggle lets you select P-90, rail, or both wired in series (humbucker) when using a single pickup, and two P-90s, two rails, or two humbuckers when both pickups are selected—for a total of nine distinctly different sounds. Obviously, adding switches for phase, parallel/series operation, etc., would result in even more options.

The P-90s lacked a little of the squawk found in some vintage Gibson P-90s, but they were exceptionally big and warm sounding, with amazing clarity across their wide frequency range. The rails also produced a very clear sound, with lively upper mids and highs, and a tight low end. The two rails were particularly impressive when combined, yielding Strat-like spankiness and sparkle. In humbucker mode, the P-Rails delivered fat tones with a wonderful richness and smoothness, though with a somewhat different harmonic balance than standard humbuckers. The individual P-90 and rail pickups hummed a bit, though no more than any other single-coils, and the noise went away entirely once they were switched to any of the double-coil options.

Will having one guitar equipped with a set of P-Rails give you all the sounds you currently get from, say, your Stratocaster, McCarty Soapbar, and Les Paul guitars? Not likely, but that really shouldn't be the point. The P-Rails are truly innovative products and the many sounds that they *do* make are outstanding—and that's why they receive an Editors' Pick Award. 🎸

SPECS | Seymour Duncan, (805) 964-9610; seymourduncan.com

MODEL	SHPR-1 P-Rails
PRICE	\$129 retail/\$89 street
KUDOS	Innovative design. Highly versatile tones. Excellent value.
CONCERNS	Unusual look may not appeal to more conservative players.