

tone & technique | fine guitars | legendary players

Guitarist

Issue 401

DECEMBER 2015

BLUES SPECIAL EDITION



Featuring
ROBERT CRAY
BILLY GIBBONS
DAN PATLANSKY
+
BLUES SOLOING
MASTERCLASS
p72

REVIEWED

1960 SUNBURST

Gibson Custom Shop True Historic
Tom Murphy Aged Les Paul **p78**



Charvel Custom
Shop San Dimas



Bonamassa's blues
soloing secrets



Classic Series '50s
& '60s Strats



Robben Ford's
tech on tone mods



Epiphone Gary
Clark Jr Casino

Future

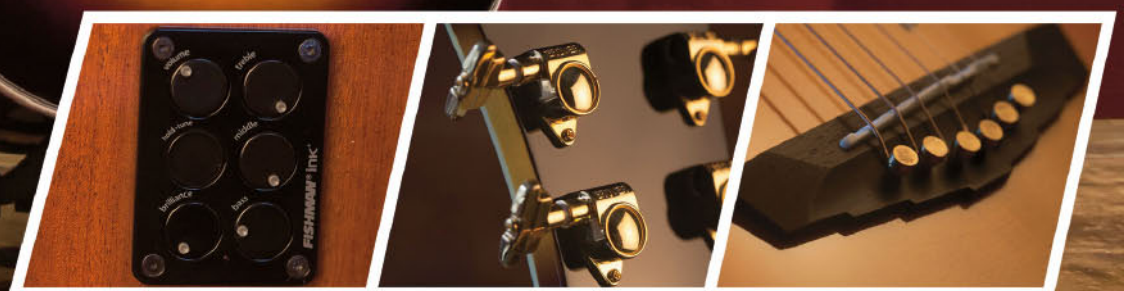


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Headline Blues



On page 66, South African blues-rocker Dan Patlansky urges improvers to exercise restraint in their soloing to the point where it feels as though they're hardly playing anything, then develop the solo from there. Considering the closest musical relation to a solo electric guitar is the human voice, with all its nuances of pitch and long-sustained notes, his advice makes a lot of sense. Think of Clare Torry's incredible, lyric-free vocal solo on Pink Floyd's *The Great Gig In The Sky*: if the notes and phrasing of that vocal solo were transferred to electric guitar, the solo would still be amazing, because it has feeling, phrasing and deep musicality.

Speaking of blues, it is with sadness that we say goodbye to Neville Marten as our anchorman for Blues Headlines. After 20 years, Nev has decided to take a break, handing over to stellar session-man Richard Barrett (see p153). "I've been humbled by the kind things that readers have said about Blues Headlines," Nev says. "But there comes a time when you feel it's time to move over and let someone else have a go. I've asked Richard because I love his playing, and I'm sure you will, too. But I'll continue doing gear demos, so you haven't quite seen the back of me yet!" he adds.

Finally, prompted by feedback from you, we've simplified how you access *Guitarist's* video and audio. You can get it all at one, easy-to-bookmark webpage that will stay the same every month, meaning you'll always know how to find it. Simply type <http://bit.ly/guitaristextra> into the address bar of your web browser from now on to instantly access all your *Guitarist* video and audio goodies. Enjoy the issue!

Jamie Dickson **Editor**

Editor's Highlights



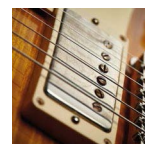
Drive On!

Daniel Steinhardt and Mick Taylor dish bucketfuls of glorious dirt in this month's free 36-page guide to overdrive, boost and distortion



Bonamassa's Blues

Richard Barrett's scorching lesson in Joe Bonamassa's blues soloing is a lick-packed primer to the blues-rocker's stunning technique **Page 153**



True Story

Gibson's True Historic 1960-spec 'Burst had us all swooning. Worth the money? Read Nev's in-depth review and decide for yourself **Page 78**

Guitarist

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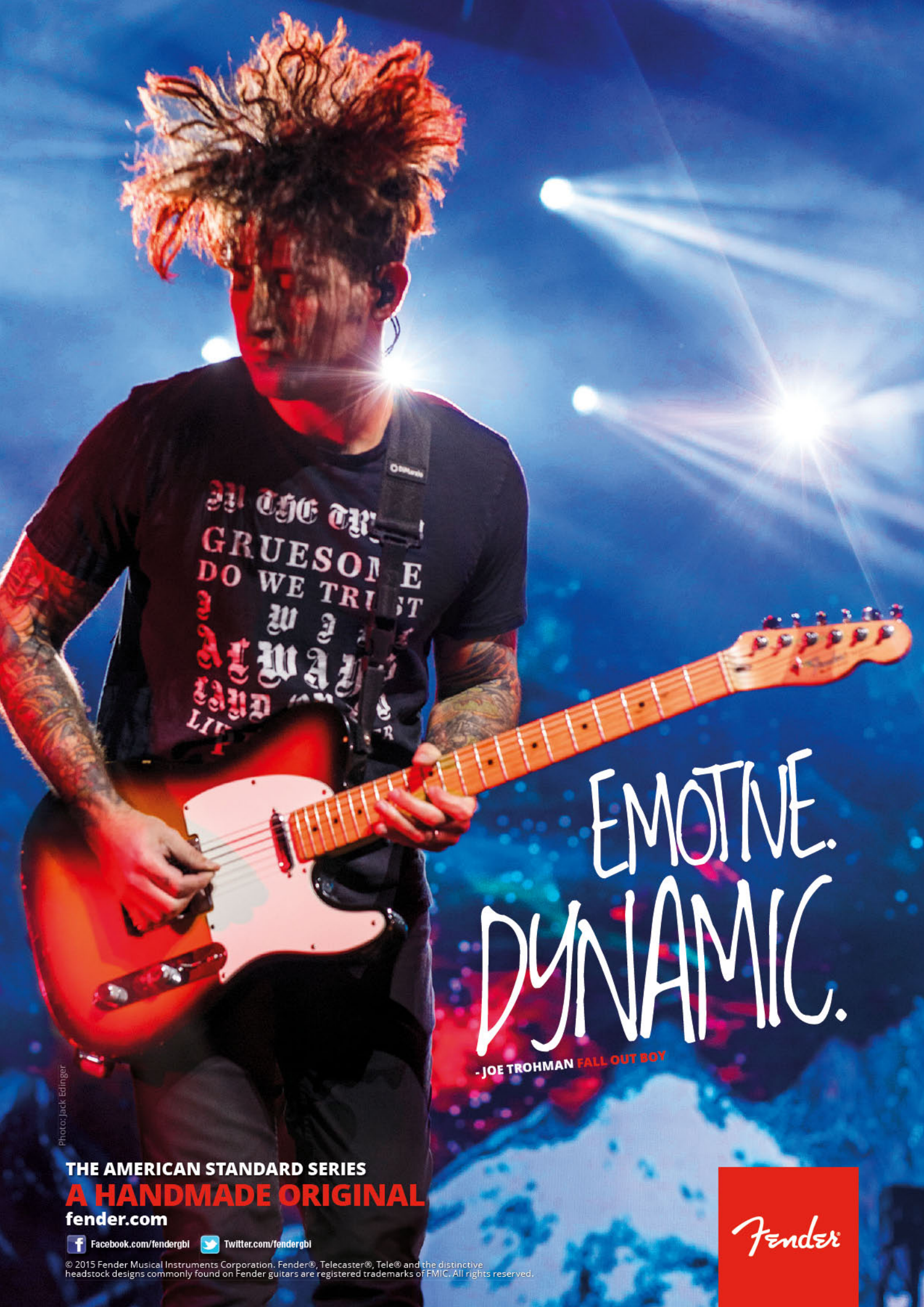
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EMOTIVE. DYNAMIC.

- JOE TROHMAN **FALL OUT BOY**

Photo: Jack Edinger

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Fender

Contents

COVER FEATURE

BLUES SPECIAL EDITION

52 A blues soloing
masterclass, the
latest Gibson Custom
Shop Les Paul and interviews with
Billy Gibbons, Robert Cray and
Dan Patlansky





REGULARS

- 003 Editor's Welcome
- 027 The Lineup
- 039 Readers' Letters
- 042 New Music
- 100 Subscribe
- 124 The Tone Doctor
- 133 Gear Q&A
- 138 Longterm Test
- 144 Old Gold
- 158 Reader Ads

FEATURES

- 048 Trey Gunn
- 052 Billy Gibbons
- 058 Robert Cray
- 066 Dan Patlansky

NEW GEAR

- 010 **Epiphone** Gary Clark Jr Casino
- 016 **Charvel** USA RTM San Dimas 1H
- 020 **Fender** '65 Princeton Reverb &
'65 Deluxe Reverb Special Editions
- 078 **Gibson** True Historic 1960 Les Paul
Murphy Aged
- 088 **Peavey** Valveking 20 MH,
Classic 20 MH, & 6505 MH
- 098 **Orange** Micro Dark
- 102 **Fender** Acoustic Pro

PEDALBOARD

- 112 **Boss** ES-8
- 114 **Moog** MF Flange
- 116 **Mad Professor** Evolution Orange
Underdrive & Simple Predriver
- 117 **TC Electronic** Hypergravity Compressor
& Sentry Noise Gate

AUDITION

- 118 **Fender** Classic Series Special Edition
'50s & '60s Stratocasters
- 120 **IK Multimedia** AmpliTube Mesa/Boogie
- 122 **Mad Professor** Red Cable
- 122 **One Control** Tri Loop

TECHNIQUES

- 72 **Dan Patlansky** Blues Soloing Masterclass
- 146 **Guthrie Govan** Masterclass
- 153 **Blues Headlines** Joe Bonamassa

VIDEO & AUDIO

To enjoy all of the video and audio content in this month's issue, simply type the following link into your browser and follow the instructions on-screen:
<http://bit.ly/guitaristextra>

The background is a dark, textured field of blue smoke or mist. On the right side, there is a glowing, translucent sphere with a complex, fractal-like internal structure, emitting a bright blue light. The text is centered and rendered in a bold, sans-serif font with a yellow-to-white gradient and a white outline.

EIGHT

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FIRST PLAY



**EPIPHONE GARY CLARK JR
'BLAK & BLU' CASINO**
£649

WHAT IS IT? Signature version
of the classic hollowbody thinline

CASINO ROYALE

Words
Dave Burrluck

Photography
Olly Curtis

Grammy Award-winning, modern blues-and-more artist Gary Clark Jr gets his own signature model. A Casino too far or a class act? We find out...

Think 'Casino' and you invariably start and stop with The Beatles. Rather unfair, really, as the hollow-bodied Epiphone version of the Gibson ES-330 has served all sorts of players – not least Gary Clark Jr, whose 2012 major-label debut, *Blak And Blu*, sent him squarely into the mainstream. Despite his Austin, Texas blues roots, Clark paints a far wider picture, evidenced again by his autumn 2015 release, *The Story Of Sonny Boy Slim*. "I love everything about the Casino," he says. "I love its P-90 pickups, its shape, how hollow and light it is, and even the way it sounds unplugged when I'm playing it around the house. I feel like it was made for me."

Clark's signature Casino comes with or without a Bigsby vibrato (both without a pickguard), in just one colour, the rather fetching Blueburst. It's a very tidy build, too. Yes, we have a pretty thick-looking modern poly gloss finish – hardly unusual with its Chinese origin – offset with shiny metal plating, including the Bigsby. The white binding on the





top and back edges and the fingerboard is all clean and crisp. Wide and low 'medium jumbo' frets (approximately 2.6mm wide by 1.1mm high) sit over the edge binding of the very slightly flatter-than-standard 356mm (14-inch) cambered fingerboard. Inlays are simple pearloid parallelograms and there are no model-specific logos anywhere.

Like the ES-330 – but unlike the centre-blocked ES-335 – the Casino is totally hollow, although the top does have some reinforcement in the central area. But even with the additional heft of the Bigsby, it's a lightweight thinline that feels very familiar. The metal-covered 'dog ear' P-90s are screwed directly to the top. There is no height adjustment for either, aside from the screw-in pole pieces. Control setup is Gibson-standard and the knobs are neat black 'top hats' with metal inserts, although the sharp-edged metal pointers seem a little archaic.

Feel & Sounds

Bigsby or trapeze? While many of us simply love the look, not to mention the seemingly more open midrange of a Bigsby, they can be painful to string up, and here tuning stability needs some TLC. But with strings stretched, a rub with a needle file and a little lube applied to the saddles, the Blak & Blu's Bigsby performs rather well.

There's a really appealing acoustic tonality to both versions of the guitar, with more volume than you'd hear on a centre-blocked semi. Acoustically, the trapeze version has a fuller, thicker sound compared with the slightly more open tonality of the Bigsby version. The non-



1. Unusually for a signature model, this one is offered with or without the Bigsby vibrato. You choose
2. The P-90 single coils are all part of the Casino heritage, and they're a perfect match for a host of classic sounds
3. Another unusual feature for this signature guitar is the lack of, well, signature. The clean headstock keeps the classic vibe intact
4. Just remember that the Casino, like the Gibson ES-330, is fully hollow without a centre-block: at high levels, it will feed back
5. Gibson's classic four-control layout (shown on p14) needs no introduction from us. If you use your controls to drive, you may want to consider the trapeze version – that Bigsby arm can get in your way



Whacking up our power amp, anything from the 60s-era Beatles and Stones seems to fall out of the guitar, and it's a great strummer

Bigsby guitar is 0.43kg (0.95lb) lighter, too, and feels slightly neck-heavy strapped on.

The neck adopts a D-shaped profile which feels pleasantly slim front to back (21.5mm at the 1st fret, 23mm at the 12th) and, as supplied, the setup is overly low, especially on the trapeze model, though that is swiftly sorted by raising the tune-o-matic, resulting in a slinky and hugely bend-friendly feel thanks to those wide frets. And due to the lack of centre-block, the neck sits further into the body, joining at the 16th fret rather than the ES-335's 19th fret.

Fairly low-output P-90s like these can certainly be a little over bright and the bridge pickup needs a little dialling in and tone-control reduction to avoid being teeth-jarring. The neck pickup, meanwhile, drops us right into Kenny Burrell or Grant Green's tone area. Whacking up our power amp, anything from the 60s-era Beatles and Stones seems to fall out of the guitar. It's great for more soulful textures, too, or edgier rockabilly; it's definitely hollow, and with it, a great strummer.

Adding some gain gets to the heart of Gary Clark Jr's 'signature' sound: that slightly fuzzy, wider overdrive that seems less direct than an ES-335 or certainly a solidbody. On cramped stages, you'll be teetering on the edge of feedback and there's some microphonic squeal, but if you can control that feedback, textures are easy to evoke.

So, which would we choose? The Bigsby works its magic, once again – there's just something about this guitar that we prefer





These affordable hollowbodies will suit a huge swathe of pop, blues, soul and jazz history, or strummier Britpop and indie

over the trapeze version. You might have the opposite opinion: it's best you audition both!

Verdict

Colour aside, there's little new here and even if you've never heard of Gary Clark Jr, these are both fit-for-duty, affordable hollowbodies that will suit a huge swathe of pop, blues, soul and jazz history, or strummier Britpop and indie. Remember, it's a hollowbody, so feedback may be a problem, but control that and you have a pretty fine version of a true classic. Yup, we'd love a Gibson Memphis ES-330... but while we dream of or save up for that, here's a shrewd and way more cost-effective alternative. **G**



EPIPHONE GARY CLARK JR 'BLAK & BLU' CASINO WITH BIGSBY

PRICE: £649

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Double-cutaway, thinline hollowbody electric

BODY: Maple/birch/maple laminate

NECK: Mahogany, 1960s SlimTaper D Profile, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")

NUT/WIDTH: White synthetic/42.8mm

FINGERBOARD: Single-bound rosewood with pearloid parallelogram inlays, 356mm (14") radius

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo

HARDWARE: ABR Tune-o-matic bridge, licensed Bigsby B70 vibrato and Grover Rotomatic tuners – nickel-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Gibson USA 'dog ear' P-90, 3-way pickup selector switch, individual pickup volume and tone controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.38/7.4 (w/ Bigsby); 2.95/6.5 (w/ trapeze)

OPTIONS: The trapeze tailpiece version costs £619

RANGE OPTIONS: Standard Casino costs £459. Other Casinos include the smaller Coupe (£349) and the Elitist 1965 Casino (£1,499)

LEFT-HANDERS: Not available

FINISHES: Gloss Blueburst top with black back, sides and neck

Epiphone

00800 444 27661

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9/10

PROS Impressive build, sound, weight and price

CONS As ever, the Bigsby needs a little TLC, and the bridge pickup can be a little spiky – though, of course, neither ruin the fun

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FIRST PLAY



**CHARVEL USA CUSTOM
SHOP RTM SAN DIMAS 1H**
£1,399

.....
WHAT IS IT? A double-cut
solidbody bolt-on

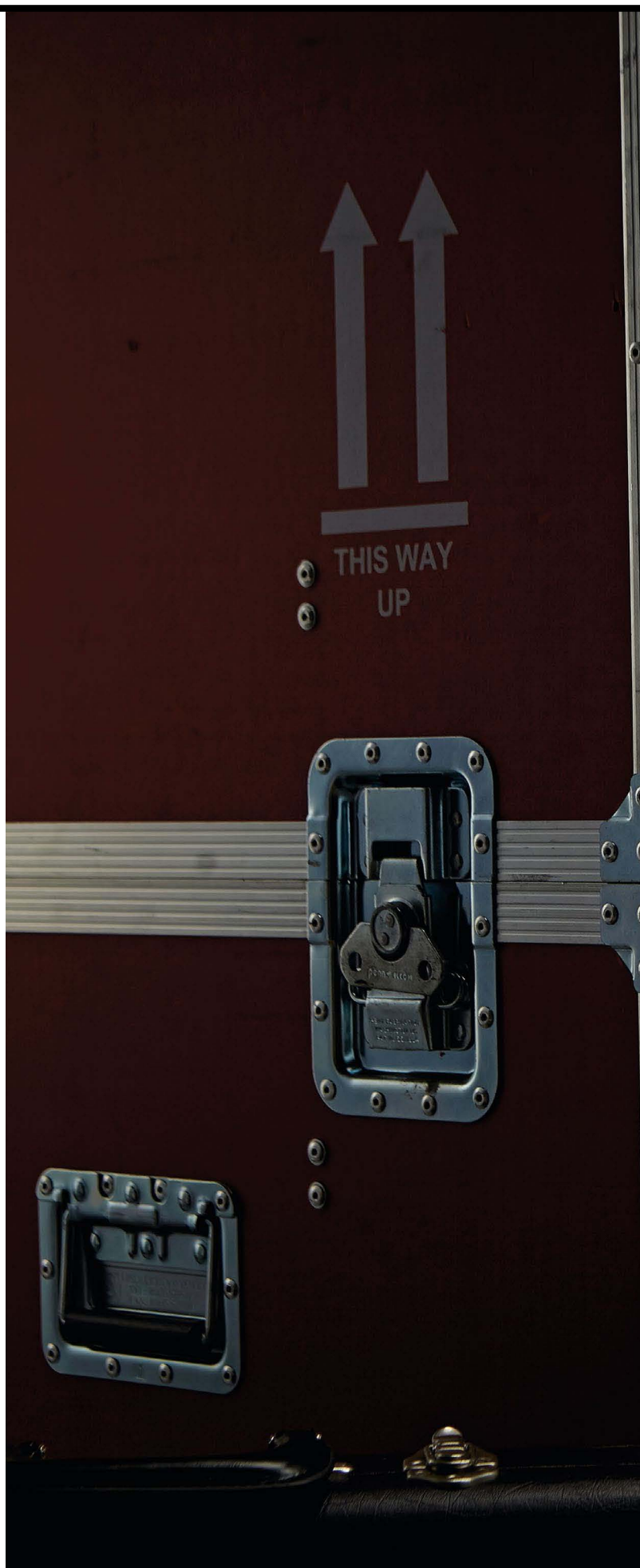
Specs appeal

A lean, green shred machine with Californian custom shop credentials – and a 1980s price

Words Darran Charles **Photograph** Joby Sessions

Although the Charvel brand has been around since the early 1970s, a newer generation of guitarists may have only recently met its acquaintance via the newly released Guthrie Govan signature model. But since Fender bought the Charvel brand back in 2002, a modest number of San Dimas models have been finding their way to these shores, with the greater number of these coming from Japan.

What you may not know is that Charvel has been operating a Custom Shop for over a decade, inviting you to build your dream guitar with its very own master builders. As you would expect, access to the Custom Shop can be a relatively expensive affair and one that yields a waiting time of between 12 and 18 months. Recently, however, Sheffield-based Rich Tone has procured exclusive access to Charvel's new 'Custom Select' programme, which grants you access to Custom Shop-built guitars, but instead of having carte blanche with specifications, there is a fixed (but extensive) menu of options to choose from: all the way from the type of body wood used, to the style of truss rod. Some selections will carry an extra cost – such as specifying birds eye maple for the neck, or the addition of a maple cap to the body







1

– but the vast majority of options are free of charge. The only constants are the neck carve, body shape and headstock.

This model, spec'd by Rich Tone, harks back to the 'superstrats' originally created by founder Wayne Charvel back in the 70s, where he'd made his name running a custom shop repairing and upgrading Strats. So, as per the original traditions of Strat hot-rodding, you won't see some of the modern design tweaks incorporated in today's souped-up double-cuts, such as an ergonomically sculpted neck heel or a lower horn cutaway.

In brief, the spec includes a quartersawn maple neck with compound radius fingerboard, medium profile frets and an original Floyd Rose bridge. Steve Vai fans will recognise its appearance as being similar to his famous 'Green Meanie' Charvel; though with the appointment of just one pickup, this is a more stripped-down version, electronically speaking at least.

Feel & Sounds

It's fair to say that Charvel's neck carves are well known in guitar-playing circles as being a benchmark of playability and comfort. Perhaps a little skinnier than San Dimas necks played in the past, this one still manages to comfortably fit your palm courtesy of a very modern-feeling elliptical carve, with a sturdy set of shoulders providing consummate support. The tactile gun-oil finish to the back of the neck adds another level of comfort. The medium-gauge fretwire seems an inappropriate appointment for an unabashed rock guitar, but the vintage aesthetic has not been transferred to its

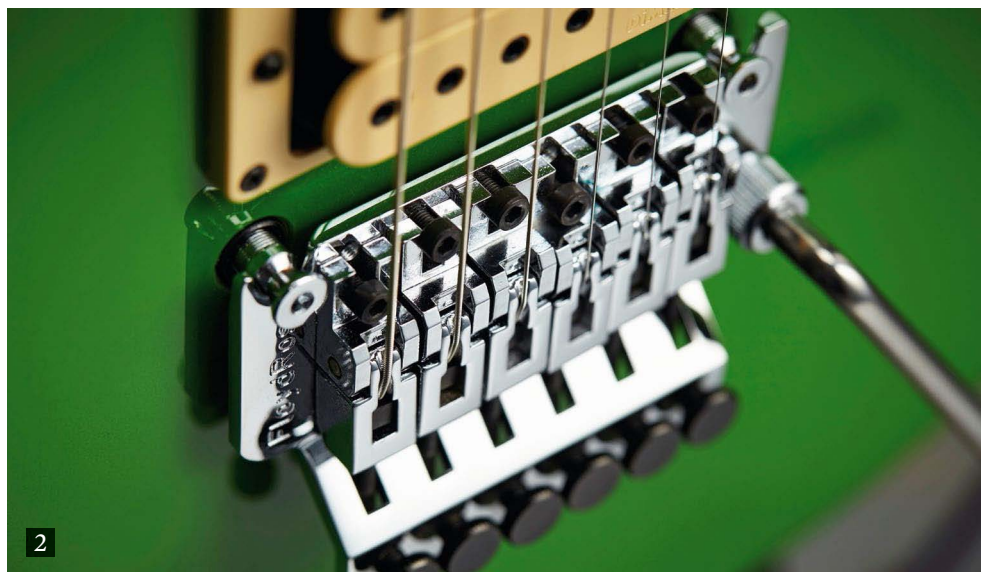


1. Vintage-style truss-rod adjustment requires you to remove the neck, which could prove time-consuming and inconvenient for a globetrotting musician. However, for an extra £50 you could choose the more modern 'wheel' adjuster

2. An original Floyd Rose features on this model, but if extreme whammy bar abuse isn't your forte then the Custom Select route offers you options of a non-locking vibrato or a fixed bridge

3. Just one pickup here: a DiMarzio Evolution. High output but an appropriate appointment on an unashamedly rock guitar





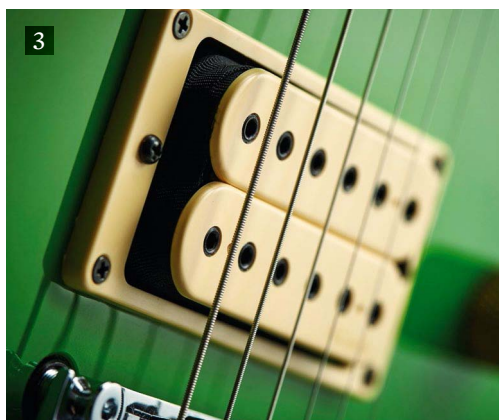
The DiMarzio Evolution humbucker is perhaps best known for its appearance aboard Vai's basswood-bodied JEM

playability, as being able to feel the wonderful satin smoothness of the unfinished maple 'board under your fingers enhances the playing experience even further.

The sole humbucker may fill some guitarists with trepidation: combine this with the omission of any tone control and the guitar looks positively naked! But the DiMarzio Evolution humbucker chosen here is perhaps best known for its appearance aboard Vai's basswood-bodied JEM, and placed in this alder body it screams equally as loudly, though with substantially more top end. The overall tone is like the appearance: a homage to those hot-rodded, iron-pumping double-cuts of the 80s. You have to admire its 'you want rock – you got it!' appearance and the way it wears this lack of the versatility proudly on its sleeve.

Verdict

The Custom Select concept itself is worthy of great praise, especially when taking into account the relatively very low price for what is almost a full Custom Shop experience – particularly considering the huge range of options on offer. The potential purchaser may select an entirely different spec to this



one, which is why it's perhaps fairer to judge the guitar on the ever-present body shape and neck, which are simply top-notch and demonstrate exactly why, almost half a decade later, a USA Charvel still remains an aspirational purchase.

However, on our review guitar, there were two very minor QC issues – the area of the neck behind the 3rd fret not being perfectly finished, and some unpainted wood underneath the vibrato backplate – but this is an early example model and certainly not indicative of the high quality and attention to detail we've experienced from both Charvel USA and Japan.

This is a unique opportunity to customise an instrument from a world-famous brand, at a price that's an absolute steal when compared with other high-profile manufacturer's custom programs. Whether you're brave enough to go for 'Slime Green' is another matter... 

Thanks to Rich Tone Music for supplying this guitar for review. For more info on the Charvel Custom Select programme, call 0114 326 7777 or visit www.richtonemusic.co.uk



CHARVEL USA CUSTOM SHOP RTM SAN DIMAS 1H

PRICE: £1,399 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Double-cutaway, solidbody electric bolt-on

BODY: Alder

NECK: Quartersawn maple, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Floyd Rose locking nut

FINGERBOARD: Maple with compound 305-406mm (12-16") radius

FRETS: 22, medium

HARDWARE: Gotoh tuners, Original Floyd Rose vibrato

ELECTRICS: DiMarzio DP158 Evolution at bridge, volume

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.6/8

OPTIONS: Extensive menu of options, see website

RANGE OPTIONS: Outside of the Custom Select programme, there are plenty of off-the-shelf options. For example, a Pro Mod SD1 2H with Floyd Rose and Slime Green finish retails around £700

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, adds £300

FINISHES: Slime Green (as reviewed, extensive colour range)

Fender GBI

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www.charvel.com

7/10

PROS Spec-out your dream Charvel without going the full custom route. Great neck: without doubt one the most infinitely playable out there

CONS A one-pickup guitar will not be a good fit if you need versatility

FIRST PLAY



**FENDER '65 PRINCETON
REVERB SPECIAL EDITION**
£1,009

.....
WHAT IS IT? Special edition of
Fender's 1x10 studio classic



**FENDER '65 DELUXE
REVERB SPECIAL EDITION**
£1,179

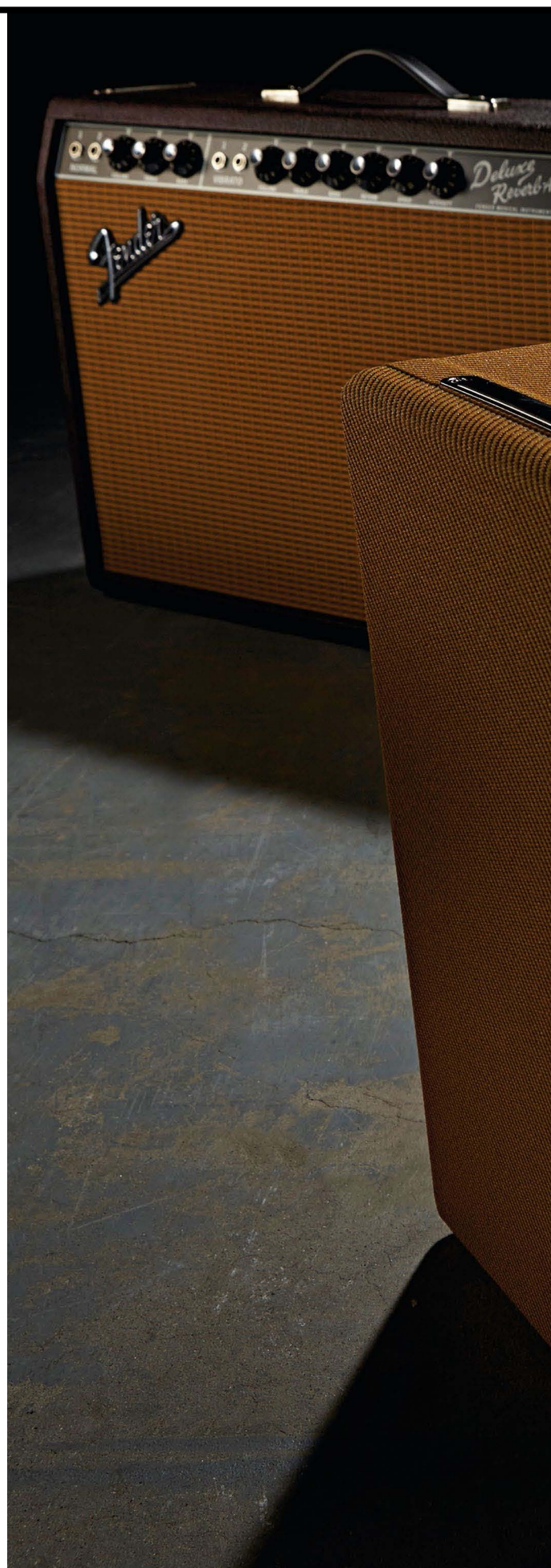
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WHAT IS IT? Special edition of
Fender's 1x12 studio classic

The Need For Tweed

A pair of Special Edition Fender combos that combine classic looks with timeless tone

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Joby Sessions

While digital modelling and modern multi-function amps continue to be popular, there's a growing move back to vintage heads and combos, powered in part by a boom in high-quality outboard pedals with increasingly realistic valve overdrive simulations. "I just want a good basic amp, with a good drive pedal" is a request we're hearing all the time now, and what better place to start looking than Fender's catalogue, which has two ideal candidates in the shape of the '65 Princeton Reverb and '65 Deluxe Reverb reissues. This is truer now than ever, as Fender has just announced new limited factory special edition versions of both models, with enhanced cosmetics.







The old sales axiom 'people buy with their eyes first' is just as relevant today as it ever was, and based on that, Fender is likely to see a mini-boom in the sales of these two Special Edition combos. The Princeton Reverb is expertly fitted out in lacquered tweed livery, with a Bassman brown/gold speaker grille. Not so obvious at first glance is the colour co-ordinated dark brown control panel and the carry handle, which are both nice visual touches. The Deluxe has a very attractive combination of Wine Red Tolex with a wheat grille and a regular black panel and handle. Both amps benefit from Jensen Alnico loudspeakers: a P10Q in the Princeton and a P12Q in the Deluxe.

Front and rear panel layouts are quite faithful to the originals, with high- and low-gain inputs feeding volume, treble and bass controls, plus a level control for the valve-powered spring reverb and speed and intensity controls for the vibrato effect, which is actually a tremolo, of course. The Deluxe gets a second effects-free channel, again with two inputs and volume, treble and bass controls.

As you might expect after half a century, the electronics are different. The originals were built up using eyelet boards, a rectangle of fibreboard with rivets stamped into it at strategic points into which the components are soldered, with a separate can on the top of the chassis containing all the main filter capacitors and a valve rectifier. The modern versions retain the valve rectifier but use single-sided printed circuit boards for all the

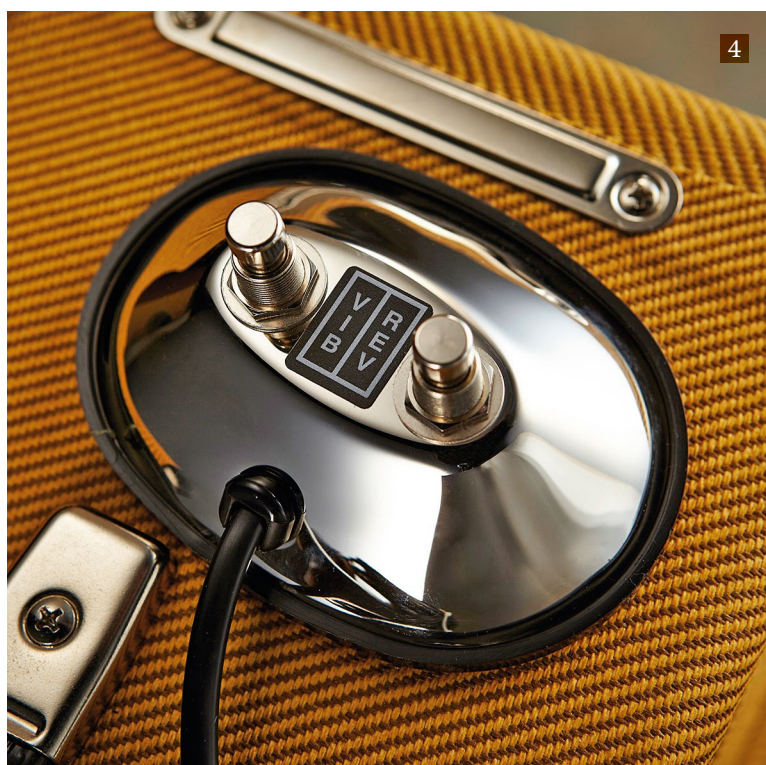
small components – one large board holding preamp, power amp and power supply stuff, with ribbon connectors to two smaller boards that connect the front-panel inputs and controls. We're not generally big fans of this type of PCB for valve amps. However, on these models, Fender has handwired the valve bases, keeping all the heat away from the boards for much-improved reliability. As a result, there's a lot of wiring and soldering inside both amps, and it's generally quite clean and tidy, with the valve AC heater supplies twisted and raised above signal leads to reduce hum. With so much handwiring already inside these amps,

1. Not immediately obvious, the Princeton's control panel is a dark brown, to match the tweed covering
2. Key to the sound of both amps is the use of special-design Jensen Alnico loudspeakers, which enhance the treble response





3



4

3. The spring reverb fitted to both amps is powered by valves and transformers. It's one of the best spring reverbs you'll ever hear

4. The classic-styled chrome footswitch toggles reverb and vibrato (valve tremolo)

it begs the question: why doesn't Fender go the whole hog and use eyelet boards, as it did with the originals?

Feel & Sounds

Both amps use a valve rectifier, and in common with all such designs, it takes a few minutes for the voltages to ramp up and stabilise properly. Plug in, and you're immediately transported back to Fender's golden years; both amps have the sugary sweet clean tone that's recognised all over the world as the classic 'blackface' Fender sound, with a less aggressive midrange than their earlier 1950s tweed counterparts,

and an airy, multi-layered treble thanks to the characterful Jensen drivers.

Both amps deliver a thoroughly addictive tone that flattered every guitar we plugged into them. The low output wattage means they're easily pushed into overdrive, with a subtle edge at around six on the volume controls when used with a regular-output Stratocaster; slightly less when a Les Paul was plugged in. The reduced frequency range of the Princeton's 10-inch driver is a positive asset for recording, making the sound sit in a mix that much easier, with little or no EQ or compression tweaking needed. After a few hours of use across a variety of different musical styles, it's easy to see why this amp was a favourite for some of the world's top session players.

Meanwhile, the Deluxe Reverb's bigger speaker and cabinet add up to a bigger sound – the slightly increased volume level and headroom mean the Deluxe is just right for pubs and clubs, and like the Princeton, its smooth cranked-up overdrive with just a hint of edge is perfect for blues, fusion, Southern rock... in fact, just about any American musical genre you care to name. The Princeton's 10-inch speaker and lower wattage make it easier to induce crunch tones, while the Deluxe Reverb's 12-inch speaker and 22-watt output power mean extra headroom and clarity, so it will retain definition a little better as volume rises.

If you want more drive at lower volume levels, teaming either amp with a good





5. EQ is kept nice and simple... This isn't a Mesa/Boogie, after all

overdrive pedal gives fantastic results. On both the Princeton and the Deluxe, the valve-powered reverb is superb – noise free, with a huge range from soft ambience to full-on surf, while the vibrato/tremolo effect goes from deep, slow pulses to almost LFO territory. One small idiosyncrasy is the need for a footswitch plugged in on the Deluxe before the effects work – the Princeton can work without one.

Verdict

These two classic designs from Fender show why, 50 years on, there's still no shortage of players who want them. The Princeton's compact size and juicy low-volume performance make it a shoo-in for a desirable home studio amp. The tweed is easy on the eye, too. The Deluxe Reverb's 12-inch speaker and 22-watt output power mean it's the ideal companion to the guitarist playing small club and pub gigs: basically, the type of venue that most of us play in all the time. These amps are relatively expensive compared with the competition, but the build quality and finish standard are very good, while the sounds both amps deliver are world class. If you want an amp that not only sounds great but looks fabulous, too, our advice is to hurry – these Fender Special Editions aren't going to be around for long. **G**



FENDER '65 PRINCETON REVERB LACQUERED TWEED SPECIAL EDITION

PRICE: £1,009

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: All-valve preamp and power amp, with valve rectifier

OUTPUT: 15 watts RMS

VALVES: 3x 12AX7, 1x 12AT7, 2x 6V6, 1x 5AR4

DIMENSIONS: 405 (h) x 505 (w) x 240mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 15/34

CABINET: Ply

LOUDSPEAKER: 1x Jensen P10Q

CHANNELS: 1

CONTROLS: Volume, bass, treble, reverb, speed, intensity

FOOTSWITCH: 2-button switch toggles reverb and vibrato effects

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: External speaker output

OPTIONS: Also available in black, as standard, at £999

Fender GBI

01342 331700

www.fender.com



FENDER '65 DELUXE REVERB WINE RED SPECIAL EDITION

PRICE: £1,179

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: All-valve preamp and power amp, with valve rectifier

OUTPUT: 22 watts RMS

VALVES: 4x 12AX7, 2x 12AT7, 2x 6V6, 1x 5AR4

DIMENSIONS: 445mm (h) x 620mm (w) x 240mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 19/42

CABINET: Ply

LOUDSPEAKER: 1x Jensen P12Q

CHANNELS: 2, non-switching

CONTROLS: Volume, bass, treble x2, reverb, speed, intensity

FOOTSWITCH: 2-button switch toggles reverb and vibrato effects

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: External speaker output

OPTIONS: Also available in black, as standard, for £1,179

8/10

PROS Superb version of this classic amp, complete with upgraded cosmetics

CONS The new incarnation comes at a price, and it's not cheap

8/10

PROS Pure audio candy, aided by the Alnico Jensen driver. One of the best-looking combos we've seen in ages

CONS Again, not cheap

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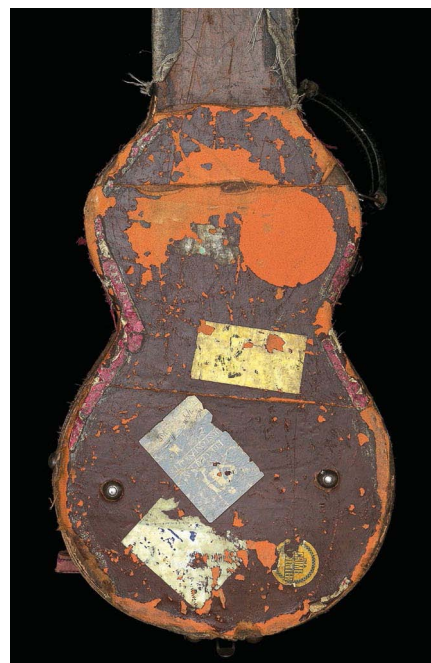
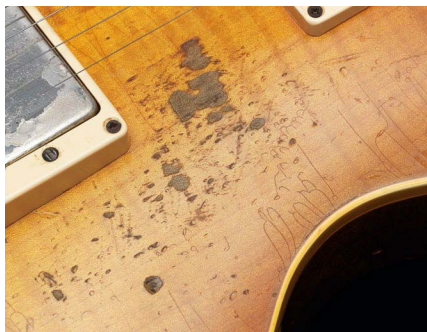
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The Lineup

Don't miss it! Must-see guitar goings-on for the coming weeks...



Bonhams Entertainment Memorabilia sale 10 December, Bonhams, London

A '59 Gibson Les Paul for sale is an event in itself, but factor in the notable provenance of it being once owned and extensively used by the late Paul Kossoff, and we have a very rare auction. Bonhams Knightsbridge will be auctioning the Free icon's Les Paul on 10 December as the highlight of its Entertainment Memorabilia sale. Stephen Maycock, Bonhams entertainment memorabilia specialist, tells us more...

Can you explain a little about the guitar's history between Paul Kossoff and its current owner, Arthur Ramm?

"Arthur played in a band called Beckett in the 70s and supported Free a number of times. Arthur became friends with Paul. One night, Paul broke the neck of his Les Paul and borrowed Arthur's in exchange for Arthur having Paul's natural-finish Les Paul – the one played at the Isle Of Wight concert. After about a year, Arthur returned the guitar to Paul, by which time, Paul's guitar had been repaired and he kept it. After Paul's death in 1976, Arthur contacted Paul's girlfriend about the guitar and, with [Paul's father] David Kossoff's blessing, purchased it."

We understand the neck was repaired to a very high standard after an unusual break around the 5th-fret area in the 70s. What other wear is there?

"The neck from the 5th fret back and the headstock were replaced, hence the lack of a serial number. The guitar has knocks, scratches and play-wear, back and front, reflecting its life as a much-used instrument. The bridge pickup volume control has been replaced at some point and the scratchplate is not fitted. Photos of the guitar when Paul had it show this as missing."

Is the case the one Paul Kossoff used?

"Yes, it was made by the Stone Case Co., and is known as the 'Californian Girl' – 'Cali Girl'. It was damaged in a fire and a portion at the headstock-end replaced. It travelled extensively with Paul throughout the 70s."

It's never been confirmed exactly which Les Paul Kossoff used to record *All Right Now*. Is it possible that it's this guitar?

"The earliest known photo of Paul playing the guitar live is in October 1970. However, there is a black-and-white promo film of *All Right Now* where he is playing this guitar, but

it isn't known if this is the one actually played on the recording of the single. It's thought Paul acquired the guitar just after recording the track. Paul owned this guitar from 1970 until his death in 1976, so for most of his professional career. It's therefore reasonable to suggest he would have used it fairly extensively for both live and studio work. He bought and sold a number of other guitars in this time, but kept this one – presumably because he particularly liked it."

What sort of interest in the guitar have you had so far?

"It's very early days: news of the sale has only just been released, but we anticipate international interest. Guitars such as this rarely come onto the open market. Kossoff is often cited as an influence by other notable rock guitarists, so we envisage interest from collectors and players alike. We're expecting a six-figure sum, but at this stage we're keeping a fairly open mind." **G**

The Bonhams Entertainment Memorabilia auction will also include two Rickenbackers, a Gibson body and three necks owned by Pete Townshend. www.bonhams.com

What's Goin' On

All the best guitar events happening over the next few weeks, in one place

The Aristocrats 12 to 19 December

Various venues, UK and Ireland

Guthrie Govan, Bryan Beller and Marco Minnemann's UK and Ireland run begins in Dublin and is part of a wider European tour with seven dates and a single day off between them. But stamina has never been a problem where these three are concerned; a jaw-dropping showcase of fusion is the order of the day. Guthrie has temporarily handed over guitar duties in Steven Wilson's band to Dave Kilminster, allowing him to refocus on The Aristocrats, supporting their superb third album, *Tres Caballeros*, with an ambitious touring schedule. Despite its layers, the record was very much shaped with live performance in mind, and before entering the legendary Sunset Sound studios in Hollywood, the band road-tested the material in front of an audience at Alvas, a small fusion club in San Pedro, California. Now, we can see how that material has developed with Guthrie's improvisational tendencies.

www.the-aristocrats-band.com



Warren Haynes

21 November

St John's Smith Square, London

Haynes plays this one-off UK show to support his *Ashes & Dust* solo album, a rare opportunity to see him in intimate surroundings away from Gov't Mule and backed by Nashville Americana band ChessBoxer and acclaimed fusion drummer, Jeff Sipe.

www.thegigcartel.com

The Merseyside Guitar Show

22 November

Aintree Racehorse Exhibition Centre, Liverpool

This year, the show celebrates its 13th year at Aintree with 100 exhibitors over four floors. In addition to a host of big and independent brands, there will be vintage and second-hand gear to buy and trade. The Connie Lush band and Paul Brett are among the live acts performing.

www.guitarshows.co.uk

Devizes Guitar & Luthier Fair

28 November

Devizes Sports Club

With a focus on independent makers, this event will shine a light on homegrown British luthiery talent and bespoke instruments. Alongside Kevin Almy, MPL, Kinkade Guitars, David Dyke and JJ Amps & Guitars, there will be live bands throughout the day.

www.wegotickets.com

The Darkness

28 Nov to 30 December

Various UK venues

The band are finally returning to their home turf for a full run of UK dates on the Blast Of Our Kind tour this winter. Expect catsuits and Les Paul histrionics aplenty from the flying Hawkins brothers, as they deliver the best cuts from their four albums, with recent acquisition Rufus (son of Roger) Taylor on drums.

www.livenation.co.uk

The Dead Daisies

5 to 11 December

Various UK venues

Featuring former and current members of Mötley Crüe, Thin Lizzy and Guns N' Roses, the band tour in support of this year's second album, *Revolución*. Guns guitarist Richard Fortus remains their lead player with David Lowry handling rhythm duties. They have a third guitarist in reserve in frontman John Corabi, too.

www.thedeaddaisies.com

Family

10 & 13 December

Glasgow O2 ABC & O2 Shepherd's Bush Empire

Family reunited for their first shows in 40 years in 2013, and are repeating the experience this December. The current line-up features Jim Cregan returning to his true love of guitar after originally playing bass in his first tenure with the band in the 70s.

www.livenation.co.uk

Carnival Of Madness Tour

28 Jan to 6 Feb 2016

Various UK arenas

Hot on the heels of the Def Leppard/Whitesnake arena tour, Black Stone Cherry, Shinedown and Halestorm are looking the most worthy to take the torch for the next generation – and they're bringing young Cape Cod trio Highly Suspect along for the ride.

www.livenation.co.uk

Giants Of Rock

29 Jan to 1 Feb 2016

Butlin's Minehead

The last few years have seen weekend festivals in holiday resorts gaining in popularity and scope; this one is aimed squarely at fans of 70s rock. Ian Hunter And The Rant Band, Michael Schenker's Temple Of Rock, Nazareth and Wishbone Ash are main draws, with Micky Moody and Snakecharmer also in attendance.

www.bigweekends.com

The Players

News and happenings from the world of your favourite guitarists



Pedal To The Metal

Kirk Hammett releases first signature pedal for new company

Metallica's Kirk Hammett has released the first pedal from his KHDK Electronics company, and it's his first signature stompbox. The Ghouls Screamer overdrive (US dollar price announced 31 October) brings with it an impressive array of controls and configurations. In addition to the traditional drive, tone and volume controls, there are five additional toggles to manipulate EQ: bass, high boost and two compression controls that allow players to select between three types – from warmer vintage character to an aggressive tone that enhances harmonics.

Anton Silva is KHDK's chief engineer and he's quick to highlight that versatility is a priority for this pedal: "With Kirk's diverse tones in mind, we knew he needed a Swiss Army Knife of overdrives," he says. "Under his direction, we achieved and surpassed his vision with the Ghouls Screamer."

"I'm excited as hell!" added a succinct Hammett.

The boutique KHDK line will also include the No. 1 Overdrive and No. 2 Clean Boost and it seems that the company – co-founded by Hammett and David Karon, hence the name – has already been busy ahead of a full-scale launch. A number of pro players have been testing prototypes, including Gojira's Joe Duplantier, Disturbed's Dan Donegan and Volbeat's Rob Caggiano.

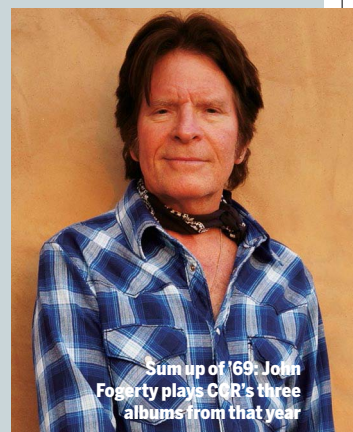
www.khdkelectronics.com

An 1880 Martin 0-40 used by **Joan Baez** between 1966 and 1968 is up for auction on 20 November in Philadelphia at Freeman's Musical Instrument Auction. The iconic singer/songwriter gained the guitar when she traded 0-40 models with fan Joan Saxe in 1966, touring the world and recording extensively with it before trading it back with Saxe in 1968. More info: www.freemansauction.com

How blue can you get? **Joe Bonamassa** fans struck lucky at his 19 October gig at Paris venue Le Grand Rex when he was joined on stage through the evening for blues workouts by not just one, but three guitar greats: **Larry Carlton**, **Robben Ford** and **John Jorgenson**. Carlton guested on a version of BB King's *Never Make A Move Too Soon*, Ford sat in on the Otis Rush standard *Double Trouble*, and Jorgenson duelled with Joe on Muddy Waters' *All Aboard*.

Joe Perry has revealed he's planning to go instrumental on his next solo album, the follow-up to 2009's *Have Guitar, Will Travel*. "Been in the studio working on my solo instrumental CD I began when writing *Rocks*, my autobiography, but didn't have enough time," the **Aerosmith** guitarist posted on Twitter. When quizzed by a fan about the musical style he's pursued, he replied: "It'll have diversity. Maybe one or two songs with me singing, or another singer, but mainly, it'll be an instrumental album." Meanwhile, Perry himself admitted Aerosmith's future plans are presently unclear.

Guns N' who? It looks like **Slash** is focusing on other things than a reunion right now. He recently confirmed to the *San Bernardino County Sun* that his next record with **Myles Kennedy And The Conspirators** is already 90 per cent written. "We just seem to get more in a groove the longer we stay together, and the harder we work on the road," says the guitar hero. "It seems to come out in the new material."



Hot on the heels of his recent autobiography, **John Fogerty** has announced an eight-night Las Vegas residency focusing on the three albums his band **Creedence Clearwater Revival** released in 1969. Dubbed 'Peace, Love And Fogerty', the songwriter will perform highlights from *Bayou Country*, *Green River* and *Willy And The Poor Boys* alongside other Creedence material and solo hits at the Venetian in January.

If you're on the lookout for some reading over the festive period, Wishbone Ash's **Andy Powell** has just released his autobiography through Jawbone Press. *Eyes Wide Open: True Tales Of A Wishbone Ash Warrior* was written by Andy and Colin Harper, and charts the twin guitar trailblazer's rise with the band – and the low points.

Metallica bassist **Robert Trujillo's** film about his musical idol **Jaco Pastorius** has a release date. *Jaco* will arrive on 27 November with DVD, Blu-ray and download options. A soundtrack will also coincide with the release, including three new recordings.

Robert Plant and **Bernard Butler** have been confirmed to appear at a tribute concert to **Bert Jansch** in the late folk artist's home town of Glasgow on 31 January. They'll appear alongside Jansch's Pentangle bandmate **Jacqui McShee** at Bert Inspired: A Concert For Bert Jansch at the Old Fruitmarket venue, part of the city's Celtic Connections festival.

Headroom

New gear and guitar arcana you need to know about. This month: Components for the perfect pedalboard

1 T-Rex ToneTrunk 45 Pedalboard £85

The Danish company offers a range of sizes in its updated ToneTrunk series to suit your needs with the Minor (158 by 560mm), 45 (316 by 450mm), 56 (316 by 560mm) and 70 (316 by 700mm). The lightweight aluminium 'boards now incorporate a multi-tiered design to make them more stage-friendly for your feet, as you can switch the back tier of effects without accidentally knocking the pedals at the front. We also appreciate the routing holes for your power and patch cables as nobody likes a messy 'board. A tough softcase is included and there's an optional extra Leveling Bracket (£12) that installs on the lower tier to create a level surface for your wah or volume pedal. www.t-rex-effects.com

2 Thomann Pedal Board Tape £7

Not to be confused with Velcro, this is 1m-long by 25mm-wide Dual Lock. Velcro is all very well for the first two or three times you pull a pedal on and off your 'board for repositioning, but it soon wears and becomes less effective as time goes on. This doesn't have a 'male' and 'female' side like Velcro, and is more robust. But remember: your pedals will be harder to move again as a result. www.thomann.de

3 Cable Ties £1.98 (for 100)

Ah, the humble cable tie. These 4.5mm-wide nylon wonders will quickly become your friends in the quest for pedalboard nirvana. The stage can be a hard, unforgiving battlefield and these will hold your cables and pedals down when things gets turbulent. www.screwfix.com

4 Pedaltrain Nano+ £37.50

If you're a mini-pedal fan, streamlining your effects or just want a separate essentials pedalboard for jamming, the Nano+ is a compact but solid option in Pedaltrain's extensive range of 'boards. Its 457mm by 127mm dimensions allow for up to six small pedals, and it comes with Pedaltrain's improved softcase that has a heavy-duty zip (good to hear, as zips can often be the

first things to suffer under the strain on our pedalboard bags). The Nano+ also includes everything else to get you started – with 920mm of its adhesive-backed hook-and-loop as well as assorted zip ties. You just need to bring the pedals. www.pedaltrain.com

5 George L's 155 Patch Cable Kit £85

If you want the flexibility of tailoring your pedalboard around custom patch cable lengths, a solderless cable kit could be an ideal investment. George L's has long been a name to trust in this category, with a 3m cable and 10 angled jack plugs supplied offering low 23pf/ft signal capacitance. www.georgelsstore.com

6 Mogami Premium 25cm Patch Cable £26.99

Mogami calls its Premium range "the absolute highest quality guitar pedal/ accessory cable on the planet". A bold claim indeed from the Japanese company (its cables are assembled in the UK), but Mogami may have a point. Neglex oxygen-free copper core aids transparency while a carbon-impregnated PVC layer minimises handling noise. With Neutrik Black and Gold 1/4-inch jacks, Mogami also offers a lifetime warranty lest you have reason to doubt its claims. www.mogami.co.uk

7 Voodoo Lab Pedal Power 2 Plus £159

There are a number of excellent options to power the pedals on your 'board, but Voodoo Lab's offering has become regarded as an industry standard from a company that was the first to provide high-quality power supplies for effects. It can handle the needs of a medium-sized pedalboard with eight isolated outlets (1,100mA total) to help your pedals run quietly. There's also a 'sag' knob on two of the outlets, for turning down the juice to simulate a low battery – a really useful addition for transistor-based fuzz, octavia and distortion circuit pedals, as opposed to digital units less affected by variations in supply voltage. www.voodoolab.com



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THE TONE DIARIES

Shred In Tooth And Claw

Why high-output pickups needn't be the blunt instruments of the pickup world
Words Jamie Dickson

There's a lot of buzz around 'low wind', low-output pickups among tone-minded players – and there's no doubt that for blues, country and classic rock, the sensitivity and detail of well-made, underwound humbuckers is really appealing. But sometimes, there are occasions when we want to say 'subtlety be damned' and reach for a genuinely spicy humbucker, as we were reminded when reviewing the Charvel San Dimas 1H in this issue (our review on the Custom Select model is on p16). For knocking a certain kind of hair-metal solo out of the park, hot pickups such as Seymour Duncan's Invader or comparable units from Dimarzio, Bare Knuckle and other makers are huge fun.

But even in the world of high-output pickups, the subtleties of tone-honing cannot be abandoned. For one thing, if you simply overwind pickups to achieve a louder pickup, it tends to shelve off higher frequencies, which can lead to a loud but dull-sounding 'bucker. So, how do skilled pickup makers raise a little heat without scorching away all the nuance a good pickup should have?

Dynamic Situation

Tim Mills of Cornish boutique makers Bare Knuckle Pickups, which makes many hot but high-performance humbuckers, outlines the challenge: "For me, it boils down ultimately to dynamics," he says. "If you produce a pickup that isn't dynamic, that's completely compressed, then as far as I'm concerned, it's got a monotonal voice. It's easy to make a high-output pickup that's a high-resistance but choked-up pickup. But what we try to do, through magnet choice, the materials that we're making the pickups out of, and the way that we'll offset the coil windings, is to try to give the player as much dynamic control as possible, so that as they roll back the volume control to clean up the tone a little bit, they are not losing dynamics and their high end."

Kevin Beller, head engineer with Seymour Duncan, agrees that engineers have to use lateral thinking in their design choices if they want to build hot pickups that actually have

some character and dynamics. "In some cases, we can bring in a strong midrange emphasis, but still maintain a lot of high-frequency response by not letting that DC resistance get super high," he says. "That's done by not just pouring turns of wire on: we try to manipulate some of the other parameters by selection of materials and by winding technique.

"For example, some magnets will have a different impact on resonant frequencies. If we wanted to have a strong magnetic field but keep the resonance up a little bit in the higher frequencies, we would tend to select a ceramic magnet rather than an Alnico one."

The voicing of pickups can also be optimised for hard rock in other ways. Jaime Campbell of boutique pickup makers The Creamery cites the example of some 'hot' humbuckers that have extremely high output readings. On paper, such pickups may look like fire-breathing gain monsters. But those readings can be misleading, because they result from liberal use of finer-than-usual 43-gauge wire. This brings the voice of the pickup down more towards midrange.

"You'll read about such pickups having 'crushing' output of 20k or more, but while [using extra turns of finer wire] is creating that high output reading, it's not necessarily pushing the amp much harder," Jaime says. "You're just creating a very mid-range pickup that is great for certain styles of music."

So, returning to the Seymour Duncan Invader – a hot pickup that I admired as a teenager – what was the idea behind that brutal-looking rock and metal humbucker, with its bolt-like polepieces, we ask?

"You know, the 100 per cent honest take on that is that at first, we were just going for a distinctive look, more than anything!" Kevin Beller of Seymour Duncan smiles. "But it has a particular sound – the polepieces are really large and they raise the inductance of the coil a lot, because there's so much iron there. That tends to lower the resonant frequency and it usually comes into a lower midrange frequency that has a lot of punchiness to it.

"If you produce a pickup that's completely compressed, then as far as I'm concerned, it's got a monotonal voice"

TIM MILLS





ABOVE The needs of the new generation of shredders, led by Van Halen, Vai and others, made next-generation humbuckers a necessity

LEFT As far as pickup experts are concerned, the crucial factor that distinguishes high-output humbuckers is their dynamic response

Some people might describe it as too honky, but in a high-gain amplifier situation it tends to make the distortion hold together a little better – there's less of that sizzly, unconnected feel to the highest frequencies. As a clean pickup, it probably sounds too honky to most people's ears with that low-midrange emphasis, but for guys that are playing aggressive high-gain, high-output styles of music, it can really work."

So, although high-output pickups are often derided as the blunderbusses of the pickup world, you could argue that they take as much or even more ingenuity to make properly than those vintage-style, low-output 'buckers – it's all about boosting useful mids while keeping enough edge for clarity. Maybe it's time to make space for Invaders, or something like them, in your quiver of tonal tools. 

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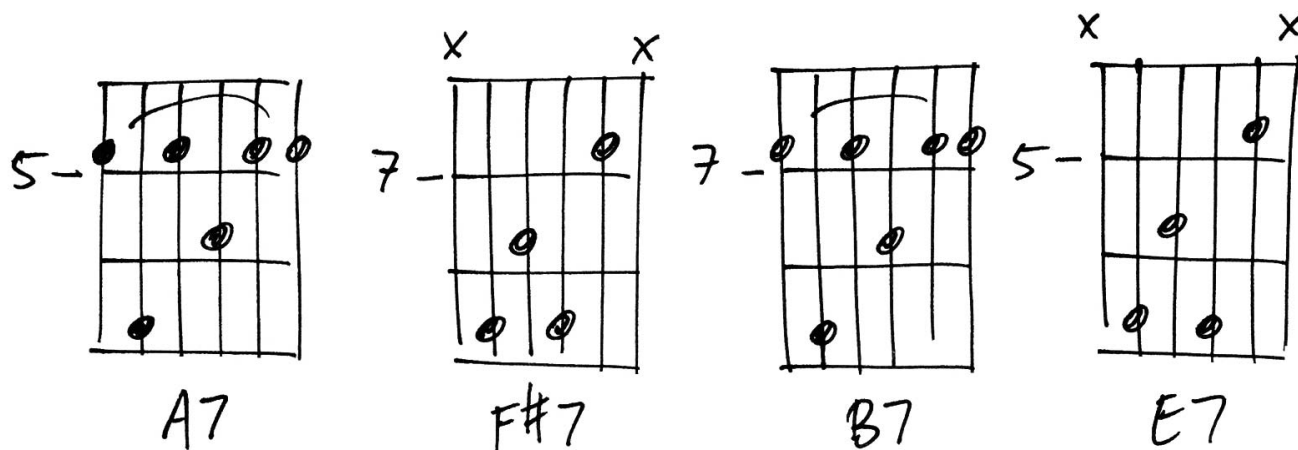


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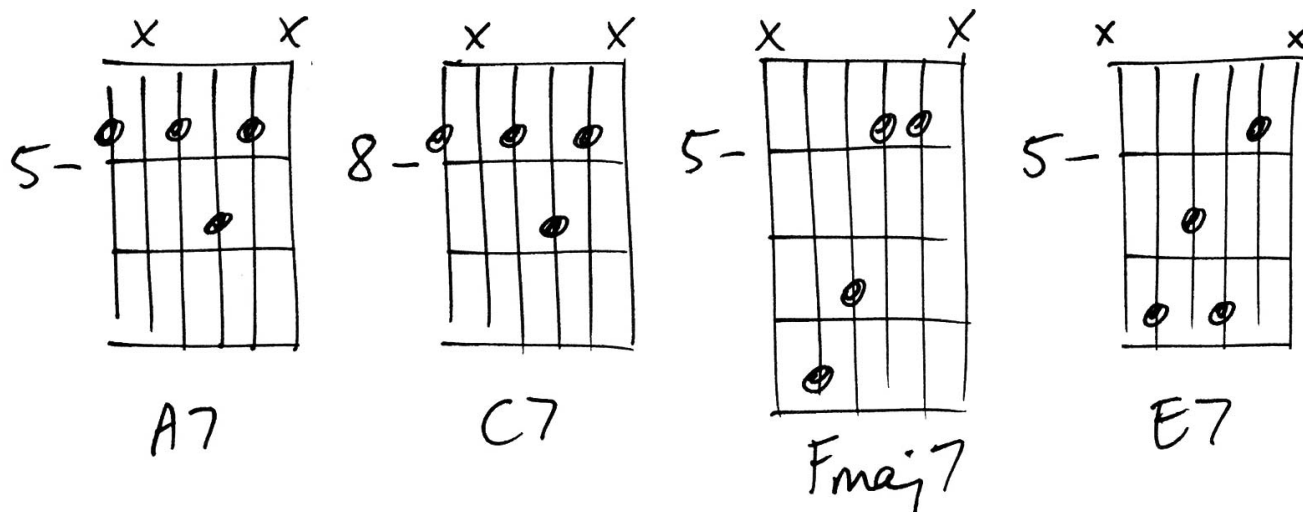
Substitute

This Issue: Tritone Turnaround

Let's tick off another Big Concept in chordal shenanigans: tritone substitution. First of all, what's a tritone? The name is a clue, because it's an interval spanning three whole tones – from E to B $\flat$, or C to F $\sharp$, for example. That's half an octave, and this is the interval connected with those 'diabolus in musica' tales about medieval music (there's no evidence of that attitude; they just found it ugly).



ANYWAY, the theory goes that you can substitute a chord with its equivalent a tritone away. This is particularly common in jazz, and generally works best with dominant 7th chords. Why? Well, in C7 (C E G B $\flat$), there's a tritone between E and B $\flat$. If we shift that whole chord a tritone, we get F $\sharp$ 7 (F $\sharp$ A $\sharp$ C $\sharp$ E), where there's a tritone between A $\sharp$ and E. Apart from the renaming of B $\flat$ to A $\sharp$ – those are the same notes!



TWO of this month's chords will not be changing. In these difficult times of dwindling natural resources, we hope you can understand that we sometimes have to recycle chords to save money. To keep things interesting, though, we've chopped that clumping barre chord down to a more mobile shape.

HERE'S where the substitution starts... we've replaced the standard F $\sharp$ 7 (the VI of the I-VI-II-V progression) with C7, its tritone equivalent. This immediately gives a fresh new sound to the turnaround. For best results, shift your lead-guitar noodling to A minor pentatonic (A C D E G) here.

HERE'S a more complex substitution. The straight tritone shift would go from B7 to F7, which works fine, but the Fmaj7 just seems to flow more nicely. It also means you can keep using A minor pentatonic in your solo line.

AT this point, we've stuck with the standard progression: partly because there's a satisfying chromatic descent from F to E; partly because it jerks us back into the familiarity of the regular blues progression. But do try using B $\flat$ 7 here, and vary which of the chords you substitute in a turnaround. How about A7-F $\sharp$ 7-F7-E7? Or how about A7-F $\sharp$ 7-F7-E7? Try them all!

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Ralph McTell

He's a hero of British folk and his stroll through the *Streets Of London* has passed into songwriting legend. But will he walk away from the 10 questions we ask everyone?

1 What was your first guitar and when did you get it?

"I bought it in Kennard's department store in Croydon. It was an impossible beast of torture made of plywood with a fishtail and untunable machineheads made by Egmond Freres in Belgium. It cost five guineas and I was robbed. It lay dormant in the council flat until my mum sent it to me while I was in the Army at Shropshire. It haunts me still."

2 The building's burning down, what one guitar would you save?

"My Gibson J-45 that I have had since I was 20 years old. I traded it in against a Harmony 12-string and £45 at Pan Music on Wardour Street. It was the best trade-in I ever had, and my hand and fingers grew round that instrument. 90 per cent of all my writing has been done with that guitar and, although I rested it for several years, it will be with me till the drop. I now have at least six more J-45s and only one of them gets close to this beloved guitar. My guitar is called Miss Gibson after the Reverend Gary Davis's J-200 Gibson, which he favoured most of his playing life. I now have a J-200 as well, just like the great man."

3 What's the oldest guitar that you own?

"I have a 1920s archtop Gibson L-1 that has a round soundhole, and doesn't have much volume. I just wanted to own this particular classic. I also have a 1932 000-28 Martin that I bought off a guy in 1961 after he heard me playing outside a pub called The Angel in Poole, Dorset. He acquired it from a bloke who said it was owned by the guitarist in the original Billy Cotton Band."

4 What plectrums do you use?

"I mostly play fingerstyle, but occasionally, I'll use light-to-medium plectrums."

5 When was the last time you practised and what was it?

"I play every day. I seldom practise... I never tire of working on the wondrous technique of Reverend Gary Davis and Blind Arthur Blake. I have made an instrumental album called *Sofa Noodling*,



"My life was altered forever, because of the success of 'Streets Of London', but I regard it as a blip on my graph"

which is basically what I do when I'm playing guitar on my sofa."

6 When was the last time you changed your own strings?

"I am the only one allowed to change my strings and I change them for every gig. I was shown a great way to tie strings by Jerry Donahue. He called it the 'Nashville tie'. I showed it to an Aussie musician, and he has shown it to several other Aussie musicians and tells me it is known as the 'McTell tie' over there. It is seldom that anyone could boast that one had shown Bert Jansch anything to do with acoustic guitar, but I showed him this method, and he showed me a way of quickly unwrapping guitar strings. I change mine every gig, therefore I think about my dear friend Bert every time I go to work."

7 If you could change one thing about a recording you've been on, what would it be and why?

"I would remove three songs from my first album, because I was made to record them for the sake of my publishers and I had no idea what they were about. One of them was *Suzanne* by Leonard Cohen – I still don't know what it's about!"

8 What are you doing five minutes before you go on stage and five minutes after?

"Before: pacing and checking my pulse. Picking up song lists, constantly checking I have all my spare capos, water, shirt buttons, picks, and so on. Then I do it all over again. Fix my in-ear monitors, check I am getting signal from the desk. Check everything again. Wonder if I will remember the words to a newly included song. After: wait until my skin changes colour, and go out to meet and greet the lovely people."

9 What song would you play on acoustic around a campfire?

"I wouldn't, but I would like to have still had my Egmond Freres guitar, which I could then throw on to the flames."

10 What's the closest you've come to quitting music?

"After *Streets Of London* was a hit in 1975 to '76, there was too much pressure to repeat the success that came accidentally, and was not the course I would have chosen. I never went into music as a career. The career happened because of music. I realise how lucky I've been and how my life was altered forever because of the success of *Streets*, but I regard it as a blip on my graph and I know I've written better songs and am still trying to improve on what I've already done. My temporary quitting was a sincere attempt to regain my musical integrity and I have no regrets whatsoever. I did take some talking into doing *Alphabet Zoo* and *Tickle On The Tum*. But, truthfully, I have no regrets doing that either... There is now a third generation growing up with Kenny The Kangaroo." [DM]

Ralph McTell is currently on tour in the UK, but if you miss him this time around, he'll be back to play the Royal Albert Hall in May 2016

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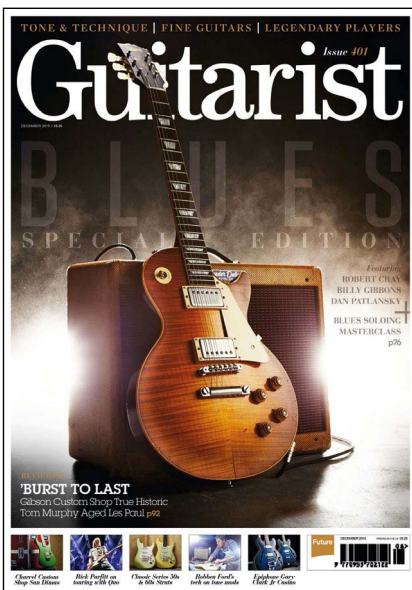
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Feedback

Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor. Drop us a line at guitarist@futurenet.com

Star Letter



AS LONG AS YOU CAN BOOGIE...

I started playing guitar when I was seven years old (I'm 51 now) and taught myself how to play using music books like *The Beatles Complete*, and by dropping the needle onto records, occasionally slowing singles down to 33rpm and albums down to 16 to try to work out chords and riffs, then transposing songs back to original keys. Of course, the desire to upgrade from Satellite/Columbus-grade guitars soon followed. Over the years, I have had varying degrees of success in bands: in the early 80s, I was even on the telly, but my music career was pretty much lodged in the club/weddings/tribute circuit. Ironically, my most successful showbiz stint was in a Beatles tribute show.

Divorce, re-marriage, followed by a 'proper' career in the care industry put musical aspirations to rest – until two months ago, when I get a Facebook Messenger text from an ex-bandmate I've not seen for 20-odd years, saying, 'Hey stranger, how you doing? You still singing and playing? We're looking for a lead guitarist and singer...'

Having only months earlier gotten rid of most of my guitar collection and amp, I hastily acquired a new amp (by the way, how can Fender produce the Champion 100 for that price?), dusted off my two remaining electrics – a Jimmy Moon custom-built circa 1990 and a 'Fender Strat' project that I built myself – and fitted a Fishman pickup to my go-to house acoustic (a 3/4-scale Fender Sonoran). I added a couple of pedals and six weeks of rehearsals, and I was good to go.

I did my first proper gig in nearly 12 years last Friday, singing and playing all you'd expect from a club band playing hits from the last five decades... Yes, I know, I'm a middle-aged cliché, but what the hell, it's just great to be playing again.

Alan Colquhoun, via email

There are so many upsides to getting out gigging. It makes you a better player, reminds you why you fell in love with guitars in the first place, and very often, prompts real-world revisions of the kind of guitars, amps and effects you want to work with. And it's also the moment when you can share your love for music with a bunch of people in a room, having a good time the old-fashioned way with music: at volume and in person. More power to you, Alan, guitars weren't designed to be stored under the bed in a dusty case. I hope your return gig is the first of many. Cheers!



Squier Cabronita: an example of today's great build quality

PAST IMPERFECT

I recently bought a 1939 British-made Dallas banjo ukulele (banjolele) from a local charity shop. I know, not a guitar, but bear with me. The woman on the till told me it was donated by the son of its previous owner – an old man who had recently died. The woman was also told that the old man had been a submariner during the war and the instrument was bought at the height of George Formby's fame, and apparently the purchase was inspired by George's onscreen success with women. The little four-string travelled with the owner throughout the war: a treasured possession and constant companion. It's well played, judging by the fingernail pitting of the ebony fretboard, thumb-grooved neck and battered black case.

I discovered the banjolele, if bought new, would've cost almost £5, when the average wage was around £270 a year. Nowadays, the average annual wage is now more like £25k, and if the Dallas was available today, it would cost about £700 – for what, quite frankly, is a poorly built, low-quality instrument. And it's a banjolele. Fortunately, today, you can get a great-sounding and beautifully crafted electric or acoustic for that. I'll never complain about the price of modern guitars again!

Kirk Hilton, via email

Very true. Even if you look at the list price of established vintage classics such as '59 Les Paul Standards, it works out rather more expensive in real terms than a Standard built today. Vintage stuff has a special charm, but for consistent quality at an affordable price, today's new guitars are better than any that have gone before.



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THANKS, DAD

Hi guys, as a regular subscriber to your great mag I thought I would share a wonderful personal story of mine. I am a guitar player of many years and have always admired the country twangers who have their guitars adorned with beautiful engraved accessories.

Well, I mentioned this to my elderly father (I am 52), who trained as a hand-engraver way back in the 1950s and had a very successful career. He had his designs and handiwork displayed all over the world, and even had one of his tankards presented to Frank Sinatra at the Savoy in London – and Frank sent him a very nice letter!

Anyway, cutting to the chase, unbeknownst to me, my father had taken my single-ply scratchplate – he came round while I was at work – from my Telecaster and had a piece of pewter sculpted to the shape of the scratchplate, returning the original to my

guitar the same day, ready for engraving. Now my father has been retired for years and suffered several strokes and survived an aneurysm, but he dug out his tools and crafted this incredible scratchplate for me to adorn my Telecaster. I have a fantastic picture of him sitting at his bench doing this, it must have taken him a long time and was such a 'special' present to me and so very personal – it meant such a great deal. I have attached a couple of pics and I wondered if you were interested in putting it in your mag? Completely understand if you think it's not suitable in this day and age but thought I would give it a go – as it would be a nice gift for me to return to him as a small way of saying thanks for his skill and hard work.

Craig Carta-Mumford, via email

What a great story and what a unique, beautiful gift: your dad's skills are clearly undiminished by the passing years. Please

Right: Reader Craig Carta-Mumford's father's marvellous handiwork under closer scrutiny

Below: A beautiful, custom-engraved pewter Telecaster scratchplate

Facing page: Clive Gibson-Leitch's Martin Junior was transformed, thanks to a pro setup by Oxford's Dave Smart



pass on our best compliments on his remarkable work. The only problem for you is what to get him next Father's Day!

I'VE BEEN SET UP

Dear *Guitarist*, last month, enthused by your recent review, I bought a Martin Junior Dreadnought. I have lusted after a Martin all my long life, but when I got it out of the box, I was a bit disappointed. It looked and sounded great, but the action was way too high and the strings too thick, so I couldn't do any of the cool bends that are part of my style. So I took it to Oxford's Dave Smart and told him how I wanted it to sound and feel.

A few days later, I got the guitar back: it was now the guitar of my dreams. He transformed it from an instrument that I wouldn't have bothered to pick up to something I lay my hands on whenever I can. And all for £30! Dave has also done similar jobs for my mate on his Epiphone acoustic and Squier Telecaster, identifying any problems and solving them. Many of your readers are clearly able to set guitars up for themselves, but for those of us who can't – get a professional setup: the results are incredible!

Clive Gibson-Leitch, via email

Thanks for writing in with your transformational tale, Clive. Lack of knowledge of what a good setup can do is responsible for many perfectly good guitars being dismissed as difficult to play – or other apparent 'faults' that are, in fact, readily correctable. Like any other mechanism, guitars often drift out of top fettle over time, or perhaps they just happen to be set up contrary to your own personal preferences.

So, don't put a guitar down for good until you're sure it can't be transformed by a sympathetic setup. If you're new to the game, check out expert tech Simon Law's excellent new regular feature on setups and tone on p124 of this issue: it'll get you off to a flying start.

GREEKS BEARING RIFFS

Dear *Guitarist*, I was interested to read Brian Trowell's Star Letter (issue 400) about spontaneous moments, versus the over-preparation route, and couldn't agree more. I was on holiday in Crete earlier this year, and as I have done for the last couple of years, I played some acoustic gigs with a mate of mine in front of a reasonably large gathering in the open air in front of some tavernas. Towards the end of our gig, two local Cretan musicians turned up with laoutos (eight-string traditional instruments) and asked us if they could play some music through our amps.

Send your letters to: guitarist@futurenet.com



They didn't speak English, and we could only order beer in Greek. They played a few songs, but before they packed their gear away, one of them, an extremely talented young player, carried on playing complicated runs. Despite my lack of comparable talent, and probably fuelled by one too many glasses of wine, I picked up my guitar and started trading solo runs with him.

After he left me for dead, I got revenge and started to play *All Right Now* by Free and he pretty quickly managed to pick up the rhythm (despite not knowing the song at all) and my mate started singing. The audience were captivated, and we ended with some

big hugs all round and a few more hours' drinking with them. The whole experience was a genuine 'hair standing up on the neck' moment and is one I will remember more than any other in all my years of playing.

Paul Simmons, via email

Sounds like your friendly away match against the traditional stringed musicians of Crete was a blast, Paul. Further proof, if any were needed, that musicians understand each other pretty well with instruments in hand, even if the phrase book isn't handy. What's the Greek phrase for 'nice one'?

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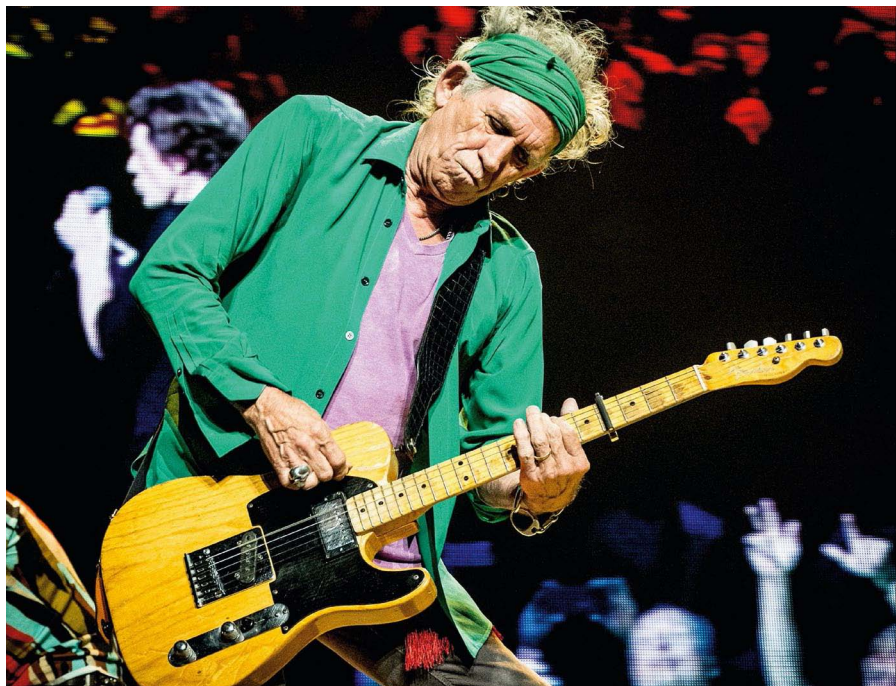
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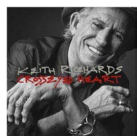
Music

The month's best guitar music, plus top players in the studio



Keith Richards

Crosseyed Heart (Mindless Records/Republic/Virgin EMI) **8/10**



Mellow but gritty solo outing has grizzled charm

When you've made some of the most important musical statements in rock during a long career, what does a musician such as Keith Richards have left to say now? Well, a fair bit, it turns out – and most of it is well worth taking the time to listen to.

The album opens with the pleasingly unvarnished Robert Johnson-esque blues of the title track, during which you can hear Keith's sharp inhalations between each old-time acoustic-blues riff. Nice also that he left in the moment when he decides that the steam is running out of this rootsy performance, declaring "Alright, that's all I got..." before abruptly giving up the attempt. Like falling out of coconut trees and accusing Mick Jagger of having a small willy, it's the sort of piratical candour that's endeared successive generations of rock fans to Keef.

But lest this sound like a man painting a musical caricature of himself, there's lots about *Crosseyed Heart* that's just

plain good. It's hard not to warm to the gritty, propulsive groove of *Substantial Damage*, with its humorous tale of love rolling on the bald tyres of mutual distrust. Everything that's always made him magnetically listenable on guitar is still here today.

But there's something extra, too – a kind of sweet, nostalgic echo of lost innocence. You'll hear it in his surprisingly moving cover of the country classic *Goodnight Irene*, with its deep, sonorous acoustic guitar and eerie ripples of mandolin. Taken as a whole, it works. Keef struggles to turn out a bad riff and, combined with the tattered charm of this hellraiser grown mellow and reflective, this album is a surprisingly affecting, engaging listen. In that sense, it's a little like Bob Dylan's *Love And Theft*: perhaps not quite an essential listen, but pretty tasty for a late fruit on the gnarled branches of Keef's 50-year career in rock. **[JD]**

Download: *Goodnight Irene*

For fans of: Bob Dylan, Mark Knopfler

John Jorgenson

Divertuoso

Cleopatra

9/10



Flood-damaged guitars dry off in the heat of some truly stunning playing

When flood waters drowned his collection of vintage guitars and amps in 2010, Grammy Award-winning guitarist John Jorgenson – perhaps best-known for his formidable playing with The Hellecasters – decided to record an album of tracks made with, and named after, guitars he'd saved from the waters. Thus *Gifts Of The Flood* forms the opener album of a feast of scintillating guitar that this three-disc box set contains. From the serene soundscapes of *Jazzmaster 1* to the Teflon-slippy country chicken-pickin' of *Sunburst Tele 2*, it's a deeply accomplished display of fretboard hot-dogging. His album of bluegrass songs, *From The Crow's Nest*, recorded with the J2B2 quartet, is a bracing hayride through the backwoods of American acoustic song, while his quintet-based *Returning* album shifts the vibe to gypsy jazz. Like all great players, he's strong as hell in all areas. Be warned, it'll make you envious! **[JD]**

Standout track: *Sunburst Tele 2*

For fans of: Danny Gatton, Vince Gill

Steve Hackett

Premonitions: The Charisma Recordings 1975-1983

Universal/Virgin

10/10



Hackett's box of tricks is a triumph

10 CDs, four DVDs and an informative book make up this magnificent boxed set of the early material of Steve Hackett's solo career. Along with the regular album releases, this set includes previously unreleased tracks, alternative versions and B-sides plus live shows and radio broadcasts from the era. Steve's guitar playing is inspired and unique, so this offers the very best opportunity to fully explore the diversity of sounds and techniques that he brings to his music. Better still, his two biggest-selling albums, *Spectral Mornings* and *Please Don't Touch* have been given the Steven Wilson remix treatment in both Stereo and 5.1 Surround Sound on DVD, and the results are quite simply superb. The other two DVDs contain pseudo Surround Sound versions of Steve's debut solo album, *Voyage Of The Acolyte*, and the later *Defector*, and with so much coverage of each track, from studio and concert performances, this is a true fan's delight. **[RN]**

Standout track: *Every Day*

For fans of: Steve Howe, Martin Barre

Joe Jackson

Fast Forward

Ear Music

8/10



Still looking sharp

Things have been a mite quiet on the Joe Jackson front recently – in fact, it's seven years since the mercurial songwriter's last album of original material. Matters are about to be put right, however, with the release of *Fast Forward*, an album recorded in four different cities across the world, with four very different sets of musicians accompanying him. Jackson chose New York, Amsterdam, Berlin and New Orleans as the sites for the new CD, and all this restless globe-trotting seems to have paid off, because the material here shows that his powers as an innovative, adventurous songwriter have not diminished one whit. Watch out for a live tour with UK dates in February 2016. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Poor Thing*
For fans of: Elvis Costello, Graham Parker

Eva Cassidy

Nightbird

Blix Street Records

7/10



Breakthrough album revisited

It was the original version of the *Nightbird* album, recorded live at Blues Alley Jazz Club in Georgetown, DC, that launched Eva Cassidy's career in 1996. Sadly, she was never to see the fruits of her success as, just months after the album was recorded, she died of cancer. Subsequently, her ability to sing a broad spectrum of material – everything from pop to blues and jazz – made her a worldwide phenomenon. Now, the album has been remastered and, more crucially perhaps, the whole set from that original performance has been rendered intact, meaning that there are no fewer than eight tracks here that have never been heard before. Watch out for a forthcoming documentary, too. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Over The Rainbow*
For fans of: Bonnie Raitt, Alison Krauss

Jack Bruce

Sunshine Of Your Love

Universal

8/10



The bass rate...

It's unbelievable to think that it's been a year since the music world lost one of its true innovators. This compilation has been timed to coincide with the recent tribute concert at London's Roundhouse and features highlights from Jack Bruce's six-decade career. It begins with Cream, a band whose meteoric rise to fame resulted in a staggering 33 million album sales. From there, the 35-track two-CD package traces Jack's solo career, beginning with tracks from *Songs For A Tailor* and *Harmony Row* and coming up to date via BBM to his more recent *Silver Rails* CD. A great memorial to an amazing musician. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Rope Ladder To The Moon*
For fans of: Cream, BBM

Lionel Loueke

Gaïa

Blue Note

7/10



Jazzing it up!

To record this album, jazz guitarist Loueke took his bandmates Massimo Biolcati (bass) and Ferenc Nemeth (drums) into Sear Sound studios in New York and played in front of a small audience. As he says, "No headphones, no isolation and no overdubs... It was a very special event." What did this recording-session-turned-gig produce? The result was some truly fascinating music that veers from an African influence one minute to a rock-infused jazz workout the next. Loueke wrote 11 original songs for the album – the 12th being the surprise addition of the Bee Gees' *How Deep Is Your Love* – each demonstrating his unique voice on the instrument. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Wacko Loco*
For fans of: Pat Metheny, John Scofield

Flying Colors

Second Flight: Live At The Z7

Mascot Label Group

8/10



Fasten your seatbelts...

Sometimes, when rock virtuosos combine forces to form a band, things can go horribly wrong. But, happily, this wasn't the case when Steve Morse, Mike Portnoy, Neal Morse, Dave LaRue and Casey McPherson formed prog-rock outfit, Flying Colors. The album package comprises two CDs and the choice of either a DVD, Blu-ray or 4K to provide the visual aspects of the performance. Needless to say, the playing is superb from all concerned with Steve Morse on fine form throughout, providing some blazing solos and demonstrating outstanding rhythm chops – prepare for take-off! **[DM]**

Standout track: *The Storm*
For fans of: Toto, Dream Theater

A Thousand Horses

Southernality

Decca

7/10



Party like it's 1969

This Nashville-based rock outfit's debut is already turning heads on both sides of the Atlantic, with the first single receiving some airplay on rock radio in the UK. The band display their influences unapologetically throughout the album – think of a marriage between Lynyrd Skynyrd and The Black Crowes with a dash of early 70s Rolling Stones, with perhaps a soupçon of Tom Petty and you're there. The songs are infectious and tend to burrow deep into the brain, with guitarists Bill Satcher and Zach Brown providing exactly the right amount of Southern sass to the band's considerable presence. We think they'll go far! **[DM]**

Standout track: *Smoke*
For fans of: Lynyrd Skynyrd, Allman Brothers, The Black Crowes

CLASS ACT
 Albums worth
 chomping all the
 way up



© JUSTIN BOROKI

Leslie West

Soundcheck

Provogue

9/10



Scaling new heights

There's a host of guest stars on this, Mountain man Leslie West's 16th solo album: Brian May, Peter Dinklage, Bonnie Bramlett, Bobby Whitlock and the late Jack Bruce all contribute during the course of the album's 11 tracks. The legendary tone and vibrato that made Leslie's guitar sound so unique during his tenure with his former band is all present and correct here – never more so than on *Spoonful*, the track that closes the set, taken from a 1988 live performance with Jack Bruce on bass. But there are many highlights – check out Brian May's blues rock soloing on *Going Down*, Leslie's slide playing on *People Get Ready*, or his guitar duet with Peter Frampton on *You Are My Sunshine*. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Spoonful*
For fans of: Mountain, Cream

Show Of Hands

The Long Way Home

Hands On Music

9/10



Award-winning folk

Show Of Hands have become elevated to legendary status among the folk-rock fraternity in recent years, with plaudits aplenty from the music press worldwide. The award-winning duo of Steve Knightley and Phil Beer return with their first album in three years on their own label, with a 12-track package of songs that cover the folk mainstay – stories of war, lost love and sea-faring derring do. Accompanying the pair is a host of Brit-folk's best, including Jackie Oates, Miranda Sykes, Phillip Henry and Hannah Martin, ensuring that each song on the album wears an instrumental fresh face, providing a perfect foil for the narrative every time. There's still time to catch them on their current UK tour, too. **[DM]**

Standout track: *The Old Lynch Way*
For fans of: Martin Carthy, The Wayward Band

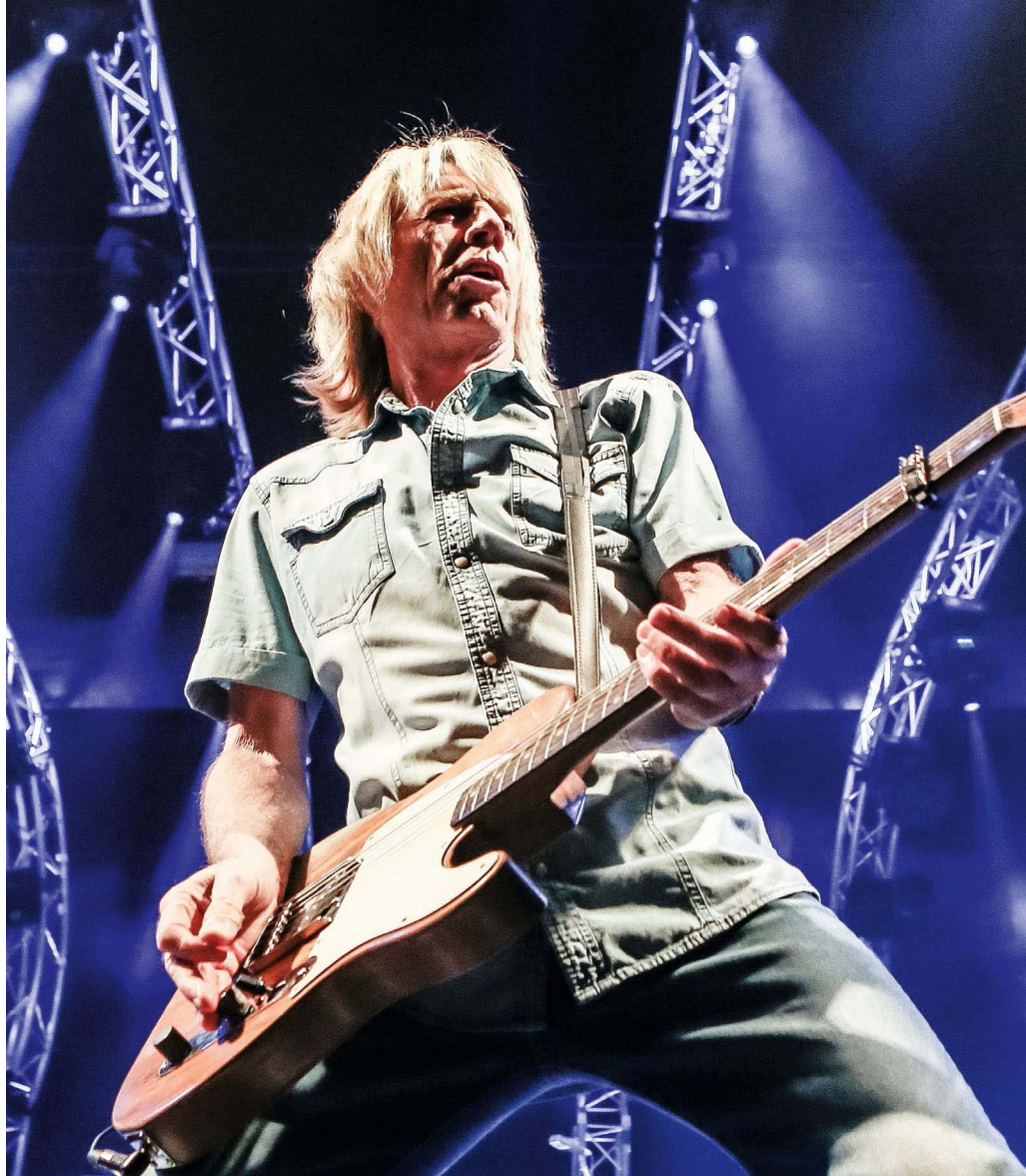


Rick Parfitt

Quo's guitar man explains the perils of getting your wings, the mysterious 'mush', and reveals his favourite venue

Words

David Mead



What was your first live gig?

"The first big group I ever saw were Herman's Hermits at the Atlanta Ballroom in Woking. The venue had a sprung floor, a new thing in 1960, and I was amazed, not just seeing Herman's Hermits, but also to be bouncing up and down! It was a great experience. Soon after, I saw The Kinks at the Taunton Odeon. Then I used to go to see beat groups at the local Co-op venue. Every time I went along, I'd watch the guitar player and learn a new chord. I only went to three shows, of course."

Describe your current stage rig?

"Quite big! Quite loud! White! It's called Marshall! It's got a microphone in front of it! There's loads of stuff I don't understand behind it. I have a live AC30 in an enclosed box sitting behind the backline. Our soundman, Andy May, gets a combined sound from the two amps, mixes it down and then feeds it to the PA and out to the audience – it's a big, colourful, magnificent guitar sound. I have three pedals; one makes everything louder, one makes everything twinkly, and one turns everything off. It's not rocket science."

Best tip for getting a good live sound?

"Of course, the guitar is the key to it all. Without that, there would not be much point

in having the amps. The whole combination of guitar and sound from the backline, becoming one and working together so well, is amazing – some nights, that is, not every night! Sometimes I look at the monitor tech and indicate that the sound is mushy, not punchy as I like it to be! In that labyrinth of wires and boxes, one little gremlin can move a little to the right and it'll sound strange. I've never understood why sound can vary so much from gig to gig, and after 50 years, I've given up trying to fix it! It's either a good day at the office, or it's a bad one."

What's the nearest you've come to a 'Spinal Tap' moment on tour?

"We've certainly got lost on the way to the stage! In some of those old theatres, you can follow the signs to the 'Stage' that lead you down flights of stairs, until the last door you get to is locked. "Hello Cleveland", indeed! Everyone then troops back up and tries to go down the other side. Sometimes we've heard the intro 'drone' playing and we're all thinking, 'Where the fuck are we?' and have gone so far out of our way.

"Falling over is, of course, the classic. We call those moments getting your wings, and we've all got them. Doing the rockstar thing and leaping off the riser, not landing on the right

beat, falling flat on your face, then trying to get up. Now, *that's* embarrassing. It's difficult to hold the rockstar face when your leg is hurting and you've made a bit of a twit of yourself!"

What's the best venue you've played?

"Hammersmith Odeon, or whatever it's called now. We've been playing it forever, it would seem. Best gig in the world for me. You can give me stadiums, arenas, whatever you want. At Hammersmith, you have real contact with the crowd, you can't fault it. You can see and feel it rocking. Not far behind, I'd put Green's Playhouse in Glasgow, which we used to play. It's gone now. Talk about feeling at one with the audience. That Scottish audience were a real challenge. If they didn't like you then, boy, you knew all about it."

What's your worst journey to or from a gig?

"We have had a few, I can tell you. I do remember being in Ireland, driving from Belfast to Dublin. The guy behind the wheel was Dennis, nicknamed 'The Skull', don't ask me why. He wasn't the greatest driver in the world. About halfway there, the road went to the right; we didn't, we went straight on and into a lake! Somehow, we managed to get out and get the car back on the road.



ABOVE Rick and the band describe falling over on stage as "getting your wings"

•

"You've got to convince an audience that you're enjoying it, and persuade them to enjoy it with you. That's where the professionalism kicks in"

•

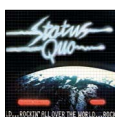
"I do remember being in a Transit van and getting stopped on the Falls Road in Belfast when The Troubles were at their height. We were told not to move any further under any circumstances. We just had to sit tight and felt incredibly vulnerable. After around 15 minutes, we were waved on, but, while we never found out what the problem was that night, it was not a pleasant experience."

Your best tip for getting the audience on your side?

"You can't ever take an audience for granted, or give less than 100 per cent. We sometimes play big, public gigs where anyone can come along. We did one recently, in Sweden, to around 25,000 people and some were Quo fans, but many didn't know who we were. You've got to work at it. You've got to convince them you're enjoying it and to persuade them to enjoy it with you; that's where professionalism kicks in. It can be difficult to connect with those standing further back with their arms crossed, but thanks to good sound and hard work, we normally win in the end. You must keep chipping away. That's the challenge, and we're always up for it."

What do you do to warm up?

"Nothing. Next! Once we've rehearsed, done a few gigs and the band is 'played in', about 30 minutes before we go on stage I'll pick up a guitar and play the opening to *Caroline*, to ensure my hands and fingers are ready. I do enough stretching and all that once we're working! Sometimes I might think to myself, 'How the fuck am I going to do this tonight?' but when the lights go down and I hear that audience, that's it, somehow it happens." 



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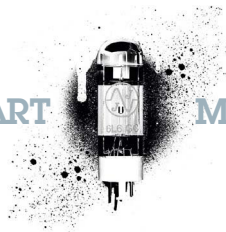
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ALAN NIMMO

New and notable guitarists you need to hear

Who Is He?

The kilt-wearing, Les Paul-wielding guitarist and vocalist from King King, one of the country's hottest emerging blues outfits, first came to the guitar around the age of 12, his interest spurred on by his older brother. Initially, his attention was drawn to bands like Guns N' Roses, but after spending some time with a beaten-up old acoustic guitar that had been lying around the house, he began listening more to blues-rock: "I really started getting into bands like Free, Bad Company and Peter Green and started literally fumbling around on the fretboard until it sounded like what I was listening to."

Who Has He Listened To?

Pretty soon, Paul Kossoff's playing became Alan's biggest influence – something that remains in place today. From there, he discovered Gary Moore's *Blues For Greeny*, which provoked some further exploration into the blues genre in the shape of John Mayall's Blues Breakers. After that it was Clapton, Thin Lizzy, Bernie Marsden and Micky Moody, plus the older school of BB King, T-Bone Walker and Muddy Waters. "I heard Gary Moore play *All Your Love* and I thought, 'Where did that come from?' I heard John Mayall doing it after that and then I went back and discovered it was Otis Rush and started listening to him. It was a great discovery."

What's So Great About His Playing?

Alan's playing references a fine blend of influences that stretch back to Robert Johnson, but with a contemporary twist, and combines the fire of Gary Moore with the passion of players such as Peter Green and T-Bone Walker, something he's been working on since his formative years in school bands. In fact, his first ever gig was in front of 800 of his fellow students in his school's assembly hall. "We were playing *Born To Be Wild* and Jimi Hendrix stuff and there was a great band from Glasgow called Gun and we used to cover one or two of their songs as well."

Why Do You Need To Hear Him?

Alan's come a long way since the school hall. He might have been armed only with a cheap guitar and a Boss MG-10 amp in those days, but that the enthusiasm and zeal that fires a King King performance today was in



"I'm such a dinosaur when it comes to these [pedal] things. I'm not a tech head at all. I'm a plug-in-and-go guy"

evidence even back then. A self-confessed technophobe, Alan went through the next few years using a Les Paul and an old Marshall JMP head with a George Dennis wah-wah pedal that still forms part of his gear today. "I am forever trying to find the ultimate sound and I get new gear all the time. After a while, it's, 'I'm not quite happy with that', but I'm always searching for the perfect sound."

What Gear Does He Use?

You'll find him playing through a Budda amp head, fed into an Orange 2x12. He also uses an Orange Rockerverb 50 head. Guitar-wise, it's still the Les Paul Standard, but as a contrast he will switch to a Lone Star Strat-style guitar for some numbers. On the floor, he favours Line 6 effects such as chorus, tremolo and delay, and uses a Dunlop Pork Loin or Analog. Man King Of Tone for his drive sound. "I'm such a dinosaur when it comes to these things. I'm not a tech head at all. I'm a kind of plug-in-and-go guy but I've forced myself over the years, especially with King King."

Where Should I Start?

King King have three albums so far – *Take My Hand*, *Standing In The Shadows* and *Reaching For The Light* – but it's on the live stage where the real magic is unleashed and King King have a busy touring schedule, much to the delight of their growing fanbase. "I've always been a live player. I've always been at home on a stage, because trying to get the passion across and the feel, that's the best part for me. Trying to get the audience in the palm of your hand from the first song, that's what makes me tick. That's great." [DM]

Old Love: Take a listen this version of Clapton and Cray's track for sensitivity and firepower

Jealousy: This soul-influenced blues ballad features a masterful solo, as well as an epic vocal performance

Waking Up: This track gets the funk out to show how King King are maturing as a working unit in the studio

King King's UK tour with special guest Dan Patlansky starts on 7 May 2016 at the Lincoln Engine Shed. Tickets: www.thegigcartel.com
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TREY GUNN

With the release of the 16-disc *Thrak* box set, we asked King Crimson's Trey Gunn to fill us in on the intricacies of playing a 10-string

Words David Mead Photography Eric de Bruijn

During the mid-1990s *Thrak* era, King Crimson's line-up comprised two guitarists and two drummers with Tony Levin and Trey Gunn holding down the more subterranean side of things. Trey's unusual choice of sonic weaponry was made for him by Mark Warr – a mighty 10-string instrument that encompassed both bass and guitar ranges – which meant that he could produce anything from a thunderous low end to high melodic counterpoint for guitarists Adrian Belew and Robert Fripp. So, did he start out on bass or guitar? “Neither,” he chuckles...

Sort Out Your Priorities

“I started out as a piano player for many years, then bass guitar and then guitar. I was in a lot of different bands in high school, but I opted out of going to college for a couple of years and worked in a construction company and studied jazz guitar. Even though I was pretty much in the punk-rock world where the attitude was ‘don’t know anything’, I always thought that was fucked up. So I ended up studying jazz guitar. I was living in South Texas and there was a jazz guitarist there who had students and I studied with him for a while.

“Then, eventually, I realised I needed to go to college and study music. I just wanted to know more about how this whole thing fits together.”

Beware Of Geography

“I was not aware of King Crimson until 1980. I had a friend whose older brother had the first record and I heard it when I was 13, but then I just didn’t hear the band again until 1980. Thinking about it, I heard Fripp and Eno in ’78 or ’79, but that still didn’t draw me over to Crimson. It’s weird, Texas was kind of off the map – it wasn’t the East Coast or West Coast. However, we had this kind of hard-rock scene and Crimson actually played in my hometown many times, which is freaky, because it’s kind of a desolate, off-the-beaten-path place.”

Customise Your Curriculum

“I went to the University of Oregon and I didn’t study performance, because I didn’t want to play classical music. I studied composition, which kind of gave me the chance to not spend so much time on an instrument. I was just trying to steal all the techniques and ideas that I could on the sly! There weren’t that many options in 1981: you either went to GIT or Berklee, and I looked at both those places and felt nauseous being there.

“So I went leftfield, and studied classical composition. At the same time, I was playing in as many punk bands as I could and working in a recording studio. Then I heard Crimson’s *Discipline* and Mahavishnu’s *Visions Of The Emerald*

Beyond. Those records just blew me to pieces. So that was when Crimson first hit me and knocked me over.”

Exorcise Your Ghosts

“Whenever I picked a guitar up, no matter what I did, it felt like the ghost of Eric Clapton was hovering over my shoulder. There was this blues thing that was still there and, for a lot of people, that’s a virtue, but for me, it just felt a bit phoney. It wasn’t the guitar itself that was feeling off to me, but the tuning; it’s the 4ths tuning – that’s where the blues is – and that was when I started to think, ‘What can I do?’ About 12 months later, I discovered 5ths tuning. As soon as I put that on the guitar, it was, ‘Oh, shit!’ The 4ths didn’t work for me, but the 5ths did, and that’s when I started to follow that path.”

When The Pupil Is Ready...

“If this was 300 years ago, I would have found a master musician and frickin’ worked in his garden or whatever I needed to do to learn from him. Why don’t we do that today? Why isn’t John McLaughlin my teacher? And I thought, ‘I should just contact these guys.’

“So I made this fairly extensive list of all the people I thought were great musicians and as I went through the list, it seemed like most of them you couldn’t really learn



The Warr's 10 strings range from gauge 0.128 to 0.009

“When Robert Fripp asks you to be in King Crimson, you don't really say no!”

something from – but then Robert Fripp's name kept popping up to the top.

“Whereas with Bowie and Gabriel, it feels like they just do what they do, with Robert, it seemed like he had the capacity. Three months later I saw in *DownBeat* magazine that he was teaching guitar. I thought, ‘Okay, I've got to go.’”

Resistance Is Futile

“When Robert Fripp asks you to be in King Crimson, you don't really say no! I had been working with Robert for many years on a lot of different projects with the String Quintet and The California Guitar Trio. I had a sense that he was playing around with Crimson ideas and we were working together, playing around with vocabulary, and so when he asked me, it wasn't a surprise. It was pretty daunting at first! The awesome thing was that we played enough shows so that when it came time to

record *Thrak*, it was really frickin' quick – I mean, I think it was two weeks. The first week, we had all the tracks done and then it was just overdubs and vocals.”

Question Conventional Technique

“I play both sides in 5ths and the strings are an octave apart from each other so everything is identical – mirrored – and your hands are crossed. There's this really strange kind of satisfying symmetry. Other guys do what they call ‘uncrossed’ where the bass strings are on the outside and the high strings are in the middle. I knew that I wanted all 5ths, but I get that it looks totally different from a guitar and probably if you picked one up you'd be utterly lost because of the tuning and the string configuration.”

The Gears Of Warr

“At the time, I was kind of having to cobble together something, because the Warr is full range and there are bass strings that need to function as a real bass guitar. So I would send half the instrument to some kind of a bass rig and the other half to some kind of guitar rig. I've always had some bass processing and guitar processing and then usually kept the signals separate for the sound man. Now I'm running one Fractal Axe-FX and it's fucking amazing. It sounds the best I've ever sounded and I'm able to use the CPU to process the bass and

the guitar separately and even mix them together myself and just send a stereo mix to the house and that's it – or I can send out three outputs where the bass is a mono and the guitar is left and right.”

Home In On The Range

“The Warr's bottom string is a low C below electric bass and I was using a 0.128 all the way up to 0.009 on the top. When you hit the 0.128 in the middle of the neck, it's an enormous sound, and when you hit the top it's pretty small, even though the Bartolini pickups are custom wound. So, I ended up using two compressors on the bass: an [Empirical Labs] Distressor at 20:1 to catch the loudest things and then a DBX.

“I learned this trick from Tony [Levin], which is no big deal now, but at the time he figured out that if you want distortion on the bass you have to mix the direct signal in as well. Now we have millions of ways of doing that, but at the time, it was really goofy. So I would use a [Line 6] Bass POD as distortion and mix it back together through another compressor. On the top side, I used a Sansamp – I used different kinds of distortion – and then I had a TC Electronic G-Force for a couple of years and an Eventide for a while.”

King Crimson's limited-edition 16-disc *Thrak* boxset is available now via Panegyric

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BILLY GIBBONS

He's no stranger to testing the boundaries of blues-rock, as 1983's glossy, synth-laden *Eliminator* attests. Now, ZZ Top's main man has fallen under the spell of Cuban music on his debut solo outing, *Perfectamundo*...

Words Julian Piper Portraits Gerardo Ortiz

ZZ Top are in a jam. The outdoor gig they were due to play in Boise, Idaho has been blown out by flash floods, and to make matters worse, they're unable to collect a haul of custom-made quirky guitars that are waiting for them at the workshop of John Bolin in Boise.

"We've got busloads of instruments needing his attention, a load of junk, with all the good new stuff at his shop," Billy Gibbons' familiar sand-blasted voice drawls down the line. "But the good news is that it shaved off several hours of driving time, and now we've got a sunny day off here in Telluride [Colorado]. It's a great gig in an old mining town situated between two dramatic, sharp canyon sides. The stage is at the far end so the music has only one place to go: it can't go left or right, [there are] just two solid walls of mountain."

The idea of *Sharp Dressed Man* scaring the heck out of the mountain lions is certainly an intriguing one. Since they boogied their way out of Houston in the early 70s, ZZ Top and their infectious brand of barrelhouse rock – the whole shebang anchored by Billy Gibbons' growling guitar, the skin-tight drumming of Frank Beard and Dusty Hill's jawbone-shaking bass – have been unstoppable. Chewing up punk-rock in their slipstream, even the synthesizers and the depraved delights of digital recording employed on their 1983 album *Eliminator* failed to dent the visceral gut-bucket raunch that's always been the band's trademark.

So, at first sight, the idea of Reverend Billy Gibbons going all Latino on *Perfectamundo* with his solo project Billy Gibbons And The BFG's is a strange one. But from the first notes of the album's opening track, *Got Love If You Want It*, with Billy's guitar ringing out over a greasy Afro-Cuban rhythm, it's clear that ZZ Top fans have nothing to fear.

What initially drew you towards playing the guitar?

"I'm self taught, and didn't have the patience for proper lessons. But I was talking this whole thing over with Dusty recently. He said, 'I knew that I wanted to do this, be playing something early on.' I said, 'Yeah man, I knew the same thing.' My mom took my sister and I to see Elvis Presley when I was five years old and I can remember it like it was yesterday. I just knew: 'I wanna do that!' Then on Christmas Eve 1963, Santa stopped by with a sack and left me a Gibson Melody Maker and a Fender Champ. From that point on, while the other kids on the block were trying to learn to play The Beatles, I was working out Jimmy Reed and Muddy Waters licks."

In 1988, you donated 'Muddywood' – a guitar you'd had made from a piece of Muddy Waters' house – to the Delta Blues Museum in Clarksdale. Has the blues always been the bedrock of your music?

"Without question, but I was drawn to the music not knowing what you call it; when you're a youngster you just like what you like. We had a housekeeper, big Stella, and

she loved the radio, and she'd have that radio blasting on the blues channel all day long. My younger sister and I would ask, 'Stella, what is that?', and she'd say it was Jimmy Reed or Muddy Waters. We would make up a list of all these tunes, and beg our mom to get these records when she went shopping. But the list was not from our hand, it was straight from Stella; she'd tell us what to order up!

"That was the inspiration, the cornerstone. We never had to look back. [Blues is] such a great art form. But thank goodness for you Brits! The art form was running the risk of vanishing forever, and if it had not been for so many of the great British acts embracing the blues, it would have become just another throwaway music over here. Till this day, I still talk to people who think The Rolling Stones wrote *Little Red Rooster*, and The Beatles wrote *Roll Over Beethoven*."

Growing up in Houston, you must have run across Lightning Hopkins?

"Yeah, I used to see him all the time, and although I didn't know them back then, Frank and Dusty backed him upon many occasions. Back in the 60s I had my band, The Moving Sidewalks, and Frank and Dusty were playing in a band that was called The American Blues who were based in Dallas, Texas. Funny thing was that although we played in Houston and they played in Dallas, we never saw each other perform except on television. They had a Saturday television dance show, and that

“I’d been invited to play the Havana Jazz Festival... but I didn’t want to crash a jazz party with a whole bunch of rock ’n’ roll. So that’s what started ‘Perfectamundo’”



ABOVE Billy Gibbons collaborated with New York City-based Cuban musician Chino Pons and Argentinian-born musician and producer Martin Guigui on *Perfectamundo*

was the only time they saw me and the only time I saw them!”

You got to play on the BB King & Friends album, brought out to celebrate BB King’s 80th birthday. When did you first meet?

“My dad being an entertainer, it wasn’t uncommon for me to tag along with him when he’d make the rounds, and one of those afternoon stops would often be a recording studio. There were two proper studios in Houston back then, ACA and Gold Star, and because his band was from Houston, BB King was recording there. I remember going into the studio, and although I didn’t know who BB King was, I was dazzled by the whole thing, just seeing a real loud band, playing this great music.

“I had the great pleasure of being invited to perform on that tribute album when BB King was turning 80. On the way over to the studio, I was asking this buddy of mine if he knew what BB wanted to record, and he said, ‘Well, I think he wants to record this song he did way back in the 50s called *Tired Of Your Jive*.’ I smiled and he said, ‘You seem fairly confident with that.’ I told him I saw

BB record the song when I was seven years old, and of course told BB when we met up. Naturally, he didn’t have any recollection of it, but said, ‘You were actually there?’ I said, ‘Yeah, I was just a little boy there with my dad.’ So he said, ‘Okay, you shouldn’t have any trouble with it! Are you plugged up?’ I said, ‘Yeah, I’m in tune and ready to go.’ And so he told me to go over by the vocal booth. I asked him what I was going to do there, and he said, ‘You’re going to sing, the words are there for you.’ I said, ‘But BB – I’m white...’

“He was a wonderful guy and if you ever get the chance, check out a piece of video on YouTube under the title of ‘Billy Gibbons and BB King’. He came through town last year – the band had just come off the road, and a pal of mine said he’d take me along. Little did I know he’d taken a guitar along and I ended up on stage. There’s a good 15-minute clip of BB and I swapping stories. The band was just loping along quietly behind us, and I told this same story. The good news is that he really did leave a glorious legacy behind, and if you want to turn that blue to happy, just put on a good BB number and you’ll be dancing!”

You’ve got an intriguing bunch of musicians on *Perfectamundo*, including Cuban singer Chino Pons and Argentinian keyboardist Martin Guigui. How did the project come about?

“We had no real intention of making an album of Cuban-inspired music, it was just an experiment to see if we could do it, and to legitimise my trip to Cuba. I’d been invited to play the Havana Jazz Festival, but I’m the furthest thing from a jazz guitarist.

Unlearning, The Coronado Way

There have always been no holds barred when it comes to Billy Gibbons’ choice of guitars – his favourite maker John Bolin has appropriately just finished a guitar with an inlaid picture of Cuban revolutionary Camilo Cienfuegos. But a Fender Coronado? Billy explains: “Jimmie Vaughan was playing this little jazz club with my friend Mike Flanagan using what looked to be a Fender Coronado, a short-lived offering from Fender that I can probably call Fender’s darkest day – the most heinous, horrible guitar. And I thought, ‘Isn’t that just like Jimmie Vaughan? He’s gonna pull the rug out from all of us: he’s not playing a Strat, he’s not playing a Gibson this or that, he’s playing a horrible Fender Coronado.’ I was sitting at the back entertained by this whole thing, and Jimmie called me up. I took a second look at this guitar. I said, ‘What is that?’ He refused to answer, but it was not a Fender Coronado – it was even better, it was a cheap Japanese copy. How could it get any worse?

“I put on the guitar but Vaughan had scrapped the light-gauge strings; these things were telephone wires. Not only was he playing the most unthinkable guitar, he’d strung it up with the most unthinkable wire. It does make you play differently. I said, ‘Why would you torture yourself like that?’ Jimmie said, ‘It’s the way I can unlearn; it’s barely playable.’”





Gibbons with his John Bolin-made 'showpiece' tribute to Buck Owens

© BLAIN CLAUSEN

How the heck did my name get on a jazz roster of all things? I didn't want to pass up a trip to Cuba, so I thought we'd better get something done quick because I didn't want to crash a jazz party with a whole bunch of rock 'n' roll. That's what started it."

Did you have any particular guitars in mind when you began recording?

"I grabbed the first thing within arm's reach, which was my 'go-to' Les Paul, but then I tried a Fender because I knew if I used the Les Paul, I'd come out with the same blues stuff. Then, because I've been a fan of the lowly Fender Esquire forever, I suggested I should try using one in the hope that it would change things around a little. But they said, 'No, it's still sounds too bluesy.' So I ended up playing a 1961 SG Les Paul, that I bought from a lady in Hawaii who was a lounge player. When I got hold of it, the thing was mint! 1961 was the first year they changed the body shape into what later became the SG, but at the time they were still calling it Les Paul.

"My problem was that much as I wanted to break out of this blues-based block, I found I couldn't – but the blues figures sounded good within the Cubano rhythmic backbeat. So, although I'm not Cuban and can barely speak Spanish, the album does

seem to work. A couple of my buddies who are from Cuba sprinkled holy water on it, and said, 'Don't change a thing, man. Sounds pretty good.'"

There are some really thick guitar tones on *Perfectamundo*. How did you come up with the sound?

"We used two amps, a 1966 18-watt Marshall and one of the new Magnatone reissue combos. The Marshall is very rare, because it has two 12s instead of the two 10s that they normally used. It has the original Celestion speakers, but they carry a sticker that must have been put on before the company had changed the name to Celestion, saying Silverdale Road, which was apparently where the factory was located. It's a really robust amp.

"With the Magnatone reissue, they resurrected the mighty name, took it one step better, improved the sound, and even included that Magnatone wobbly vibrato. The sound is killer and it's still got all the personality the original amps had. We set the amps up on opposite sides of the room, mic'd them up, panned one to the far left and the other to the far right, creating this very thick sound. The end result was quite pleasing, and I'm really happy with the way it worked out."

Finally, it's over 20 years since your groundbreaking approaches on *Eliminator*. How do you feel about it now?

"We were out-of-control crazies in the studio, twisting knobs and grabbing things to see what they would do. That turn of events left all of us in a state of shambles. Now you've got these nostalgic rigs that demand everything be recorded on analogue tape, and people stand around waving the purist flag. But after *Eliminator* we were left on the side of the tracks, total wrecks, saying, 'Wow. What do we do now?'

"Fortunately, if you choose to live in the digital world, sometimes it's about the appeal and sometimes it's about economics. It's less expensive and sometimes it's all the studio has to offer. Analogue has enjoyed this robust revitalisation, but we still use both – there's no hard-set rule we can think of. You can argue all you like, but who wants to wait 30 minutes while a big heavy roll of tape comes to a stop, and then you have to rewind? By the time that tape stops, you've lost the moment." 



Billy Gibbons & The BFG's new album, *Perfectamundo*, is out now on Concorde Records

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ROBERT CRAY

Once the new kid on the block, Robert Cray is now firmly recognised as blues aristocracy. Here, he shares memories of Albert Collins, BB King and Stevie Ray Vaughan – and reflects on the state of blues today with *Guitarist*

Words Julian Piper Photography Joby Sessions

It's been over 30 years since Robert Cray first blew into view. He rejuvenated the stagnant 80s blues scene and was totally unique among his peers. As Keith Richards once sagely remarked: "He had one foot in the past, and one foot in the future." Clean-cut and strikingly photogenic, Robert Cray fused the grit of older generation blues heroes such as Magic Sam and Otis Rush, with the smooth R&B of OV Wright and Al Green, all topped off by his savage Albert Collins-inspired guitar licks. He wrote some great songs, too, and blues credibility – if he needed it – quickly arrived when Albert King recorded *Phone Booth*. Eric Clapton covered *Bad Influence*, and his early albums, such as *Strong Persuader*, became must-have additions to any self-respecting record collection. But it wasn't all plain sailing...

The blues mafia withheld their praise. Cray's music just wasn't raw enough for them, and they saw him as some kind of heretic – a musician who refused to abide by the rules. Through it all, however, young Robert kept smiling on, happy to ignore his critics, wailing away and showing off his seductive Gospel-inspired vocals, while honing one of the most distinctive blues guitar tones to come along since John Lee Hooker plugged his Gretsch into a beaten-up Silvertone amp.

Now, 40 years after he and bassist Richard Cousins first put together their band in Portland, Oregon, comes *4 Nights Of Forty*

Years Live, a live CD and DVD of musical snapshots recorded over the years with Cray's various bands, plus extracts from four recent shows. Perhaps what is most striking about the footage is just how little has changed – still the same stinging Strat solos, still that same soulful voice.

We recently caught up with Cray to discuss his guitar-playing career so far and took a glimpse at his live rig, too.

You started out acting as backup for Albert Collins in the Pacific Midwest around 1976. That must have been a fantastic experience?

"It was a great opportunity to work with one of our heroes, and Albert became like a father figure to us – we were only about 23 years old, young kids, and being around him was great. He showed us the ropes, showed us how to travel and taught us how to all get along on the road. It was before Albert signed with Alligator Records, and it had been a while since the Imperial records he put out. Canned Heat first brought him out to California, and things were good for him for a long time before they started to tail off.

"In 1976, we had just finished a run of four nights at a club, and the owner told us Albert was coming through and needed a backup band. We'd been playing some of his numbers anyway, so we met up, went out for four days, and became good friends. After that, for a period of about 18 months, whenever Albert was out on the West Coast,



1. Note the hardtail bridge setup of Robert's Strats: when you've got a vibrato as good as his, who needs a vibrato unit?
2. Robert plays his Signature Strats live, including this Custom Shop Artist Series Stratocaster
3. Robert leans on another of his signature guitars, this time in Inca Silver, with a '61 C-shaped neck and a poly finish

we backed him up. We worked everywhere between Vancouver, British Columbia, and down to San Francisco, where we played the 1977 blues festival.

"Before that, we had worked with Curtis Salgado in Eugene, Oregon. Eugene was a college town of about 100,000 people, and we managed to bring in a lot of blues players who could use it as a stopover gig between Vancouver and San Francisco. So, we had Buddy Guy and Junior Wells, Big Walter Horton, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, Hubert Sumlin... All these great people came to town."

There have always been very obvious echoes of Albert's playing in your own guitar work. Did you consciously strive to absorb his style, or was it something that happened naturally?

"We were standing alongside him night after night on stage, playing his songs, so it was just natural that we would absorb the way he played, and what he did. He was a big inspiration, and I just loved the way he would dig into the strings with his fingers, picking them really hard, then letting them drop back. His fingers were so hard; they were like picks! I'd try to pull off some of his

licks, but it was hard. Albert played with his Telecaster tuned to C or D minor tuning and used a capo. For me, [who had been] playing a guitar in normal tuning, the stretches were about a mile long!"

You started playing shows in the UK around the time Eric Clapton recorded *Bad Influence*. Soon after that, Clapton got up on stage with you at Dingwalls in London. How did it feel to have that kind of recognition?

"I heard that he was coming, because his guitar tech had come in earlier in the afternoon and set up an amp. But, of course, it was great to have Eric up there – a flimsy disc of a couple of numbers came out with *Guitar Player*."

When you first came to the UK in the mid-80s, it was a time of great interest in roots music, and many people saw you as being the 'saviour of the blues'. How do you feel things have worked out?

"Pretty well, I think – we're still a working band, out there playing the music that we love. But we were lucky to get out there at a time when there was a lot of interest in our kind of music."

Praise from the blues aristocracy – BB King, Buddy Guy – came very quickly, but there was a certain amount of hostility in the blues press towards what you were doing. Did that hurt?

"No, I know a lot of bands that play music that they deem to be blues, which is so different from mine. So, if anyone thought that way, I regard it as a problem for them, because I enjoy blues as much as they do, and there's enough room for everybody out there. I never wanted just to re-do old blues songs, and there are so many influences over what I do. I've just wanted to write songs that pertain to me and my life – which is what a lot of the old blues songs were about anyway – and let the music breathe, be whatever it happens to be."

You played at Alpine Valley the night Stevie Ray Vaughan died. Do you think blues music has lost direction since?

"I'd been looking forward to that night in a big way. I hadn't seen Stevie for six months, and Jimmie Vaughan was there on the second night, which was great, because we're really good friends. Everybody had a great time jamming on *Sweet Home Chicago* at the end, but when I got back to my hotel,

“I never wanted just to re-do old blues songs, and there are so many influences over what I do; I’ve just wanted to write songs that pertain to me and my life”





4. Robert's bright, stinging tone is based on Fender's Vibro-King

5. ...together with a pair of Matchless Clubman heads with 4x10 cabs

6. ...and a set of rackmounted effects, which include: a wireless system; a Vibroman rack built by tech Zack Zaccaria, which simulates the tremolo effect of a Magnatone amp; and a TC Electronic 2290 delay unit

"I was one of the people that should have been in the helicopter that crashed. In fact, it was one of Eric's crew that had taken my place, the guy who'd helped me on stage with my amplifier at the end of the concert"

I had a call from my manager; I was one of the people that should have been in the helicopter that crashed. In fact, it was one of Eric's crew that had taken my place, the guy who'd helped me on stage with my amplifier at the end of the concert.

"But terrible as it was, I don't think blues music has changed since Stevie's death. It's music that's always suffered from not being in the mainstream, but at the same time, that aspect of it has always propelled anyone who's an eager listener to go out and seek it. It's how I became interested. Like when you're a young kid and you want to think of something as being your music. And I'm still like that – when I'm out on the road, we go and find vinyl shops, see what might be there that I haven't got. Often, people come up and might want to talk about Muddy Waters records, which were amazing; there were no long guitar solos, but everything was there in just a three-minute song."

Over the years, you've mainly recorded your own songs, but you have covered *Who's Been Talkin'* and *Sitting On Top Of The World*, tracks associated with Howlin' Wolf. Has he always been a favourite?

"I've always loved Howlin' Wolf's songs but sadly, I never got to see him. Richard [Cousins] and Curtis [Salgado] went up to catch a show in Seattle just after we'd been out on the road for four nights, and because I was tired, I stayed home. I always regret that, but it was towards the end of his life and he wasn't well."

At one point, you enlarged the band with the Memphis Horns and Tim Kaihatsu playing second guitar. But you always seem to come back to the small format...

"It was expensive to keep that band on the road, but at that time, I think we were making more money, too [laughs]. I like working with a small combo, it's what I've always done, and of course, sadly, the Memphis Horns aren't any more. But I really enjoyed working with those guys."

You took part in the *Hail! Hail! Rock 'N' Roll* Chuck Berry birthday concert. What was it like working with Chuck?

"That was great, and I had a really good time. But Chuck was giving Keith Richards just the hardest time. Keith was there to pay homage to his hero, but the way Chuck acted was untrusting, especially as he knew

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Keith. But I think he really wanted to be on top of everything.”

Given your admiration of people such as OV Wright and Al Green, working with Willie Mitchell on the *Take Your Shoes Off* album must have been a big thrill?

“Yes, it was. Willie came to Nashville where we had already been recording, wrote out the charts, and we cut the song *Love Gone To Waste*. Then went back to his old studio in Memphis – where he cut all those great records – to finish off the mixing. It was really cool to work with him.”

You shared stages with BB King a lot over the years. How did you first meet?

“The first time we met was in the early 80s in California, when we’d opened up a show for him. BB hadn’t arrived at that time and when I came offstage, I wasn’t allowed in my dressing room. One of his minders kept me out, which made me upset. So, that wasn’t a very good start, but we became really good friends – he was one of the nicest people walking the planet.”

Your style is one of the most instantly recognisable in the blues arena. You started out on a Gibson ES-345 on the *Who’s Been Talkin’* album. Changing to a Strat must have required a whole different technique?

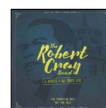
“I actually started out using a Gibson SG Standard, then because I wanted to get those BB King sounds, I put that down and played a 345. That gave me a real deep sound at that point; the 345 was too heavy on the bass end, too bright at the high end.

“Then I caught Phil Guy playing – Buddy’s brother – using a Fender Super Reverb with the reverb up quite a bit, and a Strat. The sound he was getting really blew me away, and shortly after that I fell in love with my 1964 green Strat; it gave me the sound I wanted and was also so much easier to use working around a microphone stand. After the Gibson 345, with the six-position controls, a Strat with just the three-position switch was so much easier to work!

“I’ve since retired my ’64 Strat, but the new ones just play great. I make up my own strings – an 0.011 for the high E through 13, 18, 28, 36, 46.”

For a long time, you used Fender amps and then you switched over to Matchless setups. How did that come about?

“We were doing a show in Hollywood opening up for Bonnie Raitt, and I had the chance to try out her guitar player’s setup; I played down by the bridge and the sound through the Matchless just flipped me out. I still have the Fender Super Reverb and use it for recording sometimes, with a Fender Vibro-King as a second stage amp, but the Matchless Clubman 35 is my main amp – Class A 35 watts with a 4x10 cabinet, and I use two of them. Jimmie Vaughan used the same setup for a while. We change the tubes around a bit, experimented doing various things. They’re just great amps. I also use a Magnatone Stereo Vibrato that my guitar tech made for me years back. Some people collect guitars, but I collect amps!” 



The Robert Cray Band’s *4 Nights Of 40 Years Live* double-CD and DVD is out now on Mascot Records

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SHADES OF BLUE

Soulful South African six-string king Dan Patlansky shares a few tips on improvisation, phrasing and playing more expressive blues

Words Matt Frost Photography Laurence Harvey

Since 2007, South African blues-rock sensation Dan Patlansky has been running an annual series of residential Guitar Weekends in a number of beautiful out-of-town locations in his native country. As a result of working with improving classic rock and blues players of all levels, Dan has garnered a reputation as a revelatory guitar tutor and he was more than happy to pass on a slew of pointers to the readers of *Guitarist* in our exclusive Style File and video (find it via <http://bit.ly/guitaristextra>), showcasing some of the techniques that make him one of the finest bluesmen in the Southern Hemisphere, if not the world.

And if you haven't yet sampled Patlansky's playing – he was most recently seen on these shores shaking up stages as main support for Joe Satriani on his much-lauded Shockwave Tour – then be sure to pick up a copy of his superb 2015 long-player, *Dear Silence Thieves*. It's still getting our pulses racing, that's for sure...

When growing up, which blues-rock and blues guitarists influenced your playing?

"I started off with guys who weren't really blues guys and who were doing more the classic-rock thing – David Gilmour and Jimmy Page and guys like that. Those are the guys that kind of got me into the guitar-playing thing. I think both those guys came from the blues and my

favourite licks they played were from the bluesier side of their playing. [Hearing] David Gilmour and the *Shine On You Crazy Diamond* solo really was a massive turning point for me, and that was a blues approach to a solo. It was real sparse, and it was that real 'phrased' type of playing. I was like, 'Wow!' and all the guys were saying, 'Well, that's the blues, man!'

"Then I really got into Clapton, and he does a lot of that kind of looping playing where he'll take three notes and just loop it and build the tension. Then, I went across the pond to the States, and I discovered Stevie Ray Vaughan and I think, as a blues player, it's so difficult to ignore a guy like Stevie Ray Vaughan. From there, I checked out Stevie Ray Vaughan's influences and all the Kings – you know, Albert King, the whole Freddie King thing and the BB King thing. Then, I just went back further and got into guys like the slide-guitar players, such as Son House and Robert Johnson and everything in between."

How would you sum up your approach to soloing and the balance of improvised elements you typically incorporate?

"I'd say that 90 per cent of the time, the solos are improvised, but I always find you can run out of ideas and licks, so I kind of approach it quite differently. I do this technique called 'milking'. When you think you're out of ideas, it's a cool thing just to

practise anyway. So, I take four notes and just milk them for every possibility they have in them. At home, when I'm feeling like I'm out of tune with the whole playing thing, I will just sit with four notes and try and make music out of them. And you can bend them, so effectively you can actually get a lot more than four notes out of them... but just that little box pattern kind of opens up the rest of the neck to you and you've got endless possibilities.

"Also, it means you're not thinking about note choice, you're just thinking about feeling the music and trying to make music out of nothing. I find that it's just such a fantastic tool to open up your playing."

Do you have any tips in terms of developing an ear for invention in solos?

"I'm telling you [trusting your gut instinct] is the way forward, man. It makes so much sense. If you take all the best improvisers in the world – jazz musicians like Charlie Parker and those kind of guys – I don't think they were going, 'I'm playing the Mixolydian scale now' or 'I'm going to go to a harmonic minor now!' They were just playing with their ears and making music, and they were so damn good at it.

"Pentatonics are really easy ones: they're easy to play and they're soulful, but you don't have to think too much about them. If you add all the notes in between and on the outside, you get all the scales anyway



Solo Flight

Dan Patlansky gives us a few strategies when coming to the climax of a solo...

"I think all solos need to start somewhere and end somewhere and I find there's so many little tools you can use to create [interest]. I mean, first off, it's about lack of shade, but on all kinds of levels. So, you know, going from real soft to full-blast creates interest in a solo. But it's also about your phrasing. I always think of it as punctuation in your soloing. If you're using more commas and full stops and then less of that later on, it's like when a good comedian tells a joke – eventually you're getting to a point where it builds somewhere."

"That's really important, and the most important thing is that you're not listening to the wrong kind of players. It's not going to make sense if you're listening to Justin Bieber and you want to play like Jimi Hendrix – it's just not going to work, man! You've got to listen to Hendrix if you want to play like him, because that phrasing is what sticks in your subconscious. It's not the notes, it's the phrasing and the feel and that will eventually come out in your playing."

and you always know what your safe notes are. So, if you think of your pentatonic notes as safe notes, then that's home base. Any one of those is going to sound pretty good against whatever key you're playing. Then, use the others as your kind of 'out-there' notes, tension notes, and you can kind of cover everything."

What advice would you give to guitarists looking to improve their rhythm playing?

"Yeah, I think rhythm playing is something that most guitar players forget about because they just want to get into the soloing and the flashy things. But rhythm guitar playing is possibly even more important than lead-guitar playing."

"You're going to be doing a lot more rhythm when you're playing in a band than you're going to be doing soloing, so I think it is such a crucial thing to get under your fingers. A cool thing that pushes you in the right direction and makes you want to practise rhythm playing is learning cool chord voicings... when you play a different voicing, they can suggest different rhythms to play. Also, any great guitar player you've heard is a fantastic rhythm guitar player."

"I mean, Hendrix was a sublime rhythm guitar player. For the most part, he was playing in a three-piece band where you've got to handle the rhythm as much as the soloing. Stevie Ray Vaughan is a great

example, too... he was kind of the iconic guy of being able – without even a band – to just play a slow blues, which is a tough thing to play. Slow blues is a cool thing to practise, as is taking a song that isn't a blues and having – I don't know – three chords like A, C# minor and D and playing off them like Hendrix did, while trying and to keep some sort of rhythm going."

We noticed that one of your guitar workshops was labelled 'Chords And Harmonies.' Tell us more...

"Yeah, that's something that no-one's ever very keen on! Everyone's like, 'Oh boring... that sounds like a theory workshop!' but it's actually a really important thing. It's not really about rhythmic patterns, it's more about opening up your chord playing, changing a familiar shape... the way Hendrix did it, because that opens you up to all sorts of stuff."

"This workshop is also about getting all these fantastic voicings and adding some tension to your chords. I think the more you explore the chord voicing thing from the rhythmic side, then the more interesting your guitar playing becomes. You can take some boring old songs that you've been playing for years and years, and you can really reinvent them – and you do so just by using a different chord voicing. It can become fantastic."

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How far do you notice common elements that particularly hold back players?

"I think we all, as guitar players, are our own worst enemies. There are certain things that you avoid playing and practising, because they're just a drag to practise. I notice that on [Guitar] Weekends and I always say to the guys about that 'milking' technique, taking four notes so you can really sound good. A handful of people will do it and you see big results in those guys, because then they go out onto the stage and they do a proper solo and it just sounds more refined and more musical. It's musical because, all of a sudden, it's the important things in music that are coming out. It's the feel and the phrasing and that's all the listeners are hearing.

"People saying, 'That resonates with me because I'm feeling it' is the most important thing. That's the mindset that you've got to change. It's fantastic to know all the stuff, but it's got to be a musically listenable thing... and the guys that do that milking exercise do see tremendous results. It takes so much willpower to sit for an hour with four notes on a 12-bar blues, busting out every kind of option you can and trying to make music with it. But it pays off, man! I still do it today."

•

"It takes willpower to sit for an hour with four notes on a 12-bar blues, busting out every kind of option you can and trying to make music with it. But it pays off, man!"

•

What techniques can make guitarists more expressive in a blues context?

"It seems obvious, but listen to the right sort of stuff. Constantly listen to blues stuff if you want to be a blues player and metal stuff if you want to be a metal player, you know what I mean? And obviously that milking technique really does bring out a lot of soul in your playing.

"As a modern player, you've got to be able to play fast and slow. It's not all about just hanging back. It's great to play fast, because it creates another element to your playing – it makes it more three-dimensional – but it's [important] to know when to use and not to use that. When you're sitting behind the guitar, you're thinking, 'I'm holding back', but if someone films you playing, you're never holding back as much as you thought you were. If you're on stage playing, hold back more than you think you are, and take it one step further back. You'll be shocked what you hear on the other side – it will be much more musical..."

Dan Patlansky joins King King's UK tour as special guest from 7 May 2016 at the Lincoln Engine Shed. Tickets: www.thegigcartel.com

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STYLE FILE

DAN PATLANSKY

Rising star of the blues-rock world Dan Patlansky is a great soloist, and here, we focus on the techniques in four excerpts from his video masterclass

Words Adrian Clark **Photography** Pierre Van der Walt

Dan Patlansky may not quite be a household name in the guitar world, but after supporting Joe Satriani for part of the Shockwave tour, he'll certainly be making a lot of new friends. Dan's main focus is on his songwriting, but his guitar playing is a major feature. He blends classic blues-rock sounds with modern touches and an effortless control of dynamics. In this video lesson, he demonstrates several aspects of how he developed his style. Here, we've selected four excerpts from the video to look at in more detail...

Example 1

DAN starts with a classic blues line, using mostly the A minor pentatonic (A C D E G) with the usual addition of the ♭5th (E_b). On beat 3, he hammers on to the 9th (B), something you'll often hear in the playing of Stevie Ray Vaughan and other Texas players.

Example 1 shows a guitar line in A minor pentatonic (A C D E G) with the usual addition of the ♭5th (E_b). The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The line is marked "N.C." (No Chords) and "BU" (Bent Up). The fretboard diagram shows the following notes: 7 (8) 5 5 8 5 7 5 7 5 8 8 5 8 5 7 8 7 5 7 9 8 7 5 7 5 6 5 6 5 8 5. The line ends with a hammer-on on the 9th (B) on beat 3.

Example 2

NOW Dan demonstrates how he can change the mood, simply by varying the attack and aggression in his playing. Bars 1 and 2 have a light lyrical touch, but then he digs in for the last half. The minor pentatonic once more provides the melodic backbone here, again with the added ♭5th, and Dan also resolves to an (implied) underlying A major chord with the C# at the end of bar 3.

Example 2 shows a guitar line in A minor pentatonic (A C D E G) with the usual addition of the ♭5th (E_b). The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The line is marked "N.C." (No Chords) and "BU" (Bent Up). The fretboard diagram shows the following notes: 0 9 10 8 10 10 11 10 8 10 8 10 8 9 7 5 7 5 6 5 6 5 3 5 3 5 5 3 4 5. The line ends with a hammer-on on the 9th (B) on beat 3. The final bar shows a trill (tr) on the 5th (E) and a C# at the end of bar 3.

Example 3

AS a singer/songwriter, rhythm playing is a vital skill for Dan. Here's how he might approach the first four bars of a slow blues. He switches quickly from chordal accompaniment to lead fills – a vital aspect of the slow blues style. To help with these smooth transitions, try to play chords with your thumb fretting the sixth string, so you don't have to move so far for the lead fills.

Example 3 shows a guitar part in A major, 12/8 time. The first system covers bars 1-2, featuring an A7 chord and a D9 chord. The second system covers bars 3-4, featuring an A7 chord and an A7sus4 chord. The notation includes lead lines with various fingerings (e.g., 5-6-7-8, 7-9-5-7, 5-5-7-8, 5-5-8-8-8-7-8-7-7-5-7-5) and chordal accompaniment. A 'BU' (bend) is indicated in bar 2, and a 'BD' (bend) is indicated in bar 4. A 'Let ring' instruction is present in bar 4. The guitar part is written for a right-handed player, with the left hand fretting and the right hand picking.

Example 4

ANY talk of quick shifts between rhythm and lead playing brings us inevitably to Jimi Hendrix, and here, Dan demonstrates a few decorative chord/melody ideas, reminiscent of Jimi's *Little Wing* style. Note how the lead fills are primarily based around notes of each chord, rather than just linear scale fragments.

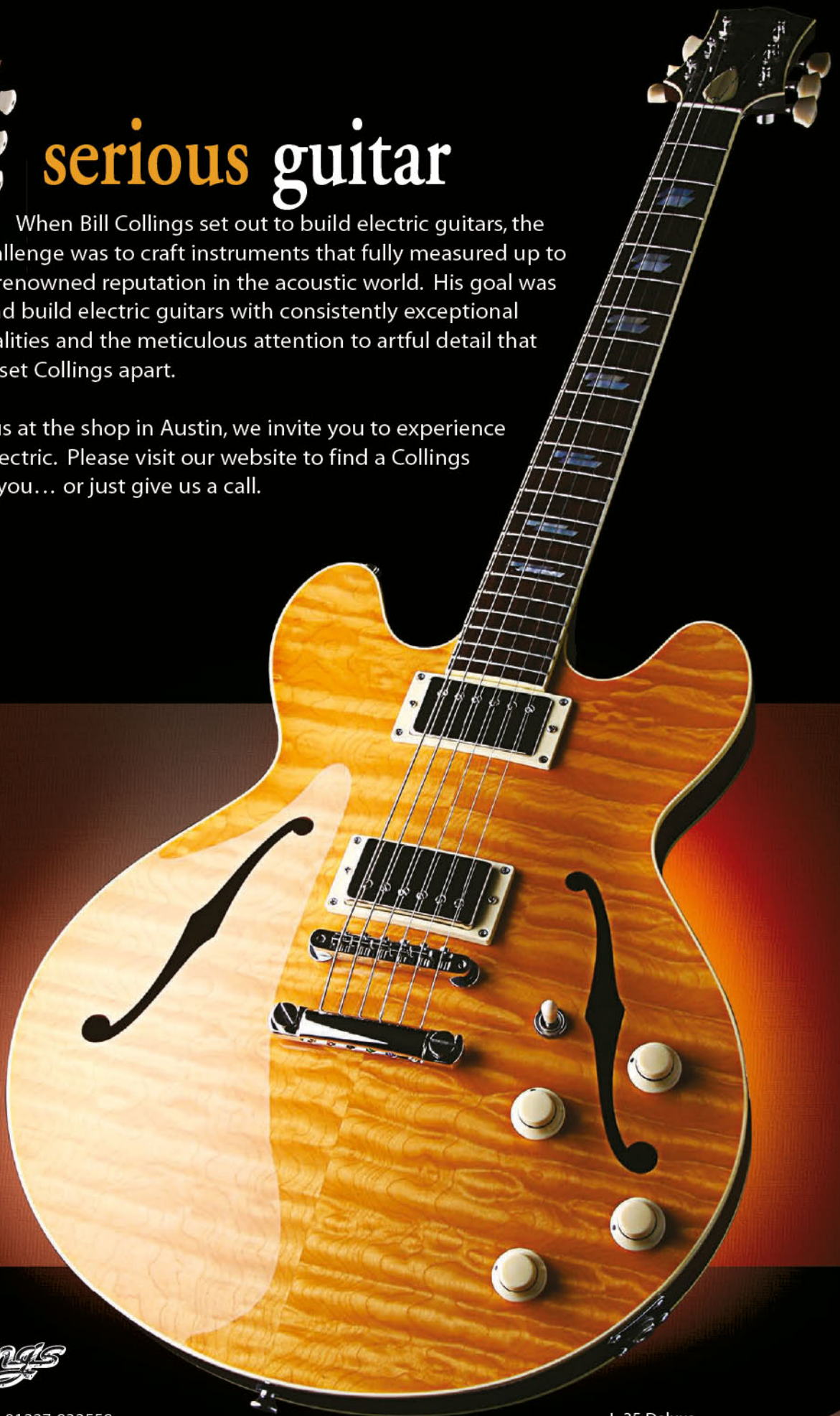
Example 4 shows a guitar part in A major, 4/4 time. The first system covers bars 1-2, featuring an A chord and a C#m chord. The second system covers bars 3-4, featuring a D chord and an A chord. The notation includes lead lines with various fingerings (e.g., 5-7-5, 7-6-6-7-6, 7-X, 9-11-9, 11-9-11-9, 11-11-11-9-10-9, 12-9) and chordal accompaniment. A 'BU' (bend) is indicated in bar 2, and a 'BD' (bend) is indicated in bar 4. A 'Let ring' instruction is present in bar 4. The guitar part is written for a right-handed player, with the left hand fretting and the right hand picking.



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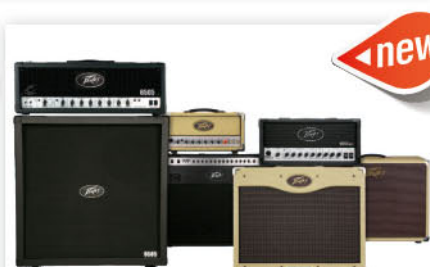


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History Repeating





The latest Les Paul Reissue upgrades pack serious authenticity into this guitar's hand-aged form – but at a price. Neville Marten finds out if it's all been worth it

Words Neville Marten Photography Joby Sessions



GIBSON TRUE HISTORIC 1960 LES PAUL, MURPHY AGED **£7,999**

CONTACT **Gibson** PHONE **00800 44427661** WEB **www.gibson.com**

What You Need To Know

1 Yet another upgrade to the Les Paul Reissue?

No company producing top-end products can stand still in the quest for improvement, whether in cutting-edge technology or in recreating vintage artefacts. At *Guitarist*, we applaud such ongoing tenacity and attention to detail.

2 Who's Murphy?

Tom Murphy is the Gibson employee responsible for introducing the company to the principle of taking pristine guitars, fettling them with a variety of implements and techniques, and turning them into replicas of half-century-old originals. Read more about Tom Murphy over the page.

3 Can it really be worth that much?

With each Reissue upgrade inevitably comes more hands-on intervention from the most skilled employees. It's usually this that adds hundreds and sometimes thousands to finished prices. Thankfully, the differences are usually palpable.

With the latest Les Paul Reissues boasting ever more vintage-accurate detail, Gibson has decided to change the name of the range to True Historic, to more accurately reflect what these guitars are all about. All True Historic models (in '58, '59 and '60 guise) are available aged, for a hefty £1,750 up-charge; the legendary Tom Murphy is responsible for their creation, and they come with an exclusive hardback booklet proclaiming so. Our 1960 model in Vintage Lemon Burst is one such rare beast.

Hand-in-hand with the name change comes a raft of forensic detail upgrades. First, Gibson declares that both mahogany neck and maple cap are 'double carved'; the second carve is apparently to eliminate inconsistencies from 'slack belt' sanding and other processes. The tops are then hand-shaped to produce the final contour: catch the top right and the light picks up the dished perimeter beautifully, its highly figured yet subtle grain dancing like flames in a fire. Of the double-carved neck, Gibson says that each profile – from the fat '58 to the skinnier '60 style of our guitar – feels that much closer to its vintage forbear.

Other changes include re-assessing the plastics and recreating them with microscopic accuracy. The pickguard is

more faithfully reproduced, including the slightly ragged edges of the originals (contrary to popular belief those vintage gems weren't pure perfection), and larger countersinks for the screws. Around the back, too, the control cavity plate looks slimmer and the plastics more accurate in colour. The fitted die-cast 'True Vintage' toggle switch cover can be swapped for a supplied plastic one, should you prefer.

The nickel-plated pickup covers, too, have been re-tooled, with production methods more akin to the late-50s. So, the corners and radius are more precisely shaped. Plus, as the originals' polepiece holes were punched from the rear, the tops were sanded to flatten out lumps and raggedness, hence imperfections here and there.

Another important factor in making the guitars look, feel and play better is in the softening of certain areas that were previously left sharp. For instance, the headstock's edges and pointed wingtips have been lightly dressed to leave a more hand-finished look; the fingerboard binding, too, has been 'rolled' along its top edge for a more comfortable feel. The finish itself has been wet-sanded by hand to reduce its thickness and lend greater authenticity (it's around half as thick as on this reviewer's own '56 Goldtop Reissue).



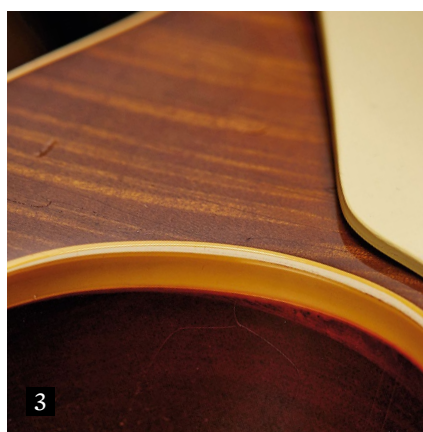
All True Historic models (in '58, '59 and '60 guise) are available aged, for a hefty £1,750 up-charge



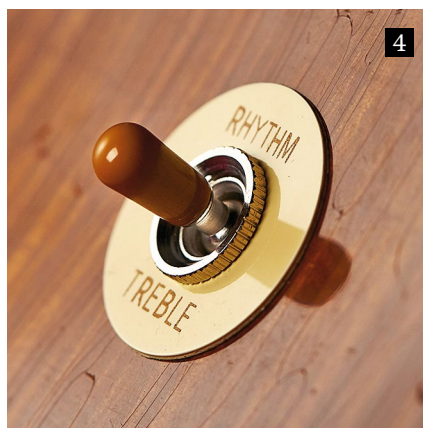
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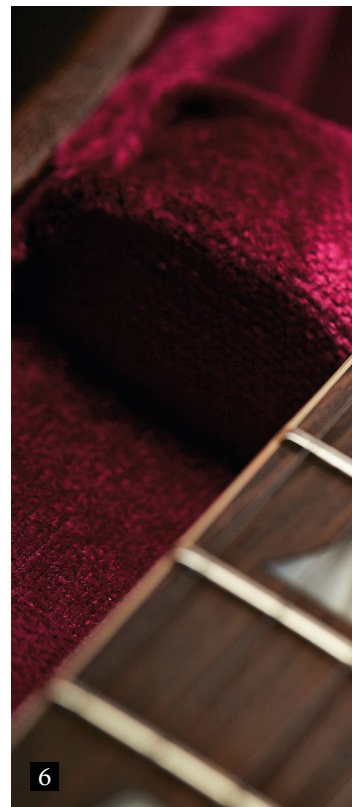
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1. Lightly aged nickel ABR-1 tune-o-matic bridge and traditional lightweight aluminium stud tailpiece

2. Gibson has retooled its pickup covers with more accurately shaped perimeters and corners, and with authentic wear-marks from sanding their tops after stamping

3. Plastics have all been reformulated; note the pickguard's sharper edge, the scraped binding and the maple cap peeping out from beneath it

4. Ageing guru Tom Murphy completes the lacquer checking using only a hand-held Stanley blade and his own proprietary finishing techniques



Tom who?

The maestro of the aged finish, Tom Murphy has long experience of turning new into old

Tom Murphy began work in Gibson's Nashville touch-up department where he learnt on the job by watching more experienced colleagues. From there, he moved through the ranks from paint-shop repairs to more serious restoration work. While repairing and part-refinishing a colleague's early 60s Firebird in gold, he saw his shiny new neck finish was at odds with the lacquer-checked and patina-laden body, so set about copying this ageing on the re-sprayed areas, distressing the finish and adding faux checking. The results stunned not only him, but also others at Gibson. The guitar was displayed at a trade show with tremendous success and the rest, as we know, is history.

Since then, Murphy has assembled a specific set of tools including keys, Stanley blades, and even a heater to mimic natural lacquer sinking. Murphy receives each guitar finished and buffed, but with no electronics or hardware installed. Then, using his assemblage of equipment, he painstakingly adds lacquer checking, dents, chips and other telltale signs of ageing. Tom says that on starting each guitar, unless it's a specific commission to look a certain way, he has no real idea of how it's going to turn out.

Not all aged Gibsons are by Murphy, though; Tom signs his pieces using a subtle 'TM', which keen eyes will find between the bridge pickup's controls and body binding. There's also the aforementioned authentication booklet that comes with each Murphy Aged True Historic. He's distressed many famous recreations, from Jimmy Page's Reissues with their signature cigarette burn, to Dickey Betts' 'Allman Brothers' Goldtop and Gary Rossington's 'Lynyrd Skynyrd' Les Paul with simulated headstock repair – complete with black-painted securing screws. Murphy's work has become so sophisticated that it's all but indistinguishable from something originally built over half a century ago.

5. Each Murphy Aged True Historic comes with its own signed and numbered booklet

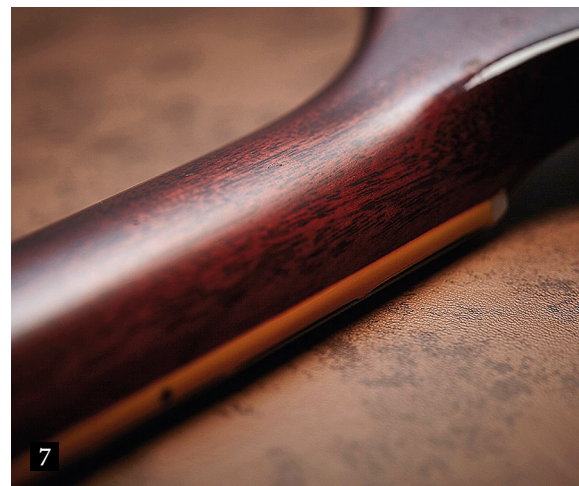
6. Fretboard edges are 'rolled' for a smoother playing feel

7. Our slimmer 1960 neck profile is not for everyone, but some players will love it

8. Faux de-lamination of the maple top is an ageing work of art, but may be a detail too far for some

9. Tinted control knobs sit atop vintage nickel dial pointers

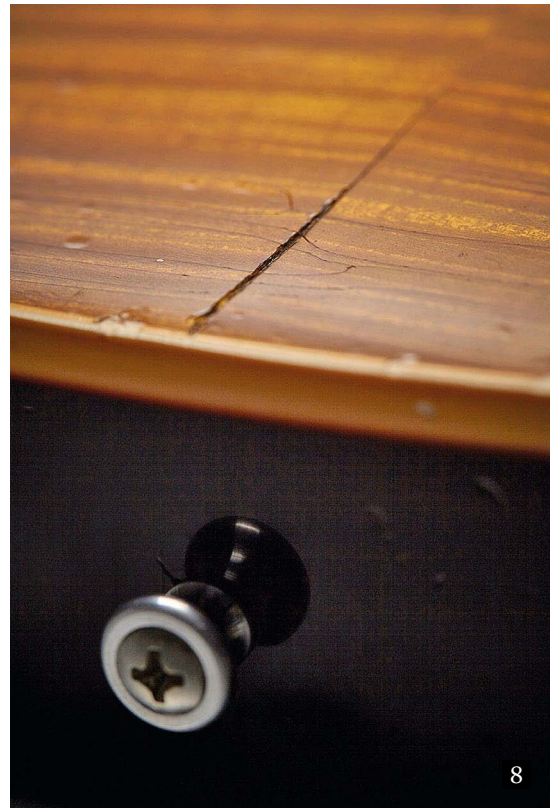
10. Simulated wear on the back reveals how wet sanding has markedly thinned the nitro-cellulose finish



There's also a thinner headstock veneer, re-tooled control knobs, pickup surrounds and a return to scraped binding where the stain is removed with a blade prior to clear lacquering. This can leave a perceptible ridge, but a happy byproduct is that the binding edges are made slightly softer. Aniline dye is retained for the grain-filling and staining process, but this, too, has been given a darker, more authentic vintage hue.

Pickups are Gibson's Custom Buckers. These are asymmetrically wound, with the slug coil in each getting around 300 extra turns of 42-gauge copper wire. At 8.5kohms resistance, the bridge humbucker is 0.5k hotter than its partner. As has been the norm for a while, Bumble Bee capacitors are employed, along with quality CTS pots.

Our guitar comes in Vintage Lemon Burst nitro and has gone through the Tom Murphy ageing process (see the box, left).



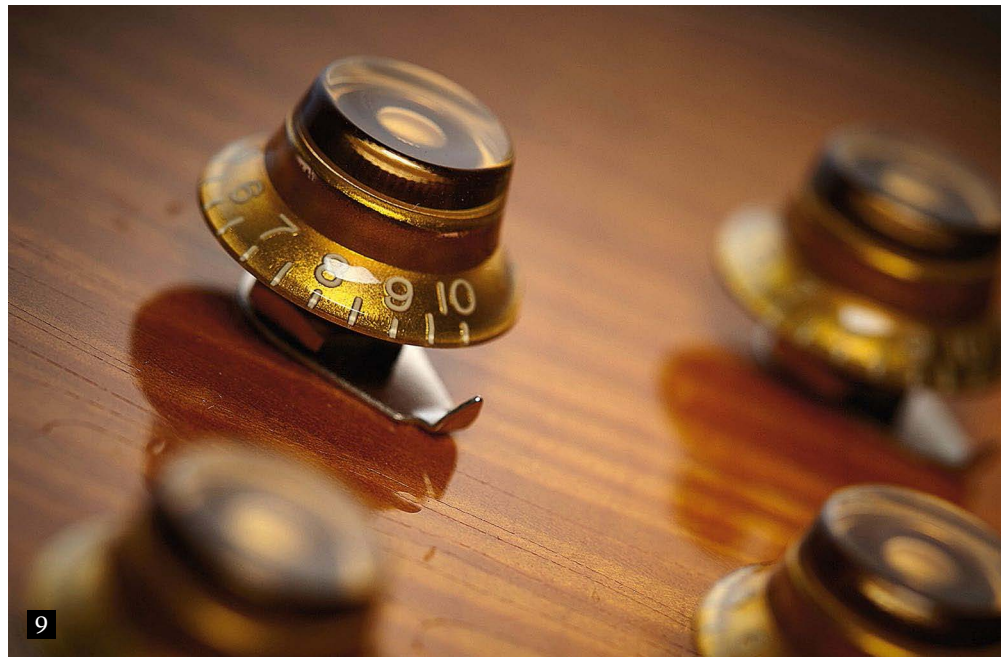
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We'd say it features medium wear for an instrument that purports to be 55 years old; it's been crafted to excruciatingly high levels of detail and would fox many a Les Paul buff. One striking feature is a short section between tailpiece and endpin, where the two-piece top is apparently de-laminating. The use of original-style hot hide glue is now standard on True Historic models and, since this is susceptible to heat and moisture, such eventualities, while not common, certainly did happen. It adds real authenticity to the overall effect, but might be a detail too far for some.

A highlight of the Murphy process is the lacquer checking. Tom achieves this with nothing more than a naked Stanley blade, but has it down to such an art that its authenticity would be almost beyond question were the truth not known.

The guitar's standard-width but relatively skinny 1960 neck profile is not for everyone. But whether you prefer the more 'all things to all people' feel of the '59, or the clubbier '58 experience, there's no doubt it's a comfortable handful. Any fingerboard edge sharpness is gone, and with the action perfectly set, right out of the case, the True Historic is a breeze to play.

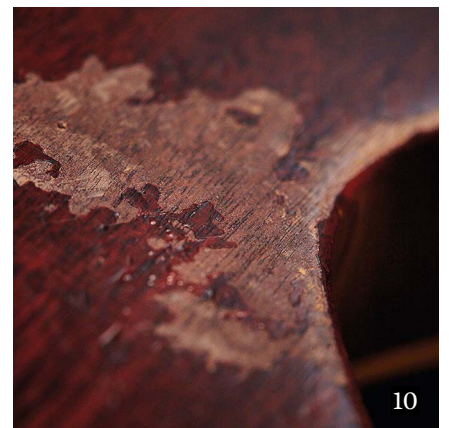
As mentioned in the recent 'Dutchburst' review (also a 1960), there's a feeling of easier top-end playability since, by slimming the neck, Gibson also shaves a millimetre or two off the crook of the heel, giving the thumb a tad more access and therefore the fretting fingers a mite more freedom. In a random *Guitarist* office straw poll, we'd favour this neck over the '58, but the '59 would pip it at the post.



9

Sounds

Sonically, we have no qualms in saying that this one of the finest Les Pauls we've played. Through our stock Marshall JTM45, it does all that you'd expect: driving bridge pickup tones, warm and woody neck, twangier in-between settings and, of course, a plethora of other sounds available from tweaking volume and tone controls. A particular favourite is both pickups on: bridge pickup, full volume and tone; neck pickup, volume on seven but tone back to four. This produces a sort of 'woman tone lite' that's vocal and expressive, and usable in any number of situations. Flip to either



10



11. The beautiful lacquer checking extends to the headstock with its softened edges and less pointy wingtips. Also note the lightly tinted Kluson Deluxe-style tuners and pearl Gibson logo

pickup on its own, knock back the volume, and the tone becomes bright and articulate. It's great for chords, general rhythm or arpeggios. Whack everything up full and there's power aplenty at your fingertips, yet never once did we feel the horse was in control of the rider.

Verdict

The elephant in the room is, of course, the non-use of period-correct timbers. With the quantities that Gibson will be making, even of these 'limited production' instruments, that's clearly impossible. However, other companies are employing Honduran mahogany and Brazilian rosewood on extremely low-run, prestige models – with the requisite certification in place, of course – so we'd love to see Gibson offer this as an 'uber' limited edition, over and above the main range. We shudder to think what they'd cost, but we're pretty sure every last one would find a home.

And on that thorny question as it relates to our guitar, we would suggest that price is all but irrelevant since the True Historics

are so desirable that well-heeled Les Paul lovers will barely bat an eyelid.

We've played this guitar through Marshall's new Astoria amp, a Fender Blues Junior, a Morgan SW22R, and demo'd it using our own JTM45. It's met or exceeded sonic expectations at every turn and proved a joy to play. Plus, it looks so good, it's hard to keep one's eyes off it.

Hand on heart, we'd ultimately prefer the all-purpose '59 neck profile over our guitar's shallower 1960, but that's merely a matter of choice – others would sell their soul for it. And who would blame them?

It's hard to recall an instrument that's caused such a stir at *Guitarist* – and it's not as though we don't see our fair share of desirable electrics! Whether it's Tom Murphy's beautiful ageing, the delightfully figured but subtle maple cap, the gorgeous Lemon Burst finish, the brilliant set of vintage tones or the mere desirability of something so damned expensive, there's only one conclusion: that Gibson has done it once again and made its Reissues even more enticing. **G**



GIBSON TRUE HISTORIC 1960 LES PAUL, MURPHY AGED

PRICE: £7,999 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody

BODY: Cream-bound solid mahogany back with carved, two-piece flamed maple cap

NECK: Mahogany, 1960-style slim profile, softened headstock edges and thin holly veneer facing

SCALE LENGTH: 624mm (24.6-inch)

NUT/WIDTH: Nylon/42.8mm

FINGERBOARD: Indian rosewood with aged nitro-cellulose trapezoid inlays

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo

HARDWARE: Nickel-plated tuneomatic bridge and aluminium stud tailpiece; reissue Kluson Deluxe tuners

OTHER FEATURES: Black Royalite control cavity cover and die-cast toggle switch plate

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Gibson Custom Bucker pickups (w/ nickel-plated True Historic pickup covers), 3-way toggle selector, volume and tone for each

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.62kg/8lbs

OPTIONS: 1958 and 1959 spec: 1958 (plainer top, fat neck); 1959 (highly figured top, medium carve neck)

LEFT-HANDERS: Not at present

FINISHES: Vintage Cherry Sunburst, Vintage Dark Burst and Vintage Lemon Burst (as reviewed)



9/10

PROS Vintage vibe and heritage; fabulous tones and gorgeous looks

CONS It's very expensive; we'd like to see an 'uber' limited edition with period-correct timbers; the slim 1960 neck is not for everyone



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Not quite in the market for a True Historic Les Paul?
Fret not, you still have plenty of options...

1 **EPIPHONE** LES PAUL STANDARD PLUSTOP PRO £499

Gibson's sister brand Epiphone produces a wide range of highly affordable Les Pauls that might surprise even the most seasoned of players with their quality/price ratio. This LP Standard features a AAA flame-maple veneer top and Epiphone ProBucker-2 and ProBucker-3 coil-splittable humbuckers, and comes in a choice of finishes, including Honeyburst, Heritage Cherry Sunburst, Trans Blue, Vintage Sunburst and Wine Red.
www.epiphone.com

2 **GIBSON** LES PAUL STANDARD 2015 £2,199

Granted, Gibson's 2015 models – with their wider necks, zero frets and G-Force 'robot' tuners – were probably the most controversial to appear in the company's long history. However, there are some bargains to be had here, with models being heavily discounted throughout the year and with the 2016 models already in stock.
www.gibson.com

3 **GIBSON** LES PAUL STUDIO '50S TRIBUTE 2016 TRADITIONAL approx £749

While we await the official Gibson announcement of its 2016 production models, dealers are already stocking guitars such as this highly affordable satin-finish Studio. It features mahogany/maple construction plus a 50s-profile neck, 22-fret rosewood fingerboard, and 490R and 498T humbuckers at the neck and bridge respectively.
www.gibson.com

4 **GIBSON** LES PAUL STANDARD 2016 TRADITIONAL approx £2,099

Seemingly back on track, this 2016 Les Paul Standard returns to a more classic feature set here with standard neck dimensions, regular tuners and nut, plus coil-splittable Burstbucker Pro Rhythm and Lead pickups, a compound-radius rosewood fingerboard and modern weight relief. It has a solid mahogany body and figured maple top.
www.gibson.com

5 **GIBSON** CUSTOM LP R9 1959 VOS LES PAUL 2014 £4,699

Gibson's ongoing efforts in recreating the 'original recipe' of the Les Paul ran to the ninth attempt, prior to True Historic, with a host of subtle details including the use of aniline dyes, hot-hide glue for the neck joint, historic no-tubing truss-rod assembly, accurate body and fingerboard binding colour and new pickups in the form of Gibson's Custom Buckers.
www.gibson.com

6 **GIBSON** COLLECTOR'S CHOICE #18 1960 LES PAUL 'DUTCHBURST' £5,799

Reviewed in issue 392, the Collector's Series replicates real Les Pauls owned by a variety of collectors, using laser measuring, by matching the wood grains and colour tones, and recreating each mark of time. This 'Dutchburst' was so good it got us in hot water: reviewer Neville Marten took rather a long time sending it back! Perfection, at a price.
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Power trio





Combining boutique features with a compact and practical format, Peavey's affordable new trio of Mini Heads proves good things come in small packages

Words Nick Guppy Photography Olly Curtis



PEAVEY VALVEKING 20 MH & CLASSIC 20 MH & 6505 MH £540, £595 & £595

CONTACT **Barnes & Mullins Ltd** PHONE **01691 652449** WEB **www.peavey.com**

What You Need To Know

1

What are these mini heads all about, then?

Simple: three identically sized amps from Peavey, based on three very popular and distinct ranges with very different sounds.

2

Which one should we buy?

The Classic 20 MH is Peavey's tribute to those vintage 50s American amps that shaped early electric blues and rock 'n' roll. The 6505 is modern rock and metal, while the ValveKing sits in the middle, with versatile tone to cover almost anything.

3

Any tricks onboard?

Well, there's MSDI: Peavey's 'Microphone Simulated Direct Inject', which provides the sound of a real mic'd up cabinet with a balanced XLR output that can drive any live or studio desk, as well as a speaker defeat switch and ground lift. It's a great way of getting big tone onto a disc or out to a big audience with minimal hassle.

It seems that we guitar players can't get enough of small guitar amps. To underline that, Peavey has just released new versions of three of its most popular heads, in a new series called Mini Heads. The Classic and 6505 have all been redesigned with familiar-looking front panels and cabinet cosmetics, while sharing similar rear-panel features to the ValveKing

Micro head we reviewed a while back, creating a trio of small but very capable amps that are going to be just as handy on stage as they could be for home practice, recording or rehearsals.

Now part of the Mini Head range, the ValveKing 20 combines some serious boutique features at a very affordable price point. Inside its particle-board cabinet,





the electronics are printed circuit-board based, and laid out neatly in typical Peavey fashion. The front panel has a single input jack with controls for clean and lead gain, bass mid and treble, reverb level and master volume. There are buttons for channel select and gain boost, both of which can also be foot-switched. Between these last two is the ValveKing's clever 'Vari-Class' control, which continuously varies the dual-EL84 output stage operation from two-valve Class AB push-pull to single-ended pure Class A. Around the back, there's a speaker outlet with switchable impedance and a three-stage attenuator that varies the full 20-watt power rating down to five watts and one watt. Next to this is Peavey's MSDI output, which provides a balanced out with switchable speaker emulation, speaker defeat and ground lift, as well as a regular 3.5mm headphone socket. There's also a series effects loop, a USB recording output, and provision for a pair of two-button footswitches, to control channel, boost, reverb and effects loop selection.

The Classic 20 MH takes Peavey's long-running and highly regarded Classic series and reworks it for the Mini Head format. Again, we have a single input socket feeding a dual-channel preamp with shared EQ, and controls for clean volume, overdrive gain and master volume (using Peavey's old-style pre and post names), bass, mid, treble and reverb. The internal electronics layout and rear panel are identical to the ValveKing 20 MH, with the same speaker, attenuator, recording and headphones output, effects loop and footswitch functions, and the same dual-EL84 output stage.



1. The ValveKing's Vari-Class control continuously varies the output-stage operating mode from Class AB to single-ended pure Class A, reducing power output, thickening the tone and shifting the dynamic response. It's a unique, patented feature and very clever
2. TSI (far right on the front panel) stands for Tube Status Indicator and it's a handy visual check that your output valves are working okay, and also protects the amp in case of valve failure

Finally, the 6505 Mini Head is based on Peavey's flagship 6505 design, with the same gain structure and similar front panel features. These include separate rhythm and lead preamp and master volume controls, low, mid and high EQ, a bright switch on the rhythm channel, power stage presence and resonance, together with a footswitchable crunch mode for the rhythm channel. Rear-panel features are identical to the other two mini heads, with the same speaker, DI, loop and footswitch functions. Despite having significantly different sounds, all three heads have a similar 'family' look, as the cabinets are all the same size and share Peavey's typically high build and finish quality.

The Rivals

Orange's DT30H Dual Terror (£519) is a two-channel version of the Tiny Terror, delivering 30 watts from an all-valve circuit that can be switched to five and seven watts. **Blackstar's versatile HT Studio 20 head (£429)** features two channels and its Infinite Shape Feature control for the widest possible tonal range. **Hughes & Kettner's TubeMeister 18H head (£499)** has two channels, a backlit control panel, switchable output power and a Red Box DI circuit. For the money, it's arguably the strongest competitor in this sector



3. Peavey's Microphone Simulated Direct Interface provides a balanced output to desk or DAW, for live or studio use. It sounds very realistic, and has a handy speaker defeat, headphones socket and ground lift. It's featured on all three heads

4. The USB output is derived from the MSDI circuit and needs no special drivers; just plug in and start recording. The output level is calibrated to work with any attenuator setting and the speaker can be on or off



Sounds

The ValveKing 20 MH has one feature in particular that sets it apart: Vari-Class. A simple knob on the control panel takes the ValveKing's trick output stage from Class AB push-pull at one extreme to single-ended pure Class A at the other, with every variation in between, going from dynamic punch with a fast attack to smooth compression and a thicker midrange. It's a very versatile amp that sounds great for rock, metal or jazz. There's plenty of gain on tap to suit practically any guitar – you won't quite turn a regular-output Strat into a fire-breathing distortion monster, but you can get quite close. At the other extreme, the ValveKing is capable of some surprisingly lush, fat clean tones that work very nicely

for jazzier styles, especially with a dab of the onboard digital reverb. Teamed with a PAF-loaded Les Paul and running near pure Class A, the ValveKing 20 does a good job of translating the guitar's acoustic warmth and sustain into an excellent vintage jazz tone – the Les Paul guitar is practically synonymous with rock today, but it's worth remembering that Les himself had deep roots in jazz.

Next up, the Classic 20 MH has a more focused sonic palette. There's a punchier midrange and an edgier distortion tone, which team well with the dual-EL84 output stage – making a practically perfect platform for country, blues and classic rock. Dating back to 1991, the Classic range is one of Peavey's stalwarts and the tweed covering leaves you in no doubt as to the genres it's aimed at. Driven with the right guitar, the Classic can go from vintage Allman-era Southern rock to an excellent twang that'll inspire any country picker. Strat players can pull the heavier, Buddy Whittington-type of tone from it just as easily as the clarity of Stevie Ray, while for semi-acoustic players, the Classic is almost purpose-built for rockabilly and redneck jazz. Its frequency range is ideally matched with the P-90 and the slightly brighter humbucking tones of Gretsch's Filter'Tron, perfect for Brian Setzer or Danny Gatton styles, although the 20-watt output stage doesn't quite have enough clean headroom for live use, unless its mic'd up.

The 6505 is even more focused, aimed squarely at modern rock and metal players. It's a bang-up-to-date version of the amp formerly known as the 5150, a popular choice for rock and metal users all over

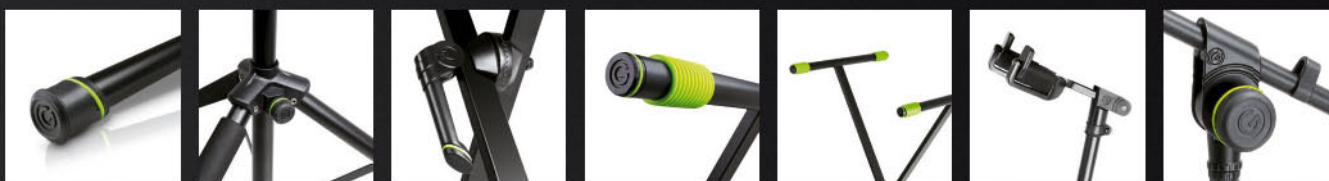


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the world, and not just because of the Van Halen association. This amp's bone-crushing thick distortion is the product of a lot of preamp gain stages and a powerful resonance control that boosts the low-end response. While it has less than half the preamp valves of its full-sized big bro, it still sounds remarkably similar, with the same full bass response and OTT crunch sounds that eclipse most players' notions of a good metal lead sound. The 6505's lead channel squeezes out even more grind and sustain for a superlative rock and metal sound, although like the original, it takes some dialling in to achieve the best results.

All three amps impress with their similar back panel features: the MSDI output sounds quite realistic and delivers a good clean signal to live or studio desks, while the USB connector works faultlessly on our Win7 PC DAW. A good word is due for the built-in reverb, too, which sounds a lot more expensive than it is and easily frees up an outboard digital effect.

Verdict

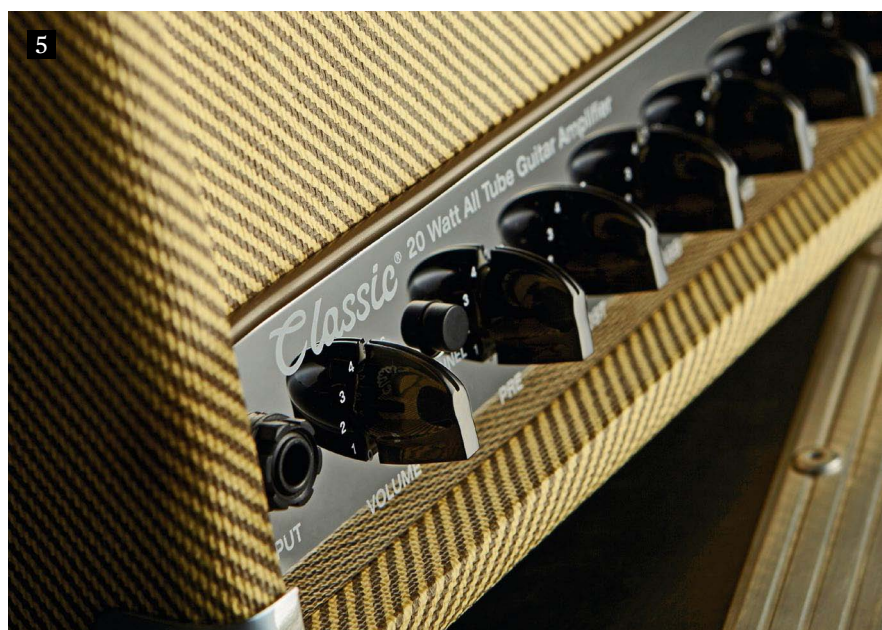
Peavey's manufacturing and design expertise has been fully leveraged with these three heads; they look great and sound very impressive, with power and clean headroom to handle most smaller gigs, and studio-friendly features that make a huge difference when it comes to getting tracks down fast. The price is reasonably competitive, bearing in mind these are all real valve amps and all three heads look and sound anything but bargain basement.

For versatility, the ValveKing rules, with a tone that can easily cover almost any musical base, thanks to its clever Vari-Class control. Metal and modern-rock players should make a beeline for the 6505 with



its huge overdrive capability and lightning pick response, while the Classic is ideal for blues, country, and anything else under the 'Americana' label.

Whichever head you choose, you'll get the same clever rear-panel features, including the attenuator, MSDI and USB outputs, and it's these that give the Mini Head range such wide appeal. From beginner through to experienced pro, there's something here for almost everyone. Small is definitely big! 





6



7

5. Smartly finished in tweed, the Classic 20 MH has the tone to match its distinctively vintage appearance

6. The 6505's rhythm channel has a crunch mode that adds a huge dose of extra filth. This function can be switched remotely if needed, giving nearly three-channel operation

7. The resonance control on the 6505's power amp boosts the low-end response



PEAVEY VALVEKING 20 MH

PRICE: £595

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Valve preamp and power amp with solid-state rectifier

OUTPUT: Maximum 20W RMS, switchable to 5W and 1W RMS

VALVES: 3x 12AX7, 2x EL84

DIMENSIONS: 185 (h) x 356 (w) x 197mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 8/17

CABINET: Particle board

CHANNELS: 2

CONTROLS: Clean volume, pre gain and post gain, bass, mid, treble, reverb

FOOTSWITCH: 2-button LED footswitch supplied; can be used for channel/boost or reverb/effects loop

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: 3-position power reduction switch, speaker outlet with 8/16ohm switch. MSDI XLR output with headphones socket, speaker defeat and ground lift. Series effects loop, microphone simulated USB recording out

OPTIONS: None

8/10

PROS Very authentic vintage USA sounds, tailor-made for blues, rockabilly, redneck jazz and more

CONS A little more clean headroom would make the overdrive channel much more effective



PEAVEY CLASSIC 20MH

PRICE: £540

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Valve preamp and power amp with solid-state rectifier

OUTPUT: Maximum 20W RMS, switchable to 5W and 1W RMS

VALVES: 3x 12AX7, 2x EL84

DIMENSIONS: 185 (h) x 356 (w) x 197mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 8/17

CABINET: Particle board

CHANNELS: 2

CONTROLS: Clean volume, pre and post gain, bass, mid, treble, reverb

FOOTSWITCH: 2-button footswitch supplied; can be used for channel/boost or reverb/effects loop

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: 3-position power reduction switch, speaker outlet with 8/16ohm switch. MSDI XLR output with headphones socket, speaker defeat and ground lift. Series effects loop, microphone simulated USB recording out

OPTIONS: None

8/10

PROS A versatile tone with wide dynamic range that can be precisely controlled with Vari-Class

CONS Okay, it is cheaper. But the footswitch should be supplied as it is with the other two amps



PEAVEY 6505 MH

PRICE: £595

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Valve preamp and power amp with solid-state rectifier

OUTPUT: Maximum 20W RMS, switchable to 5W and 1W RMS

VALVES: 3x 12AX7, 2x EL84

DIMENSIONS: 185 (h) x 356 (w) x 197mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 8/17

CABINET: Particle board

CHANNELS: 2

CONTROLS: Rhythm pre gain, bright and crunch switches. Lead pre gain, low, mid and high EQ, rhythm post gain, lead post gain, reverb, resonance and presence

FOOTSWITCH: 2-button LED footswitch supplied; can be used for channel/boost or reverb/effects loop

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: 3-position power reduction switch, speaker outlet with 8/16ohm switch. MSDI XLR output with headphones socket, speaker defeat and ground lift. Series effects loop, microphone simulated USB recording out

OPTIONS: None

7/10

PROS Great sound for modern rock and metal, tons of distortion and feedback at conversation level

CONS Not as much dynamic punch from this smaller power stage means things can get a little indistinct



Light lunches: Suhr's Corso, the V40 from Victory, and Orange's Micro Terror

When Small Became Big

The story behind the mini 'lunchbox' head phenomenon that spawned the new heads from Peavey

Small amps are in vogue today like never before, so it seems. However, they've been with us since the beginning of the electric guitar and they never really went away. The very earliest guitar amps were based on radio circuits and cabinet designs dating back to the 1920s and 1930s – hence the low outputs, wooden cabinets and occasionally ornate speaker grilles found on many early combos, such as Epiphone's 1930s 'Century'. At the same time, the metal case 'lab equipment' cabinet could be found on amplifiers whose heritage was based on public address and recording products, including New York's McIntosh Labs power amps – over 25,000 watts of which powered the Grateful Dead's legendary Wall Of Sound way back in 1974; or the less well-known, but equally influential Vortexion, made closer to home in Wimbledon, which drove many British dancehall PA systems back in the 1940s.

By the late 1950s, popular music was undergoing its biggest-ever seismic shift, with the advent of rock 'n' roll. At the time, one of the biggest amps around was Fender's tweed Twin, although many guitar players favoured the 4x10 tweed Bassman, which was less powerful in watts, but had four 10-inch loudspeakers.

Guitarists tended to favour bigger amps due to the shortcomings of PAs, which were often purely for vocal reproduction. By the mid-60s, players such as Ritchie Blackmore and Pete Townshend wanted more – a lot more! – and pestered a certain Hanwell drum-shop owner to make an amplifier that eclipsed the Bassman, both in size and power. This ushered in the arrival of the iconic Marshall stack, which – thanks to its use by Townshend, Blackmore, Page, Clapton and a certain James Marshall Hendrix – forged the template for modern electric guitar amplification.

By now, amplifier distortion had become an integral part of the electric guitar's voice, but in those early pre-master-volume days, no recording engineer wanted to deal with a 100-watt stack running at full tilt. Instead, many guitarists continued to use smaller valve practice amplifiers in the studio, like Fender's five-watt tweed Champ, or the slightly more powerful 'blackface'-era Princeton Reverb, which have appeared on countless million-selling albums. Rack systems and high-powered small Californian combos aside, that was pretty much the status quo, until the more recent advances in PA systems and in-ear monitoring, together with a second digital explosion in home recording, both of which favoured smaller low-powered amplifiers.

One of the first modern designs to feature a metal case and low-output power stage was THD's UniValve, released in 2001, but it was Orange's more accessible 15-watt Tiny Terror, which came along five years later, that really captured our attention and proved phenomenally successful, with over 30,000 sold worldwide. Not surprisingly, almost everyone jumped on the bandwagon and today, many manufacturers' catalogues feature at least one mini amp of some sort, as evidenced by Peavey's latest Mini Heads.

But will Orange's Micro Dark (see review over the page) set off a new trend for even smaller amps we can all carry in a gigbag? Only time will tell, but you can bet a lot of manufacturers will be following that amp's popularity with more interest than usual. **Q**

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ORANGE MICRO DARK £129

The Brit amp giants kick-started the lunchbox amp market, and now they're gunning for the micro arena

Words Nick Guppy Photography Joby Sessions

Almost a decade ago, Orange scored a major worldwide hit with the release of the Tiny Terror, with over 30,000 sold and many more if you add in the subsequent designs. Beyond any doubt, the Tiny Terror was a major boost to small 'lunchbox' amp popularity, and today practically every manufacturer has one in its catalogue. Now there's a new product from the legendary British manufacturer that threatens to do it all over again and create a new cult for even smaller amps: the Micro Dark head.

It may look like a toy, but the Micro Dark is every inch a real amplifier, with a very usable 20-watt solid-state power stage coupled to a preamp that uses a single 12AX7 for authentic valve-overdrive timbres. It has the same heavy-duty enamelled steel chassis and cover of its bigger cousins and is built to last, with all the internal components mounted on one very high-quality PCB. One of the reasons the Micro Dark is so small is that it relies on an external power supply: a laptop-style brick providing 15 volts. This aside, everything else is where you'd expect to find it.

The Micro Dark is a straightforward single-channel design with controls for gain and volume, together with Orange's very versatile Shape tone control, which boosts mids in one direction and scoops them in the other. There's also a very usable headphone output that features Orange's authentic CabSim speaker emulation, in addition to a speaker output, and a fully buffered effects loop.

Sounds

Plugged into a Vintage 30-loaded 4x12, the first thing that the Micro Dark impresses us with is its volume – easily one of the biggest-sounding 20-watt heads we've tested in a long time, with an impressive dynamic range not far off a valve output stage. Gain and shape controls work together for a wide range of drive and tone characteristics; you can get quite close to the Class A sparkle of the AD30R, and there's enough space for some mildly driven classic-rock sounds. Turn up the gain to the last third of its travel and the Dark Terror's insane overdrive is unleashed, with more than enough distortion for satisfyingly thick modern rock and metal sounds. Overall, it's astonishing just how much great tone Orange has managed to squeeze into such a small box – with a 4x12 or 2x12, this amp is plenty loud enough for home practice, rehearsals or even small gigs.

Verdict

Despite the Micro Dark's diminutive appearance, it's capable of tone and volume out of all proportion to its size. At less than the cost of many high-end overdrive pedals, here's a proper amp that's small enough to live in any gigbag, yet powerful enough to handle almost any situation. The price is more than reasonable, and for what this little head can do, it's a steal. Christmas is coming and the Micro Dark has every chance of being a runaway success. If you want one on your Christmas list, then we urge you to act now! **G**

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: Designed in UK, made in China
TYPE: Hybrid valve/solid-state preamp, solid-state power amp
OUTPUT: 20 watts max
VALVES: 1x 12AX7
DIMENSIONS: 165 (w) x 135 (h) x 95mm (d)
WEIGHT: 0.78kg/1.72lb
CABINET: Steel
CONTROLS: Gain, shape, volume
FEATURES: Buffered FX loop and CabSim output

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9/10

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FENDER ACOUSTIC PRO £709

Fender makes some of the best electric guitar amps in the world, but now its combos are going unplugged, if you get our drift...

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Joby Sessions

What You Need To Know

1 Fender acoustic amps: haven't we seen these before?

Yes, we have. Fender's current Acoustasonic amp range includes the mini 15, the 90 and the top-line 150 combos, which follow a traditional Fender tweed combo styling. This new model, along with the new Acoustic SFX, adopts a more 'furniture' style, aimed to look as good in your living room as on stage.

2 Most of us just plug into a PA. Why do we need this?

Sure, a PA is a great choice, so long as your monitoring is adequate. An amp, however, can act as your own personal monitor, with EQ, effects and level control independent of the out-front PA. For smaller 'café' gigs, a good acoustic amp might be all you need for guitar and vocals.

3 Okay, so, who's the target audience for the Acoustic Pro?

Anyone who needs a small 'PA', really, either for home or small-venue sound reinforcement. It can be hooked up to a main PA for larger gigs, too.

As we reported back in issue 399, Fender's acoustic march is well underway in terms of mainly affordable instruments that might not pack a huge amount of Fender DNA but certainly provide excellent value. The current Acoustasonic amp range provides the necessary 'backline', but for 2016 it's been augmented with a more stylish duo topped with this 200-watt Acoustic Pro that – aside from the classic logo, sewn into the brown material front covering – looks like a piece of modernist furniture.

Indeed, the back and sides are made from a thick maple multi-laminate with grey rubbery plastic base and a clean top-panel control layout fronted with a rubberised grab handle (which also provides a neat tray for your mp3 player or tablet). Thanks to the neodymium 12-inch woofer, weight is kept to a minimal 12kg – it's an easy one-hand lift – and includes a pretty rugged cloth cover to keep it shipshape. You even get a metal tilt-back kick-stand that flips out from the base to slightly angle the combo's projection upwards. All good.

That top panel is very clean and minimalist: the two channels are mirrored left and right, with the same controls and XLR/jack combi inputs. It's pretty standard stuff with three-band EQ (with sweepable midrange), volume, reverb and a phase

switch for primary feedback rejection. A small back panel also provides effects send and return jacks, a footswitch input to bypass each channel's reverb, and also push switches for the effects loop level, mic or line level outputs and ground lift. It's not over-spec'd: there's no control for overall volume level, which could be helpful to crank the output as your gig gets nosier, for example.

Sounds

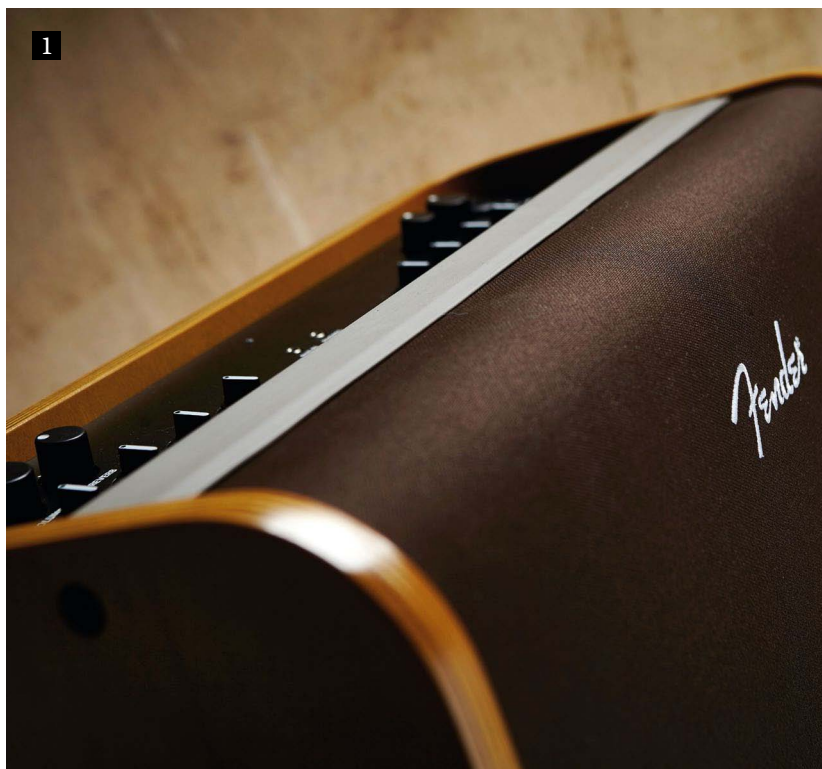
The simplicity of the input channels shouldn't baffle anyone. Unlike some acoustic amplifiers, this is more akin to an old-school hi-fi. The EQ is broad, with treble and bass being the general tailoring tools, while the wide midrange sweep and level allow you to dial in on any unwanted frequencies. You may need to use this in combination with any outboard EQ (or indeed on-guitar EQ) you have. Quite often, both an upper mid and lower mid cut are necessary and there does seem to be a very slight lower-mid 'cloud' to the output here, either from a steel string or a music player. The reverb type isn't specified and, with a little EQ added, it's quite rich sounding. However, as before, when you increase the amount, there's noticeable modulation that's hardly natural. So, less is more and less is perfectly good for a little ambience.

1. This grey grab-handle in front of the controls also doubles as a tray on which to rest your smartphone or tablet

2. There are standard hook-up facilities around the back including effects loop and DI XLR

3. Connections for your music player and headphones are on the top panel. Easy

4. The Acoustic Pro features two channels with identical volume, reverb and EQ controls

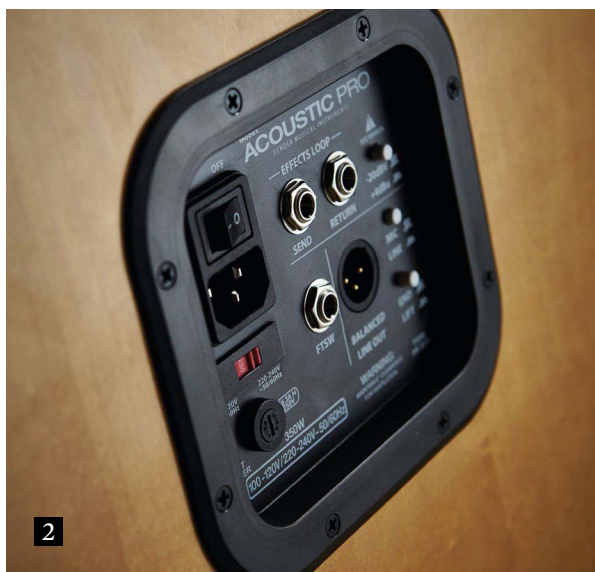


Multi-functions

Bundled into the 'acoustic amp' market sector, amps such as the full-range Acoustic Pro can be a lot more than just an amp for your acoustic gigs. In reality, a good acoustic amp is a mini PA and for small-venue gigs, it might be all you'll need for guitar and voice. Placement is important, of course, and although there's no pole-mount facility on the Acoustic Pro, placing the amp on a chair or table works. And while you're taking a break, you can easily run an mp3 player into the amp for some background music, albeit in mono.

There's plenty for the electric player, too, especially if all you need is a clean amp. We used the Acoustic Pro with a centre-blocked semi on a jazz gig with excellent results. It has plenty enough volume to compete with a bassist and small-kit drummer, too, without needing to be mic'd or plugged direct into the PA. If you're using floor multi-effects with switchable outputs, select the full-range setting and it'll act as a perfect amp for lower volume 'electric' gigs.

With its light weight, it's easy to transport, a consideration for many of us playing central city gigs where cars can be a no-no and public transport – and an all-important carry cart – are the secret. And for any player using a hybrid electric with both magnetic and acoustic-like piezo outputs, the Acoustic Pro is a perfect partner to your regular electric amp for a dual-amp setup.



A major omission in the design would seem to be any kind of input 'peak' indicator, which seems a little odd, bearing in mind the quite diverse range of onboard acoustic pickup systems, not to mention the very fast attack of most under-saddle systems. Conversely, trying a variety of steel and nylon strings, the latter given some hefty Spanish *rasgueados*, we couldn't get it to clip or distort. The downside of that may well be the reason that there's a little too much hiss, which is accentuated by boosted treble EQ. And speaking of omissions, channel-mute buttons are always handy if you have to swap guitars during your gig.

Sonically, it's certainly pleasantly room-filling with, seemingly, a wide, less-direct sound than our reference AER, for example.



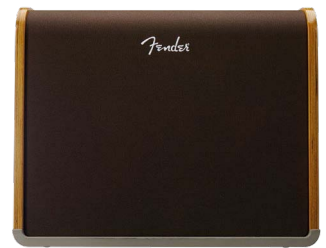
4

Tonally, it avoids being overly 'hi-fi' in character, although some control of the tweeter, or at least high-end presence, would have been nice, especially if you are perhaps using both steel and nylon strings, or indeed an archtop or semi for those jazz gigs. As ever, the better the sound you put in, the better the output and direct in. With no outboard EQ, we had little to complain about, with a seemingly 'all round' response that would suit all but the pickiest players – who may need to lose a little lower midrange and perhaps tweak the ultra high end, especially if you play with your fingernails. However, using our stage pedalboard with its own more specific EQ was a doddle, and we could simply EQ the amp to sound 'right'.

Verdict

There's a lot to like about this combo: from its overall style to the neat mobile device 'tray', or indeed its light weight and generous output. In theory, things like the lack of an input peak indicator should be a minus in an amp of this nature, but in use, its omission didn't bother us at all.

The advantage of the Acoustic Pro's straightforward user interface is that it's dead easy to set up, with the welcome facility to make use of your outboard effects via the effects loop. As an all-rounder, then, there's little to dislike here, and certainly with its high-quality 'voice', it should meet the needs of anyone playing small-venue gigs, while doubling as a personal monitor on larger stages when you need it to. **A**



FENDER ACOUSTIC PRO

PRICE: £709

ORIGIN: Mexico

TYPE: Digital acoustic guitar combo amplifier with tilt-back kickstand

OUTPUT: 200W

CHANNELS: 2

LOUDSPEAKERS: 1x 12-inch neodymium woofer, 1x 2.5-inch tweeter

CONTROLS: Volume, reverb, phase switch, low, mid frequency, mid level, high (x2). Effects loop level, mic/line output and ground lift switches

CONNECTIONS: XLR/mono jack input x2, headphones out mini-jack, aux in mini-jack, DI out XLR, FX send and return (both 6.3mm jack)

FOOTSWITCH: 2-button (not included) for reverb bypass for each channel

RANGE OPTIONS: To partner the Acoustic Pro, there's the Acoustic SFX (£589) with delay, chorus, vibratone and reverb

DIMENSIONS: 455 (h) x 533 (w) x 105mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 12.2/27

Fender GBI

01342 331700

www.fender.com

7/10

PROS The fine sound, sharp styling, weight and simple interface are all strong points here

CONS The fact that there's no input indicator might bother some; it's not cheap. Quite a lot of hiss



Acoustic Amp Choice

Once upon a time, the acoustic amp market was a wasteland.
Not any more. Here are six amps worth considering

1 **YAMAHA** THR5A **£199**

This is a very handy 'at home' acoustic amp, rather than a real gigging tool. It offers four types of digitally modelled microphone simulations for your amplified sound. Its five-watt output seems small, but it's perfect for home use and practice, and looks mighty cool, too. No XLR out here, but it does have USB out.

<http://uk.yamaha.com>

2 **LANEY** A1+ **£279**

Back in our review in issue 389, we said Laney's A1+ is "an absolute value-for-money no-brainer". With 80 watts of power, two channels, an eight-inch bass driver and a one-inch tweeter, onboard effects and numerous bells and whistles – including a separate auxiliary input – that belie its price, it's highly recommended.

www.laney.co.uk

3 **SCHERTLER** UNICO CLASSIC **£762**

Equipped with a one-inch dome tweeter and eight-inch woofer, the Unico Classic offers 200 watts of bi-amplified power with three independent input channels, phantom power, three-band EQ on each channel (four-band on Mic channel), built-in spring reverb and comprehensive hook-up options.

<http://audenguitars.com>

4 **AER** COMPACT 60/3 ACOUSTIC AMPLIFIER **£769**

The third update of AER's classic Compact 60 pretty much sets the standard for gigging acoustic amps. With a small footprint and light weight, it has 60 watts of power, dual channels, four onboard effects (reverb 1 and 2, delay, chorus), plus numerous hook-up facilities.

www.aer-amps.com

5 **MARSHALL** AS50D **£419**

This long-running 'PA-in-a-box' from Marshall sports a 50-watt output, two specially designed eight-inch Celestion speakers and a high-fidelity polymer dome tweeter, as well as two channels and digital effects (chorus and reverb). A highly popular choice.

www.marshallamps.com

6 **FISHMAN** LOUDBOX PERFORMER **£825**

Next up from the company's Loudbox Artist amp comes the Performer – and it's feature-packed: with 180 watts, two channels, dual digital effects sections with reverb, chorus, flanger, delay, echo and slap echo, three-way speaker design, tilt back kick-stand, phantom power, phase and notch filtering plus effects loop. Phew!

www.fishman.com



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PEDALBOARD

From a switching system to marshall your army of effects, to classic flangers and low-power drives, we step on the stompboxes that signify this month



With stompbox fever showing no sign of abating, it was only a matter of time before the big boys developed a switching system of the kind pioneered by TheGigRig's pro-oriented G2. Helping you organise your old-fashioned pedals into pre-programmed groups that can be brought into play at the touch of a single footswitch – plus much more – Boss's sleek ES-8 (see p112) is the first unit of its power we've seen at these prices. Tap dancing round a massive 'board could be a thing of the past...

Meanwhile, the ever-inventive Mad Professor has two novel gain-tweaking effects for us, in the form of the Simble Predriver and Evolution Orange Underdrive (p116). The latter actually sharpens and cleans up woolly drive tones, rather than adding more dirt...

Meanwhile, the audio invasion of the guitar world by Moog continues with its Minifooger Flanger (p114), while TC Electronic has more practical and great-sounding tone-sculpting tools waiting for us on p117 – the HyperGravity compressor and Sentry Noise Gate. **G**



BOSS ES-8 £549

Boss comes up with a switching solution that will transform your whole pedal setup

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Joby Sessions

Pedals: most of us can't be without them, but with multiple stompboxes underfoot we soon find ourselves doing more tap dancing than playing, not to mention looking like a contortionist angling your foot to hit three footswitches at once for a composite sound, for example. The obvious answer is, of course, to add a switching unit to organise your pedalboard, and Boss has recently entered the market with the ES-8: an effects-switching system boasting a feature set that makes it hard to resist.

The ES-8 features eight send-and-return loops to connect your pedals, with eight dedicated footswitches to activate them. The eight loops comprise six mono, one mono-in stereo-out, and one stereo-in stereo-out. At its most basic, you can use the ES-8 in its Manual mode with the eight footswitches simply calling up the individual effects connected to the eight loops. But the real power of the unit is in Memory mode, where you

can readily recall user-programmed patches. It couldn't be easier to switch between Manual and Memory mode – there's a dedicated footswitch for it and the change is instant, with all the LEDs changing from red to blue so you know exactly which mode you are in.

In Use

The main advantage of using patches is that you can bring in various combinations of effects with a single footswitch, but the really powerful feature of this unit is that you don't have to stick to a rigid order for the effects. Each patch can arrange the loops in any order, so you can, for example, have distortion before or after a delay for a quite different sonic result. To take things even further, you can set up parallel effects paths within a patch and you can also program it so reverb and delays can ring out and decay naturally when a patch is switched, rather than cut dead. On top of that, each

RIGHT Manual mode switches in the individual effects in each individual loop, while Memory mode (shown with blue LEDs) recalls user-defined combinations of effects



patch can also store data to take care of a bunch of other useful functions.

Besides MIDI connections on the ES-8 for sending control and program-change messages and MIDI Clock, there are a bunch of outputs to feed pedals equipped to take expression and control input. Now, these can be fed from external expression pedals or footswitches plugged into two ES-8 inputs, but control parameter values can also be stored with patches to, say, call up a particular delay time.

The control outputs can also be used for channel-switching duties for any amps that take footswitch input. Incidentally, the ES-8 has two audio outputs, so you can connect two amps, and it also has two inputs, so you can have two instruments permanently connected – both of these outputs and inputs being selectable with patches. While many functions can be initiated automatically with a patch change, the ES-8 also lets you assign various functions to any footswitch, so you

could have one dedicated to amp switching, or one assigned as a tap-tempo switch. A footswitch can be assigned as latching or momentary, so you can trigger an effect for as long as it is held down.

There really is an awful lot of functionality under the hood, and with 800 patches in 100 banks (switched with dedicated Bank Up and Bank Down footswitches), you can exploit as much of it as you want.

Further ES-8 connections include a permanent tuner output (there's a mute footswitch so you can tune silently) and an extra send and return loop that can sit anywhere in the pedal chain. Intended for use with a volume pedal, it can alternatively be used in conjunction with your amp's effects loop to facilitate the four-cable method of having some effects in front of the amp and some in the loop.

In use, the ES-8 offers a very clean signal path and silent switching with no pops and clicks, plus the practicality of switchable buffers at the input and output to cater for different needs, and, while it can encompass many complex functions, it is not difficult to use. We would have liked a computer-based patch editor as an alternative to the front-panel buttons, while the comparable but pricier pro-grade G2 unit from TheGigRig offers more intuitive ease of use.

Verdict

Guitarists with multi-effects pedals from Boss, Line 6 and others have been able to switch between individual effects and patches and change the order of their effects for some time, but have been limited to manufacturer-supplied sounds. Essentially, then, the beauty of the ES-8 is that it gives you all the switching and routing flexibility of a floor-placed multi-effects, but applied to your own favourite, carefully chosen stompboxes. In short, the ES-8 will gloriously transform your whole pedalboard experience. **G**

PROS Massive control for your pedalboard. Well-priced

CONS A recipe for cable spaghetti; no software editor

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: Taiwan

TYPE: Effects switching system

FEATURES: 800 patch memories, switchable input and output buffers, flexible routings and assignments, tap tempo with subdivisions

CONTROLS: 8x edit buttons, 8x numbered footswitches, 2x bank footswitch, memory/manual footswitch, mute footswitch

CONNECTIONS: See image above and manufacturer website for further info

POWER: AC adaptor (supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 439 (w) x 137 (d) x 65mm (h)

OPTIONS: Footswitch: Boss FS-5U, FS-6, FS-7; Expression pedal: Boss FV-500L, FV-500H, Roland EV-5

Roland UK

01792 702701

www.roland.co.uk

8/10





MOOG MF FLANGE £169

A subtle and yet completely out there take on flanging

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Joby Sessions

Moog is, of course, a name synonymous with synthesizers, but the same analogue technology that goes into synths lends itself to effects pedals, too, as can be seen by Moog's long-standing Moogerfooger range and the smaller Minifoogers. We took a look at some of the Minifooger range about 18 months ago in issue 382, but we now have our hands on the most recently released Minifooger, designated as number 07 in the range: the MF Flange or, as Moog subtitles it, "Bucket Brigade Harmonic Manipulator". While the Moogerfooger range offers large, complex pedals, the more affordable Minifooger range is designed to be pedalboard-friendly and simpler to operate. Common features of the range include standard nine-volt battery or adaptor power, true bypass and the facility to plug in an expression pedal for real-time parameter adjustment.

The MF Flange has Rate, Depth, Time and Feedback knobs to dial in the sound in one of two modes selected by the Type switch, which determines how the feedback is summed to offer either a traditional flanger sound, or create what Moog describes as a more vocal sound. A connected expression pedal can be used to sweep through the range of delay times normally available from the Time knob. Normally set up for a standard guitar-chain mono operation, the MF Flange does support a stereo output, facilitated by an internal switch and using a TRS jack and appropriate splitter cable from the output socket.

Sounds

Built around a real analogue BBD chip, the MF Flange has a lovely, warm voicing. With four knobs to position, there's a wealth of possibilities here and, because each interacts with the others, there's plenty of exploring to do. The Time control is crucial, because in its 20ms and down range you can dial in variations that range from strong flanging at the top end of the travel to a more chorus-like effect at the other extreme. The Rate and Depth knobs set how that delay time is modulated and both have a wide range; the Rate knob's lowest level offers a languid sweep over several seconds – great for adding ever-evolving tonality to a slowly strummed rhythm part. At its fastest, you get a tight pulsing for helicopter, sci-fi death ray or fast rotary sounds. Bringing in the Feedback adds emphasis to the sweep and can dial in some typical metallic flanging tonalities.

Verdict

With Moog's proven build quality, this is an excellent modulation pedal that will give you familiar classic flanging and more. **A**

PROS Typical flanging isn't for everyone but this goes beyond the standard to make it a really versatile modulator

CONS There's little we don't like here, but fans of micro pedals may not be impressed by its size...

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Flanger pedal

FEATURES: True bypass, BBD circuitry

CONTROLS: Rate, depth, time, feedback, type switch, bypass footswitch, internal stereo switch

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input, standard output, expression pedal input

POWER: 9V battery or 9V adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 83 (w) x 144 (d) x 58mm (h)

Source Distribution

020 8962 5080

www.moogmusic.com

8/10

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1 MAD PROFESSOR EVOLUTION ORANGE UNDERDRIVE £149

ORIGIN: Finland

TYPE: Underdrive pedal

FEATURES:

True bypass

CONTROLS: Volume, Bass, Midrange, Treble, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) or 9V battery

DIMENSIONS: 62 (w) x 111 (d) x 50 mm (h)

Rocky Road
01494 535333
www.mpamp.com

Underdrive: a new category of pedal?

Well, not exactly new, as we've seen the HomeBrew Electronics Detox EQ, a Paul Gilbert signature pedal, does a similar job. The idea is that if you have a vintage single-channel amp that you can turn up to find your sweet spot of overdrive, you can kick in the Underdrive to instantly get a cleaner tone when needed.

So, why not just use your guitar's volume knob? Well, that can darken the tone to an unwanted degree, whereas the Underdrive turns down the midrange where the overdrive largely comes from, but has bass, midrange and treble knobs to get that cleaner tone sitting just right. It all works really well, too. With the pedal's volume control setting exactly how much the signal to your amp is reduced, you can clean up a dirty sound while keeping your EQ just where you want it. A bonus is you can use it as a booster if you turn the midrange knob up. [TC]

VERDICT There's a certain simplicity to stepping on a pedal for a cleaner sound. Genius

7/10

2 MAD PROFESSOR SIMBLE PREDRIVER £149

ORIGIN: Finland

TYPE: Preamp/booster/compressor/upper harmonic enhancer pedal

FEATURES:

True bypass

CONTROLS: Hot/Cool switch, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) or 9V battery

DIMENSIONS: 62 (w) x 111 (d) x 47mm (h)

The Simble Predriver is described as a preamp/booster/compressor/upper harmonic enhancer. While that may sound complicated, the pedal is far from it: it has no knobs and just two toggle switch-selected settings, Hot and Cool, representing different amounts of boost up to a max of 10dB. The Simble lies in classic tone-conditioner territory – it's a pedal to improve your sound that can either be kicked in for extra boost, or just left on permanently.

With a clean amp and the Cool setting, you get a tone that seems automatically richer with extra sustain and a nice touch of grit. The Hot setting goes further and dirtier, adding a few more dB of boost and a touch more midrange. There's great sensitivity to picking and also to guitar volume, if you want to leave it on full-time and control things with your volume knob. It's great for pushing a dirt pedal or used just in front of your amp, making it a brilliant tone sweetener. [TC]



VERDICT This could be an essential ingredient of your tone that you don't want to turn off

9/10

1



2



1 TC ELECTRONIC HYPERGRAVITY COMPRESSOR £99

ORIGIN: Thailand

TYPE: Compressor

FEATURES: True bypass, multi-band compression, TonePrint facility

CONTROLS: Sustain, level, attack, blend, Spectra/TonePrint/Vintage switch, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input, output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) or 9V battery

DIMENSIONS: 72 (w) x 120 (d) x 48mm (h)

TC Electronic

0800 917 8926

www.tcelectronic.com

Potential compressor users may have been put off by the fact that compressing their whole signal might mess with their sound too much. But the latest pedals offer parallel compression – via a blend control mixing compressed and uncompressed signal for natural-sounding blends.

The HyperGravity features that blending facility but also ramps up the versatility by offering a range of different types of compression. A three-way switch enables you to select Vintage or Spectra, representing respectively the sort of squashy tone typical of the most-copied of stompbox compressor designs and multi-band compression that offers a more transparent signal control. Both do a decent job, but the jewel in the crown is the TonePrint option, where you can load the pedal with compression programmed by TC, one of its roster of guitarists, or create your own with the software editor. There's plenty of extra gain, too, so you can use the pedal to drive an amp. **[TC]**

2 TC ELECTRONIC SENTRY NOISE GATE £95

ORIGIN: Thailand

TYPE: Noise gate pedal

FEATURES: True bypass, hard gating, multi-band noise removal, TonePrint facility

CONTROLS:

Threshold, damp, decay, Gate/TonePrint/Hiss switch, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input, output, send and return

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) or 9V battery

DIMENSIONS: 72 (w) x 120 (d) x 48mm (h)



Noise gates can be lifesavers if you have a rig bedevilled by an excess of unwanted noise – be that low-frequency hum from single-coil pickups or earthing issues, or unwanted hiss from a massively cranked amp or dirt pedal.

The Sentry features both traditional hard gating that shuts down the signal depending on its volume, and multi-band gating that can zero in on specific frequencies for a perhaps more natural noise-reduction experience. With knobs to set the amount of noise attenuation and the rate at which the gate closes, there's plenty that can be achieved with those two presets, but for really zeroing in on the exact noise reduction needed, the TonePrint facility lets you finely edit your gate's characteristics. What's more, send and return jacks let you use it solely, say, on a noisy high-gain distortion pedal to set up gating that works very naturally, the gate being triggered by the direct guitar signal, but closed after the noisy pedal. **[TC]**

VERDICT A compressor pedal that you can program exactly to your needs. About time!

7/10

VERDICT If a noise gate is a necessity in your signal chain, this one offers real versatility

9/10

|||||

Audition

We test the best of the rest
of the month's new gear

Photography Joby Sessions

|||||



FENDER CLASSIC SERIES SPECIAL EDITION '50s & '60s STRATS £589

CONTACT **Fender GBI** PHONE **01342 331700** WEB **www.fender.com**

Fender's triple-pickup masterpiece was an instant hit on its arrival in the mid-1950s and has remained that way ever since. One of a number of ways Fender keeps the format fresh is with special and limited-edition runs, and the latest one has just arrived in the shape of a series of Mexican Strats in special-colour finishes. During the golden years of Fender's early production, the company frequently used the DuPont paint catalogue for its finishes, choosing shades often found on popular cars of the same era, usually from General Motors. These car-derived colours were designated as Lucite, a form of acrylic, though a nitro clear-coat was often applied over the top, meaning the outward appearance of finishes such as Lake Placid Blue yellowed over time into different hues altogether, forming part of the charm of vintage Fenders. So much for history. The twist with this latest special edition is that all the guitars are finished in vintage car colours that weren't originally used by Fender. We're taking a look at two here: a 50s-style Strat finished in Apple Green and a 60s version in Canary Diamond Yellow. And if they don't float your boat, the '50s is also available in Jetstream Blue and Rangoon Red; the '60s in Lilac and Cerulean Blue.

Both our review guitars come from Fender's Ensenada, Mexico plant and follow the traditional vintage-style layout, so we have a small pre-CBS headstock with drilled and slotted tuners, a choice of maple or rosewood fingerboards with narrow fretwire on a 184mm (7.25-inch) radius, four-bolt neckplates and a vintage vibrato bridge, with pressed steel saddles and six screws. The '50s Strat gets a plain white single-layer scratchplate; the '60s has a three-layer aged 'mint green' plate. Both have the same electronics: a trio of vintage single coils under aged white covers, connected to a five-way selector switch, with a volume and two tone controls.

The finish is generally very good, though we'd have to say we're a little disappointed with the body contours, which aren't accurately shaped and lack the finesse found on other models. There's also a noticeable edge to the radius'd outline, which should have been blended into the top. Both guitars are adjusted in a more or less identical manner, with the vibrato bridge floating and quite a high action – not

ideal for all players, and a setup that trades tuning stability for that upward pull on the vibrato arm. The vintage narrow fretwire is just high enough for comfortable string bending with the factory 10s – but only just. The neck profiles are slightly different, too: a medium 'C' shape on the '60s rosewood example and more of a 'V' on the maple 'board '50s guitar.

Sounds

In use, both the '50s and '60s guitars have all the sounds you expect to get from a Strat – we particularly liked the neck and position 2 (bridge and middle) settings with a little top rolled off. The bridge pickup is good, but a little too raspy; it's very difficult to get a perfect balance of body combined with the aggressive top that a great Strat bridge pickup needs, while retaining subtlety and sustain when played clean. For us, the bridge pickups on these guitars are a decent seven out of 10: great for overdriven blues or rock, less so for country, slide and roots stuff. Use a decent compressor and a touch of reverb, though, and you can pick like Knopfler, or play over the end of the neck while holding the vibrato arm for a passable Marvin sound. While the '60s neck looks the part with its dark rosewood 'board, we actually found the lacquered maple '50s Strat nicer to play – it was easier to bend notes and doublestops and just felt a little friendlier, with a touch more sustain.

Verdict

So, a pair of decently turned-out Strats that look, sound and play convincingly vintage, at a very reasonable price. As for the colours, well, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. The subtle shades certainly look like they could have come straight out of a period Fender catalogue, even if Fender never used them. Canary Diamond Yellow is a good match for the colour in Dodge's 1959 options list. Apple Green is harder to pin down – the colour is closer to that used on some modern NYC taxis, while the name was certainly used on Chevy trucks from the 1940s. If neither appeals, but you still fancy the idea of an exclusive tint, there are four others to look out for! **[NG]**

7/10



IK MULTIMEDIA AMPLITUBE MESA/BOOGIE €149

CONTACT **IK Multimedia** PHONE **N/A** WEB www.ikmultimedia.com

When Randall Smith started remodelling Fender Princeton amps in his California workshop in the late-60s, he was inventing not just the boutique amplifier but also modern high-gain amps per se. Almost 50 years on, Smith's Mesa/Boogie brand has become massive, turning out iconic models along the way, and is now celebrated in a special edition of AmpliTube.

While just about every amp simulation software program under the sun offers a modelled Rectifier sound, IK Multimedia has taken things one stage further and – following on from its manufacturer-endorsed Fender, Ampeg and Orange sets – put five of Mesa/Boogie classics in a package, all with the company's input and blessing. Chronologically, the amps in the collection start with a Mark III based on a 1984 model. You also get a modelled Mark IV, Dual and Triple Rectifiers and the more recent TransAtlantic TA-30. All the matching cabinets are included, too.

Sounds

The first thing of note here is the attention to detail in the beautifully rendered user

interface. The amps' controls are accurately reproduced, including the pull action of knobs and the graphic EQ. With one mouse click, you can get to the back panels to access the Mark III's presence and reverb knobs and Simul-Class/Class A switching. Turn any of the knobs with your mouse and you'll see a read-out just below the fascia showing the dialled-in numerical value.

Plenty of factory modelled presets are provided for each of the five amps, so you can quickly flick through and test them for different musical scenarios. The three-channel Mark III and IV offer sparkly clean Fender tones through the rhythm channel's crunch to the fat sustaining lead tones that the amps were known for, all with the extra midrange shaping of the graphic EQ. The Rectifier range will be forever associated with high-gain rock and metal tones, and neither model here disappoints in that area, especially with the third channel cranked. There's aggressive crunch and harmonically rich lead all night long. The real TransAtlantic amps were a bit of a departure for Mesa/Boogie in that they covered both American and British sounds,

adding EL84-derived Vox tones. The modelled version also has a range of clean and low-level overdrive sounds through to more typical higher-gain fare. Cool.

Verdict

So, the essence of Mesa has been usefully channelled for computer-based music makers, offering a versatile range of sounds. At current exchange rates, the bundle will set you back about £110, which is a lot of money for five modelled amps, especially as there is a certain amount of duplication of sounds between the models.

However, if you are a big Mesa fan and want the officially endorsed sims, then that may seem quite reasonable. Do you really need both Rectifier models, though? Each of the amps in the bundle is also available singly, so if you're already an AmpliTube user, or you download the free AmpliTube Custom Shop, you can cherry-pick your favourite(s) of the bunch. **[TC]**

7/10



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MAD PROFESSOR RED CABLE £149

CONTACT **Rocky Road** PHONE **01494 535333**
WEB **www.mpamp.com**

The RED is a cable extension about three feet long, with male and female ends. You plug your normal cable into it and then plug the red cable into your pedals or straight into your amp. Mad Professor says that the cable is based on its work with Kuopio University and the Spindec company, and that it features SpinX, a nano technology that uses a magnetic field to align electrons into a straight signal-transporting chain. This is said to optimise the signal chain and minimise signal loss, while offering faster signal transfer and more dynamics.

In Use

Now, the mere announcement of this cable has so far proved controversial, with less-than-favourable appraisals online. However, we're open-minded at *Guitarist* and always up for anything that improves tone and feel... And yet, in a test that allowed instant switching between the RED and a normal lead, this reviewer couldn't hear or feel enough of an improvement to warrant shelling out £149. However, that's not to completely write off the RED: for some players, having what they regard as the best possible components in their signal chain inspires a confidence that helps them play better, and there's no harm in that.

Verdict

The bottom line is, if you can comfortably afford it, try it for yourself and see if it makes a difference for you. **[TC]**

5/10



ONE CONTROL TRI LOOP £89

CONTACT **Zoom UK** PHONE **08432 080 999** WEB **www.one-control.com**

The Tri Loop can fulfil a number of roles for the guitarist, namely as a loop switcher for two different pedals or pedal chains; a router that can keep three guitars connected to your amp and select between them; and as a router/amp selector that can send/switch signal to two amps. In addition to this, it can be used to switch amp channels or as a 'Favorite' or Tap Tempo switch for Strymon pedals.

Weighing in at the size of a small stompbox, the dual-footswitch Tri Loop can be powered up in various modes to suit its purpose, each denoted by the colour of its central LED, which can light up red, white, blue or green. There are options for the footswitches to operate either as latching or momentary switches, and there's also an optional buffer that can be used in either or both of two loops.

Sounds

We particularly liked the flexibility when using each loop for a different effects pedal. In the Red mode, these could be independently engaged or bypassed, but the White mode allows one footswitch to operate an overall bypass for both connected pedals, while the second toggles between the two – ideal if you wanted to switch between, say, two different distortions without having to hit both their footswitches at once.

Verdict

The array of functions that the Tri Loop is capable of endows it with a broad appeal. It's a great utility item for a pedalboard and a steal at the price, too. **[TC]**

8/10

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THE TONE DOCTOR
PART ONE

CHEAP TRICKS

Simon Law is an expert luthier and tech, who has maintained guitars for some of the best in the business, from Robben Ford to Larry Carlton and Matt Schofield. In a new series on how to get more from your guitar, he reveals some of the essential, but inexpensive setup and maintenance techniques the pros use to coax magical tone from any guitar...

Words Simon Law Photography Olly Curtis

The dream of owning the very best guitar and amplifier is one that most of us have had at one time or another. My own dreaming started when I first picked up the guitar in the early 80s. I would spend hours thumbing through the hallowed pages of *Guitar Player*, *Guitar World* and, of course, *Guitarist* magazine. My eyes would be drawn to the then black-and-white adverts of Chandler Guitars, Peter Cooks, Sam Ash Music and many more. I'd think: 'If I only had £1,250, I could buy the Mesa/Boogie that I was dreaming of...' and this, of course, would make me the best guitar player in the world! Well, wouldn't it? Er, no, was the simple answer.

Some years later, after scrimping and saving, borrowing and bargaining, I bought myself that Mesa/Boogie amp and you know something? It didn't make the huge difference I had hoped it would. Of course, the amp worked flawlessly, and I could spend hours dialling in the tones of my heroes like Hendrix, Stevie Ray Vaughan and Jeff Beck. But at the end of it all, I didn't sound like them at all: I still sounded like

little old me. So, this got me thinking. It's not just the gear, it's me! If I sound good, then of course I stand more chance of the guitar sounding good when plugged in.

Fast forward many years, and I still think about those days and what I had learned. While it's nice to own the very best gear in the world, it may not always be necessary, especially if we can't afford it. Over this series of features, I'm going to talk about, show you and explain how to make the most out of the gear you have, be it a battered, budget guitar or a well-worn old amp. Simple tweaks to these amps and instruments can make them stand proud against the best of the best. I am also going to try and make some sense of the myths behind certain equipment players have used over the years.

Flow Chart

Let's start by imagining the flow of tone from us through to the amp. Firstly, it starts with us: are we fretting the strings well? Are we holding the pick the correct way? Or rather the way that suits us? These are tiny things that make a huge difference: it's

worth taking some time just analysing your own technique to see where improvements can be made. If you're tense while playing, and grip the neck and strings too tightly, you risk simply choking the notes and possibly causing more physical problems in your hands and forearms. Relax and take your time: get comfortable and you stand more of a chance of playing great guitar.

Next, we come to the guitar itself: how is the action? In simple terms, that's distance of the string from the fretboard. Setting it too high can make the guitar very hard to play and also cause intonation issues. Too low can also render the guitar hard to play and cause intonation issues. So, what's right? Before we make any adjustments, I suggest you start with a fresh set of strings, fitted correctly, and a nice clean guitar. We won't be using any specialist tools for these adjustments, just a screwdriver or two, the correct-size hex key and maybe a small ruler, pliers and our eyes, ears and hands.

To make a quick initial assessment, first play the guitar acoustically (not plugged in). Strum a chord: if it sounds like fingernails down a washboard, the action is probably



too low; if it kills your fingers and leaves red grooves in your fingertips, then it's probably too high. The problems with both of these extremes is the effect on tone, especially with a low action. In fact, most guitars I work on tend to have actions a little on the 'too-low' side. The string needs to ring out loud and clear for it to be amplified by the pickup correctly – so nothing must hinder that string's vibration, such as glancing, unintentional contact with the frets.

⊕ A Question Of Truss

There are a few factors that affect the action: firstly, there's neck relief. This is about balancing the tautness of the reinforcing truss rod inside the neck against the strings' combined tension. If we didn't use truss rods, most necks would bend like bananas under the tension of the strings – or they'd have to be built like telegraph poles to compensate.

The way I make a quick assessment is to either use a capo at the 1st fret, or press the sixth string down at the 1st fret. Then, using my other hand, I press the sixth string down further up the neck at the 14th or 15th fret and carefully sight halfway between the two. There should be a slight gap between the string and fret of maybe a millimetre or less. If it's more than this, then the action will be higher than it needs to be further up the neck. If it's less than

this, or if the string is sat on the fret, then this will cause a buzzing and a rattly tone in the open-chord lower-fret register. A simple truss-rod adjustment will cure both things. Slackening the truss rod will allow more relief; tightening will lessen the relief and straighten the neck. But remember, 'lefty loosey, righty tighty'. This adjustment also allows a little for personal playing style. When making adjustments to your guitar, always do a little at a time, then try it out. That way, you can always go back to where you started. Truss-rod adjustments normally need only a quarter of a turn or so either way.

British blues guitarist Matt Schofield, who I have worked with for many years, uses 0.011 to 0.054 gauge strings with a medium-high action, large frets and a fair amount of relief. At first, when you pick up one of his guitars, you think – or rather your fingers think – 'Holy moly, that's tough', but the truth is, when you start playing his guitar, you 'get it': big strings, big frets and big action means big, big tone – and, actually, it's not all *that* hard to play, plus it's very rewarding tonally.

But big actions certainly aren't for all of us. My own preference is for a straighter neck and slightly lighter strings at 0.010 to 0.046, which gives me more of an even feel all the way over the neck and is probably the most popular action and string gauge.

1 The common-or-garden tools you'll need to attempt Simon Law's tone tips

2 Great tone starts in your playing style: check this, and also evaluate your action by strumming a chord and detecting any extremes

3 Don't be intimidated by truss-rod adjustment. But make sure that you only make small adjustments of a quarter-turn each time, and test the results

"When you start playing Matt Schofield's guitar, you 'get it' – big strings, big frets and big action means big, big tone"

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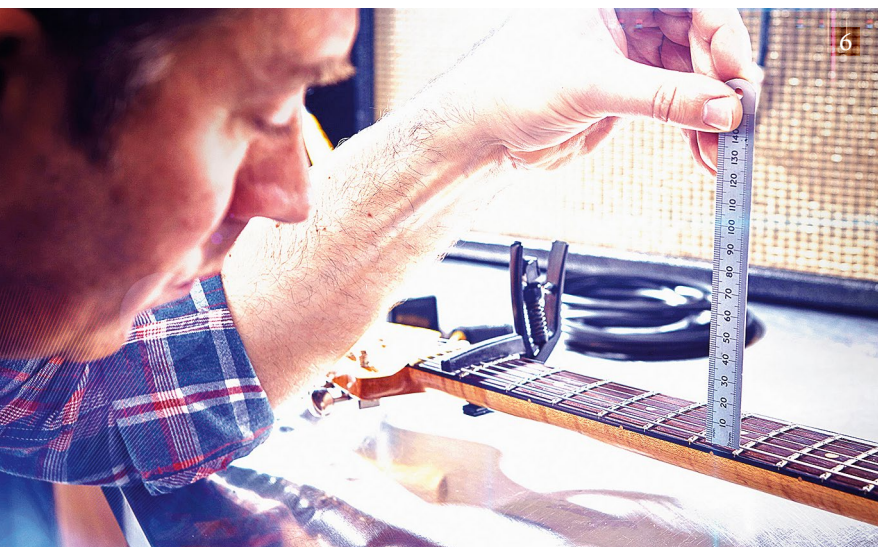
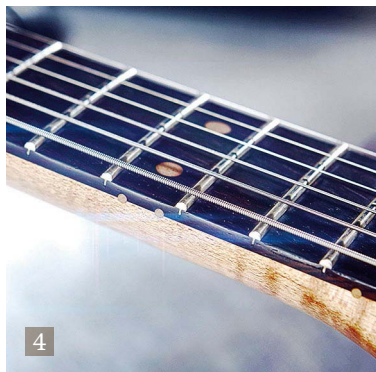
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4 An action that's too low can choke notes, and while it may be easier to play, you'll not be getting the most out of your guitar's tonal potential

5 We've exaggerated the high action here for pictorial purposes, but trying a higher action can reap rewards for your tone, and can aid playability for bluesier styles that incorporate string bends

6 Capo the 1st fret, hold the string down at the 14th or 15th fret and measure the gap between the fret and the string in between these two endpoints – a gap of more than a millimetre and you may need to lower your action

7 Slackening your strings a little will make bridge-saddle adjustment way easier

Tough Nut

The next area to look at is the top nut and bridge. The bridge is a fairly straightforward thing to adjust; the top nut, however, takes a little more skill and a lot more patience, so let's start with the bridge. Once again, this is my 'on the road rule of thumb'. I start by using a capo or just a finger to hold the strings down at the 5th fret and then I sight across the top of the strings over the 12th fret. I'm looking for the strings to follow the radius curve of the fingerboard. If one or more strings seem high or low, then adjustment's needed.

If a bridge saddle needs to be adjusted, then slacken the string a little first: this makes the adjustment way easier, especially if you have to raise the saddle. Once the curve is sorted, we can move onto the general action. Fret the sixth string at the 12th fret and pick the string. Does it have any overtones or rattles? If so, the height needs to be raised a little: try this on all the subsequent strings. If the string is clear-sounding and not hard to press down, then it's bang-on. If it's clear-sounding but hard to press down, then lower the saddle a little. Again, half a turn each time on both saddle screws, tuning between each adjustment – and once again, repeat this on all the other strings so all sit at a good individual height but, viewed overall, conform to the curve of the fretboard.

The next link in the chain is the top nut. This should really be a whole subject on its own, as I feel that how the top nut is cut and the material it is made from are two of the most important factors affecting the tone of the guitar. I generally favour good old-fashioned bone: it's what Gibson, Fender, Martin and many other makers have favoured over the years. Cheaper guitars may have a hard white plastic nut, but a few quid spent getting the nut changed for bone will reward you greatly. This is a job you can do at home, but I'm going to leave that for another day. So, assuming your top nut is generally okay...

Hot Pots

Tonally, another huge improvement can be made in your guitar's electronics. This includes pickups, pots, switches and sockets. One of the more overlooked improvements is to volume and tone pots. Why? Because all of the signal at some point is passed through these components, so the value of these pots affect the tone greatly, and cheaper pots just don't have the same strict tolerances as better-quality ones such as CTS or Alpha. Single-coil pickups, as used on Fender-type guitars, typically use 250k audio-sweep pots (logarithmic), and humbucking pickups generally use 500k audio pots. The higher the value, the less treble they remove from the signal.

"How the top nut is cut and the material it is made from are two of the most important factors affecting the tone of the guitar"

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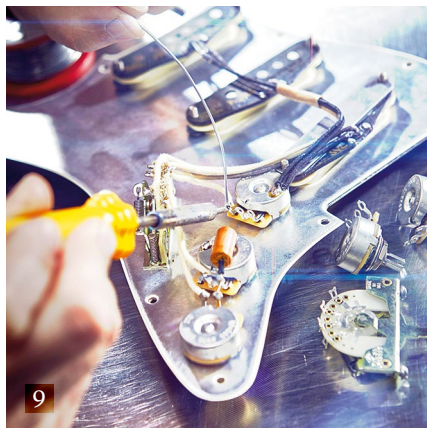
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8



9



10



11

8 Replacing the audio pots on your guitar is an oft-overlooked mod: an underperforming pot can sap both output and treble

9 While the soldering iron's on, you might as well change any sub-standard capacitors for quality upgrades

10 Hit the road, jack – why not replace your factory-standard jack socket for a higher-quality one, too?

11 Once the guitar's back together again, it's time to adjust your pickup heights for better balance across all the strings

Single-coil pickups are already quite 'toppy', so 250k suits these perfectly. Humbuckers, on the other hand, tend to be darker, with more mid and bass response, so the 500k helps retain treble response.

I have measured pots in entry-level guitars and a cheap 250k-rated pot can sometimes measure at less than 200k. This means you will lose a lot of output and treble to ground, simply killing the response of the guitar – making it sound dull and lifeless. A simple pot change here for some good-quality items will help the tone dramatically. That usually also helps with the sweep of the pot, keeping it even and feeling more 'musical' under your fingers. This is a simple swap and anyone with basic soldering skills can do it.

I used to make little wiring diagrams before removing components, so I could be assured of putting things back in exactly the same way. These days, of course, it's easier just to take a good picture with a mobile phone and copy that. Good-quality pots can be bought from most good guitar repair shops, or ordered online. They shouldn't cost more than £5 each: money well spent. While I had the soldering iron on, I would probably also replace the socket for a good-quality Switchcraft item and the tone cap for an Orange Drop. Again, these can be bought for around £4, so a huge improvement for almost no money.

While checking the guitar into an amplifier, have a listen to the balance of the pickup response. Setting the pickups too close to the strings can create serious problems with intonation, and inhibit string vibration. I would start by adjusting the bridge pickup so it is around 5mm from the strings. Listen to each string: is it balanced from the first string to the sixth? If not, make a small adjustment of half a turn of the height-adjustment screws and then listen again. Next, move onto the middle pickup (or neck pickup if you only have two) and balance the neck pickup output against the bridge and then check from string to string, too. After this adjustment, you should have a guitar that rings out balanced from the bridge through to the neck, without major jumps in level. Once again, personal taste is everything and sometimes, it's good to have a little extra push from the bridge pickup – just don't go mad.

So, in our first foray into tone tweaking, we've not changed anything major and we've spent very little money – maybe as little as £25, including the strings. But I bet you'll notice a huge difference, and you'll hopefully be well on your way to getting 'the tone' that you hear in your head. Next time, we'll get further down the chain and look at guitar cables, amplifiers and speakers influence tone – and how they can be tweaked for professional results, too. **E**

"In our first foray into tone tweaking, we've not changed anything major and we've spent very little money – maybe as little as £25, including the strings"



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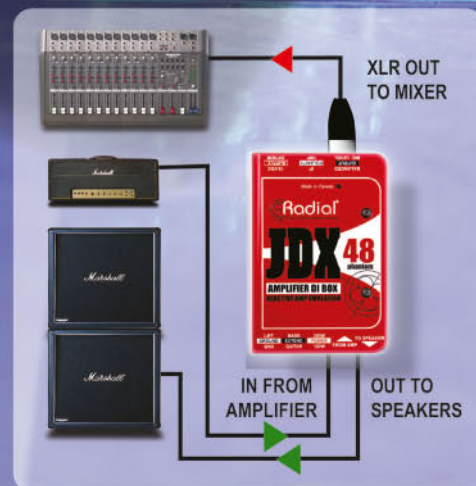
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Q&A

This issue: Fluid drive, too much bass and the best woolly tone...

Expert Panel



Jamie Dickson

Guitarist editor Jamie is as happy with steel wool in his hand as he is with Steely Dan in his headphones, and loves vintage-gear restoration and ambitious signal chains.



Dave Burrluck

Guitarist's assiduous reviews editor is also the author of numerous guitar books. Very handy with a fret file and indeed any aspect of a finely fettled six-string.



Mick Taylor

Ex-editor of *Guitarist*, Mick has wielded Allen keys, screwdrivers and sandpaper from an early age; he also has a worrying obsession with pedalboards.



Neville Marten

Edited *Guitarist* for 13 years, after working for both Fender and Gibson as a repairer. From desirable Les Pauls to dream Strats, he's owned and worked on the lot.



Nick Guppy

Guitarist's amplifier specialist has built up a wealth of experience gained from collecting, repairing and restoring all kinds of guitar-related audio.

Email us your questions: **guitarist@futurenet.com**

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The increased low-end response of an extended-range guitar requires you to adapt your rig to compensate

SOMETHING TO GAIN

I need some help with tone. I've recently acquired an Ibanez RGA8 and I've replaced the active Ibanez pickups with Bare Knuckle Emerald 8s. The low string is tuned to G, as it reduces the inherent 'floppiness', and keeps the mental gymnastics to a minimum; plus, I have a Behringer Spectrum Enhancer that tightens the low end up nicely. I don't play Scandiwegian doom metal, or metal of any kind, actually. More 'art rock' – not my favourite term, but you get the idea. I've been playing it clean and two-handed, a bit like a Chapman stick.

Things have progressed to the point where I want to be able to play more melodic/lead-like lines. I'm trying to get a smooth driven sound somewhere in the region of Steve Hackett's lead sound or the liquid legato sound used by guys like Tony MacAlpine or Mr Widdle. No chord work, but unfortunately, it's just not working... the low end sounds crappy, no matter what I do. My current kit includes a Tone Bender, Award-Session SP75, Tech 21 Oxford, Boss DA-2, AMT Du Hast, SansAmp GT-2 into a Marshall 9001, G-Force and a Sessionette combo. I've visited several online forums and asked questions. I got a few replies, all variations on the theme, 'Sven Thorsonsonson of Odynswrath uses a Wehrmacht Ragnarok

distortion with all 23 knobs turned to 11'. My computer screen is developing a dent the size and shape of my forehead.

Mark Woolley, via email

Maybe we're too old, Mark, but we're not sure who Mr Widdle is. Even Google doesn't know. Moving on, trying to get a 'classic' Steve Hackett tone without some kind of Les Paul and a Marshall is always going to be a challenge. You'll hear a much stronger, classic midrange punch and focus in his tone than that of Tony MacAlpine, for example, which is thinner and has more in common with the 90s shred brigade. However, we get where you're coming from with the liquid legato thing. It shouldn't be that hard with the amount of gain you have available.

When you say the low end sounds 'crappy', one challenge with extended-scale and down-tuned guitars is that they put out a huge amount of natural low end. As a result, you'll often find players using some kind of low-cut feature or EQ pedal to stop things getting too muddy. Of all the gear you mention, we'd say try a combination of the Tech 21 and the Tone Bender into any of your amps, set clean. Try the Tech 21 in the Hot Wired/British mode, as that gives you plenty of gain, but with good mids (the hi-gain mode is a bit

mid-scoopy sounding to us, especially through a transistor amp and with a modern guitar such as the Ibanez). The Tone Bender is probably best before the Tech 21, but it might be too much. In that case, go with the Tech 21 into the Marshall on a slightly crunchy setting, but try to keep the signal path simple. There are quite a few digital and transistor things in your chain, so we'd be expecting that to sound a bit thin compared to a valve amp and simpler, high-quality analogue stompboxes.

If it's possible for you to do, take your guitar to your nearest decent guitar shop and plug in, let's say, a JHS Angry Charlie, into an Xotic EP Booster, into pretty much any high-quality valve amp: for example, a Marshall DSL, Victory VX The Kraken, Suhr Badger, EVH 5150. Try the pedals on and off into clean and dirty sounds from the amps. We think you'll experience something of a tone revelation and we'd love to hear your thoughts on that.

BREAK IN THE CLOUDS?

I plan on taking an electric guitar away on holiday Down Under soon, and because it's an Epi Flying V with a set neck, I can't remove it to pack it into a padded suitcase, like the Squier Strat I'm also taking, so I've purchased a Staggy hard case with a padded,

Email us your questions: **guitarist@futurenet.com**

What Should I Buy?

Fuzzy fuzzy fuzz!

Q I'm looking to get a nice fuzz pedal, but with so many options, it's really hard to find the right one! I love the really hairy/woolly kind of fuzz pedals, less so those that lean more in the fizzy distortion region. But one major factor for me has to be clean up with volume roll off! Another preference is towards more old-school fuzz and less of the more modern 'experimental', er, 'mental' pedals (for example, the Z.Vex Fuzz Factory). I really am stuck here and need some help. I'm using a Blackstar HT Club 40 with a Fender American Standard Stratocaster, also a PRS SE Custom 22 every now and then.

Mark Thomas, via email

A Right Mark, you've got two roads to go down, not least because interpreting hairy/woolly/fizzy etc, might mean different things to different people. The first route is the Fuzz Face-derived pedal, made famous by a certain Mr Hendrix, of course. These clean up much better than...

...The second route – an Electro-Harmonix Big Muff-inspired pedal, used by all kinds of people, including a certain Mr Gilmour. Muff-style fuzzes aren't really known for cleaning up well, but many people prefer the fuzzed tone because it's thicker and has more gain than the Fuzz Face. So, you really need both, of course. Ahem...



1. Thorpy FX Muffroom Cloud £184.99

A new name in stompboxes, Thorpy builds pedals in the UK to an exceptional standard. So not only does this nail the midrange-y, vintage Big Muff sound brilliantly, it also has bass and treble controls to get the EQ just as you like it – that's rare for a vintage-style fuzz.



2. Analogman Sun Face £150

Regarded by many as the best of the modern Fuzz Face remakes, there are various options on the Sun Face, but we'd say go with Germanium transistors that are usually hairier/woollier than Silicon. It's also in a much-easier-to-live-with box than the old, massive round Fuzz Fi.

3. JHS Muffuletta Fuzz £179

This is a Big Muff-inspired pedal, but has six very different-sounding modes that ape five classic Muffs down the years, plus JHS's own take on the sound. Immensely versatile, great sounding, nothing digital in it. If you want to cover the most tonal ground possible, choose this one.



Email us your questions: guitarist@futurenet.com



Beware the dreaded 'proximity effect' when mic'ing up your guitar amp for recording

shaped lining for the guitar to sit in and intend to pack some polystyrene packaging into it as well; and wrap the hard case in bubble wrap. The airline have agreed this is in order, and that it will form part of my checked baggage allowance.

What I need to know is: will I need to release the tension on the strings for the pressurised hold on the aircraft, or any other tips you may have for these two going to a new home in Australia?

Dave Cross, via email

No need to slacken the strings, Dave. Some people believe it's a good idea, but most guitar makers agree it makes no difference in a pressurised hold. The biggest threat to the Epi is if it's dropped, where the impact of the drop can cause the neck – usually where the headstock is attached – to break. You have the perfect conditions for this in a guitar case where the neck is usually cradled just before the headstock, providing a great pivot point for the snap. So, if you pack anything in the case itself, put something under the back of the peghead, not to introduce any extra strain or pressure, just to support. Paper, bubble wrap, what have you... We do know musicians who will put a guitar case in a golf clubs transport bag. Airlines seem to hate golfers less than musicians, and we've heard it said they take better care of clubs than guitars. Speculation, but worth a mention, perhaps. Happy hols, and full marks for rocking the V in Oz.

OFF TRACK

Since music-recording programs and equipment have become so affordable these days, I have joined the many musicians with a 'home studio'. I've kitted myself out with an Apple iMac and Logic Pro X, as well as a Shure SM57 mic and 24-bit/96kHz interface in the hope of creating my masterpiece on a budget.

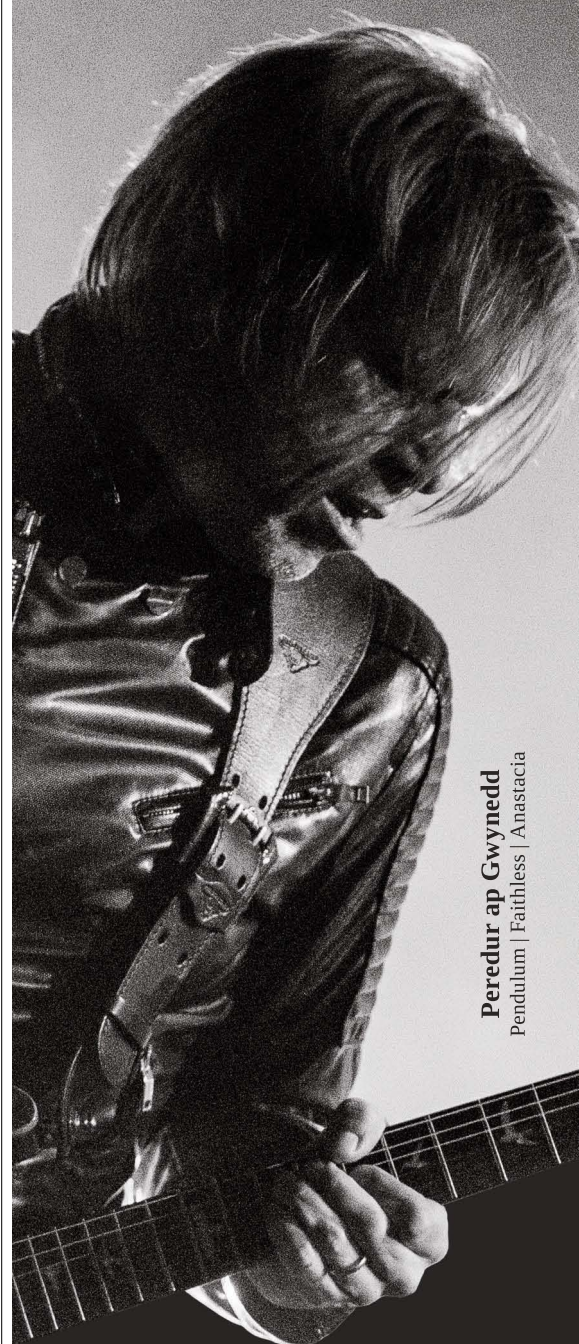
My question is on recording tone. The trouble I'm having is that the tone of my amp (both Marshall JCM900 and JMP1), which I've enjoyed for years, sounds great to my ear, but once mic'd up, it sounds

heavily compressed with too much bass and distortion. The solution: roll down the bass and distortion (to almost nothing), and add mids/treble. This has given me a recording tone through the mic that is audibly balanced, but very thin (nowhere near an acceptable tone, unless I'm doubling or sometimes tripling tracks), and sounds awfully tinny coming out of the amp directly. I've found myself having two sets of amp settings, one for recording and one for playing. Is this normal when recording? I can't seem to get my much-loved thick amp tone onto record.

Tracci Falco, via email

We'd expect your settings to change a bit when recording, Tracci, but it sounds as if something else is awry. Start with mic positioning. It might be that your SM57 is too close to the speaker, which introduces something called the 'proximity effect', where bass frequencies are accentuated, so experiment with moving it slightly further away from the grille. Also crucial when mic positioning is where it is in relation to the cone or edge of the speaker. You'll hear a radical difference in tone depending on placement, particularly with the high end, which has a huge effect on the sound of the distortion. So as a starter for 10, put the SM57 two inches back from the grille cloth and equidistant between the centre of the cone and the edge of the speaker. We're not saying that's optimum, but it's a good place to begin.

Finally, it's fairly common to use an SM57 'off-axis', that's to say at a 45-degree (or thereabouts) angle to the speaker rather than straight on, 90 degrees. Again, worth a try, as is trying all of the speakers in the cabinet with the mic (if you're using a 2x12 or 4x12 cab). You may be surprised at how different the same-model drivers can sound. It's also worth saying that it's very common to use some bass-end roll-off in the recording software's EQ plug-in. Typically rolling off -6dB or more from 100Hz down (although putting a little back specifically at 80Hz can work well). We'd advise doing some reading on electric-guitar EQ, starting with leading magazines, mic companies and so on.



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Board Games

Pedalboard problems solved

The background

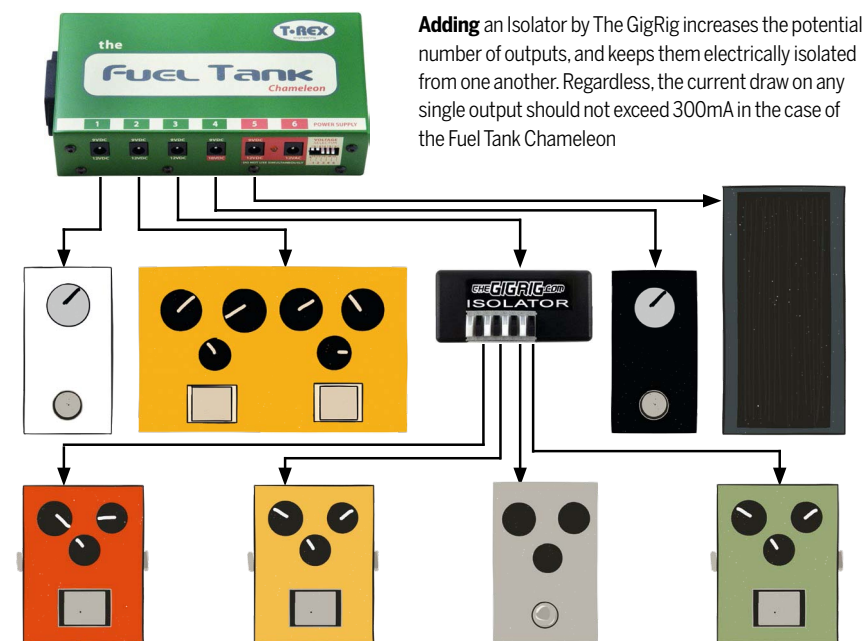
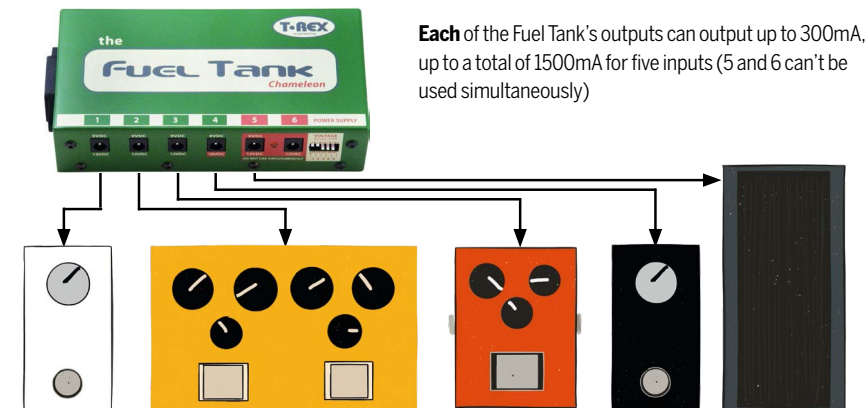
John Manvers, Guitarist reader: Ever since I ditched my digital multi-effects unit, my collection of analogue pedals has grown. I much prefer the flexibility, and there's no doubt they sound better through my Fender Hot Rod DeVille (2x12 model). However, as the pedal collection has grown, so has the faffing about with connecting them all up, specifically power. I have between six and nine pedals on my 'board, a mixture of overdrive, boost, modulation, reverb and delay. Sometimes a wah-wah, sometimes tremolo. I follow the 'standard' order (wah > boosts > drives > modulation > delay > reverb) but getting isolated power to all of my pedals is what I'm struggling with. There are only five usable outputs on my current power supply (T-Rex Fuel Tank Chameleon), so I am daisychaining certain pedals off a single output, which (I think) is introducing some noise.

The questions

1. Are my pedals getting the power they need and would it sound better if they definitely were?
2. Can I use my Fuel Tank Chameleon in conjunction with something else, or...
3. If you were starting from scratch with a 'board like mine, how would you power it?

The answers

1. It depends what pedals they are, John. To begin with, your power supply needs to be putting out the correct voltage and the cable connectors need to be the correct polarity (commonly nine volts, centre-negative, but certainly not always the case). After that, you need to know the maximum current draw of the pedal or pedals (usually quoted in the manual, if not on the pedal itself) and the maximum output of the individual power taps on your power supply. With the FTC, for example, each individual output is capable of putting out up to 300mA, isolated. That means that whatever pedals you have connected to an individual tap must not exceed 300mA. Most analogue drives



and boosts have a pretty low current draw (typically less than 50mA), where certain digital delays and reverbs can be 400-plus. It might be that your Fuel Tank doesn't have the mumbo for some of your pedals, so getting them enough current will improve the sound.

2. Yes, you can. You've already mentioned the most obvious add-on, which is a simple daisychain lead that enables you to turn those five potential outputs into many more. That's fine if the total current draw for the daisychained output is less than its maximum and – crucially – if all the pedals play nicely together and don't suffer from any hum. If they do, you need to get the offending pedals

isolated electrically. This is where we'd thoroughly recommend a visit to TheGigRig.com, where you'll find various gizmos. From the simple Virtual Battery to the Isolator, there are add-ons that would work with your T-Rex and increase its versatility.

3. Starting from scratch, there are a number of options. You could either go for a bigger, single-unit power supply such as the heftier offerings from T-Rex, Voodoo Labs, Cioks et al, or you could look at a modular system from TheGigRig. It can hurt a bit to spend so much money on something that doesn't make a noise, but all pedalboard nuts will agree that good power equals good tone. **G**

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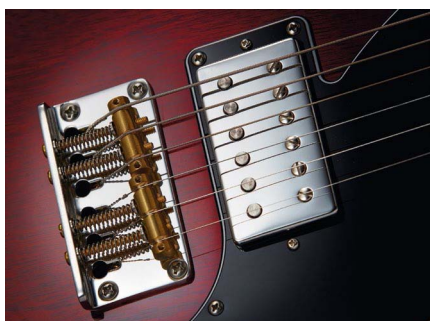
Longtermers

A few months' gigging, recording and everything that goes with it – welcome to *Guitarist's* longterm test reports

PRS S2 Vela

with Michael Astley-Brown





"The PRS Vela combines the unobtrusive feel of an out-and-out rock guitar with the visual credibility of an offset"

Writer

MICHAEL ASTLEY-BROWN
Content Manager, Guitars, MusicRadar



A great fan of the playability and sound of PRS guitars but not the looks, MusicRadar's resident guitar geek is finally lured to Mr Smith's fold by the Vela's retro charms – and begins by taking a trip down memory lane, to a time when metal was 'nu'...



For me, PRS will always be associated with my formative, early-Noughties electric years. It was the peak of nu-metal and the launch of the cut-price SE range, which was splashed across the pages of this fair organ and its sister title, *Total Guitar*. For a long time, whenever anyone mentioned PRS, I was instantly transported back to the heady days of Incubus, Sum 41 and Linkin Park.

It wasn't until later I became aware of the brand's high-end instruments, so my perception of the company has always been a little skewed. Working on *Total Guitar* and *Guitarist*, I've played my fair share of PRS guitars, encompassing price tags from £4,000 down to £400 – and to my mind, every one has been a winner. PRS instruments, and not just the expensive core-line stuff either, have since become my go-to guitars for demoing amps and effects, owing to the tonal versatility that the coil-split models have and consistency across the range. Despite all that, there's always been

one problem: to my eyes, PRS guitars have never looked cool – perhaps that's down to the nu-metal associations, or perhaps the 'lawyer's guitar' jokes ingested via years delving online forums. But yes, despite liking their functional qualities, the styling and vibe of most PRS guitars just wasn't for me.

In more recent years, the not-quite-so-fancy S2 line, then the plainer-still S2 Standards were a step in the right direction, but it wasn't until the Vela hit that I was forced to set my prejudices aside and seriously consider a PRS guitar. Visually, classic offsets such as Fender's Jazzmaster occupy a lofty position in my desirability books, and they've been put to use by plenty of my alt-guitar heroes – but for playability, they've never quite stacked up. As a dyed-in-the-wool heavy riffer who's also prone to the odd bout of legato excess, I've always longed for unimpeded upper-fret access and slick, consistent playability that your standard Jazz or Jag can't quite provide.

Enter the Vela, which combines the unobtrusive feel of an out-and-out rock guitar

with the eyecatching visual appeal of an offset, and what's more, throws in a pickup/hardware combo that I've struggled to find in an off-the-shelf electric: single coil in the neck, coil-splittable humbucker in the bridge, one volume/tone and a hardtail bridge – all rounded off, quite literally, with those comfort-enhancing body contours.

Playing the Vela for video demos a few issues back confirmed my suspicions that this might just be the offset I've been waiting for, but to my dismay, the original review model had to go back as soon as filming ended. Fortunately, further stock quickly arrived, so I asked the kind folk at PRS Europe for one exactly the same as the review model (Vintage Cherry finish, dot inlays), with the same setup, if possible. Incredibly, the guitar I received might just play even better than the original: the action is effortlessly low, while the 25-inch scale length makes wide chord stretches a breeze – plus, the hardtail bridge offers tuning I can rely on. All that, and it oozes cool. Make no mistake, gigs are calling... **G**

Reviewed 395 **Price** £1,289 **On Test Since** August 2015 **Studio Sessions** No **Gigged** Yes **Mods** None

www.prsguitarseurope.com



Caparison Angelus M3B

with *Darran Charles*

Writer

DARRAN CHARLES
Godsticks; *Guitarist contributor*



Darran handles vocals, guitar and keys for prog-rock act Godsticks. Here, he gets acquainted with the metal-friendly M3B, and introduces it into a band rehearsal already cluttered with a myriad of differently tuned guitars...

It's almost embarrassing to admit that even for just a 45-minute set, Godsticks require seven guitars on stage. That's right – seven! Four of those guitars are Gavin's (the other Godsticks guitarist) and three are mine. In our defence, it isn't sonic diversity we're seeking (quite the contrary, as I'll allude to later on), but it just so happens we have quite a few different tunings that necessitate these guitar swaps.

Over the last few years, I've been gravitating towards basswood- or mahogany-bodied

guitars with maple caps (whereas I'd been a loyal devotee of alder for as long as I can remember), armed with medium-high-output pickups. Due to all the guitar changes during a set, I want to keep as many similarities between each guitar as possible, in order to achieve some consistency in tone and output, because trying to compensate for these differences on the amp during a gig isn't ideal. So, for my drop D guitar, I thought the mahogany and maple construction of the Angelus would theoretically complement my basswood and maple Charvel seven-string, or at least better than the alder-bodied Tele that I used previously did.

In our review of the Angelus in issue 397, we described it as possessing "true metal tone", and this sinister-looking plain Black version is at least visually representative of this. I was prepared for how it would sound, but what about in the context of a full band rehearsal? We guitarists all know how much our fellow band members enjoy us bringing in a new piece of gear to rehearsal, so I was confident

they'd be excited when I walked in with yet another guitar case slung over my shoulder!

Firstly, I'd forgotten just how scooped the sound is (I hesitate to use the word 'thin', because it's anything but). Compared with the Charvel, it has a slightly more aggressive top end, and the pickups seem a little hotter, too, teasing just a little more feedback from the Marshall. Rolling off the volume produces a very even broken-up sound, and is actually perfect for another softer sounding drop D track recently incorporated into the set.

The combination of the jumbo stainless-steel frets and ebony 'board make for a particularly slick surface, adding up to a very rewarding experience when performing the whacky sliding work featured in the particular songs I'm using it for. And I think those huge fretboard inlays will prove a godsend on future dark stages. So, currently, I'm in a slight quandary: do I modify the amp settings in favour of the Charvel or the Caparison? We have a few gigs coming up, so I'll try it 'on the job' before making any decision... **G**

Reviewed 397 **Price** £1,875 **On Test Since** October 2015 **Studio Sessions** No **Gigged** No **Mods** None

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Old Gold

1964 Gibson J-45

Photography by Neil Godwin

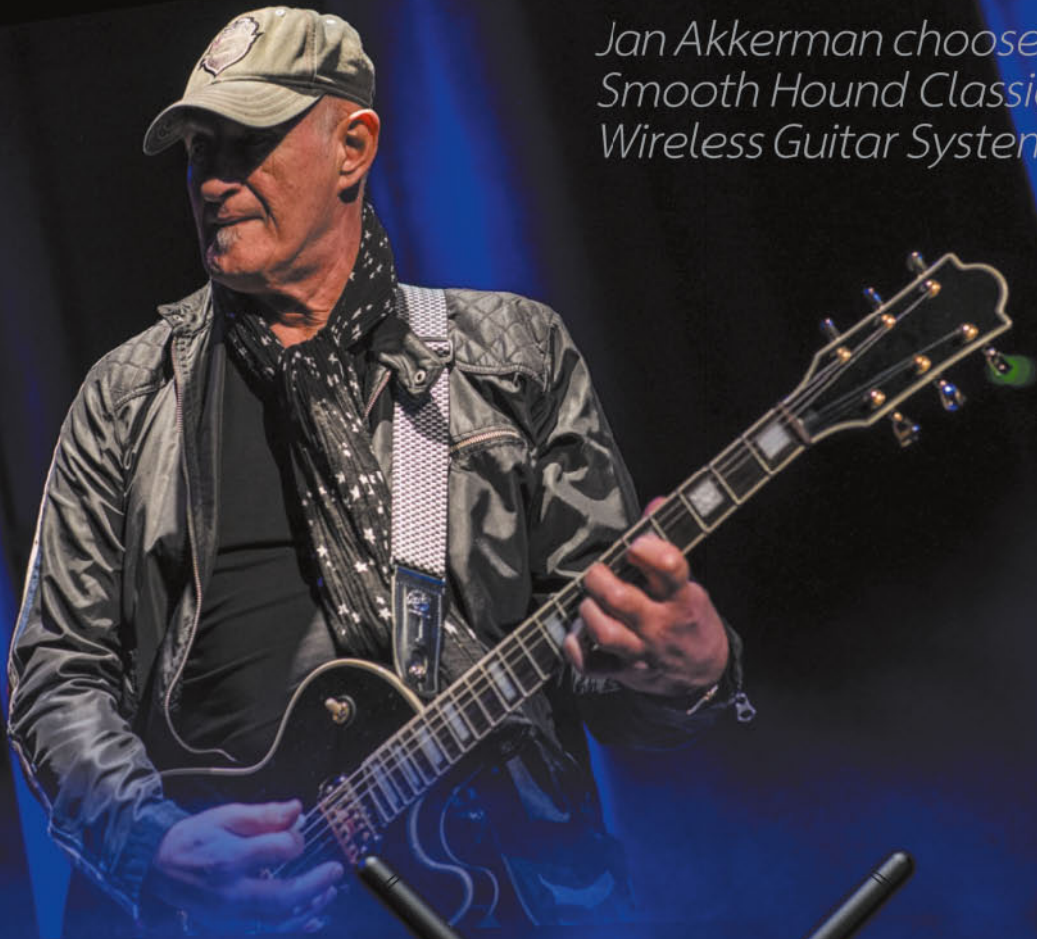
Gibson's J-45 acoustic was originally launched in August 1942 and has become known as something of a workhorse among players ever since, revered for its warmth, projection and balanced tone. A round-shouldered dreadnought, the traditional spec of the J-45 comprised a spruce top with mahogany back and sides, although some early wartime variants included a mahogany top with maple back and sides. A mahogany neck with a rosewood fingerboard and a distinctive teardrop pickguard complete the livery of this 16-inch-wide, short-scale guitar, which has become Gibson's top-selling acoustic over the years.

Since its introduction, there have been minor tweaks, but these have been principally cosmetic – changes to the binding, bridge, pickguard shape and finish options, and so on. There has been a whole host of special models, too: the 80s saw the J-45 Celebrity with rosewood back and sides, an ebony fingerboard and a longer scale length in a limited run of 90, for instance. Since then, we've seen the Montana Special, the Rosewood Custom and the Buddy Holly – based on the original wartime J-45, and limited to a run of 1,000 models between 1995 and 1998.

The model pictured here is from 1964, just two years after Gibson made Cherry Sunburst available as a finish on the J-45. Close inspection reveals some fretboard wear down near the nut, inviting the speculation that this instrument might have seen quite a lot of singer-songwriter action. The finish may have crazed, and there's a crack in the pickguard, but it looks perfectly fit and ready for action to us!



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Bending Rules Part 4

Country-flavoured bending licks

In the last three issues, we've looked at various single-note string bending approaches to scale shapes. Now it's time to introduce a batch of new bending concepts through some actual licks...

SOME of the following ideas are admittedly a little trickier than anything we've looked at in the previous columns, but... it's all in the name of fun! The unifying theme throughout the following selection of licks is that they all utilise multiple strings, some of which are bent while others remain static. Consequently, there's a distinctly 'country' flavour this month. It's probably fair to say that country players have more fun with string bending than the rest of us do, and this is at least partially because the cleaner tones typical of the genre allow multiple strings to ring out simultaneously with great clarity, facilitating all kinds of new double- and triple-stop bending ideas that wouldn't sound anywhere near as defined if you tried to play them through a more overdriven 'rock' amp.

One significant reference point for any country guitar player must surely be the sound of the pedal steel – an instrument that is all about bending! The mechanics of the pedal steel enable the player to bend a string swiftly and accurately up to a target pitch by pushing all the way down on a pedal. Translating some of this characteristic onto the guitar requires that you bend very quickly and purposefully from one note to the next, as opposed to the slower 'wailing' style of bend, which can work so well in bluesier contexts.

As a general note about all of the following licks: one of the biggest challenges here will be maintaining a constant pitch on the unbent strings. Whenever you play a double (or triple) stop and bend one of the strings, there's a natural inclination for your fretting hand to move the other strings, too: preventing this from happening requires some experimentation to find the most comfortable and stable hand position... not to mention constantly using your ears to monitor the tuning of each note!

Oh, and a quick apology to any reader whose guitar features a floating bridge. If your whammy bar is set up in such a way that it can both raise and lower the pitch of a note, you'll find that bending any one string sharp will cause all the others to go flat, as the increased pull on the strings affects the tension in the spring cavity of the guitar. Unfortunately, ideas like these really are much easier to execute on a guitar with a fixed bridge. (For the video lesson, you'll note that I used a Charvel with a floating bridge, but appearances can be deceiving: that particular instrument features a device called a Tremol-No, which enables the user to lock the bridge by tightening some screws in the spring cavity area...)

Ex. 1 is a typical doublestop idea that moves through three different mini-shapes on the neck, outlining the notes of a C7 chord. After the bend has been applied to each doublestop, the end result is a chord tone on each string: if you want to come up with some similar ideas of your own, bear in mind that the target pitch of the bent string is the one that needs to be a chord tone, and that the starting point of the bend should ideally be one scale tone lower. (Theory buffs might like to know that the mode of choice here would be C Mixolydian.) For each doublestop, try picking the lower string while plucking the higher string with your second finger.

Ex. 2 works over a D7 chord: throughout the first bar, try using the pick for all the second string notes and your second finger for everything on the first string. (For the latter half of bar 2, I would recommend assigning the third and second fingers of your picking hand to the first and second string, leaving your pick free to handle the third string. This kind of hybrid picking might feel awkward at first but it offers a certain tonal authenticity

and also reduces the overall amount of picking-hand movement so... do persevere!)

Ex. 3 takes its inspiration from some pedal steel clichés: note the suggested fingerings! For the last chord, your fretting hand should barre the top two strings at the 8th fret while bending the third string up a whole tone from the 7th fret. The artificial harmonic is actually optional, but if you do intend to incorporate it, I find that the clearest-sounding approach for this particular chord is to hold the pick between the thumb and second finger so your first finger can lightly touch the harmonic node at the 19th fret on the third string. You can then strike the third, second and first strings using your pick, third and fourth fingers respectively...

Ex. 4 introduces the idea of playing three-string shapes to outline a chord progression, bending the lowest string up to a chord tone from one scale degree below. For the bulk of this lick, the best picking hand approach is similar to that which we encountered at the end of Ex. 2 – ie, assigning your pick, second and third fingers to the third, second and first strings respectively. You'll also spot that the bend in the last chord requires a degree of 'cheating', as it's impossible to execute a conventional whole-tone bend on the second string without either dragging it beyond the edge of the fingerboard (if you're bending downwards, towards the floor) or colliding with the other strings (if you're bending in the other direction.) To solve this problem, move your picking hand behind the fretting hand and try to find a comfortable way to bend the string from there. (As you're doing this, try to ensure that the first finger of your fretting hand doesn't move: you'll need to resist the pull of that picking-hand bend!)

In **Ex. 5** we encounter a new kind of doublestop bend: here, both strings are

being bent simultaneously! For the first such doublestop, you should be able to keep the distance between the first and second strings pretty much constant as you bend, whereas you may need to push the higher string a little harder when executing the following doublestop on the third and second strings (beats 3 to 4). Your ears have to be your guide here in terms of accurate pitching!

Note the 'stepped' release towards the end of bar 1, as well: you'll recall we encountered a more basic version of this idea in the previous instalment of this column, but now we're applying the same approach to two strings

simultaneously: ensure that you pause the bend halfway through, so that the chromatic descending movement is clearly outlined.

Let's wrap things up for this month with a truly unusual lick... The first challenge here is that we need to play a four-note chord (the first finger barres all the way down to the first string!) and then bend one of the second notes up a tone: this approach is somewhat unorthodox, to be sure, but it can be very effective if you get it right!

To make the first half of **Ex. 6** work, you'll need to experiment with using various parts of your fingertip to execute the bend: your

ultimate goal is to be able to bend that third string note up a whole tone without muting the first string note that follows it: the more you can allow all the strings to ring out together, the more effective this kind of lick will sound.

The last few notes of this lick consist of natural harmonics at the 7th fret and, as you'll see from the tab, the final bend is executed behind the nut, using whichever hand feels more natural. And finally, a further apology to anyone whose guitar has a double-locking tremolo unit: it saddens me to say that this particular lick is not for you. Sorry 'bout that!

Example 1

THIS IS a typical doublestop idea that moves through three different mini-shapes on the neck, outlining the notes of a C7 chord.

C7

BU BU BD BU BU BD BU BU BD BU

11-12 11-12 (12) (11) 8 10-11 10-11 (11) (10) 9 7-8 7-8 (7) 5 5-3 (5)

Example 2

THIS example works over a D7 chord: throughout the first bar, try using the pick for all the second string notes and your second finger for everything on the first string. For the latter half of bar 2, use your third and second fingers of your picking hand to the first and second string, leaving your pick free to handle the third string.

Example 3

WE'RE taking inspiration from some pedal-steel clichés here. For the last chord, your fretting hand should barre the top two strings at the 8th fret whilst bending the third string up a whole tone from the 7th fret.

The first system of the musical score for 'The Rose Tree' is shown. It consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The first measure is marked with a 'C' (C major) and contains a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The second measure is marked with a 'D7' and contains a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The third measure is marked with a 'G7#5' and contains a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The fourth measure is marked with a 'C' and contains a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The bass staff contains a single note G2 in the first measure, followed by a whole rest in the second measure, and then a sequence of notes: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F6, G6, A6, B6, C7, D7, E7, F7, G7, A7, B7, C8, D8, E8, F8, G8, A8, B8, C9, D9, E9, F9, G9, A9, B9, C10, D10, E10, F10, G10, A10, B10, C11, D11, E11, F11, G11, A11, B11, C12, D12, E12, F12, G12, A12, B12, C13, D13, E13, F13, G13, A13, B13, C14, D14, E14, F14, G14, A14, B14, C15, D15, E15, F15, G15, A15, B15, C16, D16, E16, F16, G16, A16, B16, C17, D17, E17, F17, G17, A17, B17, C18, D18, E18, F18, G18, A18, B18, C19, D19, E19, F19, G19, A19, B19, C20, D20, E20, F20, G20, A20, B20, C21, D21, E21, F21, G21, A21, B21, C22, D22, E22, F22, G22, A22, B22, C23, D23, E23, F23, G23, A23, B23, C24, D24, E24, F24, G24, A24, B24, C25, D25, E25, F25, G25, A25, B25, C26, D26, E26, F26, G26, A26, B26, C27, D27, E27, F27, G27, A27, B27, C28, D28, E28, F28, G28, A28, B28, C29, D29, E29, F29, G29, A29, B29, C30, D30, E30, F30, G30, A30, B30, C31, D31, E31, F31, G31, A31, B31, C32, D32, E32, F32, G32, A32, B32, C33, D33, E33, F33, G33, A33, B33, C34, D34, E34, F34, G34, A34, B34, C35, D35, E35, F35, G35, A35, B35, C36, D36, E36, F36, G36, A36, B36, C37, D37, E37, F37, G37, A37, B37, C38, D38, E38, F38, G38, A38, B38, C39, D39, E39, F39, G39, A39, B39, C40, D40, E40, F40, G40, A40, B40, C41, D41, E41, F41, G41, A41, B41, C42, D42, E42, F42, G42, A42, B42, C43, D43, E43, F43, G43, A43, B43, C44, D44, E44, F44, G44, A44, B44, C45, D45, E45, F45, G45, A45, B45, C46, D46, E46, F46, G46, A46, B46, C47, D47, E47, F47, G47, A47, B47, C48, D48, E48, F48, G48, A48, B48, C49, D49, E49, F49, G49, A49, B49, C50, D50, E50, F50, G50, A50, B50, C51, D51, E51, F51, G51, A51, B51, C52, D52, E52, F52, G52, A52, B52, C53, D53, E53, F53, G53, A53, B53, C54, D54, E54, F54, G54, A54, B54, C55, D55, E55, F55, G55, A55, B55, C56, D56, E56, F56, G56, A56, B56, C57, D57, E57, F57, G57, A57, B57, C58, D58, E58, F58, G58, A58, B58, C59, D59, E59, F59, G59, A59, B59, C60, D60, E60, F60, G60, A60, B60, C61, D61, E61, F61, G61, A61, B61, C62, D62, E62, F62, G62, A62, B62, C63, D63, E63, F63, G63, A63, B63, C64, D64, E64, F64, G64, A64, B64, C65, D65, E65, F65, G65, A65, B65, C66, D66, E66, F66, G66, A66, B66, C67, D67, E67, F67, G67, A67, B67, C68, D68, E68, F68, G68, A68, B68, C69, D69, E69, F69, G69, A69, B69, C70, D70, E70, F70, G70, A70, B70, C71, D71, E71, F71, G71, A71, B71, C72, D72, E72, F72, G72, A72, B72, C73, D73, E73, F73, G73, A73, B73, C74, D74, E74, F74, G74, A74, B74, C75, D75, E75, F75, G75, A75, B75, C76, D76, E76, F76, G76, A76, B76, C77, D77, E77, F77, G77, A77, B77, C78, D78, E78, F78, G78, A78, B78, C79, D79, E79, F79, G79, A79, B79, C80, D80, E80, F80, G80, A80, B80, C81, D81, E81, F81, G81, A81, B81, C82, D82, E82, F82, G82, A82, B82, C83, D83, E83, F83, G83, A83, B83, C84, D84, E84, F84, G84, A84, B84, C85, D85, E85, F85, G85, A85, B85, C86, D86, E86, F86, G86, A86, B86, C87, D87, E87, F87, G87, A87, B87, C88, D88, E88, F88, G88, A88, B88, C89, D89, E89, F89, G89, A89, B89, C90, D90, E90, F90, G90, A90, B90, C91, D91, E91, F91, G91, A91, B91, C92, D92, E92, F92, G92, A92, B92, C93, D93, E93, F93, G93, A93, B93, C94, D94, E94, F94, G94, A94, B94, C95, D95, E95, F95, G95, A95, B95, C96, D96, E96, F96, G96, A96, B96, C97, D97, E97, F97, G97, A97, B97, C98, D98, E98, F98, G98, A98, B98, C99, D99, E99, F99, G99, A99, B99, C100, D100, E100, F100, G100, A100, B100, C101, D101, E101, F101, G101, A101, B101, C102, D102, E102, F102, G102, A102, B102, C103, D103, E103, F103, G103, A103, B103, C104, D104, E104, F104, G104, A104, B104, C105, D105, E105, F105, G105, A105, B105, C106, D106, E106, F106, G106, A106, B106, C107, D107, E107, F107, G107, A107, B107, C108, D108, E108, F108, G108, A108, B108, C109, D109, E109, F109, G109, A109, B109, C110, D110, E110, F110, G110, A110, B110, C111, D111, E111, F111, G111, A111, B111, C112, D112, E112, F112, G112, A112, B112, C113, D113, E113, F113, G113, A113, B113, C114, D114, E114, F114, G114, A114, B114, C115, D115, E115, F115, G115, A115, B115, C116, D116, E116, F116, G116, A116, B116, C117, D117, E117, F117, G117, A117, B117, C118, D118, E118, F118, G118, A118, B118, C119, D119, E119, F119, G119, A119, B119, C120, D120, E120, F120, G120, A120, B120, C121, D121, E121, F121, G121, A121, B121, C122, D122, E122, F122, G122, A122, B122, C123, D123, E123, F123, G123, A123, B123, C124, D124, E124, F124, G124, A124, B124, C125, D125, E125, F125, G125, A125, B125, C126, D126, E126, F126, G126, A126, B126, C127, D127, E127, F127, G127, A127, B127, C128, D128, E128, F128, G128, A128, B128, C129, D129, E129, F129, G129, A129, B129, C130, D130, E130, F130, G130, A130, B130, C131, D131, E131, F131, G131, A131, B131, C132, D132, E132, F132, G132, A132, B132, C133, D133, E133, F133, G133, A

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Example 4

HERE, we introduce the idea of playing three-string shapes to outline a chord progression, bending the lowest string up to a chord tone from one scale degree below. For the bulk of this lick, the best picking hand approach is similar to that which we encountered at the end of Ex. 2 – ie, assigning your pick, second and third fingers to the third, second and first strings respectively.

System 1 (Measures 1-2):

- Measure 1 (A7):** Treble clef, 4/4 time. Notes: 11 (b3), 12 (b2), 10 (2), 12 (b1), 10 (2), 11 (b3), 12 (b2). Techniques: BU (hold) on 11, RP on 12, RP on 10, BU on 12.
- Measure 2 (D7):** Treble clef, 4/4 time. Notes: 9 (b3), 11 (b2), 10 (2), 11 (b1), 10 (2), 11 (b3), 9 (b2). Techniques: BU (hold) on 9, RP on 11, RP on 10.

System 2 (Measures 3-4):

- Measure 3 (G7):** Treble clef, 4/4 time. Notes: 9 (b3), 10 (b2), 8 (2), 10 (b1), 8 (2), 7 (2), 12 (b3), 11 (b2), 10 (2). Techniques: BU (hold) on 9, RP on 10, RP on 8, BU on 12.
- Measure 4 (C):** Treble clef, 4/4 time. Notes: 8 (b3), 15 (b2), 17 (2), 17 (b1). Techniques: BU (w/RH, behind fretting hand) on 15.

Example 5

A NEW kind of doublestop bend here: both strings are being bent simultaneously! For the first, you should be able to keep the distance between the first and second strings pretty constant as you bend, but you may need to push the higher string a little harder when executing the following doublestop in beats 3 to 4. Note the 'stepped' release: ensure that you pause the bend halfway through.

System 1 (Measures 1-2):

- Measure 1 (B major):** Treble clef, 4/4 time. Notes: 11 (b3), 12 (b2), 11 (2), 11 (b1), 11 (2), 10 (2), 10 (b3), 11 (b2), 12 (b1). Techniques: BU on 11, BU on 12, BU on 11, BU on 10, BD on 10, BU on 11, BD on 12.
- Measure 2 (E major):** Treble clef, 4/4 time. Notes: 9 (b3), 11 (b2), 10 (2), 11 (b1), 10 (2), 9 (2), 9 (b3), 11 (b2), 10 (b1). Techniques: BU on 9, BD on 11, BU on 10, BD on 11, BD on 10, BU on 9, BD on 11, BD on 10.

Example 6

IN THE first half of this example, experiment with using various parts of your fingertip to execute the bend: your goal is to be able to bend that third string note up a whole tone without muting the first-string note that follows it. The last few notes of this lick consist of natural harmonics at the 7th fret and the final bend is executed behind the nut, using whichever hand feels more natural.

System 1 (Measures 1-2):

- Measure 1 (D major):** Treble clef, 4/4 time. Notes: 9 (b3), 11 (b2), 5 (2), 11 (b1), 9 (2), 7 (2), 7 (b3), 11 (b2), 7 (b1). Techniques: BU (hold) on 9, Let ring on 11, BD on 5, AH19 on 7, BU (behind nut) on 7.
- Measure 2 (D major):** Treble clef, 4/4 time. Notes: 7 (b3), 9 (b2), 7 (2), 7 (b1), 7 (2), 7 (b3), 9 (b2), 7 (b1). Techniques: BU (behind nut) on 7.

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Joe Bonamassa channels his many influences into a hybrid style that's instantly recognisable as his own

Brush Up On Bonamassa

Difficulty ★★★★★

15 mins per example

Tutor: Richard Barrett | Gear used: Single-cut electric, Ibanez Tube Screamer, Marshall JTM45 head



HELLO, and welcome to my first lesson as your tutor for Blues Headlines, stepping into Neville Marten's sizeable shoes after his long and deservedly popular stint as bluesman in residence. I'm looking forward to examining all areas of the blues technique with you, but we're going to start with the work of a modern master with a powerful style of blues-rock soloing.

Originally inspired to take up guitar at the incredibly tender age of four, Joe Bonamassa's passion for the blues was

ignited by his father's own love of music – particularly the British 'Blues Invasion' artists such as Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Peter Green. This naturally led on to the slightly rockier stylings of Jimmy Page, Paul Kossoff, Rory Gallagher and Gary Moore – in fact, it's difficult not to feel as though we're leaving people out, such is the variety of players that have left their mark on this talented guitarist. These days, Joe combines more traditional American blues with British/Irish rock.

Joe is probably most associated with the Les Paul, so that's the vibe we've gone with

here. The object of these four examples is to show a few alternative approaches over a laid-back 12-bar in C major – not always the easiest or most intuitive option when using the minor pentatonic scale, but this can yield some interesting challenges. So much of the blues is about harnessing the tension between major and minor, after all. One thing I'd particularly like to highlight is the use of the guitar's volume control for dynamics, along with the more obvious pickup choices. Hope you enjoy these examples and I look forward to bringing you more next month.

Example 1

USING the neck pickup with the volume rolled back (how far depends on the gain setting and impedance of your guitar; just roll it back until you like the sound), this begins with a Peter Green-style motif, moving to a 'piano style' lick in the same position. This is done using hybrid picking: middle finger handling the first string 'pedal tone' C, while the pick is used for the underlying pentatonic phrase.

Example 2

MOSTLY using the often neglected position-three pentatonic shape, the volume gain is a little higher for this hybrid between the Clapton/Page side of Joe's playing. This is a mixture of picked and legato phrases, with no particular thinking behind it apart from keeping things varied, so it's worth experimenting. As with Example 1, keep your eye on what's going on with E and E_b when they appear.

Example 3

SPEAKING of E and E_b, this example continues to straddle the major/minor divide, by way of the B_b (dominant 7th) starting note. We're getting a little bit more fiddly here, with the repeated triplet feel descending through this position-one C minor pentatonic. Sliding up to E natural for that last note gives a clear E natural/C major resolution.

Example 4

I KNOW the timing is a little bit raggedy here, but we wanted to keep this take, as it demonstrates something of the 'Gary Moore' presence in Joe's style. Combining legato with slides, economy and alternate picking, we're definitely on the rock side of the blues-rock camp here. Phrases like this can seem daunting at first, but a little slow, methodical rehearsal of the finger movements gives surprisingly quick results.

BU BD Bar continues . . .

E B G D A E

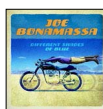
8 9 10 8 10 9 8 10 9 8 7

8 10

Hear It Here

Joe Bonamassa

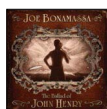
Different Shades Of Blue



Showcasing Joe's lightning-fast pentatonics and Kossoff-style vibrato, this is a good place to start if you're new to this style and wondering why so many people rate him so highly. Check out the dynamics using the volume control, pickup selection and, most importantly, the space between the phrases.

Joe Bonamassa

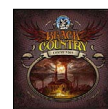
The Ballad Of John Henry



If bluesy/shreddy soloing in the context of a prog-rock style opus with a Bonham-style backbeat sounds good, then waste no time in checking this out. One of Joe's more contemporary influences is Eric Johnson, and there are some very impressive pentatonic flurries to be found here.

Black Country Communion

Black Country Communion



Using a more riff-based approach, Joe applies his talent to this team effort alongside the legendary Glenn Hughes and Jason Bonham with explosive results. Zeppelin-flavoured rock with Glenn Hughes on vocals and no shortage of incendiary, extended guitar solos? Don't mind if I do...

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*A tone-tweaker's guide to essential boost,
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Driving Ambition



Overdrive pedals started life as a simple transistorised accessory to unlock a bit more dirt from valve amps at low volume. Today, they're a big deal in the world of tone. Though the electronics components they're made of are typically worth only pence, the most sought-after examples, such as the fabled Klon Centaur, change hands for over £1,000 now. Given this degree of hype, it's easy to be seduced by the idea that the best overdrive, boost and distortion pedals are a magic bullet that can solve all of one's tonal woes in one shot. But the reality is that 'tone' begins in your mind and is shaped by a long chain of influences, from fingertips to strings to loudspeaker.

A drive pedal is just one piece in the sonic jigsaw puzzle that forms the big picture of how you sound. Looked at this way, drive pedals are not cure-alls, but often quite specific tools for shaping those tonal influences into one harmonious, powerful voice. For example, some drive pedals replace midrange that is naturally lacking in certain combinations of guitar and amp, while others simply make the natural voice of your amp bigger and richer without changing its essential character.

Understanding the nature of the world's best-known drive pedals is key to using them effectively with the rest of your rig. We hope this guide – complete with video, which you can find at <http://bit.ly/guitaristextra> – will help you get to that point a little quicker, or open up some unexpected avenues for further experimentation if you're already there. Enjoy.

Jamie Dickson **Editor**

CONTENTS

04	.....	Introduction
06	.....	Analog.Man Beano Boost
08	.....	Xotic Effects EP Booster
10	.....	Boss BD-2 Blues Driver
12	.....	Analog.Man King Of Tone
14	.....	Round-up: Premium Drives
16	.....	Ibanez TS808 Tube Screamer
18	.....	Klon Centaur
20	.....	Lovepedal Eternity Drive
22	.....	Butler Audio Tube Driver
26	.....	Pro Co RAT
28	.....	Boss DS-1 Distortion
30	.....	Marshall The Guv'nor
32	.....	Fulltone OCD Overdrive



THE SETUP

A brief word on what this guide is about – and what it isn't – plus a look at how we put the runners and riders of our Ultimate Overdrives guide to the test

We've got a confession to make here. If you're expecting a complete list of the best overdrive pedals you can buy, this isn't it. There are so many excellent and worthy drive pedals out there that it's inevitable some didn't make it onto our list, so please don't feel aggrieved if you don't see your personal favourite here, or the latest greatest thing that's all the rage on the forums. Instead, we've selected 12 epochal overdrive, boost and distortions pedals that either represent a moment when the game

changed, or a drive effect at the peak of its engineering evolution.

Don't get us wrong, however: each pedal here is a stone-cold classic and together, they represent an awesome spectrum of dirt-dealing tonal possibilities. But the primary thing we hope you'll take away from this guide is a surer sense of how legendary types of drive effect can be used with the rest of your rig, as well as putting forward a choice list of benchmark effects by which the standard of other pedals can be measured.

Let's also say a word about an important class of pedals this guide doesn't cover: fuzzes. We decided these are so important, yet so distinct that we'll be running a dedicated guide on fuzz next year. Some famous pedals, notably the Electro-Harmonix Big Muff, straddle genres of pedal and could arguably have found a place in this guide, too. But we decided to leave that particular big-hitting box for the more fuzz-focused guide. So Muff fans, we're sorry and beg your indulgence for the moment. Its time will come.



Make sure you watch the video of Daniel Steinhardt and Mick Taylor that accompanies the features throughout this supplement to hear all this classic gear in action. To access the video, go to <http://bit.ly/guitaristextra>

The Experts

To aid us in our quest, we've enlisted both Daniel Steinhardt of TheGigRig, and veteran *Guitarist* gear reviewer Mick Taylor. Daniel builds pro-grade pedalboards for everybody from Steve Vai to Ed O'Brien of Radiohead. His company, TheGigRig, creates some of the very best tone-sculpting gear going, including the G2 switching system that we've used here to rapidly A/B the pedals, amps and guitars in this guide. Mick, meanwhile, is a former editor of *Guitarist* and *major-domo* of our Q&A gear-fettring column. He's picked apart the tonal attributes of more classic pedals than he'd care to remember, but still has a powerful

thirst for discovering new stompbox sounds to add to his appreciation of the field. Together, Daniel and Mick host *That Pedal Show*, an excellent weekly video blog on how to get the best from your effects. If you haven't seen it yet, check it out on YouTube – it's an education.

The Hardware

Because no effect is an island – often performing radically differently with different combinations of guitars and amps – we've brought together a cross-section of classic hardware to test our ultimate drives through. For amps, we have a carefully fettled Vox AC30 that belongs to a very

famous prog-rock guitarist, a Marshall JTM45 and 2x12 cabinet to represent the bridge between British and American amp tone, and finally, the quintessential gig-worthy Fender combo, the 22-watt '65 reissue Deluxe Reverb, here in special-run 'Bordeaux Blues' spec, with Jensen P12Q driver. To bring it all together seamlessly, we're using the excellent TheGigRig G2 switching unit, permitting seamless transitions between effects and the various items of hardware in play today.

The guitars are equally choice, covering a gamut of classic tones: a 2003 Custom Shop 1963 NOS Telecaster in Candy Apple Red with rosewood fingerboard; American Vintage Stratocaster with Seymour Duncan Antiquity pickups; a John Mayer Signature Stratocaster tuned to E $\flat$, a Custom Shop '58 reissue Sunburst Les Paul Standard; and last but not least, a Gibson Memphis 50th Anniversary '63 ES-335 reissue.

So, the amps are on and warmed up, and the guitars are ready for action. Gentlemen, to your drives. **G**

Because effects often perform differently with different combinations of guitars and amps, we've brought together a cross-section of classic hardware to test our ultimate drives



ANALOG.MAN BEANO BOOST

Daniel Steinhardt and Mick Taylor discover what treble boosters are *really* for with this classic Germanium-transistor unit

The first class of drive effects Daniel and Mick have nominated for ‘Ultimate’ status belong to what might broadly be termed boost effects. That is, they offer an increase in perceived volume when engaged plus a flattering tonal colouration – but don’t sound as ‘dirty’ as higher-gain overdrive pedals.

Among boosts, the Dallas Rangemaster is legend. Beloved of guitarists ranging from Eric Clapton to Rory Gallagher, it remains the quintessential Marshall-baiting, blues-rock booster. Think of Clapton’s lead tone on *Hideaway* on the Bluesbreakers’ ‘Beano’ album and you’re getting the idea. Developed by the Arbiter Group in the mid-60s, the Rangemaster utilised a single Germanium transistor to provide the boosting mumbo. Highly sought-after, original Dallas Rangemasters are nonetheless hard to find and are rather archaic by modern standards of usability. The boxy enclosure, with front-mounted controls and a hard-wired output cable, works better when placed atop an amp than on the floor. Since that’s not how most players use effects these days, a number of contemporary makers have manufactured treble boosters in a more usable package.

However, as Daniel Steinhardt of TheGigRig observes, the term ‘treble booster’ is a misnomer that shouldn’t put you off trying this useful type of boost effect, which is far more musical and less shrill than the term might suggest, giving bite and focus back to amp tones that have become bloated by high volume or gain settings.

“Yes, treble boosters such as this Beano Boost do boost upper mid and treble frequencies,” Daniel Steinhardt explains. “But it works really well in conjunction with an amp that is really compressed, because the frequencies that the treble

booster is pushing become a lot more focused and sensitive and can then form an amazing sound.”

It was a tough choice, but for our Ultimate Drives line-up, Daniel has plumped for the Beano Boost by well-respected Connecticut effects maker Analog.Man, founded by tone guru Mike Piera, as a leading example of a modern Rangemaster-style treble boost. This micro-enclosure pedal has a small footprint but retains the original’s point-to-point wiring rather than PCB construction. A number of varying but period-correct NOS transistors, including Newmarket NKT275s and Mullard OC44s, have been used in this model to date. It can also be switched to emphasise either upper mids or frequencies more in the centre-ground of midrange, also like the original.

Sounds

“Let’s have a listen to the Beano Boost into the Marshall JTM45,” Daniel says, taking up his Tele. “It reminds you of sounds from the 60s and you can hear it’s not just treble that it provides. Because all of the bottom-end frequencies of the amp are still there – but the pedal is pushing the upper mid and treble frequencies into overdrive.”

“There is a guitar that needs to be played with that,” Mick says, referring to the Gibson Custom Shop ’58 Les Paul ‘Burst reissue that’s the kind of guitar Clapton might have used in his pre-Cream Bluesbreaker days. Plugging it into the Beano Boost and the Marshall, a savage but warm saw-blade tone leaps from the amp.

“It’s a really honky, dark-sounding tone,” Mick observes. For comparison, Daniel tries the same combination with the AC30 with more mid-focused but equally wild results. As an experiment, Daniel and Mick try the Les Paul into the EP Booster (see p8) first,

then the Beano Boost. This time, the tone is much harsher and more metallic. “There’s a very good reason that it now sounds awful,” Dan says. “The Beano Boost uses a Germanium transistor. And Germanium transistors need to ‘see’ the inductance and impedance from your pickups. If they ‘see’ a buffer at the input, they sound awful!”

Tone Tip

For impedance reasons, Germanium transistor treble boosters such as the Beano Boost will typically sound best at the very *front* of a chain of pedals where they can ‘see’ the guitar’s pickups directly. Placed after a buffered pedal, they can sound thin, shrill and lifeless. Use treble boosters in general to add focus and edge to a fat, compressed amp tone.

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XOTIC EFFECTS EP BOOSTER

Dynamic duo Daniel Steinhardt and Mick Taylor explore what a good boost pedal can do for you with this Echoplex-inspired modern classic

In the days before effects pedals were as numerous as they are today, top players would find tonal advantages in unusual places. The Maestro Echoplex EP-3 tape delay unit is best known, of course, for its vintage echo sounds. But as players such as Jimmy Page and Brian May have found, its internal preamp circuitry has a very flattering effect on tone, too. Daniel Steinhardt of TheGigRig explains:

“A lot of guitar players liked the sound of the Echoplex even with the echo turned off. There’s something very special about that circuit.”

While a few makers, notably including Dunlop, have made good clean-boost effects based on that principle, one pedal that we’ve seen time and again on the pedalboards of tone-conscious pro players such as David Grissom is the EP Booster by Xotic Effects of Los Angeles, which forms the second of our Ultimate Drive selections. Hand-wired, offering up to +20dB of boost, it’s a little more versatile than its compact, single-knob layout might suggest, thanks to internal DIP switches that allow users to tailor gain levels and add ‘bright’ or ‘vintage’ emphasis to its sound. A true-bypass design, its classic role is nonetheless as an ‘always-on’ booster that colours your tone slightly, while adding a little bit of extra warmth, volume and girth to your amp’s natural voice.

Sounds

“When you play the EP booster into the AC30 and then the Marshall JTM45, you notice that it’s a full-frequency boost,” Dan comments, and then demonstrates what that means with his Fender Custom Shop Telecaster. “The AC30 has prominent mids, so the booster pushes those mids up until the amp saturates really nicely. But

as soon the booster goes into the Marshall, which has lots of bottom end – because the booster is now also pushing up those lower frequencies – you’ll notice it got a bit mushy straight away.”

Switching from the Tele to the Strat and performing the same comparison with the booster on through the two amps, Mick and Dan comment on the “bonkers” amount of low end the Strat generates from the JTM45 when the EP Booster is engaged. “That low end is not always useful – but the fact that we’ve been able to use the booster to produce *that* amount of bottom end from an amp that produces about 30 watts is a wonderful thing.”

But Dan adds that it’s sometimes better to take advantage of the flattering tonal colouration that the EP Booster, and other effects like it, can add without cranking the pedal’s level control right up – which can overwhelm amps with lots of low end, such as the JTM45.

“For example, if I turn this EP Booster down to unity gain – unity meaning the same volume level as if it wasn’t switched on – it does still add something, it does still colour the sound compared to the un-effected sound of the amp. It isn’t a completely, clearly clean boost and that’s the quality of the Echoplex preamp circuit that a lot of guitarists such as Jimmy Page liked. It’s ace!”

Switching over to a Gibson Custom Shop Les Paul and a Gibson Memphis ES-335, to see how the EP Booster works with the fatter sound of humbuckers, Mick and Daniel soon find that it summons an absolutely immense but well-defined voice from the AC30.

“What I love about that sound is that it’s so focused – even if you were turned down in the mix [of a live performance or studio

recording], you’re going to hear every note you play,” Daniel adds.

Tone Tip

At higher levels, you can use a booster like the EP to make your amp’s natural voice wider and louder for solos without overly changing the core character of your sound. Watch out when trying that with amps that have lots of bottom end, though – things may get mushy! If you simply want the flattering little touch of tonal colouration that a boost pedal can add, however, turn the boost’s level control down to near unity gain and leave it on all the time.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

**DUNLOP EP101 ECHOPLEX
PREAMP £107**

From renowned US effects makers Dunlop, now celebrating its 50th year in business, the EP101 claims the same Field Effect Transistor circuitry and signal path as the original tape-echo unit had. Build quality is excellent, and the EP101 is also a little cheaper than the Xotic unit and has a wider, more stable footprint on your pedalboard. And it’s got *that* retro logo, too.

www.jimdunlop.com

MXR M133 MICRO AMP £86

Not a clone of the Echoplex circuit, the Micro Amp nonetheless deserves a mention here as the quintessential ‘always-on’ clean boost that wakes up and fattens your amp’s tone, or adds up to +26dB of volume for solos if used in the conventional clean-boost role. It’s built like a truck, affordable and there’s a Custom Shop ‘Plus’ version that offers EQ controls, too.

www.jimdunlop.com



BOSS BD-2 BLUES DRIVER

It's the original 'transparent', low-gain overdrive – Daniel Steinhardt and Mick Taylor crank it up to find out what all the fuss is about

Low-gain overdrives are cousins to clean boosts, but they also form an important category of drive effect in their own right: the fabled 'transparent', low-gain overdrive.

Essentially, these kinds of pedals take the same ingredients that make a clean boost appealing – such as the fact that when they are engaged, you can still hear plenty of the natural tone of your amplifier and guitar – but they add just a little more colouration and compression than a straight boost might. For example, where clean boosts can sound a little abrupt and stark sometimes, low-gain drives give you a little more flattering sustain and punch for those warm, bluesy solos.

Given the number of forum-worshipped, boutique low-gain drives around, it may seem unusual that our expert testing pair of Daniel and Mick have opted for the humble Boss Blues Driver as our exemplar of great low-gain drive. But it shouldn't be forgotten that Boss compact pedals formed many of the tonal templates for plenty of boutique effects since the 80s, and the Blues Driver is an undeniable classic.

"For me, it was an important pedal," Daniel says. "When Boss produced this, a lot of blues players – who'd previously been using handmade boutique things – started using these on their 'boards instead, for the reason that it's a transparent overdrive. And what I mean by that, is that it doesn't colour the sound too much."

Sounds

"Used with the Les Paul and the AC30, you can hear that all the natural frequencies of

the guitar and amp are there, but the Blues Driver just lifts the mids a little," Daniel observes. "It's nothing like the amount of mids a Tube Screamer provides, though, but it was – and is – fantastic for just boosting an amplifier that's working and giving it a little bit more edge. But it's definitely an overdrive pedal, not a clean boost, because a certain amount of that drive tone is being created in the pedal itself. But it's very warm and very natural."

Mick adds that Strat players often get on well with the Blues Driver, because the pedal tends to gently balance out the Strat's topky sound.

"Because it's got that little bit of mid-hump, it does give you a bit of extra girth. So on the hollow position four on a Strat, turning on the Blues Driver gives you a Robert Cray-style tone, where it has lots of punch but you can still hear the guitar. Switch from the AC30 to the Marshall and you veer into Clapton territory."

"It's interesting that the AC30 is breaking up earlier than the Marshall when the Blues Driver is engaged," Daniel adds. "So we're hearing the overdrive in conjunction with the amplifier, being driven harder, whereas the Marshall is retaining its clean headroom better than the AC30."

While the vanilla Boss Blues Driver is a great pedal, we've picked out this Robert Keeley-modded specimen as the perfect example of this design at the absolute apex of its refinement.

"It doesn't change the sound greatly," Mick observes of the Keeley-modded version. "But the noise floor is improved, among a few other things."

Tone Tip

With low-gain overdrives, the relationship with the amp you're using is especially critical. Used with a lower-wattage amp, they'll tend to 'push' the amp's preamp and power valves into clipping and so you'll hear an attractive blend of pedal- and amp-generated crunch tones. In that scenario, a classic technique is to turn the pedal's level up but its gain down to yield a punchy-but-warm tone that contains plenty of the amp's own voice. Amps that have more headroom will reveal more of the pedal's intrinsic drive tone – but can project that sound with stunning clarity and force.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

FREE THE TONE RED JASPER
£239

Designed by ex-Providence engineer Yuki Hayashi, the Red Jasper is a woody, organic low-gain drive with progressive features such as its Holistic Tonal Solution bypass and buffer circuit. The main attraction for us is its sweetly gritty but mellow tone, though. Not cheap.

www.freethetone.com

BOSS BD-2W WAZA CRAFT
SPECIAL EDITION £129

The Japanese pedal giant joins the boutique party with its 'Waza Craft' range of up-spec'd versions of Boss favourites. In the case of this pedal, revamped 'all-analogue discrete amplifier circuitry' and fatter 'custom' voicing modes are the goodies.

<https://uk.boss.info>



ANALOG.MAN KING OF TONE

One of the most talked-about boutique overdrives in the past decade comes under Daniel and Mick's scrutiny

The King Of Tone overdrive started life as an attempt to get away from the ubiquity of the mid-heavy Ibanez Tube Screamer sound (see p16) and get back to a more detailed, organic style of overdrive that didn't obliterate the sound of the player's guitar, but still provided more sustain, gain and flexibility than a basic boost might. Daniel Steinhardt of TheGigRig explains.

"For me, this is one of the most important pedals of the past 10 years. Analog.Man has fine-tuned the idea of having an overdrive and a boost pedal in one box," he says. "It works with the sound of the guitar and doesn't alter its frequencies too much – but just sounds fantastic."

"In some ways, this is our rule-breaker," Mick chips in. "Because quite often, we say that your choice of amp and guitar is critically important in terms of matching them up with the right pedal. But the King Of Tone will work with pretty much any guitar and amp."

Daniel agrees, adding: "I've had this particular pedal on my 'board for a decade now and I've had lots of guitars. And everything else has moved around, but that works with everything, so it's a real testament to how flexible this thing is."

While it owes a few strands of its DNA to Marshall's Bluesbreaker OD, Ibanez's Tube Screamer and other effects, the King Of Tone overdrive has its own technical and tonal identity. It has seen several revisions and each of its two drive channels has an internal DIP switch that allows the player to alter its clipping characteristics between clean boost, overdrive and distortion modes. It still weighs in at the lower end of the gain spectrum, generally speaking, and many think of it as sitting at the ideal tonal midpoint between the natural, transparent

feel of a clean boost and the smoother, plumper sustain of a Tube Screamer.

Sounds

"We're going to try this pedal with the Strat first, into the AC30," Daniel says. "You can hear there's a little bit of midrange push there but what happens a lot of the time when you push the midrange is that you have to give up a lot of top end and low end frequencies. So, yes, it does push the midrange by a hair, similar to the way the Blues Driver does. But despite that, the top end is so crisp and the attack is so quick. One of the big things with overdrive pedals is what we call the transient response, which is the way the transistors work with the initial attack of the note. And the King Of Tone for me just nails it. It's such an important part of the sound."

"The King Of Tone and the Strat into the Marshall, however, sounds special, too. But if you then swap the Strat for a Tele with the Marshall, it sounds awesome," he adds, playing a little at volume to show off the size, clarity and formidable bite of the tone that this particular combination of guitar, amp and pedal yields.

"I'm going to say something contentious," Mick adds. "If you're ever in a big venue listening to a band, that guitar sound is often made by some sort of modelling sound straight into a PA. What you've just played is the absolute antithesis of that sound. That's the kind of sound that gets you chuckled out! [laughs]"

"It's so raw," agrees Dan. "But what I love about it is that you hear the guitar. With some modelling stuff, you end up wondering, 'What are they actually using?' It takes away some of the individual character. But with this setup, all of the harmonic content from the instrument

is simply amplified. It's fantastic. The Telecaster actually sounds louder than the Les Paul with this pedal, because it's less compressed, but the King Of Tone sounds good with every guitar we've got here."

Tone Tip

They say everything in moderation. And although that sounds like a recipe for mediocrity, in the case of pedals such as the King Of Tone overdrive, adding a bit extra in the right places without masking your instrument's inherent character is a winning combination. If your current overdrive or distortion pedal sounds a bit generic or dominating, try turning down its gain control and raising the level to let the natural sound of your guitar shine through.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

THORPYFX GUNSHOT OVERDRIVE £184

Military-trained engineer Adrian Thorpe has produced something really special with his Gunshot OD, which enables blending a mid-rich TS-style voice with a more amp-like, mid-scooped 'Calibre' gain stage. A rich variety of drive tones emerges from the interaction between these contrasting gain stages, ranging from nuanced boosts to rip-snorting leads.
<http://thorpyfx.com>

FULLTONE FULL-DRIVE2 FD2 MOSFET £119

This affordable dual-channel, boost-to-overdrive pedal has bags of adaptability and offers the choice of either mid-hump 'Vintage' voicing or a 'flat-mids' mode, plus MOSFET or 'normal' clipping modes.
www.fulltone.com

PREMIUM DRIVES

Check out this selection of classic and boutique drive stompboxes, for the keen-eared tone connoisseur



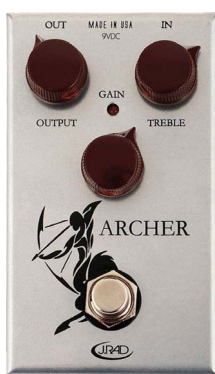
FREE THE TONE GIGS BOSON GB-1V £222

This high-end, high-ticket overdrive from Yuki Hayashi's Free The Tone stable seeks to fit the 'sounds natural/does everything/has enough gain' ideal. It does so admirably, by offering a range of usable tones from slight fattening to full, singing drive. A must-audition alongside modded Tube Screemers and OCDs.
www.freethetone.com



KEELEY ELECTRONICS LUNA OVERDRIVE II £189

The main man for modding classic effects-pedal designs has his own roster of pedals – and the Luna Overdrive earned itself Guitarist's coveted Gold Award. It'll do blues, no problem, but the extra edge, bite and distortion means it can cover more – it's among the best-sounding distorto-drivers we've ever heard.
www.robertkeeley.com



J ROCKETT ARCHER £149

This is the best value Klon-alike on the market. It's based on a silver Centaur owned by J Rockett co-boss Chris Van Tassel, and is the result of a initial collaboration with Klon designer Bill Finnegan. The collaboration faltered but the Archer remained, going on to great success. There's also the gold Archer Ikon model, using up-specced diodes: the 'magic' ingredient.
rockettpedals.com



CROWTHER HOT CAKE £149

A pro favourite, this was designed to leave your guitar and amp's character largely unchanged; instead just ladelling on drive (and presence midrange) in the desired quantities. The drive begins as a cleanish boost, goes through medium-fat and on to a squashy, harmonically packed powerhouse akin to Billy Gibbons' full-on 'patent pending' tone. Unique.
www.crowtheraudio.net



SUHR SHIBA DRIVE RELOADED £179

The Shiba Reloaded tweaks the overdrive circuit of Suhr's lauded 2009 original for a more amplifier-like drive with a tighter lower end character, and the small matter of 50 per cent more gain on tap. The result is one of the most naturally playable overdrives around, with a choice of 'smoothness' settings.
www.suhr.com



DURHAM ELECTRONICS SEX DRIVE COMPACT \$219

Raunchy! Designed for Charlie Sexton, guitarman for Bowie and Dylan, this racy-sounding clean booster offers blooming bass and plenty of presence, with three compression settings. If you want to preserve the sound of your amplifier's natural drive, then start your quest here; it also comes in compact form.
www.durhamelectronics.com

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 Devin Townsend, Carlos Garcia (John Newman)
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IBANEZ TS808 TUBE SCREAMER

Daniel and Mick reveal how to get the best from the daddy of all mid-frequency boosting overdrives, the Ibanez Tube Screamer

What hasn't been said about this emerald jewel of the pedalboard over the years? Launched around 1980, the original TS808 Tube Screamer had a small, square-ish footswitch, solid black knobs and a slightly narrower enclosure than the more common TS9 that followed in 1981 and a slew of later variants, each of which has – many would argue – a tangibly different tonal character from the original 808.

In terms of electronics, the JRC4558D dual-chip op-amp is famously synonymous with the early TS808's sound, although other op amps were used freely throughout the TS family of drives, while small differences in the spec of resistor components also separates the various versions of the Tube Screamer. The *raison d'être* of all TS tone is the same, however, as Mick and Daniel explain.

"This is my favourite overdrive pedal of all time," Mick confesses, "because Stevie Ray Vaughan used one," he laughs. "And of course, he typically played a Fender Stratocaster, into Fender amps. And, basically, the Tube Screamer put back all of the midrange that was naturally missing from that combination."

Anyone tempted to play the TS snobbery card should note, however, that according to effects expert and archivist Dave Hunter, photographic evidence indicates that Stevie Ray Vaughan used TS808, TS9 and the less-fancied TS10 variants over the years, suggesting that he either thought there wasn't much to choose between them or that they were getting progressively better.

Sounds

"Fender amplifiers represent the classic American sound," Daniel says, indicating

the reissue '65 Fender Deluxe Reverb with a Jensen driver with "sizzling highs" that is on hand for testing purposes. Mick, meanwhile, has picked up a John Mayer signature Strat from a few years back.

"Without the Tube Screamer, that's a very 'scooped' sound," says Daniel. "You've got a warm bottom end, and a very crisp top end. But when you hit that with the Tube Screamer you suddenly get the midrange back... and there it is! When you play the Marshall JTM45 on its own, you can hear that it already has lots of midrange present. So if you add the Tube Screamer to it, it sounds awesome, but now the midrange is really pushed [forward in the mix]."

"So that's why the Tube Screamer works so well with those American-voiced amplifiers," Daniel continues. "Where there's naturally a bit of a mid-scoop, the midrange push of the Tube Screamer just evens it out."

Switching to the humbucker-equipped '58 reissue Les Paul alters the balance of things once again, as Daniel demonstrates.

"The Les Paul already has a lot more midrange than a Strat," he says. "Even though this one has low-wind pickups that don't have that crazy mid-push that a lot of Les Pauls do."

Mick is impressed.

"That sounds blooming great!" he says of the commanding, girthy tone that now emerges from the Fender combo with the Les Paul and Tube Screamer.

"We've got it set up as a lot of people like to set Tube Screamers," Mick adds, "With the level high and the overdrive knob low. So it gives you a bit of a boost-y thing."

Daniel agrees, and adds: "With the Tube Screamer, when you start pushing the overdrive control up it can get a little bit

unruly, shall we say. As soon as you turn it above noon, you're just compressing the tone more. The sound everyone knows and loves is really achieved with the overdrive knob just shy of 12 o'clock."

Tone Tip

British amps such as Marshall JCM800s or Vox AC30s often already have a strong midrange, whereas the spankier American amps of Fender, with their sparkling highs and glassy bottom end, can benefit from a bit of help in the midrange. Understanding the core tonal balance of your amplifier is key to selecting the right overdrive pedal to complement it and thus achieve a balanced overall tone. Indeed, if balance is what you want to achieve, of course...

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

IBANEZ TS808 TUBE SCREAMER REISSUE £185

With used prices for original units soaring, Ibanez eventually succumbed to the inevitable and reissued the original 808 with JRC4558 chip. Arguably the warmest Tube Screamer in the family, the reissued Ibanez 808 is not cheap, but comes straight from the horse's mouth.

www.ibanez.com

MAXON OD-9 PRO+ £149

Maxon was the electronics company Ibanez chose to develop its effects in the early 80s. Maxon now offers the OD-9 Pro+, and argues it's an improvement, offering subtler compression and more headroom thanks to the option to run it at a higher internal operating voltage of 18 volts.

www.maxonfx.com



KLON CENTAUR

Daniel Steinhardt and Mick Taylor enter the realm of legend with the fabled Centaur...

It's the most hyped overdrive pedal of all time – so what's so special about this rather plain-looking stompbox that's been cloned and coveted more than any other boutique drive? Although it's often spoken of as the ultimate 'transparent' overdrive, it actually has something of a mid-hump like the Ibanez Tube Screamer (see p16), although its classic role is to be used at low-gain settings like a clean boost, to drive your amp's natural voice a little harder. Designed by Bill Finnegan in 1994, it has several neat features that contribute to its reputation as the all-time heavyweight of low-gain overdrives, including elevated internal voltage for extra headroom and clarity, and a gain control that cleverly adjusts the EQ profile as gain is increased, to ensure the optimum tonal range for the level of dirt being applied.

"When this came out, it was immediately picked up by a lot of well-known artists," Daniel Steinhardt observes. Mick adds that John Mayer, Joe Bonamassa, David Grissom, Warren Haynes and Philip Sayce are just a few of the notable players who have favoured it.

"So, what is it about the Klon?" Daniel asks. "Well, it's really interesting how much of the guitar is still present in its sound. It doesn't sound like a pedal."

Sounds

To illustrate the point, Daniel and Mick pair the Klon with the Fender Deluxe Reverb reissue that's on hand. To start off with, they set the Klon up to work as a classic overdrive, with the gain relatively high.

"It's still got that mid-boost thing," Mick observes, as we take in its chunky but well-defined voice through the Fender. Daniel then switches to the Ibanez TS808 Tube Screamer, the classic mid-boost

pedal, to compare the amount of mid push each pedal generates. "The Klon is clearer sounding," he notes.

Switching to the Klon with the Marshall, Daniel says: "What the Klon does is, it has that quick transient response: it grabs the note very fast so you can hear more of the attack, but is voiced very similarly to the Tube Screamer."

"Everyone says that you can hear more of your guitar with the Klon," Mick reflects. "And I think that's probably true," he continues, switching to the Gibson ES-335 with the Klon, going into the Marshall. The pair compare the Klon and the Tube Screamer with this setup again.

"Can you hear that the Tube Screamer is a bit softer?" Daniel asks. "That is why people love the Klon – it just helps with that attack a little bit. We're using it right now as an overdrive, but the other thing about the Klon is, people use it more commonly as a boost. So let's turn the gain down."

Turning down the Klon's gain yields a tone that is chunkier and edgier than the Marshall's straight clean tone, but still clear and well-defined. But that's not the only useful purpose for a boost-configured Klon. Next, Daniel combines it with a BK Butler Tube Driver (see p22), with the Klon first in line and the Tube Driver second, to produce an ultra-punchy, far-carrying lead tone that recalls the sound of David Gilmour.

So, used singly or stacked, the Klon's clarity, natural feel and flattering mid-push make it a more subtle tool than the Tube Screamer. But is it worthy of all the hype?

Well, you'll have to try one yourself to decide. Certainly, its creator would prefer that it's judged on its own merits: frustrated with the 'cult of Klon' that has seen prices for used original Centaurs soar above £1,000, Bill Finnegan produced a cheaper,

offshore-built version, the Klon KTR, in 2012, that was actually emblazoned, at his behest, with the words: 'Kindly remember the ridiculous hype that offends so many was not of my making.'

Tone Tip

We often say that guitarists buy with their eyes, but it's equally true that we buy by reputation. The Klon Centaur is worthy of high praise for its performance, and is without question a milestone design. But there are a lot of pedals out there that will do a very similar job at a fraction of the price. So let your ears be your guide and your money the last thing you part with: learning to be analytical but unprejudiced about effects will help you find great sounds at all price points.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

LOVEPEDAL KALAMAZOO £150

The circuitry is different, but boy, can the Kalamazoo sound a lot like a Klon! The kind of drive that boosts and accentuates the sound of your guitar, rather than swamping it, there's bags of clarity and punch on offer here and a useful four-pot control layout.

www.lovepedal.com

ELECTRO-HARMONIX SOUL FOOD £40

If you don't fancy paying over a grand for a real Klon, Electro-Harmonix's Klon Centaur-inspired Soul Food is ludicrous value for money. No, it's not double-take identical, but it does a nice job of providing the kind of flattering, clear boost that made the big K so hyped.

www.ehx.com



LOVEPEDAL ETERNITY DRIVE

A meticulous makeover of the Tube Screamer concept has turned this mid-rich boutique overdrive into a classic, as Daniel Steinhardt and Mick Taylor discover

One of the great things about so-called boutique effects makers is the way that talented independent designers can take a well-known mass-production pedal as a starting point, then refine the concept until they have something that's a classic in its own right. Such is Lovepedal's Eternity Drive.

Designed in Michigan by Sean Michael, it's a medium-gain overdrive with pronounced mids, in the style of the Tube Screamer, but with some added benefits. Daniel Steinhardt of TheGigRig explains:

"This is a very important pedal, one of the first pedals to explode onto the forum scene," Daniel says. "It was one of the first boutique drives that was really embraced and became a staple for a lot of people. This one here is one of the first series, which was handwired by Sean himself."

"The thing about Sean is that he's got an amazing set of ears and he's a killer guitar player," Daniel adds. "So he tweaked and tweaked this until he got it right, then sent it out to a few people and they got back and said, 'This is the pedal I've been searching for my whole life.'"

Sounds

"If we listen to the Tube Screamer first into the Fender Deluxe," Daniel continues, "then compare it to the Eternity Drive, you can hear it has a little more harmonic content and a little more bottom end than the TS808."

Picking up the theme, Mick adds that the Eternity Drive has qualities that many players found lacking in a stock Tube

Screamer, notably bottom-end grunt. "A lot of people on the forums got them, looking for that sound from Fender amplifiers [in which the overdrive pedal replaces the 'missing mids']. I've been using this with Voxes and a whole bunch of different things and it does have that clear midrange push. But if you're doing a solo, it's just fantastic."

To illustrate the point, Mick takes up his E₇-tuned John Mayer Stratocaster and plays the Eternity through the Marshall JTM45 this time, producing a smooth but punchy drive that is harmonically detailed and sweet as a nut.

"That's killer," comments Daniel. "Very natural compression, harmonic content... all of the things that you want from the Tube Screamer. But with just a little bit more love there, especially in the bottom end. And it stacks really well with other pedals, too."

While there are many versions of the Eternity to date, such as the Roadhouse, E6 and Burst, Daniel recommends the Kanji variant as a good starting point for those new to the series.

Tone Tip

If you've used a well-known drive pedal from a mainstream manufacturer for years and like its basic sound, but find yourself wanting a certain 'something' extra, do some research into boutique pedals that are inspired by the same design. You may well find that others have identified that pedal's weaker points and have designed pedals that offer a tweaked alternative, opening the door to total tonal satisfaction.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

PROVIDENCE RED ROCK OD-1 OVERDRIVE £216

Want a bit more bottom end from your TS? Need to fatten up spindly single-coils? Try the Red Rock, from Japanese maker Providence. The company says it's optimised to give extra body to the sound of single coils, but we've found it works great with humbuckers as well. It has elevated internal voltage for extra clarity, while the buffered boost circuit at the input helps you fine-tune the way the pedal interacts with your amp's preamp stage, making it easy to dial in chunky drive with any rig. Smooth and creamy, it'll yield Larry Carlton-style *Room 335* tones all day.

www.providence-ltd.com

EARTHQUAKER DEVICES PALISADES £229

It said it would never make one, but having caved in and released a Tube Screamer-inspired pedal in 2014, the quirky Ohio maker has pulled out all the stops with the Palisades, which offers several extra layers of tweakability over a stock TS, including a choice of several different voicings from classic 808-style drive to harmonically rich MOSFET and Schottky diode clipping for a fuzz-like tone. The bandwidth control, meanwhile, alters gain structure and EQ characteristics. The Palisades also has two channels – a lower-gain channel with a wider range of dirt and a higher-gain channel with a more focused range. Is it the most flexible TS-style pedal ever? Try it and decide for yourself.

<http://earthquakerdevices.com>



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Concept & Design:
B. H. Butler

BUTLER AUDIO TUBE DRIVER

It's the choice of legends from Floyd to ZZ Top, and it gets phenomenal punch from a single valve, as Daniel Steinhardt and Mick Taylor discover

David Gilmour, Eric Johnson, Billy Gibbons. No slouches, tone-wise, and all united in their use of the Butler Audio Tube Driver pedal, which stands alone among our selection here in having a single 12AX7 valve at the heart of its drive tone, a component more commonly found in the preamp of the average valve amp. The pedal is also unusual in having been engineered by BK Butler, who also designs high-end home and car stereos.

"It's a very well-known, very dynamic sounding overdrive pedal that reacts like the preamp of a valve amp," Daniel Steinhardt comments. "But it also has quite a tightly defined, even sharp, voice – which is why it helps with cutting through in solos, and which is why it appeals to players such as Eric Johnson."

Sounds

"Into the Marshall with the EQ flat, it sounds quite natural," Daniel observes, as Mick summons a tight, biting but sustaining lead tone from it that's balanced out nicely by the Marshall's ample bottom end. Activating a Klon in front of it adds a bit more compression and thickness, but, thanks to the Tube Driver's hard-edged voice, definition is retained. No matter which way the Tube Driver is used, however, it's clear it has considerably more teeth than most of the other pedals here, with that very valve-like ability to slice through where transistors might squash and soften tone.

The stock four-knob Tube Driver is handmade by BK Butler, who quotes a

build time of a few days and signs each unit. Some added flexibility is also possible with his modded version, which features a fifth control for variable bias – and BK Butler says this more complex version has been taken up by many of his best-known clients. The mod costs extra, but it does unlock a greater range of gain from the pedal's single valve. British users should also note that although a 220 to 240-volt version is available for no extra charge, all Tube Drivers are shipped with US plugs fitted, requiring an adaptor to be used.

Tone Tip

The Tube Driver is just one example of a drive pedal that works well in combination with other overdrives. So what's the best order to arrange your overdrive pedals in? Do high-gain pedals come first – or should it be the other way round? Many opt for the traditional highest-gain-first approach, but Daniel argues that: "I've tried it every way and I keep coming back to this: lower-gain pedals first, cascading up to the higher-gain pedals. Why? Well, if you take a really high-gain overdrive pedal and put a low-gain overdrive after it, you've got this huge amount of gain and nastiness with the first pedal, but that gets tamed down by the natural compression in the low-gain pedal. However, if I swap that around and take that little bit of clipping and warmth from the low-gain overdrive pedal and then I push it into the high-gain pedal, it embellishes and enlarges the harmonics and the compression that I've already got going with the low-gain pedal."

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

VOX STRAIGHT SIX OVERDRIVE £129

There aren't too many drive pedals that feature real valves inside, partly due to the problems of generating sufficient plate voltage in a stompbox for it to sound good. However, Vox's Tone Garage series is a notable exception. We like the company's dynamic, detailed Straight Six overdrive that houses a single 12AX7 valve and offers a bright voicing switch for cutting, Tube Driver-style lead tones. They can be snapped up for very decent street prices at the moment, too. It'll even work off six AA batteries!

www.voxamps.co.uk

BLACKSTAR HT-DRIVE £129

Blackstar blazed a trail with a range of valve-driven effects in slightly oversized enclosures, which operate at high internal voltages for maximum valve performance. With cascading gain stages, thanks to utilising both sides of the dual triode 12AX7 valve, the HT-Drive also sports a speaker-emulated output for convenient home studio use.

www.blackstaramps.com

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PRO CO RAT

Daniel Steinhardt and Mick Taylor enter the dark sewers of high-gain drive tone to confront the infamous RAT and find out how to make it squeal

Bratty, over-the-top, with a narrow sweet spot, the RAT is the wild child of the pedals we've assembled here. Designed by Pro Co's Scott Burnham, the RAT uses a duo of silicon diodes to bring the hurt, making it less sensitive to placement at the front the signal chain than the germanium diodes of the MXR Distortion+ that inspired it. Due to quirks in the resistor spec, the RAT has huge amounts of gain on tap, with the LM308N op-amp pushed into clipping itself when the pedal's gain control is dimed. That hasn't stopped subtle, intelligent players such as jazz giant John Scofield from favouring the RAT, which was originally made between 1979 to 1987. Part of its flexibility results from its powerful treble-tweaking EQ that lends it a more treble and mid-voiced character.

"It's a high-gain overdrive bordering on fuzz-y," Daniel Steinhardt explains. "But the pedal's filter control was new at the time. So let's switch between the OCD and the RAT and you'll hear what I mean with the filter control."

Sounds

"Immediately, you'll notice that the bottom end is not as full as the other ones," Daniel comments after a few moments of thrashy, trashy sonic assault through the Marshall JTM45. Switching to the AC30 reveals an even more aggressive, mid-led edge.

"That's why some people equate the RAT with being the 'Tube Screamer' of distortions," he adds. It has that really pronounced midrange and shelves off those bottom-end frequencies. When you want to

be heard and you don't want all that bottom end, the RAT is a great choice."

Mick adds that: "It partners better with a Marshall-type amp than it does with a Fender type amp, right?" Daniel agrees, reflecting once again the value of a balanced pairing of an amp with abundant, possibly overwhelming bottom end with a distortion pedal that cuts through and trims off a little low-end flab from your tone. Although both of our experts are keen to stress, as always, that there are no absolute rules – only preferences and choices.

Despite the relatively short production span of the original RAT, a later, revived production phase in the 90s has led to the current RAT 2 incarnation, with slightly different voicing due in part to the inclusion of an LED indicator to show when the pedal is switched on. The original version had no LED indicator light, like many 70s-era effects, a 'non-feature' that was repeated on the reissue-format 'Vintage RAT' for the sake of authenticity.

Tone Tip

Just as a Tube Screamer helps replace the mids that are weak in US-voiced amps, there's a role for pedals that gently shelve off certain frequencies that your amp might have too much of. Marshall amps, used with closed-back cabinets, have a lot of bottom end – and while that might feel empowering, it's not always necessary or useful to have a lot of pillowy bass in your sound. Distortion pedals that trim bass a little can be useful in making your tone more lean and penetrating – ultimately, mids are the guitarist's best friend.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

PRO CO DEUCETONE RAT £229

Is too much gain never enough for you? Time to try this two-RATS-in-one, twin-channel unit from Pro Co, which has some fairly out-there capabilities, including the option to cascade one RAT into another to create a veritable maelstrom of distortion. Featuring an all-analogue signal path, it'll also let you select between the Vintage and later Turbo RAT voicings, plus two newer guises: the Clean and Dirty RAT. You can chop and change how these voicings are used across the two channels, and the whole glorious mess is contained in a bomb-proof steel enclosure – making this the ultimate rodents' nest. In case all that isn't lurid enough, the graphics glow in the dark!

www.procosound.com

MOOER BLACK SECRET DISTORTION £42

Though geared more towards slavish imitation rather than sonic innovation, a small army of micro-enclosure Moorer pedals has found its way onto players' pedalboards in recent times. Moorer's closest equivalent to the RAT, the Black Secret, has a crisp treble edge, riding atop fountains of gushing gain. The pedal's two voicing modes (Vintage and the off-the-wall Turbo) and Filter EQ control leave little doubt as to whose homework Moorer has been peeking at in class. Still, it's small, solidly built for the price, and cheap as chips.

<http://mooeraudio.com>



BOSS DS-1 DISTORTION

Daniel Steinhardt and Mick Taylor get nasty with *the* original distortion pedal to find out why this familiar orange brick is still a benchmark tone-maker

The orange case of the Boss DS-1 is probably the most recognisable in all pedal-dom, thanks not only to the ubiquity of Boss compact pedals in the 1980s, but also because it was, and is, a favourite of some landmark hard-rock players, such as Steve Vai and Joe Satriani, who you might imagine would turn to more boutique offerings. However, the DS-1's combination of ample bottom end and aggressive mids have made it a classic match with high-gain heads and closed-back cabinets, to send jagged chunks of sonic masonry flying.

"Imagine – it's 1980 and there's some hair-metal tune on the radio and everywhere, there are guys in their bedrooms saying, 'How do I get that [shred] sound?'" Daniel Steinhardt says. "So Boss brought out the DS-1, which is a very angry-sounding distortion pedal."

The DS-1 was launched in 1978, and its characteristic hard-edged clipping is generated by a diode-based gain circuit. The op-amp fitted was originally a Toshiba TA136AP unit but this changed to Rohm, Mitsubishi and New Japan Radio alternatives in later production versions. Although its classic orange styling looks unchanged at first glance, there have been a few small revisions over the years, for example in the placement of the DS-1 model name relative to the word 'Distortion' emblazoned above it.

Sounds

Our experts start off with the AC30 and the '58 Les Paul reissue – the mid-rich Vox and Marshall being most suited to handling hard-rock distortion tones among our three test amplifiers. After a few joyful minutes of not-entirely-grown-up riffage, Mick

observes: "I've just got to say this: that's the best-sounding DS-1 I have ever heard!" Daniel concurs and adds: "This particular DS-1 belongs to Dave Gregory [formerly guitarist with XTC and now Tin Spirits] and he bought it in the 80s, and used it on most of the XTC stuff with pedals then. It's a corking-sounding distortion pedal."

"Every one I've heard since then sounds thinner," Mick muses, and Dan adds that the newer ones do seem to be voiced subtly differently. "The thing with the DS-1," Daniel says, "is that it has a lot of bottom end. Imagine again that you're that young kid and you plug this into your little amp at home and it sounds huge. But if you then plug it into something like the Marshall JTM45," he trails off... Loud, malevolent gain tones thick with pinched harmonic squeals follow. "It's a big, fat, angry sound," Daniel concludes and Mick agrees, adding: "If you were playing an 80s hair-metal guitar like an Ibanez or a Jackson or something like that, a lot of that midrange would be scooped out even more, especially if you had some crazy 'idiotbucker' in the bridge position," he jokes.

"It's very aggressive-sounding," Dan comments. "And that is with the distortion actually set quite low, but the level high."

Tone Tip

A lot of people are confused about the difference between overdrive and distortion and how to apply them. "The main difference is harmonic content," says Daniel Steinhardt. "If you look at an overdrive pedal, it produces a lot of even-order harmonics, and consequently sounds very warm and lovely. Distortion pedals, by contrast, give you even-order harmonics, but also some more 'odd-order' harmonics

in there as well and it just sounds angrier. The way that the top of the waveform is cut off, or 'clipped', is a lot sharper.

"It sounds a lot more aggressive. It's still the same concept, though, but just more and angrier."

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

BOSS DS-1X £109

If you like the DS-1, you should definitely give this next-generation update a try, as it's a really interesting proposition. The big new feature is its Multi-Dimensional Processing, which translates in real-world terms as a precise, ultra-detailed tone that seems to occupy a wider space in the stereo image. Crisper, hotter and more expansive-sounding than its older brother, trialled back-to-back, it makes the original DS-1 seem flat and lacking in sparkle, though its voice is very modern so it's not one for retro-heads, who may prefer Robert Keeley-modded versions of the original if they're craving more bottom end than stock units. <http://uk.boss.info>

FREE THE TONE HEAT BLASTER £345

A distortion pedal for people who don't like distortion pedals, the Heat Blaster uses a JRC072D op-amp here, in conjunction with red LEDs for the clipping (most pedals use diodes) that grant a little more headroom and less squidgy compression than found in many distortion pedals, cutting down on fizz and maximising texture and character. The useful low and high cut controls will also help you find an ideal balance with your amp. It's the polar opposite of the template set by the DS-1 in some ways, and some will prefer it for that very reason. www.freethetone.com



MARSHALL THE GUV'NOR

Big Jim Marshall left his mark on more than just an iconic series of amps. In its Guv'nor from the 90s, Marshall turned in a very cool distortion pedal

Though they stand in the long shadow of Marshall's towering stacks, the Milton Keynes company's drive effects are by no means poor relations, though many of its pedals took the voicing of its heavy-hitting amps as an inspiration. Many players who took up the guitar in the 1990s will undoubtedly feel a wave of misty-eyed nostalgia, then, as they gaze upon the no-frills black metal enclosure and distinctive wedge shape of the Guv'nor high-gain overdrive, which made its way to us here thanks to an extraordinary kind and prompt loaner from one of Daniel Steinhardt's regular customers.

Released along with the low-gain Blues Breaker and middleweight Drive Master in the early 90s, the Guv'nor was almost the hottest of the bunch (the aptly named Shred Master had even more beans) and was, in its way, quite progressive as a piece of 90s pedal design – and has since proven to be a major inspiration to latter-day effects makers.

"There are lots of really great distortion pedals that owe their existence to this thing," Daniel Steinhardt comments.

"I remember reading *Guitarist* back in the day and seeing ads for that pedal, and just wanting it so bad," Mick adds, speaking for lots of players out there.

Sounds

"The Guv'nor was a unique circuit," Daniel resumes. "Back in the day, this was Marshall broadening its horizons, and as well as quite a special circuit, it also has this three-band EQ instead of a single tone control, so the Guv'nor was something you could

dial in to suit pretty much any amplifier. So let's have a listen to it with the Les Paul into the Marshall JTM45." Predictably, Marshall into Marshall yields a tidal wave of commanding, bass-heavy drive, although the amp itself is set up to run quite clean.

"That is *fat*," Mick comments, admiringly. "It's huge, isn't it?" adds Daniel. Running it, next, into the AC30 trades a little low-end mumbo for smooth-but-searing lower mids. But the overall impression here is one of bottomless power and a smooth but well-defined voicing.

"Interestingly enough, the Guv'nor is a little bit softer than some distortions on the attack," Daniel says. "It's not harsh. But it works brilliantly into an amplifier that's quite open. Now, that pedal into an amplifier that's dimed, is a little bit too compressed. But with a lovely big clean sound on the amp, it's fantastic. Because it simulates natural amp compression – it's great. But although this is less aggressive than some of the pedals here, it still has all the high-gain range."

Tone Tip

The fact this pedal works so well with a clean base tone set up on the amp nods to an emerging trend in amp design: towards amps that are designed to provide plenty of headroom and act as a blank canvas for effects. Fender's uprated Mike Landau Hot Rod DeVille ML or Victory's V40 head are good examples of the trend – if you're a player that uses a lot of pedals and like the way that they gel together with the base tone of warm-but-powerful, open-sounding amps, then consider whether

your current amp has enough shunt to work in even partnership with effects such as the Guv'nor. Generally speaking, the lower the output, the more of the amp's own clipping and compression you'll hear when you push it with a drive pedal. If you want to hear the voice of the pedal with extra clarity and projection, however, try an amp that's voiced to support effects, and which has plenty of headroom.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

EMPRESS EFFECTS HEAVY £259

Like tweakable distortion? This Empress Effects unit does what it says on the tin, with gusto. It's a dual-channel design with oodles of gain on tap, plus a Guv'nor-like three-band EQ for sculpting the living rock of your high-gain tone. There's also a noise gate to keep unwanted noise to a minimum, while the pedal has a relatively small footprint on your 'board for a twin-channel design.

<http://empresseffects.com>

WAMPLER TRIPLE WRECK £239

American tones more your kind of thing? Take a look at Wampler's Triple Rec, whose name hints at the hard-edged US metal-amp lineage it was inspired by. Like the Empress Heavy, it has a three-band EQ to give definition to the abundant gain on tap and help you match it with the tone of your amp, vintage and modern voicings, and a boost switch to step up the aggression on demand.

<http://wamplerpedals.com>



FULLTONE OCD OVERDRIVE

Daniel Steinhardt and Mick Taylor get obsessive about what's arguably the most flexible and usable distortion pedal that there's ever been

Los Angeles-based effects maker Mike Fuller is very much a maverick genius of the effects world. When he's not racing vintage Ford Mustang sports cars, he's under the bonnet of a new effects pedal, tweaking, refining, innovating and generally sculpting great sounds. Though it's hard to pick a single 'winner' from among his many successful drive pedals – which are often lateral-thinking evolutions of classic designs – the pedal that you'll see owned (and cloned) the most is his excellent OCD. Somewhere between a hottish overdrive and an all-out distortion, some of the complex, chimed graduation into drive that's found in smaller British amps such as the Vox AC15 also forms part of its crisp but pliant tonal character.

"This is another distortion pedal that the internet blew up about, when it came out," Daniel says. "It's a fantastic-sounding thing. If you imagine when Boss was making the DS-1 they were making it to a price-point; by comparison, what Fulltone did was they simply started making their stuff with the best-quality components they could."

The OCD, Fuller says, was something he designed for himself that he reckoned would prove popular with other players, and so it has. A front-mounted switch allows users to either select the more transparent, boost-like drive tones of the pedal's Low Peak mode or top-tier, louder performance when High Peak mode is selected. The pedal's tone control, meanwhile, rolls off high end without affecting bass frequencies. Its excellent dynamics and detailed articulation also make it one of the most amp-like of drive pedals. "Let's compare the OCD to the DS-1 into the AC30," Daniel proposes. An excellent idea...

Sounds

A short but intense period of high-gain play follows, as Mick and Daniel evaluate the OCD's performance. "Again, the OCD is very 'angry' but there's more midrange in there than with the DS-1, it's more even," Daniel argues. Mick, meanwhile, wonders if the OCD has more midrange than the DS-1, or simply less bass. He takes up Daniel's Fender Custom Shop Telecaster to investigate the theory.

"I think a Strat's gonna sound too thin with any of these distortion pedals," he says. "I think we need to go with a DS-1 and the Tele bridge pickup into the Marshall first," he proposes, before launching into some exploratory riffing with that combination. Switching to the OCD directly afterwards for comparison reveals some more points of difference. Daniel notes the OCD is "definitely tighter in the bottom end, and also that midrange is more pronounced".

"Certainly with this guitar [the Tele], it brings more of the aggression that I would associate with a distortion pedal," Mick says. Daniel adds that the tone control range on the OCD is quite broad, "because most of the time, people are playing these with humbuckers. Those are more compressed than single coils, so Fulltone has made sure that there's an amount of tonal range in there so it still sounds nice and edgy used with a humbucker."

Tone Tip

Drive pedals that are designed to have amp-like performance form perhaps the most interesting and progressive class of drive effects available today. Although it must be said that the idea of making a solid-state effect that's designed to sound like a valve amp, when it's probably going to be

plugged into a valve amp anyway, is just a little strange. Wampler (see below), Tech21 and a host of coat-tailing clones have all found useful inspiration for little boxes in bigger ones, however. We'd stick our necks out and say that pedals that copy the bright, rich chime of Vox amps are often the most successful, offering the chance to add pep, lively upper mids and a bit of harmonic detail to duller amps.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

WAMPLER THIRTY SOMETHING £255

Wampler seems to have a great handle on getting amp-like performance from stompboxes and it's created a number of excellent pedals that take classic amps as their inspiration. The Thirty Something, also produced as the Ace Thirty, is intended to mimic the chiming British gain tones of the Vox AC15 and AC30 combos, with a Headroom switch to toggle between two styles of breakup inspired by those amps. Internal gain trim pots allow you to optimise it for either single-coil pickups or hotter humbuckers, without losing the chimed charm Wampler was shooting for.

<http://wamplerpedals.com>

TECH21 SANSAMP CHARACTER SERIES LIVERPOOL V2 £154

Eagles' legend Joe Walsh is a big fan of this SansAmp take on the Vox sound, enthusing in issue 356 of *Guitarist* that: "The key knob is Character, and when you move that, it'll go from a Vox Beatle sound to the other extreme, where it sounds like a Plexi. This is a secret I shouldn't be telling you, but it's the best pedal I've ever come across," he told us.

www.tech21nyc.com



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