It’s been a long hot summer, people, and not just here in Georgia. We’re still steady rollin’ at 96 degrees (it’s late July as we write) but by the time you read this it will be September. Cool breezes will begin to blow as we approach the autumnal equinox, leaves will turn from green to crimson and gold, and crisp Autumn nights will energize us like no other season of the year. It’s Boogie time, chillun’, time for you to add something new to your personal stash of inspiring gear...

Now, no one is entitled to tell you how to spend your money, but the bargain we have struck together is bound by our promise to help you spend your money wisely. We’re here to help you make good decisions that can result in exceptional outcomes, while avoiding the frustration that comes from randomly chasing that tone you hear in you head with mixed results.

Most of our long-time readers (thank you) are aware that we routinely put ourselves in the same position you would be in any time you buy a guitar, amplifier, effect, speakers or pick-ups, and when we think about the vast assortment of gear that has passed through our hands and into these pages since 1999, it truly has been an enlightening Quest. Along the way we have learned a lot about what we like and why, those rare things that seem exceptional and extraordinary, and those that seem to have been designed and created with no more inspiration than the desire to make something to sell at a profit. Understanding which companies have attained a consistent level of excellence is not always so easy. We’ve seen ‘custom’ products elevated to cult status almost overnight – particu-
larly among pickups and amplifiers – while comparable and even superior products made by larger companies are tossed off as mass-produced and inferior. One thing the Internet and web forums have provided is not only an immediate, often real-time exchange of information and ideas, but also the proliferation of misinformation, and the use of forums by some builders to create and promote a perfumed mystique around their products. The idea that you can actually communicate with the builder of the new Stairway to Heaven Overdrive or the Chain Gang PAF is understandably appealing to a lot of people, and it’s easy to forget that these guys aren’t posting simply to make the world sound better. They want to sell you stuff.

“Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect.” – Mark Twain

Is the Quest for tone an illusion? With so many paths to choose extending from within the musical equipment industry like a tangled knot of meandering tendrils twisting into the black unknown, how can anyone today be certain where they might lead? What kind of Quest is that? Well, that’s the point. You are supposed to be brave enough to accept and embrace that risk. On a personal level, the Quest for tone is very real indeed. Musicians – and not just guitar players – have been striving to make their instruments sound better for centuries, and they will continue to do so until the source of all music has been reduced to digital samples and modeling consoles. In the meantime, it seems to us that the greatest impediment in the Quest for tone may be the fear of failure. Yours? Yes, following the crowd does allow for a certain degree of illusory comfort, but too often, that’s all you’re gonna get. Really, gang, the trick to all of this is to simply choose your own path, just as all of your personal heroes in music have done. That’s what made them your heroes in the first place, and that’s exactly what we mean when we say, ‘Quest forth.’ Did we say, ‘Follow forth?’ No, we didn’t.

Mesa Boogie founder Randy Smith initially found his own path by stuffing a Fender Princeton cabinet with power, gain and riveting tones that instantly resonated with rock star guitarists, creating the kind of exposure and street cred that no amount of advertising could ever provide. Mesa’s tag line reads, “The Spirit of Art in Technology,” and during the past 40 years Randy Smith’s amplifiers have reflected his unique vision and talent for innovation that first began in a converted dog kennel for racing greyhounds in 1967. If he had been building amps strictly for the money, he would have done something else, because he wasn’t making a living building amps. From those modest beginnings the Boogie Mark I was created, which in turn created one of the most successful and respected companies in guitar and bass amplification. You should also know that while Randy Smith continues to personally design each new Mesa model, his company is run by a small and stable family of key employees that have been an essential part of the organization for decades. All companies acquire a personality over time that is usually a reflection of the people at the top, and we can tell you from personal experience that when you deal with Mesa, you are dealing with extremely competent, true music people that are extraordinarily hands-on, outgoing and proactive. We hadn’t spoken to Randy Smith in years, but when we arranged this interview we knew what we were getting – the same passionate, articulate inventor whose enthusiasm leaves you feeling more positive and hopeful for just having spent time with him. Listen, and enjoy…

TQR: A lot of time has passed since you first made such a huge splash with Boogie, Randy. The initial success of your company seems to have been the result of a collaborative adventure involving you, and your friends and clients at Prune Music. Can you describe that process, the artists involved, and how your early work evolved into the development of Mesa Boogie?

In one sense you’re right about Prune Music being “a collaborative adventure”, and that would be our famous back room where first I labored (fixing amps) joined by Larry Cragg repairing guitars. I was told years later by Larry Thomas, who was busy founding Guitar Center in San Francisco, that “there was no way we could keep up with you guys.” I looked at him like he was crazy. We were so barely hanging on that I was moonlighting two other jobs rebuilding Mercedes-Benz engines and jacking up old houses to pour new concrete foundations under them.

“Prune was the place where everyone cool hung out!” Yeah, I did have to give him that – as bales of the finest grass
were consumed back there by our friends and customers. Here’s a partial list of just some of the guys you’d recognize: Steve Miller, Tom Johnston, Carlos & Jorge Santana, Mike Bloomfield, Elvin Bishop, Eric Clapton (with Patty Boyd!), Lee Michaels (who later bought Prune just to preserve the back room) Barry Finerty, Terry Haggerty, Bill Champlin, Bob Weir, Jerry Garcia – and man, the list goes on. I’m probably forgetting more than I’m remembering, and that’s not counting all the locals. Even saw Jimi drive by in a pink Caddy convertible, though I never got to do that hang. But I found it too difficult to get much done with all the “distractions,” so that’s when I cleaned up that old dog kennel under the redwood trees and made it my shop, out in Lagunitas.

But yeah, with exposure like that, I couldn’t help but hear the same things over and over – “My Twin is too loud and clean for small places, and my Princeton (or Deluxe) sounds great but it’s too small for bigger rooms.” Santana, of course, with, “Man, last night I couldn’t get any sustain. I felt like my dick was falling off!”

It was the guys from Country Joe and the Fish who encouraged me to play a trick on Barry Melton by doing whatever I could to make his little Princeton blow his mind. So, (you know the story) I built a hot 4x10 Tweed Bassman type circuit with big transformers in that little chassis and managed to just squeeze a JBL D-120 speaker inside. Carlos was hanging around and I asked him to try it out. I had to talk him into it because it looked outwardly totally stock. When he finally plugged in, the Muse struck and he wailed so hard people were backed up on the sidewalk outside. OK, so we were next to the Brothers Bar and across the street from the Two AM Club later of Huey Lewis & the News fame. In fact, those guys used to come into the store as little kids dripping ice cream cones while going for our Gold Top Les Pauls! We’d yell at them to eat outside first.

The big breakthrough came via Lee Michaels, a visionary dreamer and all-around cool cat (better known on B-3 than guitar). Working on a wacky project for him is where I came up with high-gain and multiple level controls, in order to drive his Crown DC-300 monster power amps. Turned down, it got the biggest juiciest Fender clean sound ever heard. Turn up the two cascading Gain controls (even with the Level down) it produced crunch and lead sounds beyond anything yet heard! I instantly thought of Carlos again and built up that circuit with four 6L6’s in a little snakeskin 1x12. It sure helped launch him with Bill Graham who said, “There’s lots of great guitar players in the Bay Area, but there’s one guy with a unique sound – Carlos.” Didn’t hurt that Bill was also a great salsa fan. So… the Santana band came under Bill Graham management and was able to play regularly at Winterland and open for the huge Brit bands when they came to town. The rest is history.

**TQR:** You have had the opportunity to watch the guitar amplification industry evolve and grow as guitarists’ tastes have evolved and changed through the past four decades... We also have a thriving community of small custom or ‘boutique’ builders today... From your perspective, what are the most significant changes and unanticipated surprises that have occurred in your business since the early ‘70s?

If we had never sold those guitars, we’d be way rich. Strats were $175 asking price. “But would you take $150 cash?” That guitar is yours. I’m talking about ‘60s guitars. We only thought the ‘50s ones were cool and valuable – like $200. Same with Les Pauls. Gold Top? $300. Sunburst: $350. One of the problems was that many items were sold as a combination of cash and dope... which makes it harder to pay the rent, even when you remember to!

OK, so MESA Engineering was the name I used to buy engine parts from Mercedes and ready-mix trucks full of concrete. “Boogie” wouldn’t have sounded right and it’s what Carlos said after playing the boosted Princeton, “Shit man! That little thing really Boogies!”
builder. But I didn’t think that way at all. I was just trying to eke out a living doing something I loved and not fall prey to the many distractions and detours I saw us make at Prune. To get on the list for a Boogie, you had to pay a deposit ($150) in advance. You selected from a menu of options to create your own amp, but the Hun-Re-Graph JBL (or Altec) became most ordered. Around four weeks before we’d build your amp, you needed to pay in full. I always paid all my bills instantly to avoid the cash-crash that plagued Prune. You were welcome to call us – but only on Wednesdays. (I’d forgotten about that one.)

This was so we could concentrate on building amps the rest of the time. Various portions were “jobbed out” to friends and relatives who were paid per piece for assembling things like footswitch boxes, shielded cables and so on. It all came together in my basement (I’d expanded from the Dog House by then) and I turned it into a functioning amp exactly as ordered, including many exotic solid hardwood cabinets with our trademark wicker cane grille. That look is something I first came up with for Lee Michaels when he was living in Hawaii. Then Neil Young got the next four.

But in the very beginning, I did everything from punching the chassis, building the cabinets, silk-screening the nameplates and fabricating the circuit boards. All Boogies, except those built on Fender chassis, used printed circuit boards. Still do, though today our double-sided, plated-through, gold alloy boards are way better. Also, after forty years of practice, my artistry at designing boards has improved too and become a full-fledged obsession. That’s the part that takes 90% of the time, the year more-or-less I need to create a new amp.

Surprises? Sure. The success of the Dual Rectifier was the biggest surprise by far. We had launched our Stylist Series (so nick-named) to hit all the high points of music and amp genres, one at a time. First was the Maverick, followed by the Blue Angel. These were more traditional lower gain amps. The Blue Angel didn’t even have a master. Certain people loved them, and still do. But when the Rectifier came out next, it immediately began to wildly outsell everything else and did so for more than 15 years.

It’s funny how some “older” players who you’d think would know us better, refer to us as that “heavy metal” amp company. Sorry fellas, is it our fault that that one was the landslide hit? What were we supposed to do, not build them because it undermined our reputation with the traditionalists? Reminds me of the jazz purists who, if they achieve any significant popularity, are thought to lose their cred as true jazzers!

See, that’s what’s eternally interesting about what I get to do. It’s the amp (by and large) that determines the musical style and even makes it possible in the first place. And it all goes back to the roots: Amplifier distortion became an intrinsic element of musical expression all the way back to the blues roots. All of us around Prune (and my first band Martha’s Laundry) were blues-based. Funny side note – our lead guitarist Lizard Slim, went out and bought a brand-new 100 watt full Marshall stack after seeing Clapton with his at Winterland around 1967. That caused us some grief by obliterating the volume balance of our instruments. “But I can’t get my tone without turning up!” So there’s that problem again. And the solution came years later with the Mark I, which separated gain from loudness and let the player adjust each one individually.

I thought that was “Problem Solved!” until (almost right away) “But… why can’t you make it footswitch back and forth between clean and lead.” That was the achievement of the Mark II and it’s ground breaking patent 4,211,893.

So, here we are today. You ask which model is my favorite and the answer is always the same: “The one I’m working on now.” (Which happens to be a pair of KT-88 powered bass amps: the 400 watt Strategy and its littler brother, the Prodigy, at 200 watts, and smaller than the TransAtlantic head.) I put everything I’ve got into each product and each one teaches me more to build upon. The Mark Five would have to rate up there because it’s the culmination of the entire Mark history, starting with the Fenders I boosted. All the landmark circuits are there in what is really a single-channel amp repeated three times. But I gotta tell you, I love all my children!

_TQR:_ Let’s talk about the amps we have here for review - the TransAtlantic TA-30. The name implies an -continued-
amplifier that bridges two very distinct, classic musical styles and sounds... What inspired the TA-30, what did you wish to accomplish specifically with this model, and how is it unique among your products past and present?

I’m especially fond of the TransAtlantics (TA-15 and TA-30) as much for their packaging as for their performance. I remember bringing my first TA-15 chassis drawings to Doug and Jim who said it needed a more vintage look. They were absolutely right and the next day I showed them a completely different sketch that became our now patented retro-hip looking sheet metal, shared by the larger TA-30. My mind’s eye was channeling a ’39 Ford grille plus a ‘Forties International pick-up front end, mixed with a World War II Army Radio Corps unit. Or something…

The TransAtlantics, as you point out, are dual-identity amplifiers, British and American. Even though Prune was a Fender shop, I remember the one or two AC-30’s that came in for work. I was reminded of the pleasures and nightmares of working on British sports cars of that era: some things are brilliant, others are so bogus they shouldn’t have been allowed to live! Such is the chassis design of the AC-30. The circuitry itself is the pinnacle of economic genius – so much tone from about $15 dollars worth of parts. Meanwhile, the expensive double chassis boxes, mounted at right angles served no purpose other than to make accessing the tubes nearly impossible while adding substantially to the weight. I vowed to overcome these problems as well as make both head and combo chassis rack-mountable, as well as light weight and accessible.

That along with the all-American tweed-based, neo-classical adaptation of the 4x10 Bassman, my original favorite. Then of course, it was fairly easy to add a pair of high-gain voicings that pay tribute to both Boogies and old Marshalls. Adding Reverb and Effects Loop, both with true-bypass for each channel was more difficult because the American channel uses substantial negative feedback in the power section while the Vox channel does not. That meant that the signal levels and sensitivity had to be compensated for differently to provide seamless operation between the channels.

But that chimey Vox sound is a classic and I wanted to offer a great version (or two) of that.

Think about how the different Vox, Fender, Marshall and Boogie voicings inspire different musical expressions. The goal with the TransAtlantics (and all our amps) is to integrate uncompromised renditions of those circuits into one versatile instrument. We’ve heard more and more players compare their favorite single-channel amps to the TA-30 and come away surprised, especially when so much is available from just one amplifier, even to the point of retiring their favorite old AC-30. Best of all, time has shown that we’ve delivered vastly improved reliability over new and old Voxes. The only complaint we hear is that guys love both the Tweed and HI-1 voicings on channel two and wish there was a way to footswitch between them—but that would require adding a third channel.

TOR: Once you have a prototype built, describe the process in which you evaluate the sound, features and design involving artists and internal staff prior to finalizing the design for full production.

For the design and prototype process we take advice from all comers. Sure there’s an incredible depth of talent right at the shop (just look at our new Express demo video) but we also pay lots of attention to the likes and wishes of our customers who are loyal and dedicated tone freaks. Usually when a product is getting close to going into production, we’ll get an idea for an improvement that requires going way back to step two or three and adds weeks or months to development. This may happen two or three times during the process as exploration reveals new and better
possibilities. But that’s OK because we’re aiming to create instruments that become long-living classics and fortunately we don’t work to any schedule. When we can’t make it any better, it’s ready, not before.

See, I’m a designer, artist, and visionary gear-head junkie. That’s what I do. The creative process is my life. So why would I want to rush a design or compromise it if I discover a better way? We don’t have investors, “Directors” or bank loans to pressure us, and my vision from day one has just been to do the right thing and hopefully success will follow, with enough money to keep doing it. And it’s worked.

Too often the emphasis today is just the reverse. Making money is the goal and people (and companies) are in a hurry to grow too big too fast… to strike it rich and pawn it off (or “go public”) before reality hits and it collapses into a pile of debt, worry and wreckage. I saw this first hand when CBS bought Fender from Leo and proceeded to screw it up. Though I was just getting started as a repairman, it hurt to watch CBS’s greed and arrogance pollute the genius of his work. I vowed never to let that happen, if, by some great good fortune, it was ever my decision to make.

And to find that forty-some years later, I actually am in such a position is nothing less than amazing. It gives us confidence to adhere to that basic vision and reminds us to give thanks every day for being able to return the trust given us by thousands of musicians around the world. My Daddy used to tell me a musical instrument is a special thing and deserves special respect… because its soul lets you express yours. And of course the old man was right.

The first sentence in the TransAtlantic manual begins with: “While the TA-30 control layout is rather sparse (for a MESA)… We had to laugh when we first read this, because at first glance the control panel for the TA-30 looked anything but sparse to us. Ten minutes later, however, we had fully digested all of the functional features of the dual-channel TA-30 without having read the owner’s manual. Of course we did read most of the manual and we suggest you do the same, but we always like to start out in ‘dumb’ mode first just to see how one might approach an amp without the benefit of the manual being present. While you can fully utilize the TA-30 without it, we suggest beginning by plugging in the footswitch and supplied stage-length cable that enables you to switch between the two channels. Turn the amp and standby on, and the head chassis is illuminated in cool blue light.

Channel 1 controls begin left-to-right with Volume, Treble, Bass, Reverb and Cut/Master. The Cut control works in a similar fashion as the original Vox cut control, rolling off high frequencies as the knob is turned clockwise. Pull the Cut/Master knob out and it functions as a master volume for Channel 1 with a pre-set Cut level at 11 o’clock.

Channel 1 can be run in two Modes: Normal and Top Boost. At moderate volume levels the Normal mode produces a very rich, cleaner Vox tone with lots of classic chime, full midrange and depth. In fact, it sounds much like a well-tuned vintage AC-30 ‘Normal’ model minus the noise, old amp sag, and musty, burning metal smell of red-hot tubes, Rothmans and old Bitter. Switch the toggle to Top Boost and that’s what you get – a more focused classic overdriven tone with brilliant treble, sustain and rich harmonic overtones. Gain and sustain are managed by mixing the Volume and Master Volume settings. We preferred to run the TA-30 in Channel 1 with the Volume control alone, where it spills over into thick overdriven tones at around 2-3 o’clock, sounding and behaving quite like a classic AC-30. Unlike our experience with vintage AC-30s, however, the TA-30 also seems to mate equally well with both our single coil and humbucking guitars in both modes. The woolly tones in a ‘Normal’ vintage AC-30 always seemed better suited for single coils unless you enlisted the help of a treble boost. If you’re fond of the vibe of an AC-15 and an AC-30, you get both in Channel 1, with a good range of almost clean, dirty and fairly filthy overdriven tones at many different volume levels.

Channel 2 controls include Gain/Boost, Treble, Bass, Reverb,
Master Volume, and 3 modes: Tweed is cleaner, clear, full and airy at low volume levels and it develops a rich, natural distortion with the Volume set above 2 o’clock. HI 1 delivers a more ripping, hard rockin’ Marshall attitude with moderate to intense levels of gain and distortion. HI 2 renders a big and blustery classic Boogie overdriven voice, warmer and rounder with more of a classic ‘American’ flavor. And for those who enjoy using a guitar as a sonic arc welder, the pull Gain/Boost knob in Channel 2 can be lit in all three modes to unleash the Boogie afterburner effect (our term, not theirs) – a scorched-earth level of gain that we have rarely experienced in any other amplifier (other than a Boogie) without the assistance of germanium transistors in a fuzz pedal.

Both channels can be operated at 15 and 30 watts/Class A and 40 watts/Class A/B via two Multi-Watt toggle switches, and we found all three settings to be equal in feel, clarity and dynamic response. In other words, your high power TA-30 doesn’t sound neutered at lower power settings. At 15 watts it simply sounds like a great 15 watt amp, not an electronic imitation of one. Additional controls include a channel switch for use without the footswitch, and reverb and FX bypass toggles for each channel. The supplied footswitch is used to switch between channels, and to toggle the SEND and RETURN FX jacks on and off. Back panel features include FX Send/Return jacks, two 4 ohm and a single 8 ohm speaker jack, and a Reverb Bypass jack that can be used to toggle the reverb effect in and out with an optional footswitch and standard instrument cable.

The on-board reverb is a lush tube-driven, analog spring design with a big pan that sounds very fine and deep with plenty of room to manage reverb intensity without committing to full surf mode too quickly. The head also ships with a very well-made, heavy duty padded carry case with storage compartments.

We received both the head with 1x12 23” cabinet and the 2x12 combo versions of the TransAtlantic. Sales Manager Steve Mueller urged us to experience both, and we now understand why. Visually, the 2x12 combo offers a more familiar, traditional appearance with a top-mounted control panel and identical layout of the head version. Of course the 2x12 combo loaded with 90 watt Celestion Black Shadow speakers is a little heavier at 59 pounds – still far less than an AC-30, and you also get the benefit of moving more air with the power and presence of a bigger rig. The TransAtlantic head weighs a mere 20 pounds, and it can be matched with a 1x10 cab, your choice between a ‘19’ or taller and wider ‘23’ 1x12 TransAtlantic cabinet, or a 2x12. We really like the portability of the head with a variety of optional cabinet configurations, and as we said, the illuminated blue chassis is just too cool.

Personally, we would rarely make use of the most extreme levels of gain and distortion available via the Channel 2 Pull/Boost, but that’s just us. We aren’t channeling James Hetfield, but if you wanted to, you almost could, and to be honest, if we could, we would.

The Channel 1 Normal and Top Boost modes and Channel 2 Tweed, H1 and H2 modes offer eminently usable voices, dynamic attitudes and tones ranging from British and chimey with just the right amount of subtle breakup, to variable levels of thick distortion and gain that will serve road warriors and home demolition specialists equally well. Don’t expect pristine clean tones at loud stage levels, but each mode combined with different tone control settings and guitars provides a wide range of subtle nuances that alter the personality, dynamic response and expressive character of the amplifier. Our only regret is that midrange controls couldn’t have been squeezed into the TA-30 chassis, especially in Top Boost mode, although in some respects the Cut control makes up for it. For us, the truly brilliant feature of the TransAtlantic design is Randy Smith’s understanding that three levels of power and volume deliver the practical value of a Jeep with the performance appeal of a Ferrari. Viewed with the hood up, the four-EL-84 TransAtlantic appears to be technically sophisticated and moderately complex, but it sounds like a straightforward analog tube amp designed with a remarkably broad range of operating parameters. Oh, and we also found both amps to be dead quiet at all settings.

If the feel, attitude and personality of the classic Vox sound appeals to you, the TransAtlantic TA-30 delivers all that and more, along with what we consider to be the classic Mesa Boogie sound and performance.

Choose among the compact TA-15 or TA-30 head, combo models, rackmount, and for those about to launch a major launch...
arena tour, the Royal Atlantic RA-100 head or 2x12 combo. Online prices as reviewed, TA-30 head: $1599.00, 1x12 23” cabinet: $419.00, TA-30 2x12 combo: $1749.00. See web site for options and details.

www.mesaboogie.com, 707-778-6565

I’ve only had one amp that scared the shit out of me. It was a Boogie, and a rare one at that. Don’s Music and Pawn in Jacksonville, Florida – in an obligatory seedy as hell neighborhood – was where I found a lot of fine gear over the years. There was the battered blonde Telecaster that had been used as an attempted murder weapon and actually brought into court as evidence (wife beats cheating hubby), the J-200 and the vintage steel resonator that are still here today, and the 100 watt Boogie Mark II C+ head that is certainly forever infamous at the World of Golf Village in J’ville.

Cranking away at Don’s, I had no clue the knobs even pulled out, but could tell it was a bastard of an amazing amp. $400 got it home, including a carpeted 2x12 ADA cab. A call to Boogie and lo and behold, the amp was some kind of rare beast a lot of guys were looking for. The power cord had a plus sign below it in black magic marker and the chassis was hand-signed by ‘Mike B,’ and others. Boogie gave me the crash course and snail mailed a manual free of charge, as well as telling me, “Have fun, that is one hell of an amp.” What ever happened to customer service like that?

Over the years, I’ve realized that some things are simply meant to be, as cliché as that may sound. There have been magic single fin surfboards that flew across emerald South American waves, books that altered my thoughts, special women, Dickel whiskey, fly rods, and yes, guitars and amps that I can’t imagine not having ever been schooled by. The Boogie was like nothing else, thanks to this bizarre and absolutely in-cinerating gain stage that when given the full throttle, would set you off wanking away on leads for days on end. I’ll admit that when I acquired the amp, I was still pretty damn pubescent and had no clue that fewer notes meant more. Practice to me meant playing 45 minute versions of “Voodoo Chile” until the police knocked.

The Boogie and I soon became fast friends, more lust than romance. Around that time Van Halen’s Eruption was out, and the Mark II allowed me to create my own misguided southern rock version the band subtly dubbed, ERECTION. Unfortunately, the amp was seemingly closer to a thousand watts than a hundred, so thanks again to more police visits, our jackass bass player renamed the tune, “Cunnilingus Interruptus.”

I took the Boogie to a gig I was hired into at the World of Golf Village that same fall. The other hired musicians all looked like the Isley Brothers, and were far more talented players. The owner had asked me to play a massive solo to start the show while the other guys danced their way to the stage. “Do some sort of obnoxious Jimi Hendrix thing, kid. I want it loud, get this show started right.” You don’t have to ask me twice. There was a soundboard but no soundman, so I slid my forearm up it and moved all the faders to full bore. The lights dimmed, 20 foot tall video screens on both sides of the stage went live as I dimed the Boogie and proceeded to DOSE the place. By the time the other guys danced to the stage, I realized that the first 20 feet of folding chairs in front of the stage had been knocked over and vacated as the patrons ran for their lives to escape the raucous thunder unleashed from the Boogie. We were shut down after three songs, paid in full, and it was the first and last time I have ever been anywhere near a golf course other than to rip some bass out of the ponds. No, fish, you dumbasses.

The Boogie, the ‘59 GA-40, and the vintage Roger...
Mayer Octavia have taught me more about distortion than everything else I’ve touched in the past 30 years combined. While the GA-40 is a sweet and big-legged brown sugar ride of greasy perfection, the Octavia is like the space shuttle taking off in your living room, and the Mark II C+ Boogie was more akin to being super glued to a SCUD missile, in my unsavory hands, anyway. They are all unstoppable forces of nature. I definitely miss that amp, but we had the fling we were meant to and I’m a better fool for it. Regret? Naw. I’ve learned not to sweat the petty stuff in life, but always pet the sweaty stuff.

—Riverhorse

While we’re poised to offer you a review of the Collings SoCo16LC, our motives run deeper than writing just another guitar review… In fact, we are harboring an agenda based on the requests we receive for recommending various types of guitars. We always appreciate being asked, and we consider your questions with the same care we would exercise before spending our own money on a guitar. Yet, we are often left wondering if some guitarists truly appreciate the variable nature of wood used to build guitars, and how specific builders seek to control those variables to insure a consistent outcome in the tone of their instruments. The truth is, some companies invest careful thought and a lot of valuable time and resources in developing rigid specifications for their designs and the materials they use to build guitars, while others operate as a high-production factory with a wider range of variation in the instruments they produce. Of all the builders we know, Bill Collings has always impressed us as someone who enjoys questioning even his own assumptions in designing and building guitars, and because he is an experienced design engineer and tool-maker, he also possesses the skill and knowledge to build whatever tooling he needs to achieve his goals. Sure, the business model for the company is to sell guitars, but Collings seems to be motivated and inspired by the challenge of creating and building instruments at the highest level with a clearly consistent, repeatable and superior outcome. We call that art.

The SoCo16LC is now the second Collings semi-hollowbody constructed with maple plywood reviewed in these pages.

**REVIEW**

**Collings SoCo16**

**TQR:** We constantly run across the persistent impression among guitarists that ‘lighter is always better.’

Absolutely not. The more scooped it might be, the hotter it might be in some spots, but it will have less middle and less of the fundamental that can make it a truly great guitar.

**TQR:** What inspired you to build plywood guitars?

I thought about it for a long time, and when we started out building the (carved) I35 we loved it and we heard the different range of tones you could get from the variations in the type of wood we use. We wanted to nail the tone of a 335 style guitar, but we heard more variation in tone produced by the wood, and I wanted to see if we could build a guitar without worrying about the variation in tone from different batches of wood and do so reliably (but with a lot more labor). What we found when we made guitars with maple laminate was that we could control the tone better. It produced a certain compression to the notes, and the laminate acts as kind of a filter for the pickup that produces a more even tone without so much extraneous highs and lows.

**TQR:** Let’s talk about the center block. We suspect it contributes to the variation in weight among 335s a great deal, and the variation is extreme – from 7.5 to 10 pounds or more.

It’s the main part of the guitar, the thing that holds it all together. You can hear more changes testing blocks than you do changing the plies in the laminate.
nate. I have an Epiphone Casino here that weighs 11 pounds. It’s amazing how much wood like maple and mahogany can vary in weight.

TQR: So I assume you weigh the maple you use for blocks as well…

You have to, and there will be some variation but we don’t allow that much. I strummed David Grissom’s ‘59 ES335 just one time and I thought, “Oh, my god. What is going on here?” It had a sound like ripping cardboard, and the tone was just falling apart. That day I thought that the wood might have been a maple and poplar combination, but that guitar is all maple. Over time, with that block, the sound is just coming alive. You strum it and it’s just falling apart – it’s vibrating where it shouldn’t, if that makes sense. If you use something like basswood in the middle ply, you’re not going to hear it falling apart as much as you would if it’s crisper wood. Basswood is a really soft and dull wood. We want that wood to be working, not absorbing vibration. We’re trying to produce tone, because the wood we use is a filter, but by the same token you don’t want to filter the filter with something that’s too soft. We did a lot of experimenting and what becomes a bigger issue is what’s in the middle ply – the outer plies just go along for the ride. We can run a range of different wood through there in making the laminate and you would not believe the difference in those guitars. We would try this, try that, weigh this, weigh that, and we eventually found what we liked acoustically (3-ply maple), and it sounds like David’s guitar. You play it just right and it sounds loose – it’s new, but it sounds loose, and it’s audibly giving up more than you’d expect. It doesn’t sound stiff, muted or ‘new.’

TQR: And were you set up internally to make your own tooling and gear up for producing your own laminate?

We make everything here. We have to, because we wanted to make it look like we cared a little bit more. We didn’t want to jam it together with the glue and presses. The guitar is loosely put together, really well-glued, but not being forced or jammed into shape. Any production plywood guitar that is jammed into shape rather than molded into the shape isn’t going to give you the same tone and you’re not going to get the same kind of vibration. We had a lot of fun working on getting the laminate together and it was a great learning experience. As I said before, you’re not a woodworker unless you can make something out of plywood.

Review

Our first impression of the SoCo 16LC nestled in its plush case was that of a classic archetype, perhaps a NOS one-off from the late ‘50s or early ‘60s that never made its way into production. The SoCo16 is a big-bodied guitar with the flowing, artful lines of a classic design with perhaps a little Gretsch influence present minus the glitz and gadgets. Simple, yet refined, it’s easy to imagine the SoCo16 being played in a jazz ensemble, country outfit, blues, rock, alternative or mega-church gospel group. A serious guitar that elegantly avoids succumbing to any stereotypes from the past, the Collings is a modern classic.

If you know Collings guitars – acoustics or electrics – then you know that the build quality is almost pervasively flawless, as if perfection has been taken to an extreme that is hard to fully comprehend or imagine. The dark sunburst finish on our review guitar, for example, is unique to Collings – a deep transparent caramel amber burst turning to a dark ruby/brown over a figured arched maple top with wide, tastefully subtle, cloud-like flame. The burst contrasts perfectly with the dark mahogany finish on the identically figured arched back, sides and the mahogany neck. Measuring 1 5/8” deep, the 7.8 pound SoCo is precisely balanced, comfortable and reassuring. The rounded C-shape 24 7/8” scale neck is, like all Collings neck shapes, perfect, neither clubby or thin, with just the right amount of depth and shoulder. Perfect, as are the dark 12” radius Indian rosewood fingerboard and medium-jumbo frets. The SoCo 16 is also equipped with precise Collings closed-back tuners, ebony peghead veneer, TonePros bridge and stop tailpiece, and Lollar Imperial humbuckers.

Tone

While fully hollowbody guitars typically sound much warmer than solidbodies, the semi-hollow thinline design with maple centerblock produces a bright and snappy tone that is unique to these instruments, and the Collings is no exception.

-continued-
Of course we are intimately familiar with the Lollar Imperials – we named them. The Lollar 7.58K neck pickup in the SoCo16 is warm, animated and lively with a clear tone that works equally well played clean where the acoustic qualities of the guitar can best be appreciated, or through a cranked amp for overdriven blues and rock tones. Wound strings respond with a throaty baritone and no mush, and the treble tones are clear and vocal. The 8.43K bridge pickup is bold and bright, chimey and jangly for clean rhythms, strident and penetrating turned up for rockin’ blues solos that can cut through the mix. The Lollar Imperials are solid, well-balanced humbuckers with excellent clarity, moderate output and trademark Lollar fidelity. Because they aren’t overwound, they also work particularly well with overdrive pedals and overdriven amplifiers. Winders that wind pickups intended to light up your amp (Burstbuckers) lack the clarity, smooth tone and depth of the Imperials.

The SoCo16 produces the enhanced natural, singing sustain of a classic 335, but the overall tone seems more open and loose rather than sharply focused and compressed. We never really embraced Gibson’s carved back ‘semi-hollowbody’ guitars like the ES-336 because they didn’t sound like a semi-hollow body guitar at all. Nor do we like chambered solidbodies like the Gibson Cloud Nine Les Pauls… You may get off on the idea of a chambered 7-pound Les Paul, just understand that the low end and mids were left in a pile of sawdust on the factory floor. The SoCo (stands for Austin’s South Congress Street by the way) is no such hybrid, but a straightforward, big-bodied thinline constructed with Collings’ own maple/maple/maple plywood, and there is magic in it. It plays effortlessly with absolutely no fight, ringing, chiming, singing, howling, and sustaining according to your intentions and the feeling and emotion you put into it. That’s it. Nothing more need be said but this… Quest forth.

www.collingsguitars.com, 512-288-7776

These days you can spend $200 or $7,000 on a contemporary Stratocaster. We avoid solely referencing ‘Fender’ here specifically because some of the most expensive ‘custom’ Stratocasters are built by independent guys who have crafted a reputation for including all the essential features you won’t get anywhere else, or so the story goes… You know – magic wood, magic tools, magic hands working the magic tools, magic neck carve, magic pickups and electronics and magical tone all contrive to transform $900 of parts, paint and labor into a collector’s dream… Well perhaps, but we’ll never know because we will never seriously review a ‘custom’ Stratocaster priced over five grand, regardless of who built it. We admire and respect custom guitar builders… we just ain’t paying five grand or more for a bolt-on anything. You’re on your own with those, but one thing is certain… If you spend that much on a Stratocaster you will be absolutely convinced that your guitar, at the exclusion of all others, was worth every penny. How do we know that? Because to feel otherwise would leave you with only one other option involving an exhaust pipe, a garden hose and a garage. When it comes to Stratocasters, we have often been more intrigued with the notion of exploring how much guitar we can buy for less, while completely avoiding undesirable compromises.

Now, if you were to have asked us to recommend a ‘budget’ Stratocaster in 2000, our first suggestion would have been the Japanese reissue Strats spanning the late ’80s, ’90s and beyond. They are still being made today, and while these guitars offer a very solid foundation, the electronics in the older models need to be replaced, and for us at least, the ‘vintage’ frets have to go. By the time you’ve done all that you could have bought a used USA Strat, right? The true bargains in Fenderland today can be found in Ensenada, Mexico, and since our first review of two Robert Cray Signature Stratocasters in March 2005, we’ve been telling anyone who will listen about these extraordinary guitars. And now we’re telling you again. Why? Have we run so low on creativity that we can’t come up with something fresh, new and different? Has the quest for tone hit a dead end? No, and no. You’re getting another dose of the Cray Signature Strat because, a) you probably don’t remember the first review from March ’05, and b) in -continued-
our opinion it remains one of the best Stratocasters made by Fender anywhere, at any price. We’ll explain soon enough. The fact that it’s ridiculously inexpensive is a bonus, but don’t let that deter you.

Do you recall our March 2006 interview with Robert Cray? He had just released a new CD and we arranged to speak with him through his PR agency on a day when we were scheduled to do multiple ‘media’ phone interviews to promote his new recording. Normally these perfunctory 15-minute interviews are held with radio stations and newspaper weekend feature writers, focusing on the product being promoted and the tour supporting it, which is what Mr. Cray surely anticipated when he called us at the appointed time. We had other ideas, and as soon as we explained where we wanted to go, Cray paused in silence, collected himself, and decided to be the professional that he is despite our having completely swerved off the reservation. He also dropped a huge tip for aspiring tonefreaks that we’ll bet you completely overlooked. That’s OK, this time we’ve made sure you get the message…

TQR: You have created one of the most readily recognizable and distinctive, signature guitar tones in the history of electric blues. Where did your journey begin?

The first guitar that I owned was a Harmony solidbody with one DeArmond pickup on it, and I went from there to an SG Standard. Back in those days I wanted to get Eric Clapton’s sound from the Cream records, and I kept that guitar for a long time. Then I switched to an ES345 because by that time I was into the B.B. King thing, and I kept that for a while – even after I got my first Fender, which was in 1979. I went to a show and saw Phil Guy, Buddy’s brother, and he was playing a Stratocaster through a Super Reverb. I don’t know what it was, but he had the right amount of reverb on it and he just had the coolest sound that I had ever heard live, and that was when I decided that I had to get a Stratocaster. I was living in Eugene, Oregon at the time and fortunately for me, there was a guy who was leaving town who had a 1964 Inca Silver Stratocaster and a Pignose amp. He sold them to me for $700.

TQR: What kinds of amplifiers were you playing?

I had an Ampeg Gemini I with one 12 and later I got a Fender Deluxe Reverb. I stayed with Super Reverbs for quite a while, and I was approached by the people from Matchless in the early ‘90s when we were doing a show at the Hollywood Bowl with Bonnie Raitt. They brought a Clubman 35 head back there for a little demonstration and I just flipped (laughing). Fortunately, I could afford the amp, so I got two of them and I just thought they were the coolest thing. I also like to experiment in the studio with different power tubes in the amps. I’m also using a Fender Vibroverb with the two Matchless amps and we will switch between them depending on the song I’m playing. On this last record I used the Matchless amps on some things, the VibroKing on others, and I also used a Magnatone 260 and a Fender Deluxe. We used a little Ampeg Jet as well, and I picked up a TC Electronics 2290 Dynamic Digital Delay.

TQR: And once you had acquired the ‘64 Strat it became your number one guitar...

Yes, and I kept the 345 as a backup until it fell off the stage and the headstock was broken. I got it fixed and got rid of it quickly. Shortly thereafter I picked up my first blackface Super Reverb.

TQR: Did your Inca Silver ‘64 ultimately become the model for your signature guitar?

It was one of two Strats. Around 1985 I acquired a ‘58 Strat that was on the album cover for Strong Persuader. The ‘64 was a tremolo model that I blocked off and the ‘58 was a hardtail.

TQR: The pickups on your signature Stratocaster are completely unique and unlike any others we have ever heard. Were they modeled specifically after the pickups on one of your vintage Strats?

We worked on them during the development of the guitar and we were going to have something that made our guitar different from the others. Initially, the first Cray guitar that was made had pickups that were extremely hot and they were a bit too pow- -continued-
ful for what I was looking for. They didn’t capture much of the actual, pure sound of the guitar and didn’t have that pure Strat sound that I had first heard from Phillip Guy.

**TQR:** Where do you like to live on the guitar in terms of pickup selections?

I live on the neck pickup for rhythm, and for solos I use the middle and bridge pickups together.

**Review**

After all these years, does the Stratocaster really need an endorsement? Hardly. But the specifications developed by Robert Cray in 1989 for his signature Strat truly are unique, and you needn’t be a blues player to appreciate them. We trolled eBay for a week or so and wound up buying a barely-played 2007 Inca Silver Cray for $509.00 shipped from someone in Sundance, Wyoming. The description stated, “Only played in my smoke-free home studio.” Have you been to Sundance? “Smoke-free trailer,” perhaps? There ain’t much to Sundance (population 1161), but the seller was an honest man, and the guitar was pretty much like new.

The Strat played OK right out of the case, but the virgin truss rod needed adjustment as the neck was slightly bowed, and it took a few hours of patient tweaking to get things dialed in to our satisfaction. When you straighten a neck you’ll usually wind up with strings buzzing in various places where they hadn’t before, and you gotta re-do your setup. We do the best we can with gradual truss rod and saddle height adjustments while allowing the neck to settle for a day or two after being straightened, and they do seem to settle, kinda like a dog that has never been on a leash.

While the neck was off, we also noticed a ring of fairly heavy Aztec silver paint lining the top edges of the neck pocket, so we sanded it down more or less level with the wood. The fit between the heel and neck pocket isn’t as tight as the Custom Shop guitars we’ve owned where you literally have to pop the heel into the pocket, but it’s tight enough. We’re betting that the previous owner had struggled with getting the action super-low on the Cray. We found two thin paper shims at the base of the neck heel that created a hump above the 12th fret and unnecessary fret buzzing on the G and B strings. We tossed the shims, set the action higher where we (and the guitar) like it, and the Strat plays flawlessly now along the entire length of the neck. With the pickguard removed, we inspected the alder body routs and the body appears to be a solid 2-piece with no ‘butcher block’ silliness. Weight is 7.4 pounds, and yes, despite the absence of a nitro finish, the neck and body can be felt to eagerly quiver and shake in response to vibrating strings.

With the neck now adjusted, we went commando and pulled the original Fender saddles off the bridge plate, replacing them with a set of steel Callaham’s. Why? The Callaham saddles are made from a much harder steel than vintage or modern Fender saddles. The slots in the saddles are longer for unimpeded string travel, Callaham uses stainless steel screws (shorter on both E strings) and springs, and there are more threads in the saddles for each height adjustment screw. Solid. You’ll notice an obvious improvement in the sound of your guitar – strings will sound more percussive in response to pick attack, and the difference in tone is similar to what you initially hear from a new set of strings – bright, lively, polyphonic and vocal. We have recommended Callaham Strat and Tele saddles ($40) for years simply because they make a difference that is worth making, and it’s one significant upgrade you can easily do yourself provided that you have the patience to set your saddle height and intonation for all six strings. You can save some time by noting the individual height of each saddle you’re replacing, and their relative position on the bridge plate.

The Cray is a hardtail, of course – a deal-breaker perhaps for woozy whammy freaks, but a deal-maker for us. As former Fender Custom Shop Master Builder Fred Stuart once said, “Is there any other kind of Stratocaster to play?” The hardtail bridge with the strings through the body adds...
woody resonance and sustain that is quite different from what you get with an inertia block anchoring the strings in a big chunk of metal. Addictive is what a hardtail is, and much less fussy than a Strat with a trem. Luv it.

Fender describes the neck shape on the Cray as a “‘60s C-shape.” That’s a little too vague and inaccurate. The signature Cray neck is a very full and rounded *hunk ‘o hunk ‘o burnin’ luv* unlike any other ‘60s Fender Stratocaster model with rosewood fingerboard other than the ‘60s Hot Rod Series. It’s the perfect neck shape for us, very similar to the necks carved by Chris Kroenlein. Cray described it in an interview with Washington Post writer David Malitz as the product of having come up with a shape that was a cross between his ‘64 and ‘58 Strats. The Indian rosewood fretboard on our guitar is also as good as it gets – dark, straight-grained with subtle figure and a smooth, oily feel that we have entirely missed on some of the Custom Shop guitars we’ve owned. Again, in Cray’s Washington Post interview he stated that during the prototype phase he and Fender employee John Grunder settled on a ‘really nice’ Brazilian rosewood fingerboard and ‘big, wide’ frets. Based on our experience, we’re betting that the factory spec sheet for the Cray Strats calls for a higher quality fingerboard.

The Cray is also equipped with jumbo frets. Does anyone really want the small ‘vintage’ fret wire found on many of the ‘50s and ‘60s Custom Shop guitars? How about a wound G string while you’re at it? It’s time to the dump the vintage fret wire, guys. What was fine for Bill Carson was fine indeed – 50 years ago. The frets on the Cray models are big – wider than the typical 6105 wire used by many builders, and we would use it on all of our guitars if we could.

The cherry on top of the Robert Cray Signature Strat are the Custom Shop Robert Cray pickups. You can only get them on the mega-buck USA Custom Shop and Mexican Signature models, and they have their own unique Fender part numbers. Cray described them as, ‘Handwound, and they have a nice sound. They’re not your run-of-the-mill pickups.’ How do they sound? To quote Riverhorse, “Every time I have ever played one of those guitars I sounded just like Robert Cray.” Well, maybe, but do not be discouraged if you don’t necessarily wish to sound like Robert Cray… More of what you hear will depend on you, and your amplifiers. The Cray pickups are definitely unique among all contemporary Fender Strat sets, measuring 6.03K/neck, 6.44K/middle and 6.90K/bridge. Those resistance measurements alone might lead you to believe they are super ‘hot’, midrange-heavy and nasty. You’d be wrong. There are lots of good Strat pickup sets, but few that seem to nail all five positions equally well, and none that sound like these. The Cray neck pickup produces the classic, deep Stratocaster tone heard on more than a few Hendrix studio tracks. If you can’t get lost in that sound you should play a different guitar. We strongly suspect that Robert Cray had Fender pay particularly close attention to the tone of the #2 and #4 out-of-phase positions, because his signature pickups produce a percussive and brilliantly animated quack that is indeed Cray’s signature tone. You can do other things with it, but yeah, the sound of the middle and bridge pickups combined is unmistakably cool and riveting. Guaranteed to draw a crowd at the blues jam. The middle pickup is bright, full and lusty – very usable for rhythm and solos, and the flatpole bridge pickup is strong, Kool and trebly in a very old-school, Magic Sam style. Heavy rockers may want something thicker, but that’s nothing new. We really, really like all three pickups in the Cray – not only for their sweet sound, but for their vocal quality that is unique among all the Stratocaster pickups you will ever hear.

USA Custom Shop Cray Signature Strats are rare and expensive. Mexican models are fairly plentiful, $500-$600 used, $899.00 new, and they are available in Inca Silver, Violet and 3-tone sunburst. The Inca Silver is our third, and they were all exceptional as described. We’re keeping this one.

The Ampeg Gemini I is...
Read slower. Think. We’re beginning to get the impression that the biggest obstacle in the Quest for tone is laziness, which includes thinking with your wallet. The Quest here has always intended to be deeper. You can fish from the easy shore, or head for the gulf stream…

Ampeg combos typically get no respect from players whose idea of great tone is limited to amps that can produce heavy distortion and hard clipping. If you’re one of those guys, you can skip this article because when we tell you that the Gemini I actually does spill over into a swampy, bluesy overdriven moan with equally swampy reverb and tremolo, you’re not gonna believe us anyway, and even if you did, you won’t be able to wrap your mind around the idea of buying a squat spinster from Linden, New Jersey, spawn of Everett Hull, a bitter old jazz bass player who hated rock & roll. We’re just sayin’… It’s OK. There is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ here, no universal ‘best,’ and if a stodgy lookin’ Ampeg isn’t you, that’s fine. We made peace with the idea a long time ago that there are people who will ignore an amplifier or guitar solely because it doesn’t look like the way they need to feel when they play the guitar.

For the rest of you, may we suggest you troll for a Gemini I? TQR board member and Delta Moon guitarist Mark Johnson left his ’67 Gemini I here with us after commenting that he had used this amp extensively in Jeff Bakos’ studio, that it had the best reverb of any amp he had ever played through, and “nothing else sounds like it,” or something to that effect. We were intrigued.

Quick rundown: This was not a cheap, stripped down model. Introduced in 1964, the 22 watt Gemini I features a clean Guitar and dirtier Accordion channel with separate volume, treble and bass controls, reverb (echo) intensity (channel one only), tremolo speed and intensity. The treble pots both have a click-stop function turned fully clockwise that engages a bright switch. The tremolo intensity pot also has a click-stop when turned all the way up that engages what Ampeg called “repeat percussion.” In reality it simply changes the tremolo from a modulating ‘up and down’ effect to on/off in the style of a Fender photo cell tremolo effect. Reverb and tremolo are turned off and on with a hard-wired footswitch.

Ampeg often used unusual tubes in its amps, at least when compared to Fender. The Gemini I was shipped with dual 7591 cathode-biased power tubes, 7199 phase inverter, 12AX7 and 6CG7 preamp tubes. Mark’s amp had been modified to use 12AX7s and a single 12AU7 in place of the 6CG7. These amps were shipped with absolutely outstanding Jensen C12Q speakers, and because the Gemini I doesn’t develop quite the same volume, power and jizzum of a Deluxe Reverb, for example, a lot of these speakers remain intact and working fine. We suppose you could also rightly assume that Ampeg players weren’t as likely to turn their amps up to 10 with a Fuzztone in 1966…

Well, Mark was right, we agree, and if that isn’t enough for you, a quick Google search will turn up plenty of voices echoing the charms of the Gemini I. You can find them for $500-$600, often in excellent condition, and while gigging musicians won’t tap it as their number one stage amp for larger venues, when you hear the Gemini, it will remain among your treasured keepers and an invaluable studio amp. The reverb and tremolo are not of this world, the Ampeg Baxandall tone circuits possess their own special voodoo that other amplifiers cannot duplicate, and the voice of the Gemini is a mysterious hi-low-fi mixture of murky mystery that reminds us of some of the earliest Stones records like “I’m Going Home” on Aftermath. We’re not saying that Keith and Brian were playing a Gemini I – they weren’t, but that’s the kind of unforgettable vibe you get. Score your own Gemini I and you’ll thank us (and let’s not forget Robert) later.

We’ve been saying this for years and by now you surely know it – changing speakers is one of the easiest, most effective and of a Fender photo cell tremolo effect. Reverb and tremolo are turned off and on with a hard-wired footswitch.
least expensive amp modifications you can ever do. We enjoy
an abundance of riches when it comes to replacement speakers
today, and while your choices are vast, well, that’s the problem,
 isn’t it? How in hell do you decide what to buy when there are
dozens and dozens of choices built by multiple manufacturers?
Speakers are in many respects, tone filters. Nearly every
guitar speaker manufacturer offers descriptions of the sound of
their speakers accompanied by graphs that illustrate response
curves and data for resonance, usable frequency range in Hz, dB
sensitivity, and Thiele & Small parameters like resonant
frequency, DC resistance, coil inductance, mechanical Q and
electromagnetic Q. That’s fine if you’re an engineer, but fairly
useless for most guitarists. You just want to know how it
sounds. What can you do to make the right choice the first time
without experimenting with dozens of speakers that lose half
their value when you sell them, even if only used for an hour?
At that point you have ceased being a musician and become a
speaker nerd. Most of us just get online, surf, read, and pick
a speaker that has the most compelling description, whether
it’s on a forum thread or a manufacturer’s web site. Throw the
dice, basically. Pickups are no different.

Well, we can’t magically remove all chance and uncertainty in
your life, but in addition to making some very carefully con-
sidered recommendations, we can offer a few suggestions that
may clear the air a bit… Consider this: If you don’t know what
you want, you’re probably not going to get it. Yeah, that’s fun-
y, like Yogi Berra funny, but true. But it does help to consider
what’s missing based on what your amplifier is giving you as a
means of determining what you want. Do you want a brighter
or darker speaker, or one that is sonically neutral with a wide
and balanced frequency response? Do you need the clarity and
power handling of a larger voice coil and magnet, or the more
vintage sound of speakers that are rated for lower power? Are
you interested in the classic American tone of a Fender amp, or
something more British? It’s perfectly OK to mix a Fender with
ceramic magnet speakers, or ‘British’ and ‘American’ tones.
Listening to your rig ‘as is’ can give you valuable clues as long
as you are willing to trust your ears. Or, you can just follow our
lead as we experiment on your behalf…

WGS
G12CS
The smooth-
cone G12CS is
described as an al-
ternative to a clas-
ic Jensen C12N,
but with slightly
smoother and less
sharp treble tones
that are appropri-
ate for taming a
bright amp. We agree. The difference between the G12C we
reviewed last month and the S model is subtle. We would be
happy with either, but if you are indeed interested in taking
the edge off the high frequencies in your amp, the G12CS
succeeds while retaining the full depth, brightness and char-
acter of the G12C. If you crave the sound of a vintage Jensen
speaker but can’t embrace the sharp tone of the reissues, the
WGS C12C and S models are both simply exceptional. You
are very likely to hear the same deep and lush, 3-D character
that was completely missing in our ‘64 Princeton Reverb by
comparison, even with a vintage Jensen C12N. Whatever
mojo WGS is putting into these speakers, it’s working.

WGS
INVADER
50
As the name im-
plies, the Invader
50 is one of many
speakers in the
WGS Invasion
series designed to
deliver classic ‘Brit-
ish’ tones. Like the
G12C and G12CS, we would be very happy with this speaker
in just about any amplifier imaginable. While low and mid
frequencies are prominent and bold, they do not overpower
or obscure smooth and musical highs, clarity, presence and
harmonic color. The Invader 50 also gracefully handles
distortion with no grinding or jagged growling in the mid
frequencies, ghost notes or cone cry. It’s just a solid, fat, bold
and musical speaker perfectly balanced for bright Marshall,
Vox and Fender amps. It turned our ’66 Deluxe Reverb into
a hard ‘rockin’ beast, but with a midrange pot installed it’s
pretty much a hard rockin’ beast anyway – just better with the
Invader 50 for that kind of luscious 20 watt plexi-blackface
sound that you’ll never get from an 18 watt dual EL-84 amp.
No, you won’t. You could also use one Invader 50 with a
G12C or G12CS in a 2x12 cabinet with spectacular results,
the G12C adding extra snap for humbucking pickups.

www.wgs4.com, 270-321-1003

Lollartrons

What could be better than adding the vintage sound of a set of
classic ’60s Filtertrons to your tone stash? Well, what if you
could nail that tone without actually playing a Gretsch to get
it? Let’s face it, the classic Gretsch models old and new just

-continued-
don’t resonate with a lot of players. Like Rickenbackers, for example, they are an acquired taste for a select few. If you happen to play Gretsch guitars and you’ve found your signature tone with them, we offer our sincere congratulations. We have devoted plenty of space in these pages recently to Gretsch guitars, and we too love their sound, but we would find it very difficult to rely on a Gretsch as our main guitar. It’s not a matter of tone, but a matter of feel… There are just too many styles of music we aren’t comfortable playing on a Gretsch. The big 6120s feedback, the solidbodies just don’t do much for us, and the later Chet and Tennessean guitars seem awkward and unwieldy. But we do love that classic sound for the right things...

Jason Lollar must have experienced the same feeling, because he has developed a new set of LollarTron pickups that are designed to fit a standard humbucking rout. And why not? When we received the LollarTrons for review, we pondered where to put them… In a goldtop Les Paul? Sure, but our instincts kept leading us elsewhere – to a semi-hollow or hollow body guitar, and it didn’t take long for us to eye our recently acquired ES-333 reviewed last month. We laid the LollarTrons over the humbuckers in the 333, stepped back and the answer was obvious. Perfect! Lollar’s new coils looked like they absolutely belonged on the 333, and that’s where they went. The results produced one of the most rewarding pickup swaps we have ever done, but first, here’s Lollar on the genesis of the LollarTrons. Enjoy...

TOR: What inspired you to create a FilterTron-type pickup?

I bought a – I think it was a ‘64 Country Gentleman, because good luck finding a set of original Filtertrons that have been pulled from a guitar that haven’t been tampered with. I tried. Anyway, you take the pad off the back of the guitar, unscrew a plastic plate and the pickups unplug with a connector on the wiring harness – easy in and out and there is no damage to the originality of the guitar.

The original ‘64 Filtertron pickups sounded warmer, rounder and they distorted a little faster than I remembered. I installed the originals into a Tele for comparison to our new Lollartrons because the sound of the Country Gentleman is so unique that I needed to be able to compare the new pickups with the old ones in two of the same guitars – the same in every way that I could possibly make them. The rest was done by measuring the gauss of the magnets, comparing other old Gretsch magnets I had, comparing the new magnets I had made, testing turn-per-layer and relating that to inductance readings. Yes, I use an inductance meter more often today, and my ears, of course, making changes using trial and error. I also had a set of the other popular, non-Gretsch Filtertrons to compare, which didn’t sound much like my originals at all – very bright and almost metallic. Having talked to a few Gretsch guys since, I found there is a segment of people that feel the previously available Filtertron types were not in character with the old ones – too bright, and I didn’t want to recreate what someone else had already done, anyway.

I was slammed by a couple of armchair experts on Gretsch forums who know enough to sound convincing to people, but don’t really know much at all. One said, “They are just standard humbuckers made to look like a Gretsch.” Well, the truth is, the internal components and design are completely different. Someone else said, “The narrower spacing between the two rows of screws on a Gretsch are what makes the pickup sound like a Filtertron.” The pole spacing on a Gretsch is 1/16" closer together between the two rows. I found the 1/16" made very little difference and the small amount it made I dealt with by turns-per-layer. Also, the bobbin size and shape is entirely different than a standard humbucker and has more to do with the resulting tone than the 1/16" difference in pole spacing. I also heard that “The ohms are too high at 4.4K – originals are 4K.” My original Gretsch Filtertrons are 4.4K measured with the pickups disconnected. Measuring with the pickups installed will give you a lower reading. There are lots of reasons the resistance can vary, including the air temperature at the time the reading was taken, but more importantly, measuring resistance as an indicator of the true sound of a pickup is futile.
I wasn’t interested in making a Gretsch-size pickup because there just aren’t that many Gretsch guitars out there, while there are a lot of standard-size humbucker guitars that can give you a viable alternative sound.

LollarTron Review

As we mentioned last month, the access to the wiring harness from the back door of the 333 is a real game changer for those of us who enjoy experimenting with pickups. We had the LollarTrons installed in 30 minutes using the existing pickup rings, and they fit perfectly. Of no less importance is how they look on the 333, and we think you can agree that they actually look as if they almost belong on the Gibson. They would also be appropriate for a Telecaster routed for humbuckers, and any number of semi-hollow bodies like the ES137.

Best of all, when we hit the first chord on the bridge pickup the effect was stunning. The smooth and jangly, full treble tones of the LollarTron urged us on playing rhythm chords and finger-style transitions as we listened to the complex harmonic overtones and transparent clarity of the treble strings ringing over the top of the reedy, baritone voice of the wound strings. To put it plainly, the LollarTrons produce quite an amazing 6-string choir – and especially in the 333. The bridge clean tones attain the bell-like chime of a 12 string. Moderate distortion adds sustain but the chime remains, and as we gradually increased gain, harmonic overtones spilled over into subtle feedback that can be controlled with your hands. You’ve heard this jangle & grunge Gretsch tone on lots of Neil Young and CSN&Y records. Very cool.

Adding the neck pickup throws in more mids and lows, but the loose treble presence remains with the neck pickup set just lower in volume than the bridge. Another classic tone.

The neck pickup is warm, smooth, and very hi-fi for a neck pickup – clear, and neither rude or overpowering in output. Although they are hum-cancelling, both LollarTrons sound more like single coils than humbuckers, just as Ray Butts intended when he was tasked with taking Gretsch beyond the DeArmond pickups of the ’50s while losing the hum to keep pace with Gibson. We haven’t played enough great old Gretsch electrics to draw a direct comparison between authentic Filtertrons and the Lollars, but they definitely possess more depth and rich harmonic textures than any of the Filtertrons we’ve played in modern Gretsch reissues. Installing them in our ES-333 resulted in one of the most rewarding surprises we have ever experienced with a simple pickup swap, but who would have thought to install Filtertrons in a Gibson thinline? Now you can.

www.lollarguitars.com, 206-463-9838

J. Rockett Animal Overdrive

This is our third review of a J. Rockett pedal. If we weren’t the first to review Rockett’s overdrive, we weren’t far behind, and his early pedals were distinguished by a unique array of unlabeled intensity and EQ controls that made them very versatile, and also capable of running from beneath you like a wild stallion. That’s not a criticism by any means, just the truth.

There always seemed to be a ‘hold on!’ factor at work with his first copper-clad overdrive, and the subsequent Afterburner. Nothing timid in either, and we admired the fact that Rockett made no attempt to label any of the switches and knobs on his early effects. Labels? We don’t need no stinkin’ labels… And you didn’t, really. In fact, the no-label look made a statement – ‘for professionals only,’ and we always got a kick out of turning someone on to a Rockett and watching them figure out for themselves what it could do. If there had been a label on a Rockett, we might have suggested just one – ‘Hold On’ stamped just below the on/off switch.

Phil Brown arranged for us to receive a Rockett Animal
overdrive, described on the web site as delivering the sound
of a stock ‘68 Plexi Marshall, or a modded Plexi ‘with a
flick of the Snarl switch.’ Phil demos the Animal along with
four other players on the Rockett web site. At this point we
should probably proceed with what… a politically correct
stock review with plenty of compelling adjectives pulled
from the official Gear Reviewer’s Thesaurus, but that’s not
what we’re gonna do. The age of the video demo is in full
bloom now, and as you can imagine, we view these com-
pressed digital dreamscape with mixed emotions. Yeah,
we get the premise, but that’s the problem. The subliminal
message behind most video demos is that if you use
this, you can sound like this. Really? No, not really. But if the
magical musical meanderings of the featured artist give you
a palpable thrill, buy it anyway. This is all too easy, isn’t
it? Well, yeah, it is, that’s why everybody is doing it. Does
it sell product? It must, otherwise why pay all these guys
to play on camera? We have no axe to grind here. Product
demos help support musicians who deserve the income and
exposure, and manufacturers must find ways to differenti-
ate and market their products. We just don’t buy the implied
message, nor do we believe that a compressed audio file
heard over the Internet and played by someone else using
their gear accurately reflects what you can expect to hear
in a room with your gear, and with you playing the instru-
ment. Consequently, we regret to inform you that the Rockett
Animal will not enable you to sound, and more importantly
play like Phil Brown. You might as well buy a Junior Brown
pedal, if one existed, but no box, guitar or amp will en-
able you to sound like Junior, either, even if you called it
‘Junior’s Brain,’ which is, by the way, the thing that enables
Junior to sound like Junior. With that bit of reality out of the
way, let’s consider what the Rockett Animal actually can do.

First of all, please understand that if you want to sound
really good with an overdrive pedal, it’s probably not a good idea to use it with a distor-
ted amp. Clean and dirty go much better together than dirt
don dirt. There are exceptions to this, say if you’re playing
a festival gig outdoors in Black Oak Arkansas, but other-
wise, not so much. OK? We used the Animal with a vintage
blackface Deluxe Reverb, Princeton Reverb and Tremolux,
tweed Tremolux and our Germino 50 LV through a 4x12
pinstripe cab loaded with British Greenbacks. Volume on
the Fender amps was set anywhere from 4-6, and the Germino on 4-7.
We did not use the ‘59
Gibson GA-40 because
it’s a filthy animal no
matter.

As far as we’re con-
cerned, a great overdrive
pedal produces fat, musi-
cally pleasing levels
distortion with very
little or no added noise,
and it doesn’t audibly
alter the essential tone
of your guitar and amplifier unless you set the controls to
specifically do so. ‘Musical’ means no fizzy, saw-toothed,
rasy grind and grunt, no high frequency shzzzz. ‘Musical’
means smooth, rich, deep and wide rather than jagged,
thin, linear and nasal. Bass and treble or a single tone con-
trol are always nice, and a couple of preset gain level/EQ
toggles are OK, but not essential. Controls should reveal
a steady taper providing plenty of room to adjust and mix
volume, gain, and EQ. The main thing, above all else,
however, is that you step on an overdrive and smile.

When we step on the Animal, we smile. It sounds musical.
It sounds beastly, in the style of Deep Purple or later, ZZ.

Top. The
tone controls
work, and
this pedal
does not
shovel all
essential frequen-
cies into the
mids. The
Animal has
a rich, vocal
tonality
about it, and
plenty of horsepower. Perfect sustain. Not a bad sound in
it. The ‘64 Princeton is suddenly a 12 watt Marshall stack
that sounds like 200. You would never know or assume
otherwise. For maximum smooth, run it with the Volume
above 12 o’clock and the Gain at 9 o’clock. Reverse for a
harder, brighter burn. Flick the Snarl toggle up and inten-
sity intensifies with big pinch harmonics. Controlled feed-
back threatens to explode. You just got paid. Should you
buy the Animal? Sure, if you like to smile.
creating the best new effects with vintage values. FREE help with effects problems by e-mail, plus professional consultation and technical services.

Analog Man was the pioneer in pedal modifications for Ibanez and Maxon Tube Screamer and several Boss pedals (TR-2, GE-7, SD-1, DS-1, BD-2, DD3, etc). They also modify DOD overdrives and Fuzz Faces to vintage specs and do true bypass mods on many effects. They also build custom switch boxes with effects loops, AB switches, buffers, channel switchers, tuner switchers, etc. Analog Man hand-built pedals include chorus pedals, compressors, distortions, delays, and fuzz pedals. Three chorus pedals are available, with several options. Five versions of compressors are available, based on the Ross style and/or the Orange Squeezer style of compression. Several Sunface versions are available for germanium or Silicon fuzzface sounds, plus the Astro Tone, Peppermint, and Sun Bender fuzz pedals. The Beano Boost is a crunchy treble booster and is also available along with a Sun Face in the Sun Lion pedal. The Bad Bob booster is now made by Analog Man. The King of Tone dual overdrive has been incredibly popular and a Prince of Tone was developed in 2012 for better availability. The ARDX20 dual analog delay is also available with a tap tempo/modulation/preset controller for the most features in any analog delay. The BIG-T log delay is also available along with a Sun Face in the Sun Lion pedal.

Other hand-made pedals available from Analog Man include FOXROX, Teeze RMC wahs, Z Vex, Black Cat, and Sweet Sound, plus production pedals from Boss, Dunlop, MXR, Wah-Hue, EHX, Eventide, VOX, Xotic, etc. Power supplies for nearly any effect are available, plus cables, pedalboards, and other accessories. Mike maintains excellent relationships with these manufacturers to insure that quality and service standards are high. Please check the web site for more information.

Analog Man, Bethel, CT
www.analogman.com, buyanalogman.com
203–778–6658

Callaham Vintage Guitars & Amps New from Callaham! Check out the new billet steel ABR-1 style “tune-o-matic” bridge: Bill Callaham is a builder of exceptional electric guitars that exceed the original quality, tone, and beauty of the vintage models that inspire his work. “Better than vintage” is an apt description for the Callaham “S” and “T” model electric guitars that feature premium lightweight ash and alder bodies, custom hand-shaped rock maple necks, and cryogenically treated Lindy Fralin pickups specially wound to Callaham’s specifications for true vintage tone. Bill also offers cryogenically treated, pre-wired vintage pick guards for Strat style guitars, and his exclusive formula for cold-rolled steel alloy tremolo blocks continue to delight players around the world with improved resonance and sustain. Callaham vintage saddles also improve sustain while minimizing string fatigue and breaks. Additional Strat parts include stainless steel trem arms, string ferrules, bridge plates and mounting screws, and string retainers. Attention Tele Players! Callaham now offers a complete line of custom Tele parts. Please visit their web site for information on pre-wired control panels with premium pots, capacitors, and cloth-cov- ered wire, specially wound and cryogenically treated Fralin vintage Tele pickups, compensated brass bridge saddles, bridge plates, knobs, jacks, tuners and string trees! The only thing better than Callaham parts is a Callaham guitar. We said that, and you can take it to the bank.

Callaham Guitars, Winchester, VA
www.callahamguitars.com 540–678–4043

Carr Amplifiers Check out the ALL NEW Carr Artemus! The is a single-channel 30-watt combo featuring a 15-watt setting, four EL-84 power tubes, three knobs (Volume, Bass, Treble), two mini-toggle switches (Mid, Edge), and an Eminence Red, White, and Blues speaker.

The Artemus offers a wide range of tones from the crunch of Classic AC style British amps to the glassy mid-scooped blackface sound. The asymmetrical, open-sided, Howard Roark–inspired cabinet design measures 24.25” wide by 17.75” tall by 9” deep, top to bottom. Carr Amplifiers is a small company located in downtown Pittsboro, NC. With six dedicated full-time craftsmen Carr Amps kicks out some of the most well-made, professional and dimensional-sounding tools a guitarist can have, whether that means onstage or in the bedroom. All Carr models are:

1) hand-wired using true point-to-point construction.
2) loaded with premium electronic components, i.e., Solen capacitors.
3) equipped with cabinets made from local NC yellow pine using dove-tailed joints for tank-like sturdiness.
4) issued a lifetime warranty for the original owner.
5) made by Americans at a fair wage. Carr Amps is one of the few (if not the only) amp manufacturer to make all its
Inc. Vintage Constructed Amplifier

Celestion tone, quality and brand appeal at surprisingly low cost. We’ve brought the custom built amplifier back to market with our ClassicTone transformers. This is the culmination of our decades of experience producing hundreds of thousands of our finest custom transformers for the amplifier industry. We have been in business since 1943 in the Chicago area and have a vast knowledge of quality transformer manufacturing for the military and amplifier industry. For many years now we have been producing our transformers for many well-known amplifier OEM’s and resellers. Our new line of ClassicTone transformers feature:

- Paper layer wound construction like the vintage era originals!
- Made in USA by us at Magnetic Components, Inc. with premium materials
- Proper raised mountings / No chassis modification required on most models
- Made with pre-tinned “Topcoat” PVC appliance wire for ease of soldering
- RoHS Compliant
- High quality, yet economically priced

http://www.classictone.net/Index.html

Collings Guitars: Bill Collins’ story provides a classic example of what can be achieved with an engineer’s brain, a machinist’s hand and an experienced repairman’s eye. After dropping out of medical school in Ohio to work in a machine shop, Collings moved to Texas in the mid 1970’s where the experience he gained repairing and restoring guitars guided his design of the first Collings guitars. His understanding of the flaws and shortcomings found in production instruments was instructive, and he set out to eliminate those shortcomings with the very first Collings guitars.

Collings instruments have grown to include 32 different acoustic guitar models including the famed dreadnought and OM models, seven award-winning mandolin models in both lacquer and varnish finishes, three archtop guitars, and a new line of seven electric instruments crafted to inspire rock, blues, jazz, country, and your music, too.

Bill Collins work is respected by professional and amateur musicians alike… anyone on the quest for quality. Some of these include artists: Keith Richards, Lyle Lovett, Pete Townshend, Emmylou Harris, Andy Summers, David Crosby, Chris Hillman, Joni Mitchell, Don Felder, John Sebastian, Lou Reed, John Fogerty, Tim O’Brien, Pete Huttlinger, Kenny Smith, Brian May, Joan Baez, John Prine, Nigel Tufnel of Spinal Tap, and Steven Spielberg to name a few. We invite you to play a Collings today.

For more information on the complete line of Collings instruments and dealer locations, please visit our web site.

Collings Guitars, Austin Texas
www.collingsguitars.com, 512-288-7776

Dave’s Guitar Shop: Dave’s Guitar Shop offers guitars by Fender, Gibson, PRS, National, Taylor, Gretsch, Ernie Ball, Rickenbacker, Martin, Santa Cruz, Suhr, Collings, Tom Anderson and many other fine new and used instruments, plus new and used amplifiers such as Fender, Line 6, Matchless, Victoria, Bad Cat, and Dr. Z, plus hundreds of guitar effects, and after-market pickups from Joe Barden, Seymour Duncan, and more. Due to their inventory of over 1,000 guitars, amps, and accessories, Dave’s is an excellent resource for top of the line Custom Shop and Historic issues, to intermediate new and used gear. Unlike some dealers’ out of date stock lists on the web and in print, Dave’s inventory is updated daily. The selection of new and used instruments is truly exceptional, and you can often select among several models of the same new guitars to find that special instrument that was meant for you. Dave’s staff is friendly and extremely knowledgeable about the instruments and gear that they sell, because they are players, too. Please check the web site for current inventory, and you are welcome to call for more information or an accurate, in-hand description.

Dave’s Guitar Shop, LaCrosse, WI
www.davesguitar.com 608–785–7704

Eastwood: Since 2001, Eastwood has been creating some of the most exciting Electric Guitars the world has ever seen. Our RADICAL VINTAGE REMAKE series feature a variety of models based on popular sixties designs - from the classic Mosrites to our top-selling AIRLINE - they capture the excitement and style of the originals. Each year the prices of the originals skyrocket - getting harder to find and harder to play! Eastwood’s focus is to make top quality replicas - that cost less than half of what the originals cost - and they are really fun to play!Eastwood’s focus is to make top quality replicas - that cost less than half of what the originals cost - and they are really fun to play! Eastwood’s focus is to make top quality replicas - that cost less than half of what the originals cost - and they are really fun to play! Eastwood’s focus is to make top quality replicas - that cost less than half of what the originals cost - and they are really fun to play!

TONE & STYLE - All Eastwood Guitars are fitted with high-quality modern components that offer an optimal playing experience that far exceeds their 1960’s original description.
counterparts. It is hard to find a guitar these days that oozes more vintage style than an Eastwood! All Eastwood Guitars are setup professionally before shipping to our customers.

VALUE: All Eastwood Models are subjected to extensive research and development to continually raise the level of performance. At the same time, we are very careful to maintain an affordability level that our customers expect. These elements combine to deliver peak performance and higher quality than the originals at a much lower price.

SERVICE: A product is only as good as the people who stand behind it. Eastwood Guitars service is second to none in the industry because we simply treat customers the same way we would expect to be treated. All guitars come with a 3 Year Limited Warranty. Guitars purchased directly from us receive a no-questions-asked return policy. Or, if you are located near an Eastwood Dealer, you can buy from them at the same direct price we offer online.

THE FUTURE: We continue to bring new models to the Eastwood line-up. Our goal is to introduce 3-5 new models each year, available in a wide variety of colors and of course, including left-hand versions. Please feel free to email us directly if you have some suggestions for models that we should consider developing in the future!

Eastwood Guitars, Toronto, Canada
www.eastwoodguitars.com, 416-294-6165

Eminence Speaker LLC, Eminence, KY
Contact: Chris Rose

Fishman: Widely recognized as the premier designer and manufacturer of acoustic amplification products, Fishman is committed to making acoustic musicians heard while faithfully maintaining their own natural tone, for the best possible sound.

The Fishman product line began with the BP-100(tm) acoustic bass pickup, originally developed to meet founder and president Larry Fishman’s own jazz performance needs. With a track record of quality engineering, reliability, functional simplicity and - most importantly - the natural tone it enables, Fishman firmly established a reputation of excellence that consumers have come to expect from the brand.

For acoustic guitar, Fishman offers the flagship Acoustic Matrix(tm) Series active pickup system, the Rare Earth(tm) Series active magnetic soundhole pickups, and the Neo-D(tm) magnetic soundhole pickup, as well as passive undersaddle, classical, archtop, and resophonic guitar pickups. Fishman’s new Ellipse(tm) series combines the Acoustic Matrix(tm) pickup with our industry leading preamp design. Designed to fit in the guitar’s soundhole, the Ellipse(tm) system provides volume and tone control at your fingertips and easily installs without any modification to your instrument.

Fishman pickups are also available for banjo, mandolin, harp/piano, violin, viola, cello and acoustic bass. In addition, the Concertmaster(tm) amplification system for violin and the Full Circle(tm) upright bass pickup offer two elegant and cutting-edge string amplification solutions.

Utilizing cutting-edge Acoustic Sound Imaging(tm) technology, Aura(tm) features the most innovative acoustic amplification technology available today. This stumpbox-sized unit captures your instrument’s true acoustic sound with stunning, studio microphone quality. Anytime, anywhere. Aura(tm) eliminates the boundaries of conventional acoustic amplification and gives the most natural, realistic amplified acoustic instrument sound available - both on stage and in the studio.

Joining the award-winning Loudbox(tm) and Loudbox Pro(tm) acoustic instrument amplifiers, the new Loudbox Performer(tm) completes Fishman’s popular, highly-acclaimed family of acoustic amplifiers and represents the size, power and features that musicians demand.

Setting a new standard in acoustic amplifiers, the Loudbox(tm) series feature a powerful tri-amped system that delivers sweet highs and undistorted lows-even at tremendous volumes. As Fishman celebrates its 25th year as the leader in acoustic amplification, the company continues to redefine the benchmark of acoustic sound. For more information, please visit www.fishman.com.

Fishman Transducers Inc.
Wilmington, MA
www.fishman.com 978–988–9199

Germino Amplification: Greg Germino’s passion is in recreating and optimizing the sound of Plexi-era amplifiers using the highest quality components and attention to detail born from decades of experience as an amp tech and guitarist. Germino amplifiers are designed and built to enable guitarists to acquire the classic sound of the Plexi amps again, while avoiding the significant inconsistencies and reliability issues found in expensive, vintage examples.

Models include:
The Classic 45 – A finely tuned, faithful replica of the JTM-45 using a custom wound version of the Radio Spares output transformer. Works well with 6L6GC/3881 tube types and KT-66s, or EL-34s after re-biasing. Rated at 35 watts, the Classic 45 can also be fitted with 6V6s when using a 5Y3 or 5U4 rectifier. The Club 40 reproduces the early sound of the JTM-50 and JMP-50 Bass 50 watt heads. A GZ-34 rectifier and solid state rectifier are selectable by a switch allowing for the softer rounder feel of a JTM-50, or the quicker pick attack and response of a JMP-50 Bass head.

Lead 55 & Lead 55LV – The Lead 55 models use a classic dual EL-34 output section and ‘lead’ circuit values. Both models are voiced the same with the only difference being the power transformer in the LV model supplies lower voltage at the output stage. Additionally, the LV model is delivered stock with optional tube/solid state rectifier switching.

Monterey 100 – Based on the original ‘Super Amplifier’ from 1966, also known as the JTM-45/100, the Monterey is a faithful re-creation of the JTM-45/100 in every way with extreme attention to detail -continued-
in both build quality, parts used and the incredible sound.

Fillmore 100 – Let’s roll back in time to 1967, the year that Marshall made the switch from KT-66 tubes to EL-34’s with new transformers for this tube type, and a steel chassis. All of these early amps used a Bass circuit derived from the JTM-45. Steel chassis made their debut in early in 67 as well.

Headroom 100 – The Headroom 100 specifically emulates the sound and construction of the very early ’68 100 watt plexi panel Super Lead and Super Bass amplifiers to exact detail. Available with either a “Super Lead” circuit for the ultimate in singing sustain or, Super Bass circuit values for those wanting a cleaner amp with a more rounded tone.

For more information on Germino amplifiers, cabinet options, dealers and prices, please visit our web site.

Germino Amplification
Graham, NC
www.germinoaamps.com, 336-376-8354

Jescar Fretwire Securely pressed into the fingerboard, the fret wire is the gateway between the musician and the instrument. It is one of the most critical components in the playing quality of the guitar. The interaction between the strings and frets determines the feel of the neck as much as the neck contour, fingerboard material, or finish.

There are many different fret wire profiles available, from small to large, low to high, narrow to wide, oval to round to triangular, all affecting the playing characteristics and feel of the instrument. Brass frets from days past have given way to today’s standard material, 18% nickel silver, also called “German Silver.” Our highly refined nickel silver consists of 62% copper, 18% nickel and 20% zinc. But even with 18% nickel silver, there are differences in hardness, tensile strength, surface quality, grain size, and other metallurgical properties that influence a fret’s quality, performance and feel.

Beyond 18% nickel silver, new alloys have been employed in the production of modern fret wire that dramatically improves the performance and aesthetics of the guitar. Our stainless steel, with its greater hardness and tighter grain structure has much higher wear resistance for greater fret life. In addition, string bending is much smoother without the friction or grinding felt with traditional fret material. We have selected a stainless steel alloy that provides the best combination of fret life and installation ease.

Most fretwire is manufactured in coils for ease of installation. Our FW39040 and FW37053 are only offered in 24” straight lengths to prevent twisting if coiled.

Pricing is based on orders of one pound minimum quantity per size, plus shipping via UPS, FedEx, or USPS. Gold colored EVO wire is available on selected sizes only. Individual frets cut to size, straight cut or cut and notched tags, are available upon request. Minimum order quantity for pre-cut frets is 2000 pieces.

CAUTION: Jescar Fretwire will improve the tone and playability of your guitar.

www.jescar.com 877-453-7227

Just Strings.com: Now more than ever, guitarists are reaping the benefits of technical innovations in string making that have led to the widest selection of guitar strings ever available. JustStrings.com is dedicated to providing guitarists with the largest selection of acoustic, roundwound, and flatwound strings, complimented by exceptional personalized service and outstanding value. Trying different types of strings often results in amazing new discoveries that not only improve the sound of your instrument, but dramatically enhance your playing enjoyment. From traditional hand-crafted strings to high-tec exotics, JustStrings.com exists to help you get the most out of your instrument. Try a new set today, or order your favorite acoustic or electric sets and SAVE! Juststrings.com offers the best prices on all of the major and specialty brands, promptly delivered to your door. Shop online at JustStrings.com, or place your order by fax at 603–899–7026 or telephone at 603–899–2664.

JustStrings.com, Nashua, NH
www.juststrings.com info@juststrings.com

Keeley Electronics – Check out the new Keeley Katana Preamp! ToneQuest subscribers receive 10% off on all pedal mods and the Keeley Comp, Java Boost and Time Machine boost: Keeley Electronics recently won a Guitar Player Reader’s Choice Award and Keeley is now the exclusive distributor for Framptone! Robert Keeley’s Time Machine Boost, Keeley Compressor, and his custom, state-of-the-art modifications for vintage pedals continue to receive rave reviews from guitarists around the world. Keeley pedals are used by Aerosmith, Abbey Road Studios, Steve Vai, legendary producer Bob Rock, George Lynch, Peter Frampton, James Burton, and many, many more guitarists and music pros around the world. The Time Machine Boost is a versatile 2 channel, 3 mode pre-amplifier designed to drive your amplifiers into overdrive or saturation. The two channels are labeled “Vintage,” and “Modern,” with the “Vintage” side inspired by rare germanium boosts like the Dallas Rangemaster. The “Modern” channel is a new +23dB gain, dual JFET transparent signal amplifier. The Keeley Compressor is a superb audiophile and studio grade compressor with true bypass switching and premium metal film resistors and capacitors for the cleanest Ross clone compressor ever available. Available with a standard Ibanez/Boss style adapter jack and/or battery power, you can say goodbye to that old red Dyna Comp!

Robert Keeley pedal mods include 2 versions for TS9’s – the TS808 mod, and the “Baked TS9” for searing hot Tube Screamer tone. Keeley uses the original TI RC4558P chip that appeared in the early TS808’s, while increasing the bass response and overdrive range. The result is a perfectly voiced 808 that’s cleaner when turned down and produces twice the drive/gain when turned up, with all of the stock 808 character in the middle. The Keeley modded BD–2 is not a fuzz pedal but has the best characteristics of a fuzz pedal, and it’s much smoother and more realistic sounding. Other exclusive Keeley modifications include the Boss Blues Driver BD–2 Tube Mod, the PHAT Switch BD–2 Mod, Rat Mods, Boss DS–1 Seeing Eye Mod, Boss SD–1, and Boss Chorus CE–2. For detailed specs, user comments, dealer information, sound clips, and ordering information, please visit the Keeley Electronics website.

Keeley Electronics, Edmond, OK

Lollar Custom Guitars & Pickups: According to Jason, he never really set out to become a custom pickup designer and builder. Jason Lollar is a guitar builder on Vashon Island, Washington (near Seattle) who originally began building pickups for his own guitars and a few friends when he couldn’t find the tone he was after. The word spread, and now Jason custom builds over 30 different pickups, including Strat, Tele, humbuckers, P90’s, custom steels and Charlie Christian-style pickups, all personally designed and wound by Jason. He is especially well known for his P90, Imperial Humbucker and Tele replacement pickups, but he has also designed pickups for many unusual applications...

Recently, Jason was acknowledged by gonzo pedal steel player Robert Randolph for having wound the pickups in his two custom Fessenden pedal steels. And the list doesn’t end there – Jason has wound...
 libero magistris, qui habetur in omni urbe, praesto et in oppido et in campo, et in monte, et in monte.
RS Guitarworks: You can depend on RS Guitarworks as your source for the finest custom guitars, expert guitar finishing, refinishing and aging, complete guitar assembly and repair, custom electronic upgrade kits, pickups, pickup covers, hard-to-find hardware, and more.

Located in Winchester, Kentucky, RS Guitarworks began as a small repair and shop in 1994. As the word spread among guitarists, business rapidly grew for RS, and today they receive guitars from around the world for restoration, finishing, aging and custom voicing with specialty components and exclusive pickups wound to RS specs by Lindy Fralin.

RS’s Old Friend, SolarFlair, Stepside and custom guitars can be seen in the hands of many top players, and offer build quality and hardware second to none. Every guitar RS Guitarworks builds is meticulously crafted with wood personally selected by RS, finished in nitrocellulose lacquer, assembled with premium components, and individually voiced in final assembly as a true custom instrument. RS Guitarworks also offers many hard-to-find aged, vintage replica parts and other specialty accessories for vintage Fender, Gibson and many other guitars that in many cases are exclusive to RS.

The RS Guitarworks Premium Wiring Kits offer a dramatic improvement over the factory electronics found in even the most expensive guitars. During extensive research and development in creating RS Premium kits, they tested over 20 different tone capacitors and nearly every type of potentiometer made before developing the RS SuperPot™. All the RS upgrade kits feature measured RS SuperPot™, that have a 5% tolerance for volumes, and CTST™ audio pots within 10% of their specified value for tone controls. Also in the RS kits are a wide variety of tone caps for single coil and humbucking pickups made by Jensen and vintage-correct replica caps by Luxe. RS Guitarworks™ also feature caps made here in the USA exclusively for RS called GuitarCaps™. RS Guitarworks wiring upgrade kits impart a fuller, clearer tone than standard factory components, with a smoother, more even and responsive taper from each pot. Additionally, each potentiometer is tested on a digital meter, checked for the proper sweep pattern, sorted and labeled as a neck/volume, neck/tone, bridge/volume or bridge/tone control.

Wiring Upgrade Kits are available in Vintage, Modern and Reissue styles for various Les Paul type guitars, as well as 335/345/355, Telecaster, Stratocaster, PRS guitars, and Explorer and Flying V types in both kit and pre-wired versions. Custom wiring and nearly any other configuration can also be built by calling RS Guitarworks™ directly at (859) 737-5300. Please call or visit the RS Guitarworks web site for complete information on finishing, refinishing, restoration and aging of new and used guitars custom wiring kits, vintage repro parts, pickups and repairs. RS Guitarworks 859-737-5300, www.rsguitarworks.net

Stewart MacDonald: Stewart-MacDonald offers a complete line of hard-to-find tools, parts, accessories, instructional videos and books for building, repairing, setting up, and optimizing the playability and tone of stringed instruments. Whether you are just getting started or you’re a seasoned luthier, you’ll find everything you need in the Stewart-Mac catalog, including: fret wire, finishing supplies, glues and adhesives, wood, bodies, necks, binding, tuners, nuts and saddles, inlay, bridges, tailpieces, electronics, pickups, and free information sheets and professional advice! Their friendly customer service and technical support staff are trained to help you make the best product choices, and they also offer an Unconditional Return Guarantee. If you’re not satisfied with an item for any reason, simply return it.

Stew-Mac is the leading supplier of innovative products for guitarists and repair pros, and every thing they make is guaranteed to work well, because every product is tested by the professional luthiers at Stewart MacDonald first! The master builders and repairmen on staff include Dan Erlewine – well-known author of guitar repair books and magazine articles, member of the ToneQuest Report advisory board, and a regular contributor to TQR. Dan and all of the experienced luthiers at Stew-Mac personally develop and test every product the company offers, and they are also dedicated to education. The Stewart MacDonald catalog is packed with helpful tips, and the company produces an extensive series of training videos at their facility in Athens, Ohio.

For more information on the entire range of products available, please visit the Stewart MacDonald web site. In addition to their free online help service, your telephone call is also always welcome.

Stewart MacDonald www.stewmac.com, 1–800–848–2273

Swart Amplification: Long before the first Swart amp ever appeared, Michael Swart had been playing through vintage amps for decades at live gigs and recording sessions as both a guitarist and recording engineer in Wilmington, NC.

Despite his access to countless vintage Fender, Vox, and Ampeg amps, Swart always felt the quintessential small recording home use amp had yet to be built, thus begin the quest for the best tone via a small, manageable package. After a slew of suitcase amp wannabees, emerged the original Space Tone 6V6se, a Class A, 5 watt, Single-Ended, tube rectified beast with an über simple circuit revolving around the soulful 6V6. The amp delivered big sound with unmatched musicality along with amazing distortion. The 18w Atomic Space Tone soon followed to wide acclaim, and Swart amplifiers were quickly embraced by working pros and guitarists who shared Swart’s appreciation for truly exceptional guitar tone.

Today, six different Swart models are hand-built to serve the needs of guitarists for live performance and recording:

Space Tone 6V6se - The amp that started it all. 5w, Class A, Single-Ended, Tube Rectified, 8” Weber, finger-jointed, lacquered tweed pine cab. Amazing STR-Tweed - Another BIG Class A, Single-Ended 5w w/extra stage, Swart reverb, and 12” speaker. Atomic Space Tone - Perhaps the amp that REALLY put Swart on the map. Considered one of the finest made. 18w 6V6 or 6L6 with tube reverb & tremolo AST Pro: AST circuit w/slightly larger cab, recessed knobs, 12” of choice AST Head MKII - AST in a head w/defeatable master volume and choice of cabinets Super Space Tone 30 Head (SSST-30) 30w
of soulful 6V6/6L6/EL-34 mother of tone beauty. Richer than chocolate. Matching, custom tweed x 12 Space Tone Cabinet Head to Swart Online for the latest news, nunts, photos, raves, artists, events, and dealer locations. Michael answers every call. Kelly responds to every mail. Personal service is #1 priority.

Swart Amplifier Co., Wilmington, NC
www.swartamps.com, 910-620-2512

Toneman: Veteran working guitarist Don Butler is an experienced tech who specializes in servicing, restoring JMI-era and modding Korg era Vox Amps to vintage specs. These, of course would be valve (tube) amps. As well as servicing & upgrading any '62-'89 era valve Marshall amps. He also services most other Golden era British valves amps like HiWatt, Selmer, Orange, Laney's and Sound City's. Also included are Tweed, Blonde, Brown and Blackface era Fender Amps.

Don offers a number of standard mods for reissue Vox, Fender and Marshall amps to bring them into "Vintage Spec" and achieve that original tone/sound that reissues sadly lack. These have earned him a solid reputation throughout the country for dramatically improved, authentic Vintage Tone from reissue amplifiers. Don has used the hand-made Mercury Magnetics Axiom/Tone Clone transformers for over 20 years along with vintage spec Sozo Premium caps (both the Iskra“mustard caps” replicas and Blue Molded Fender types) and Carbon Comp resistors in the signal path to bring reissue amps to Vintage specs. We also mod reissue Vox and Cry Baby Wah Wah's to original 1967 specs, Ibanez TS-9's and Upgrade Vox “Valve Tone” pedals.

Don is equally at home working on Gibson Historics and Standard Production guitars, Fender guitars, Rickenbacker, and of course, Gretsch Guitars. This applies to both Vintage models and current production guitars, electric and acoustic. Anything from re-frets & fret dressing, rewiring, etc. to simple set-ups and adjustments.

Don was also the first dealer for German made Pyramid Strings, starting in 1995. Don does attend the NAMM Show and the Frankfurt Musikmesse for Pyramid. Providing his input, Pyramid has re-introduced the Round Core, pure nickel flatwound “Pyramid Golds” and the exceptional Round core/round wound “Nickel Classics”. All Pyramids use a silver plated core of German Steel and pure nickel wire wrap. All plain strings are pure silver plated German Steel.

Also available now are the Bronze Wound/ Round Core Acoustic “Pyramid Western Folk”. These strings are reminiscent of the strings from the ‘50s & ’60s before most manufacturers went to Hex cores and smaller wrap wires. Strings can be ordered securely online through the website!

Toneman is open 10 am to 6 pm (Pacific Time), Tuesday thru Saturday! 661-259-4544, dc1b@earthlink.net, www.tone-man.com

TonePros Sound Labs & Marquis Distribution: Since our first published review article, The ToneQuest Report has enthusiastically recommended the patented TonePros system of guitar components.

TonePros tailpieces feature a patented locking design. For years, guitars with stop tailpieces and wrap-around bridges have been cursed by “lean” or tilt on their stud mounts. Since string tension was all that held tailpieces on, the only contact area was just a bit of the edge of the bottom flange, just a bit of the lip of the stud top, and often just as little contact with the intonation screws. TonePros® Locking Studs provide 100% of the contact area of the bottom flange, 100% of the contact area of the stud top, no lean, and dramatically improved sustain, resonance and tone.

TonePros bridge and saddle components feature the “patented pinch” - the lateral pressure that is applied from the strategically placed “tone screws” that greatly reduce the play or wiggle of the bridge posts in their inserts. The posts are frozen in place, resulting in a solid connection between the strings, bridge, and guitar top, transferring more string vibration and resonance to the guitar body, resulting in an audibly stronger, sweeter, woodier type of sound. And once your guitar is set up, it’s locked. Bridge height and intonation settings remain intact and exact, even after re-stringing. TonePros® System II Components are found on the worlds best guitars, played by the world’s best artists.

TonePros Sound Labs International, www.tonepros.com
www.guitarpartsdepot.com 818-735-7944

Marquis Distribution: At Marquis Distribution, we offer the highest quality guitar parts to fit your needs. We specialize in guitar replacement parts, and hard to find, vintage-inspired and vintage replica parts, including aged TonePros and TonePros Kluson parts, emphasizing your desire to achieve a vintage look and tone at an exceptionally high level of performance. Whether you need to replace one part on your guitar or outfit many guitars with whole new setups, our focus remains on the individual customer and your unique needs. Be sure to request the 10% ToneQuest Discount when ordering!

www.marquisdistribution.com
209-845-9579

Visual Sound: Founded in 1995 by guitarist Bob Weil, Visual Sound continues to grow it business and expand its product line, while remaining true to their core commitment of “real tone for real people”.

At this year’s Winter NAMM show in January, Visual Sound unveiled three new products for 2012: the Visual Sound Tap Delay pedal (following on the heels of last year’s big hit debut of the Dual Tap Delay), the Time Bandit click track converter and BPM generator for delay pedals. The Tap Delay pedal rolled-out earlier this summer, while the Time Bandit will be made available by early autumn. In addition, Visual Sound has brought back the Pure Tone Buffer, which is available now through their Custom Shop.

The Dual Tap Delay pedal, which made its debut a year ago, continues to receive rave reviews and robust sales!

Visual Sound’s previous release of the GarageTone series of effects pedals continues to “wow” players of all stripes. No longer does a musician on a budget have to sacrifice tone and reliability. The GarageTone series of pedals have been designed to have boutique quality sounds and superior construction at amazingly low prices. Each circuit was designed by Weil and chief engineer R.G. Keen with all the time and care that players have come to expect from Visual Sound. The pedals include: the Oil Can (Phaser), the Drivetrain (Overdrive), the GarageTone Tremolo, the Axle Grease (Delay) and the Chainsaw (Distortion).

We’re also happy to say that we’ve recently gotten excellent reviews from Guitar Player, Guitar World, Premier Guitar, and Vintage Guitar magazines.

The GarageTone series joins the already critically-acclaimed V2 Series of pedals: Jekyll & Hyde, Route 66, H2O, Double Trouble, Son of Hyde, Liquid Chorus, Route 808, Angry Fuzz, as well as the 10th Anniversary edition of the Visual Volume pedal (now in its 7th year of “raising the roof”).

Finally, Visual Sound was once again a -continued-
Wampler Pedals: There are a lot of pedal makers around that are just very ordinary. An overdrive, a distortion, maybe a fuzz thrown in, but nothing that really stands apart from the rest of the gear world. Maybe there’s nothing terrible about being ordinary. Ordinary is safe and ordinary is comfortable, but the cost of being ordinary is living inside a box with all the other ordinary companies and builders who are doing the same old ordinary things and selling you the same old ordinary tones. But who wants to be ordinary? More importantly, who wants to sound ordinary?

Wampler Pedals makes effect pedals that are anything but ordinary. Guitarists like Wampler Pedals because they want to sound extraordinary. They want something that inspires them… to play better, create music better, and sound better.

While other builders play it safe selling products they’ve been making for decades, some of them reissuing designs that deserve the label “antique,” Wampler has constantly pushed the envelope with new and exciting products designed to inspire guitarists to break out of the safety of the ordinary and into true excellence. Providing extremely high quality components and genuinely forward-thinking designs at prices that compete very well with anybody in the boutique industry, Wampler Pedals has a product to fit virtually every need.

Brian Wampler didn’t invent the distortion pedal, but anyone who has used a few of his products can tell you he has done at least as much as anyone to make sure that the sound in your head can come out of your speakers. Best of all, it doesn’t stop with what’s available. With Brian Wampler continuing to wield the soldering iron like an artist’s paint brush, the future has some serious tone in store. Wampler Pedals rocks today, and will rock tomorrow as new tonal options continue to be made available: definitely affordable, certainly competitive, and tonefully extraordinary.

Wampler Pedals
www.wamplerpedals.com
Brian Wampler
brian@wamplerpedals.com

Warehouse Guitar Speakers® LLC: is an Internet-based retail speaker supplier and manufacturer based in Paducah, KY – an area of the country with a long history in speaker manufacturing that includes the original CTS company, Credence Speakers, Voice Communication Coil, and Hawley Products – the oldest cone manufacturer in the world. When an OEM speaker manufacturer needed to clear warehouse space in 2006, WGS was born and began manufacturing and selling American-assembled guitar speakers to the public.

Today we build a wide range of high-quality and reasonably priced 10 and 12-inch Alnico and Ceramic magnet guitars speakers that celebrate and reprise the golden era of speaker manufacturing in the USA and England during the ‘60s and ‘70s, including the 15 watt Alnico Black & BlueTM, 50 watt Alnico BlackHawkTM, 60 watt Veteran 30TM, 25 watt Green BeretTM, 80 watt British LeadTM, 65 watt ET65TM, 30 watt ReapertM, and 75 watt Retro 30TM, among others. WGS also builds high-power bass and PA speakers, and we are constantly developing and adding new speaker models to meet the demands of today’s guitarists.

Why should you consider buying WGS speakers? At a time when speaker manufacturers have moved production to Asia, compromising quality and reliability while prices continue to increase, our speakers are proudly assembled in the USA by a team with decades of speaker design and building experience, at a reasonable price. Our employees take pride in building the very best speakers available anywhere. Selling direct via the Web enables us to keep prices low without compromising quality. You buy direct from the manufacturer, and we proudly stand behind our products with fast shipping and exceptional customer service. For information on the entire range of WGS guitar and bass speakers, please visit our web site today.

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For the past thirty years WD® Music Products has been providing quality service and parts to satisfied working musicians, discriminating builders and OEMs. WD® pioneered the field of aftermarket pickups and continues to lead the way in the niche we created in 1978. We have manufactured thousands of pickups and if you need a replacement or something you envision yourself we can make it happen. For many years WD® Music has also carried a full line of replacement parts for just about any stringed instrument.

WD® Music is proud to continue the legacy of Kluson® tuning machines, one of the most respected OEM and replacement tuners for decades. Replace or restore your vintage instrument with genuine Kluson® tuning machines from WD® Music. We stock Kent Armstrong® pickups, L.R. Baggs® acoustic gear, Q-Parts® custom knobs and accessories, Bigsby® tailpieces, Graph Tech® products, Wilkinson® bridges, Grover® tuners and accessories, Big Bends® maintenance supplies, Guitar Facelifts, effects and much more.

History is repeating itself with genuine Kluson® tuners, continuing with WD®’s customer service, and…Stromberg® Jazz Guitars. No one can attempt or claim to reproduce the prestige of the original archtop Stromberg® guitars. But with history in mind WD® is also proud to distribute Stromberg® Jazz Guitars. With six models to satisfy everyone from the serious working jazz musician to the rockabilly king Stromberg® offers an affordable, quality instrument for almost any taste or style. Stromberg® Jazz Guitars is a small, limited production archtop guitar company whose main goals are quality, playability and affordability. Play one and see.

WD® Music Products. Thirty years of knowledge, service, quality parts and accessories waiting to serve you. Everything from pickupguards, tuning machines, pickups, electronics, necks, bodies, bridges, prewired assemblies and hard to find hardware—if your guitar or bass needs it, chances are WD® Music has it. Old fashioned customer service, genuine Kluson® tuners, classic Stromberg® Jazz Guitars, and so much more.

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