



Take an all-time great design, put it on a diet, add state-of-the-art actives, and you've got a recipe for joy. Review by Gareth Morgan

# Sadowsky

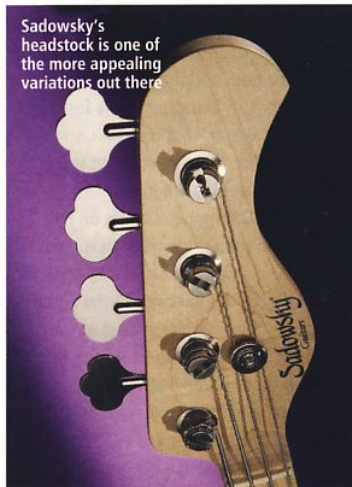
## MV4 Bass

**S**adowsky Guitars was established in 1979 by Roger Sadowsky, a trained luthier who initially worked solely on vintage Fender basses, fitting his own powerful, noise-free active preamp. Sadowsky's mods were a hit, and Marcus Miller became one of his most famous early customers. When the asking price for vintage Fenders skyrocketed, the operation expanded to produce complete instruments. All the NYC series guitars and basses are built in the US; the Metro basses, of which this MV4 is one, are made at the company's facility in Tokyo.

Roger Sadowsky is one of a number of high-profile American luthiers who use Leo Fender's original designs as the template for their own instruments, and you can't miss the origins of the gorgeous MV4 we have for review. One main difference, although it isn't obvious to the naked eye, is the slightly trimmed body: it's about half a centimetre narrower from the top to the bottom edge of the rear bout. Apart from that, it's a JB all the way, built in this case from high-grade swamp ash with a transparent Mary Kaye-style white that allows the beautiful grain pattern to show through nicely. Sadowsky respects the basic template by including

### First Impressions

A genuinely delicious instrument that exudes pure class from every pore



Sadowsky's headstock is one of the more appealing variations out there



High-quality Hipshot tuners: look vintage, but work like new

The MV4 has a swamp ash body with a transparent white finish that allows the beautiful grain to show through

the classic forearm and ribcage comfort chamfers and horns, although the upper one is fractionally thinner and the lower is a touch spikier than the original. A tortoiseshell scratchplate and a chrome control plate maintain the connection.

The 34"-scale neck is hewn from a single piece of maple. It isn't super-slim but the profile feels supremely comfortable and ultra-playable. The headstock's midriff is more oval-shaped than a Fender, and the scroll has been replaced by a scoop, exaggerated lip. Four Hipshot tuners line up on the top edge and the headstock is nicely recessed to provide an excellent break-angle for the

strings (aided by a chrome string tree) over the white plastic nut and onto the maple fingerboard. The fingerboard carries 21 medium-gauge nickel frets and comes with black marker dots on both face and top edge, the whole thing being secured at the body by the traditional four-bolt system.

The strings terminate at a chunky chrome Sadowsky bridge. An Allen key and Phillips screwdriver are required to adjust the action, but altering the neck relief needs no specialist tools, since trussrod tweaking on this bass takes place at the body end with the adjuster nut being of the 'spoke wheel' variety, as

### FACTFILE

#### MV4

**Description:** Solidbody bass. Made in Japan

**Price:** £1395

**Build:** Swamp ash body, maple neck with 21 medium nickel frets on a maple fingerboard. Hipshot tuners and Sadowsky bridge. Chrome hardware

**Electrics:** Active, with two Sadowsky J pickups. Sadowsky OBPNVT preamp, Volume, Balance, Bass boost and Treble boost controls

**Left hander:** No

**Finishes:** Various available, including two-tone '59 sunburst and three-tone sunburst; natural; metallic red and blue; solid white, black, sonic blue; transparent red, blue and white

**Range Options:** The five-string version is the MV5, with the same finished options, costing £1525. The RV4 is the '60s version with an alder body and a rosewood fingerboard. No fretless options at all

**Scale length:** 864mm (34")

**Width of neck**

Nut 39mm

12th fret 56mm

**Depth of neck**

1st fret 19.5mm

12th fret 22.5mm

**String spacing**

Nut 11mm

Bridge 20mm

**Action as supplied**

12th fret treble 1.5mm

12th fret bass 1.5mm

**Weight:** 4/8.8lbs

**Contact:** The Bass Gallery  
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[www.thebassgallery.com](http://www.thebassgallery.com)



## THE COMPETITION

### FENDER American Deluxe Series Jazz Bass

Quite simply, an extremely good active Jazz Bass

RRP: £1199

### SANDBERG California PM

How can they hand-build something this good for this price? Highly recommended

RRP: £999

### LAKLAND Skyline 44-02 Deluxe

Practical, versatile and packed full of classy sounds

RRP: £1249

on a Music Man. You don't need a specific Allen key – any screwdriver-type implement narrow enough to insert into one of the holes will suffice.

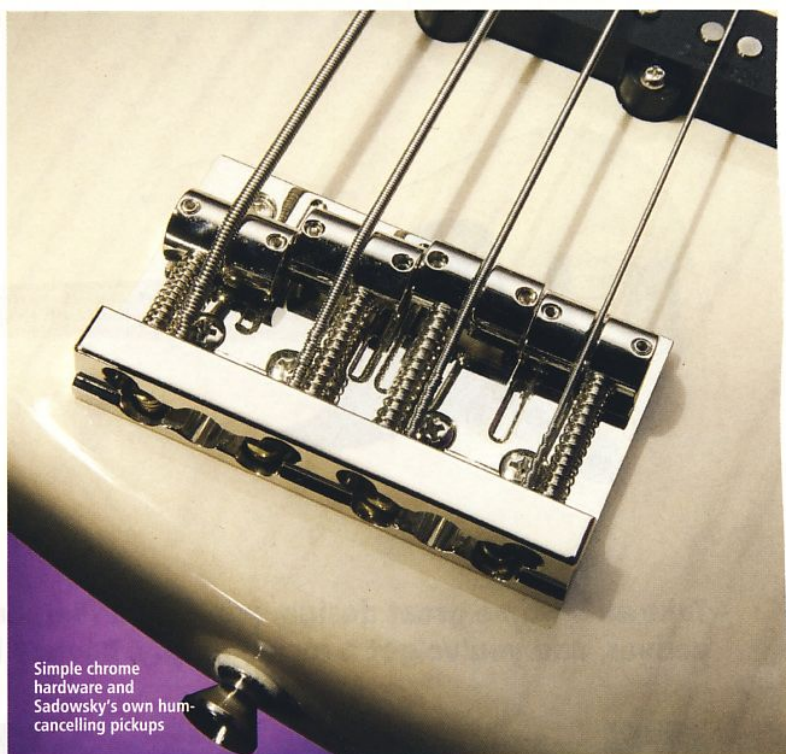
As you might expect, the MV4 is active-powered, and comes fitted with a Sadowsky OBPNVT preamp and a pair of Sadowsky J-style pickups. The controls include Volume, Pickup Balance, Treble and Bass. Pulling up on the Bass control accesses a useful passive bypass option, although unfortunately neither tone control functions in passive mode.

The MV4 is a little headstock-heavy in the seated position, but the smaller body makes you feel a little closer to the action and a restraining forearm or strap provide the perfect antidote to any imbalance.

## SOUNDS

We began with both tone controls fully anti-clockwise, with no boost, and uncovered a superbly even, full-range tone with lots of harmonic life, a decent low-end bump and a wonderfully unbiased midrange. This is effectively the same as pulling up the Bass control to bypass the active EQ, and it's a good starting point. You might find it a touch lightweight, though, so we rolled the Bass knob to half-boost – a move which provides more than enough thud to give your groove plenty of power and impact while calming the spiky edge of the D and G strings without sacrificing definition or clarity. Pushing the Bass knob to the max gives a smoother, bluesier thud which rocks out in fine style without overpowering the amp.

Next, we began edging up the Treble knob. The halfway point reinstates the funky aggression of the 'both tones off' sound but with massively increased tonal



Simple chrome hardware and Sadowsky's own hum-cancelling pickups

## The power of Sadowsky's actives is staggering and a little frightening, but it sounds classy and musical


response and level. The combination of thud, clarity and spikiness is just wonderful and slappers will simply adore the thumb sound here with its piano-esque bottom end and explosive, open highs. Try fully boosting Treble for the most aggressive, slicing assault on your ears possible. In truth, it's a bit too extreme... but it's great fun.

We left both tone controls on half boost and soloed the neck pickup to discover a superb woody, barky tone with a little more natural body in the higher registers and a raspier impact at the bottom end. Again, you can fully boost bass without a trade-off in note definition, and the increased impact is enough to give complete confidence that what you're playing will be heard. This is great for traditional rock-based styles as well as retro soul and funk, and if you need edginess or a little more zing to cut through a dense mix, nudging Treble a little further provides this. Again, full-boost is a little noisy, but perfect if you're trying to simulate a pick sound.

Soloing the bridge pickup with the same halfway EQ boost brought good news on two fronts: there's a superb evenness of volume from each pickup option and the high-mid realisation is an ingredient rather than the whole dish. While the sound of the bridge pickup is crisper than elsewhere, the MV4 still kicks out enough bass for excellent body and the top end is snappy without being brittle. Rolling Bass EQ to full doesn't really affect the definition – the MV4 is still aggressively funky but with the added authority of a bigger note. Risking maximum treble is like supercharging

every component on the bass from bridge to headstock, giving an excess of squeaks and metallic noise. As with any of the flat-out-treble settings this is a bit impractical for basic fingerstyle, but it's fun for contemporary techniques, for flailing around manically or just plain annoying the neighbours.

## VERDICT

In a word, awesome. The MV4 is beautifully put together and it arrived with such a good setup that playing it was like a hot knife through butter; I simply couldn't put it down. No, it's not cheap – but it's hand-built to the highest possible standards, and a brief comparison with similarly spec'd Fenders tells you that for what you're getting, it's not really all that expensive. The power of Sadowsky's EQ is both staggering and a little frightening and aside from the excessive fully-boosted Treble it's really musical, with a bunch of classy variations that are simple to access. Looking for a serious, high quality bass? Decided on a realistic budget? You absolutely have to try one of these beauties. 



Sadowsky's Tokyo shop's fit and finish is superb. The basses are slightly heavier than their NYC counterparts, though

## FINAL SCORE

Build Quality .....	19/20
Playability .....	19/20
Sound .....	18/20
Value for money .....	17/20
Vibe .....	18/20
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>91%</b>

Good for... the highest possible quality Jazz sounds with loads of versatility

Look elsewhere... for more contemporary styling or a more humbucker-type tone