

the ToneQuest

The Player's Guide to Ultimate Tone Report™

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Buddy Whittington

The Cops Ain't Comin' to Jacksboro Highway

Buddy Whittington had been working as a journeyman guitarist in and around Ft. Worth, Texas since the 70's when he "discovered" 6 years ago by *John Mayall* while the blues legend was setting up for a gig in Dallas in which Sidemen was the opening act. Mayall can clearly be great ear for talent, since he's recruited some of the ever to emerge from anonymity, including *Eric Coco Montoya*, and his stellar record as a blues when he tapped Buddy Whittington to join

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Buddy's band The
credited as having a
most talented guitarists
Clapton, Peter Green, and
impresario remained intact
the Bluesbreakers.

TQR recently spent an afternoon with Buddy at his house outside of Ft. Worth talking about his career and playing and listening to his collection of gear, which included a deep assortment of guitars and amps he's assembled over the years. The next night we had the pleasure of seeing Buddy play at a Fort Worth institution—*Jubilation*—a small club at the end of a strip mall that has helped support a Who's Who of local musicians over the years. So you want to hear some tone? Go straight to your favorite music retailer and get yourself a copy of John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers latest CD—*Padlock on the Blues*. Once you've heard Buddy play, you'll appreciate why he has been at the very top of our interview list from day one. We're also honored to announce that Buddy is now a member of The ToneQuest Report advisory board. Enjoy, fellow Tonefreaks, because Buddy Whittington is hands-down one of the most toneful, tasteful, and accomplished guitarists of our time. Now, what's all the ruckus about Jacksboro Highway?

TQR: Lets start at the beginning, Buddy.

My big sister was pretty hip in the early 60's and when I was around 8 years old I remember her coming home with records by Slim Harpo, Gary U.S. Bonds, several John Mayall records—a lot of stuff that wasn't really Top 40 at the time. I guess you could say that she was my muse...

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TQR: *Were you given a guitar or did you buy one with your paper route money?*

The first decent guitar I owned I sure did buy with paper route money. It was one of the Kalamazoo electrics that looked like a Melody Maker, but before that one my Dad bought me a Catalina acoustic that was sold by an auto parts store, and I had some Airline and Supro guitars. One that I have never seen since had a built in battery-operated tremolo that varied the volume.

TQR: *Did you take lessons from anyone?*

No, but there was always seemed to be someone around whose playing attracted me—different guys in the neighborhood who didn't get up until noon because they had been out playing all night. So I learned all of that early stuff like *Honky Tonk* and *House of the Rising Sun* hanging around them.

TQR: *These were much older players?*

Yeah, well I was 8 years old and they must have been in their late teens or early twenties. There was one guy I just wouldn't leave alone who had a band that used to set up in his front yard, and I just kept going over there until they finally let me start playing a little bit. He showed me some things and I started picking up licks from records.

TQR: *When did you really start playing in front of an audience?*

There was a neighborhood swimming pool here in Ft. Worth and the man that ran the place would give us free passes when my friend and I would come in and play things like *Walk Don't Run* and *Pipeline*. Then before high school I started playing with some country players because that's what presented itself to me first. There was a lot of country music and western swing in the house when I was growing up. I wasn't so hip on it as a kid but I see now that it was the foundation for what I do today, really. I'm not a very good country player, but I really admire the players that have gone that route and play those wonderful Tele licks. I was playing out on Jacksboro Highway in Ft. Worth by the time I was 14 or 15 years old.

TQR: *What was happening there?*

It was kind of a gambling area—Lord knows what all was going on. Since the 30's and 40's it had been known for gambling, prostitution, drug running, and illegal casinos, but by the time I got there it was just a funky old strip full of beer joints. All I knew was that I wanted to play guitar. There was always somebody in the band that was of legal age and at one time I was playing in a band with a fireman and a policeman,

so that was one reason why my parents would let me play down there.

TQR: *So you cut your teeth in beer and a shot country western bars?*

They were pretty much skull orchards, yep. Once in awhile we'd play a country club, which was an entirely different deal.

TQR: *And at this point you knew you wanted to be a guitar player...*

Oh, I knew that ever since I had first heard my sister's records. Sometimes I've wished that I'd re-thought things, but it's too late to go back to plumbing school now! I can't complain—it's been a real good ride for the most part. I've been doing this for a long time, and I did some electronics repair for awhile—just long enough to render everything I know now obsolete. And at 43, I can't see those circuit boards the way I used to, anyway. I still really enjoy playing for a living, but with 2 kids you have to decide how much you want to be away from your family.

TQR: *Travel at any level isn't what it's cracked up to be...*

No it isn't, and we're a real close family.

TQR: *It's time that you can never get back.*

Well, that's why this gig with John has worked out so well. He's working on his second family, he's got children from his first marriage that are my age and he has a 5 year old and a 16 year old, so he's trying to be there a little more this round, you know?

TQR: *When did your career really start to develop?*

I've always played—it's a fairly healthy music scene in and around Ft. Worth and there are a million musicians here, but there used to be a lot more places to play than there are now. Seems like a few clubs are taking care of everybody more so today, but I've been working around here steadily since 1975.

TQR: *How did you get the gig with John Mayall?*

Our band *The Sidemen* had worked a lot at a place called the Dallas Alley and the owner thought we would be a good opening act for *The Bluesbreakers*. We did our show, it went well, and John was setting up during our set. That's unusual, because after 6 years playing with John I can tell you that we rarely get to our gigs before the opening act goes on. So it was a divine intervention kind of thing having John hear us in the first place. He was right there setting up while we played our set, but I didn't know whether he would even say anything to us afterwards. He asked me if I had a business card

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and said he was going to be doing some recording and might give me a call. I've never seen anything work quite that way before. I mean, I went for a long time when I couldn't get



to make a living. Well, I'm about 10 years younger than Harvey, but I completely understand how he feels.

TQR: *Times have certainly changed...and it's never been more evident than with the astounding prices of vintage gear. Yesterday we watched a '55 Tweed Deluxe sell on eBay for \$1,855.00*

It is unbelievable, having been around when nobody wanted those amps. They used to strip and paint them black to make them look more up-to-date.

TQR: *Joe Barden reminded us of the days in the 60's when Fenders were the guitars you played until you could afford a real guitar—a Gibson.*

Yeah, I played a Les Paul for a long time and I love them, but you just can't do all the things you want...I can take a Stratocaster and just do an entire gig with it, whereas with a Les Paul, I can't get the variation in tone that I need.

TQR: *They are a little easier to play, though...*

Well, you have to acquire an appreciation for the whole Strat thing, get your hand built up a bit, and raise the action to get them to really sing.

TQR: *Let's talk about your guitars....*

I had a '68 or '69 Goldtop Deluxe—that was the first really good guitar I ever had and I played that for 5 years or so, and I bought a Telecaster Deluxe with the single humbucker that I played for awhile. Then I ran across a Les Paul Junior TV model with one P90 that I traded the Telecaster for, and I got to where I really liked that Junior because the P90 sounded so much fatter than the mini-humbuckers on the Goldtop. To this day I wish I had a Les Paul Deluxe where I could leave the mini-humbucker in the front and put a full-size pickup in the bridge position. It's hard to drive an amp with that mini bridge pickup and I suppose that Seymour Duncan has something I could use there.

TQR: *Do you still have any of those guitars?*

The Junior got ripped off along with a truckload of gear—a couple of Hammonds and an entire PA system. It was probably 5 years later that I overheard some guys talking about a Junior at a club here in town and I asked the guy who had bought it if I could look at it. It was my old stolen guitar and the guy that owned it gave it back to me.

He'd "improved" it by putting a Badass bridge and some Grovers on it, but to me, I would have probably done that too. I'm a real *utilitarian* about guitars



unless they work really well stock. I played a Gibson ES340 for awhile, and from there I went to one of the Gibson Medallion Flying V's that was produced in the early 70's. I played that for a long time until I traded it for the first Stratocaster I ever had—a sunburst '65 that was really clean and very nice. I still have that one. I wish I had the Flying V though, because Steve Daly with Kiss My Amp was telling me that that those are going for something like \$6,000 today—and that was never a great guitar to begin with. I sure wouldn't have dropped six grand on it. I don't think I'd do that on any guitar, having been around when they were \$200—it would take all the fun out of it for me. I just can't comprehend spending that kind of money on a guitar. When we were recording *Blues for the Lost Days* our producer John Porter borrowed a '58 Les Paul Standard that I used. Just going in to do a Mayall album with an old Les Paul was pretty cool. We used it on the song "Dead City" on *Blues for the Lost Days*. I tried it first with a Telecaster and it wasn't happening, so we did it with the Les Paul and a 4x12 cabinet with a Dr. Z Prescription head, and the tone was just *there*. There's nothing you can do to keep it from happening when the tone is really on, you know. It's a divine kind of thing.

TQR: *Your tone on all of the Mayall albums is entirely yours, and it would be difficult to confuse it or your phrasing with anyone else we've ever heard. You really have nailed what we like to call signature tone.*

If anything...well, I'm not the greatest player in the world. There are kids out there today that can technically tear it up, but when you get to where you're through trying to be the

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fastest player and you're ready to write some good songs and play with the ensemble instead of being the out front guitar player...I just enjoy playing with the band. There's a lot more to it—learning how to play rhythm with the band, working on your time—there's more to it than just standing up there...

TQR: *Being a Guitar God?*

Yeah, right.

TQR: *Your vibrato is really distinctive—it has a smooth edge to it that few players seem to acquire. Peter Green comes to mind, certainly. Did you consciously work on that aspect of your playing?*

Well, I think I'm still a little jerky sometimes. I try to make myself take my time and be a little more fluid with it. After a certain point I guess it becomes natural. Peter Green, now, he's the King. We're going to be doing something like 39 dates with him coming up in May. We played with Peter, Mick Taylor, and Kim Simmonds—all these British guys that I just idolized. When Mick Taylor is really on...man, you talk about vibrato...when he's playing slide there's none better.

TQR: *How's Mick doing?*

Great. He's playing with Max Middleton, who played keys on a lot of Jeff Beck's early stuff.

TQR: *Tell us a little about the people in John Mayall's band.*

Most recently we added Greg Rzab, who played bass with Buddy Guy for over 10 years. Greg just turned 40, so he was playing with Buddy and Junior Wells when he was just a young pup. And then there's Joe Yuele—he's been playing drums with John for 15 years or so—Coco Montoya got him that gig. He also doubles as our road manager/tour manager and he does a great job handling all of that. And then John handles keyboards. On the albums we use Tommy Eyre—he's a wonderful Hammond B3 player, and a great guitar player, too. He can play all the wonderful things that Chet Atkins does like *Yankee Doodle Dixie*. Just about the time you think you're starting to get somewhere on your instrument, here comes along a keyboard player that can just tear you up.

TQR: *We should get back to your axes, but speaking of Guitar Gods, Buddy, who were your most significant influences?*

Oh, boy. Billy Gibbons for sure, and I think Billy got a lot from Peter Green, Eric, and Mick Taylor. The early ZZ Top records were just really important to me—still are, talkin' about tone. They were recording in a tiny little studio in Tyler, Texas back then and I still don't think you can get any better than the sound of those early records. Then there's Roy

Nichols, who played with Merle Haggard, James Burton, Bugs Henderson...Bugs can still play his butt off. I'll tell you what I'd like to play is that old Eldon Shamblin stuff. You listen to those Bob Wills records and he's really holding the song together—it's like the rhythm guitar player takes the place of the drummer in those songs. I didn't spend enough time learning those old songs when I was younger because I wanted to play rock & roll, and now I wish I had. I know guys that are 60 years old that are so good—they just *breathe* that music. I do some gigs with those guys sometimes but I don't really keep up with them. They know all of those

“I have to get up there and blast sometimes. You got to do the gig.”

Western Swing tunes where there are 3 fiddles out front and they can hear the melody of the song and jump right into it without practicing or having ever played together. It'd be like us playing “*Statesboro Blues*,” you know? Also some of the other Ft. Worth guys like John Nitzinger and Lee Pickens of *Bloodrock* were big influences, along with Freddie King. He made a BIG impression. Most of the Texas guys I know have come home from California, but Red Young is still there doing his swing thing, Lon Price is playing saxophone, and Steven Bruton went to L.A. years ago with Kris Kristofferson. Glen Clark has had some songwriting success after a stint with Bonnie Raitt. I see Warren Ham on Leno and Conan fairly regularly too. He and his brother Bill were in the house band on the Sonny and Cher show in the 60's. Bill Ham is an awesome guitar player.

TQR: *How would you classify your style of playing?*



I'd rather not classify myself. I love playing the Blues and that's at the root of most everything that I do, but then again, I like everything. Being a working guitar player, it's never been a detriment. But I don't want to just play shuffles and slow blues, either. Anson Funderburgh is a monstrous player, and so is Jimmy Vaughan, but their

approach is different than mine—they play as *little as possible*. I've heard Anson referred to as the king of restraint. Me, I'm too antsy. I have to get up there and blast sometimes, you know. All in all, you got to *do the gig*. **TQ**

Next Issue: Part 2, Buddy's Gear In Depth...Old Marshalls, THE GUITAR, (see cover) THE AMP (The Dr. Z MAZ 38)



The G&L ASAT

ToneQuest Review

James Pennebaker

Welcome to my first guitar review for *The ToneQuest Report*. I received a 1993 G&L ASAT, serial number G038318, via FedEx from the ToneQuest offices in Atlanta this past January. It was a used instrument in exceptionally fine condition—just a shade this side of “mint” except for some minor fret wear. Now, I’d never had any real hands-on experience with G&L guitars before, so this was going to be a particularly interesting and fun review for me. Since G&L is the company originally founded by Leo Fender and George Fullerton, I expected to receive a fine quality instrument, and I was not disappointed by my first impression. The guitar is patterned after the Fender Telecaster with a few interesting twists and variations along the way. Clearly, Leo attempted to make a better version of his own mousetrap when he created the ASAT.

So let’s see what this ASAT is made of... Upon removing the neck to have a look at the wood inside the neck cavity, I could see that the body was made of alder. According to G&L, solid finishes are applied to alder bodies and their clear finishes rate ash for it’s attractive grain. This guitar is a comfortable medium weight—not super light, but definitely not on the heavy side either. The finish is a metallic gold that bears a striking resemblance to what vintage Fender gear heads would refer to as “Shoreline Gold.” The finish material has the look and feel of polyester or polyurethane, because it appeared a little too thick and durable to be nitrocellulose lacquer. Though I couldn’t be certain of the exact finish material, it’s definitely a beautiful and flawless finish job. The slab cut maple neck is satin finished and bolted to the body with a three-screw neck plate with tilt adjustment, very much like Fender guitars from the 1970’s. Some have debated whether this design is as inherently stable as the 4-screw neck plate design found on the original Telecaster. I didn’t notice any detrimental effects from the 3-screw mounting, but I don’t use the necks on my guitars as a whammy bar either! The fingerboard is Indian rosewood with 22 jumbo frets, and the headstock sports matte-finished Sperzel non-locking tuners.



Interestingly, the neck has a plugged tooling hole in the back of the headstock similar to vintage Fender guitars. This revealed that the neck blank was cut out and possibly rough-shaped using a jig and pin router, just like Leo did it in the old days. The truss rod, however, is installed quite differently from a vintage Telecaster. Upon an extremely close look you can see that the neck has been cut in half length-wise for the truss rod installation. The neck blank is split down the middle and the rod installed into a rout on the inside, rather than installing it from the rear, or top of the neck. The two halves are then glued back together so there is no “skunk



stripe” on the back of the neck. The truss rod is adjustable via a “bullet” style nut at the headstock that accepts a 1/8” Allen wrench. The controls are volume, tone and a 3-way pickup selector identical to those on a standard Telecaster, and they’re mounted on a metal control plate exactly like a standard Telecaster. The chrome plated bridge is a rear loading type of G&L’s own “saddle lock” design which has a small Allen set screw that allows all the string saddles to be pressed together. The bridge is nestled deeply in a rout on the top that G&L claims will provide improved sustain over the old string-through-body Telecaster bridge design. The bridge also features six individual, adjustable bridge feet for setting string height and intonation.



Before I plugged the ASAT in, I wanted to note how it played (and sounded unplugged). I did a very slight bit of set up work on the guitar just to suit my own playing preferences – nothing major, just a slight tweak on the truss rod to make the neck dead straight and a tiny adjustment of the neck tilt, and I was ready to go. Because of my long love for Telecasters, the ASAT instantly felt comfortable and familiar. The neck is shaped relatively thin for my taste with a flat radius on the back—definitely not a “vintage” vibe here. Add the G&L’s big jumbo frets and you have a modern-feeling guitar with one exception—the rosewood board has retained a 7.5 inch radius, similar to the original Tele design. This com-

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bination makes chording more comfortable, and combined with the extra tall jumbo frets, string bending is a breeze. Now, I admit to being so set in my ways and accustomed to vintage-style guitars that I qualify for “old geezer” status compared to most folks. I just don’t care for a lot of stuff

“After a few minutes I really began to enjoy the ease with which this guitar plays”

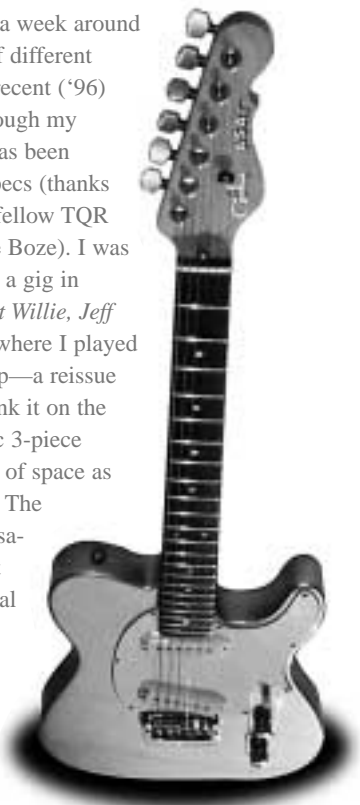
that’s being made today, including some of the various so-called “reissue” models. However, after a few minutes I really began to enjoy the ease with which this guitar played. It definitely has unique benefits in the playability department while clearly not trying to be any kind of “reissue.” In fact, it had me thinking of the limitations associated with certain vintage designs... Since this was a used guitar, there was evidence of some minor playing wear on the frets. There were slight divots under the G and B strings from the first fret up to around the tenth fret or so, and the wear was less pronounced as I moved up the fingerboard. It didn’t hinder playability in any way, but if I was keeping this guitar I would get a fret dress by a competent repair person to get it back into perfect shape; eventually intonation and playability will start to suffer.

As far as it’s unplugged sound goes, the guitar was nicely resonant and it sounded very good all by itself, with plenty of sustain. It seems as if G&L’s claims about the bridge design providing great sustain held up to my critical audition, and this was well illustrated just by playing a good ol’ first position open “G” chord where you’ve got a lot of open strings ringing. You can’t really get a good idea of what an electric guitar is going to sound like before you plug it in, but if it sounds good acoustically, you can usually be pretty sure it will sound good through an amp.

OK, time to get plugged up. The ASAT has two G&L “Magnetic Field” pickups. These are rather large rectangular “mini soap bar” or what I like to call “candy bar” pickups – one in the front, or neck position, and one back by the bridge. The rear pickup is angled back toward the treble side of the bridge similar to a Telecaster bridge pickup. Current G&L literature claims that these are “high output” single coils, but the pickups in this particular guitar produced a DC resistance of just 4.84Kohms and 4.99Kohms for the bridge and neck pickups respectively. That’s extremely low compared to most stock and custom pickups, and they don’t hit the front end of an amp as hard as most of the guitars I own, including my ’53 Telecaster and a relic Tele. I looked for a little more info on these pickups at G&L’s web site and found information

stating that the magnetic field design gives the pickups about “twice the output per wind, making the pickup much quieter while allowing a greater overall output.” While this guitar was made in 1993, I have to say that the output of the pickups was relatively low and doesn’t qualify for “greater overall output” in my book. Even so, both pickups sounded really good with lots of detail and definition to their tone, which is usually a by-product of lower output. The bridge pickup retains a high level of “twang” that you would expect from a Tele, but it also has a lot of warm low mids that you might not expect to get out of a Telecaster. Pop the strings, and you’ll get plenty of “slap” and chicken pickin’ spank, but you’re treated to a lot of woody tone, too. The unique sound of the guitar really punches through, and that can partly be attributed to the low output and the fact that the bridge pickup is mounted directly to the body as opposed to being suspended on a metal bridge plate like the standard Telecaster design. Although both pickups are surrounded by a pickguard, they are mounted directly into the guitar body with three screws for both height and tilt adjustment. The sound of this guitar really made me sit up and pay attention in the middle position with both pickups on —talk about Steve Cropper tone! It’s a perfect blend of the two pickups, with neither one overpowering the other—a really full, sweet sound that’s a rhythm players dream. The neck pickup alone has a full, rich sound with a shade of sparkle on the top end— not tubby or muddy in the least.

I played this guitar for about a week around the house through a couple of different amps. First, through a fairly recent (’96) Fender Blues Jr. and also through my ’59 Tweed Vibrolux, which has been converted to tweed Deluxe specs (thanks to the help of my friend and fellow TQR advisory board member Dave Boze). I was also able to use this guitar on a gig in Atlanta with Jimmy Hall (*Wet Willie, Jeff Beck, Allman Brothers*, etc.) where I played it through my usual stage amp—a reissue Vox AC30. I really got to crank it on the gig since we were just a basic 3-piece band and I had to fill up a lot of space as the lone guitarist in the band. The G&L proved to be a very versatile and well-made guitar that plays effortlessly. My only real complaint is that the pickups didn’t provide just a little bit more output for those times when I wanted to hit the front end of my amp with a hotter signal. **TQ**



Tommy Shannon

Do You Believe In Magic? Part 2

TQR: *How were you set for gear when you joined Stevie, Tommy?*

Well, I still had my one Acoustic 360 left and my Jazz Bass. Somehow I managed to keep the bass through everything. I hocked the amp once or twice, but I had gotten it back too.

TQR: *Did you ever pay much attention to what Stevie was doing with his gear back then?*

He was always doing something wild, wiring amps up in weird ways. He had a Super Reverb, Twins, and a Marshall. Mostly Fenders, but he loved Marshall's too. I had *no idea* how he wired all of that shit up.

TQR: *Was he using those big strings back then, too?*

Yeah, we didn't call them strings, though. We used to kid him about how they were more like barbed wire. We called him "Modern Man" because he was always coming up with all of these inventions, you know. He had this technique down that actually worked where he would take Super Glue and talcum powder, mix it up, and put it on the end of a raw, bloody finger on his left hand. Then he'd press that finger with the glue on it against the end of a finger on his right hand, let it dry a little, and pull the skin off so he had new skin on the end of the finger on his left hand. He'd do that sometimes 2 or 3 times to get through a night. His fingers always looked like hell, always bleeding.

TQR: *Tommy, did Stevie really know anything about electronics?*

Well, see...Stevie was a genius. He really was. He was real high on speed one time when we were going to Lubbock and we had this reel-to-reel tape deck that wasn't working. Stevie took it apart and had the pieces all over the back of the truck, and even though he'd never done anything like that before, he put it back together and he'd fixed it. It wasn't that he was trained, it was more *curiosity*. He'd try anything, really. He paid very close attention to all of that stuff, while me...I was more interested in chasing girls.

TQR: *Girls notwithstanding, were you as much into shaping your tone back then as Stevie was?*

Well, I wanted to get a great tone, but I wasn't aware of all

the different options back then, I guess. Stevie always liked a big bottom end, and we got these Dumbles... Stevie had one and I had one, but I didn't like mine, so I gave it to Stevie to use. I've never liked 12" speakers for bass—10"s are my favorites.

TQR: *Why?*

Well, I just like the way they sound. After Stevie had really taken off I was using these 2 Peavey's with 18" speakers,



and then I got some Hartke's with 10's that I really liked. I started getting into different tones and I wanted more than just a good bottom, and 10's have always sounded the best to me. Like those Ampeg SVT's, you just can't beat those with 8 10's.

TQR: *Did you use SVT's at all?*

Actually, I did, but to be honest, I didn't have the money for a long time. I always loved them, but they were expensive. I'm using an Ampeg SVT cabinet and a Pro 3 head now, though.

TQR: *An SVT wasn't as expensive as a Dumble...*

No, but by then I didn't have to pay for that or the Peaveys, either. I did a complete turnaround where I went from heavy .150's to medium gauge roundwound strings and I started experimenting with different heads and cabinets.

TQR: *Such as?*

Oh, an Ampeg SVT II head, a Trace Elliot head and cabs, a Gallien-Krueger, which I really liked. I probably used that more than anything else, and I still have 2 Hartke cabinets. I played Eden for awhile, and a company named Dietz here in Austin made some great cabinets that I used.

TQR: *Always staying with 10's now?*

Yeah.

TQR: *So you really have run the gamut as far as equipment goes...*



Oh, I really have. I'm definitely after the quest for tone. I have this tone in my head that I've still never found yet.

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TQR: *Can you describe it?*

Well, it's more power than I need, because that way it doesn't overdrive the amp and distort. So real powerful, solid—not muddy—distinct, percussive. It really is a tone quest. But 50% of the whole quest for tone is also about what comes from your heart and your hands. Technique is important too.

TQR: *With bass, isn't there a real fine line between crystal clear tone and "muddy?"*

Oh, yeah. And that's why 10" speakers work so well for me, because they get as close as I've ever come to maintaining the clarity and power I want without becoming muddy.

TQR: *Playing with Stevie, you were tuning down a half step. That makes it even more challenging for a bass player, in particular, doesn't it?*

Yeah, the E string is always a little loose. I tried all kinds of things—pulling my bridge back, putting clamps on the strings behind the nut—anything to put more tension on the strings, but I never could get it right. It's just hard to do when you're tuned to E flat.

TQR: *What are some of your other favorite instruments, in addition to the Jazz Bass?*

Right now I'm playing a bass that Fender made for me that has a combination of Jazz Bass and Precision pickups, and they put this special neck on it for me that they had been saving. It's really nice.

TQR: *Is the profile more like a P Bass or the Jazz Bass?*

More like the Jazz Bass—narrow at the nut and the body is like the Jazz Deluxe. The problem is, I have several basses that play much better than the Fenders, but they don't have the sound.

TQR: *Yeah, you could say the same thing about guitars—so many other guitars can be easier to play, while Fenders can pose a bit more of a struggle.*

Really, the strings rattle...I've got a bass that I played with Stevie that was made for me by Augie Balgocian—it's called an A Bass, and I really love that one. It's an incredibly good bass. I've got a bunch of instruments—a Firebird bass that I like. Stevie gave me a beautiful '57 P Bass that he carved "Soul to Soul" on with a woodburning tool just below the pickup. I keep that one locked away. I have a '66 P Bass and another Jazz Deluxe along with 2 Jennings & Thompson basses that were custom made here in Austin. They were so good that the company went out of business.

TQR: *Too good, eh?*

Yeah, they were, and they sold for \$4,000 so I guess a lot of people couldn't afford them.

TQR: *So you're a gear hound now?*

Yeah, I have a storage locker with all of this stuff in it—I probably don't even know what all I have in it anymore.

TQR: *How difficult is it for you to deal with the sound of different venues every night? You've played every thing imaginable, from Radio City Music Hall to Woodstock, and everything in between. Does the sound you're hearing live need to be really good for you to play your best?*

Yeah, I wish these engineers in recording studios could understand that. But playing those big outside venues never really bothered me because we always had a good monitor system and a good monitor guy running it, and there was no back wall for the sound to bounce off of, so I never had problems outdoors. Indoors, I've played some really tough places my whole life.

TQR: *How do you deal with that as a player?*

Well, you try and get it the best that you can first, and when you finally reach that point where you know it's not going to get any better, you just give your heart and soul to the music. With Stevie it was always an unwritten rule that when we got on stage, nothing, and I mean *nothing* got in the way of us

*“ Nothing...and I mean nothing
got in the way of us playing with
all of our hearts”*

playing with all of our hearts. You can't sit around all night at a gig constantly bitching about the sound, or you're really going to have a bad show.

TQR: *Save the bitchin' for the studio...*

Yeah. You just have to get up there with what you've got. No matter what happens, you just have to go for it, unless someone's shooting at you or something. That might be a good reason to shut things down...

TQR: *Stevie's guitar tech, René Martinez told us that Stevie didn't play loud just to play loud, but that it was the only way he could get the amps cooking the way he wanted for his tone.*

That's absolutely true, and Stevie's hearing was perfect. I remember being in the studio recording *InStep* and he had a wall of amps in this room. I was walking past them with a

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cup of coffee in my hand when he hit a high note that went through me like I'd been shot. I dropped my coffee and almost fell down, it was so loud, but Stevie had his head right next to a speaker playing so *ungodly* loud, and I thought, "How can he *do that*?" But it never seemed to affect his hearing. Yeah, obviously he's known for having a great tone, so all of that weird stuff he did to get it made sense. Didn't make sense to other people, but like René said, it made sense to Stevie, and whatever it was that he did, it worked. It took all of those different amps to get the sound that he wanted, and he had to really drive them to get the tone he was looking for, and he did. But it wasn't about volume, you know—it was all about *tone*.

TQR: *I bet there was a lot of maintenance involved in keeping all of those amps running...*

Oh, sure. Caesar Diaz was Stevie's amp tech, and in the studio they would be rolling amps in and out constantly, probably every half an hour. Stevie was *brutal* on amps, and they were always fixing them because he'd blow them up.

TQR: *In the studio do you usually run straight into the board, through an amp, or both?*

Always both. And my favorite studio amp is the Ampeg B15, which I've probably used on just about all of our recordings. You know, I'm known as a 4-string, straight-ahead player, but that's because of the bands I've been in more than anything else. On my own, I'm very interested in effects, different basses and amps, compressors—I love compression. Chris Layton and I are working on a *Double Trouble* record right now and we have a lot of really good artists on it—Dr. John, Susan Tedeschi, Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Johnny Lang, Jimmie Vaughan, and we're hoping to get Willie Nelson to come in and do a song or two. We've written what I think are some great songs. It's not really a Blues record—it has some rock & roll on it, but everyone thinks we're gonna go out and try to recreate what we had with Stevie.

TQR: *Well, not in this world...*

If it was possible it would be great, but it's not—Stevie's gone. I love him with all my heart. He was the best friend I ever had, but yeah...

TQR: *Isn't it strange how some of the truly great players that left us so early seemed not to be of this world?*

Oh, I know, I really have thought that. It's like they came here to do their job and split. Every time Stevie picked up a guitar, no matter what kind of mood he was in—he could be goofing off and acting funny—every time he picked up a guitar he would go into another state of mind that I came to know so well. I know what that state of mind is because I can go in

and out of it, but Stevie *lived* there, just like Jimi Hendrix did. You know that feeling when you get so deep into it that you feel like you're not even playing anymore? That's what I live for. It's the most wonderful, spiritual feeling. You're not thinking at all, it's as if you step out of the way and something else takes over. I've felt that, but I don't live there like Stevie did. I go in and out of that place, but Stevie couldn't help it. When it came to playing his guitar, he went there

*“It wasn't about volume, you know...
it was all about tone.”*

automatically. Like Jimi Hendrix—Jimi Hendrix is my favorite musician of all time, by the way, and he sure wasn't from this planet. You think about it—he came out in '66 and no one has ever caught up with him, ever. There was an unspeakable aspect of his playing and his music that was undefinable—more than a style—it was something altogether different. When we covered Jimi, Stevie did that totally out of respect for him.

TQR: *Tommy, what kind of music do you listen to now when you're just relaxing at home?*

It goes without saying that I listen to a lot of the music that I grew up listening to, you know, but I'm not stuck there either. I listen to people like *The Wallflowers*, *Sarah McLachlan*—a lot of people. Bruce Springsteen's *Born to Be Wild*. I'm not a fanatic about the Blues by any means—when you hear our record you'll hear that. I still listen to Hendrix, of course. That's like filling up your car with gas, you have to do that now and then. I listen to a lot of new acts too, just to hear what's happening—some of them I like and some I don't. I like John Hiatt a lot, and I love Bob Dylan—one of my heroes. Love *The Stones*, too, and Eric Clapton, of course. He's a great guy—we played together a few months ago in L.A. at a fundraiser for people that are in recovery. A lot of great artists were there—Bonnie Raitt, Dr. John, Jimmie Vaughan...half the artists I know are in recovery now.

TQR: *Any regrets about anyone that you didn't get a chance to play with over the years?*

Yes, Jimi Hendrix. He played my old '62 Jazz bass though—played it twice. He just flipped it upside down and played the *shit* out of it, but not like a guitar player playing bass.

TQR: *How did that happen?*

The first time it happened was in this club in New York called *The Scene*. The first time I walked in I just couldn't believe it—the whole place was just full of beautiful girls (laughs).

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Led Zeppelin was there, a couple of the Stones, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Jimi. We were playing there with Johnny Winter and I looked over and saw Jimi off to the side of the stage mouthing "Can I play?" I immediately stopped in the middle of the song we were doing and handed him my bass. He played a few more songs on bass with Johnny, but I never got to play with him. I would've liked to have played with Freddie King too, but I never got to do that.

TQR: *Another great guitarist from The Lone Star State. Why do you think there have been so many fantastic guitarists from Texas?*

A lot of it is tradition. When Stevie and Jimmie were real young, all of these guys would come through Austin and play at Antone's. It was a real tight knit group with no competition among these musicians—it was like a family. So the tradition has always existed here in Texas. But Austin has changed in the past 10 years and it's become really diluted. Most of the younger kids now have no understanding or appreciation of what came before them.

TQR: *What advice can you offer from your experience over the past 30 years?*

If you really love music and love playing with all of your heart, you'll find a way to be successful, but you gotta love it. If you get into a competitive thing, if you start feeling smug because you're better than this guy or that guy, you'll get lost. You just have to keep focused on playing, and play from your heart, not your head.

TQR: *You have to be into it for the right reasons...*

Oh, exactly. I look at my own life and God knows I had every reason to drop out several times and never come back, but it wasn't because I was stubborn or strong—it was because that was what I loved to do. I had such a passion for it, and everything else falls in place when you have that passion in your life. If you really love playing, it will lead you where you need to go and you won't have to worry about it.

TQR: *Tom Petty has been quoted as saying that it also helps if playing music is the only thing you can do. When you don't have any other choices—now you're talkin'.*

Yeah, that's certainly been true for me. I don't know anything else. I mean, what else am I going to do, go work at Burger King? I've felt that way all of my life. **To**



Peavey Delta Blues

review

We receive a lot of requests for reviews of new gear, and you can expect to read such reviews regularly in future issues of *The ToneQuest Report*. The challenge that we often encounter in evaluating "affordable" products in particular is that they can sometimes suffer to some extent from the compromises that all manufacturers must make to keep their costs and prices low. A Jetta wasn't intended to compete with a Porsche, and if a Porsche is what you need, don't waste your time test-driving a Jetta (or worse, struggling to make it a Porsche). Please keep this fact in mind as we review "affordable" new gear. We don't believe that manufacturers should be faulted for building a product that appeals to the cost-conscious among us; they do what they can within the constraints imposed by modern manufacturing costs, and in many respects, the quality of these products has become astonishingly good. However, you get what you pay for when buying new gear, the trade off is real, and it's one that every player must consider on a personal level.

Last month we introduced you to the joys of the vintage Fender Vibroverb and the big tone of 15" speakers. Very few manufacturers offer new guitar amps equipped with 15's today, but the folks at Peavey in Meridian, MS offer for your consideration *The Delta Blues*—a hybrid, modern design in an attractive package somewhat visually reminiscent of the tweed Fender TV front Pro amps of the early 50's. Our review follows.

Those of you that have been with us for a few issues now know that we prefer to find "as new" gear at used prices whenever possible, and frankly, it isn't that hard to do most of the time. Why walk out of a store with a new amp or guitar if you can find the exact same thing for 30%-50% less, in "as new" condition? Our Delta Blues amp was in mint condition with the owner's manual and Peavey inspection slip still nestled in the bottom of the cabinet, and the "used" sale price was \$400. Had this amp really been played? It didn't look like it, and it certainly hadn't been gigged hard or often.

The Delta Blues is a big-box, faux tweed rendition of the old Pro amps with some significant modern departures. The "tweed" is really a vinyl-like material more akin to tolex, but from several feet away it passes the tweed look-alike test, and we suspect that this covering would survive the rigors of a

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band van better than the real thing. The grille cloth is equally durable, and it offers an attractive rendition of the vintage look, rendering a nice contrast between its dark oxblood color and the straw tones of tweed. Heavy-duty chrome corner covers complete the look, along with a vintage-style, top-mounted chrome control panel complete with chicken head knobs.

Construction

The cabinet of the Delta Blues is unusually well-constructed of sturdy 1/4 inch plywood with the exception of the bottom panel, which is a variant of a “manufactured wood product.” Even the baffleboard is made of plywood, and all of the wood surfaces are painted inside with a coat of matte black paint. The cabinet design features an open back with plenty of room for the Eminence ceramic magnet 15” speaker, and you may safely assume that this outstanding cabinet will remain solid and quiet for many years, based on our inspection. Not surprisingly, this amp weighs in at a substantial but not quite hernia-inducing 46 lbs.

Features

The Delta Blues comes with lots of familiar bells and whistles, including channel switching, an effects loop, a boost channel, tremolo, reverb, and a mid-range tone pot complementing the bass and treble controls. The all-tube design provides 30W of power, and this amp is currently shipped with 4 Sovtek EL84 tubes, 3 Ruby 12AX7’s, and a silicon diode rectifier. Like all “affordable” amps built today, the Delta Blues utilizes a printed circuit board. If there is one broad com-

“We can think of a few companies that could take a cue from Peavey in the customer service department.”

plaint we can make about printed circuit board designs (snob factor aside) it’s the inconsistency of the integrated controls in some pc board amps. Turning the dials is too often an “all or nothing” experience where “taper” seems virtually nonexistent compared to traditional potentiometers used in amps featuring point-to-point construction. If a tone or volume control is supposed to function within in a range of 1-12, an audible difference should be heard through most of the indicated range of the control. Too often, the effective range of these controls seems to be severely restricted when compared to the tone-shaping capabilities of more costly amplifiers, new and old. Check for yourself on your next shopping trip.

Tone

We ran the Delta Blues through its paces with an assortment of familiar vintage and newer guitars featuring humbuckers, single coil and P90 pickups. The verdict? This amp sounded *damn* good run “straight” with the boost off and just a shade

of reverb added (<3). At a volume setting of “4” to “6” the tone was surprisingly rich, warm, and balanced, with strong lows, a healthy dose of midrange, and very musical highs. Headroom was adequate, but clearly not equal to more powerful amps in the 40W range. Credit the EL84’s and the Eminence 15 for a playing a big role in the tone of The Delta Blues. It’s a great combination that really defines the character of this amp.



Expect a useable volume range of “3” to “8”—below “3” it was barely breathing, and above “8” (the dial can go all the way to “12”) the tone became strained and unpleasantly distorted, with very

little increase in volume. The sound of the big Eminence 15” speaker did not disappoint us, either. It’s a respectable workin’ man’s speaker for a workin’ man’s amp.

Effects

The tremolo controls exhibited a very limited sweep with perhaps 1/3 of the total range of the speed control audibly influencing the tremolo pulse, and the intensity control seemed to have a negligible affect above “4.” The overall volume of the amp seemed to be severely cut with the tremolo channel active. For an occasional tremolo effect you could dial in something useful here, but overall, this feature is very limited.

The reverb controls behaved much like the tremolo—above “3” the reverb spring audibly pinged and the tone was colored with an unpleasant tinniness. However, there *is* a sweet spot that can lend just the right amount of reverb to the amp. Well...unless you’re Dick Dale, what more do you need?

In our opinion, the boost channel on The Delta Blues could just be avoided. We achieved a much, much better overdriven tone by simply turning up the amp, in fact, doing so yielded *righteous* results that succeeded in earning the amp its name. But the squashed, artificial tone of the boost channel ain’t happening. It’s been tried before, and we didn’t like it then, either. Leave it off and buy a good stomptbox(see next issue).

Conclusion

The Delta Blues can provide rich, deep, balanced, clean tone at volumes loud enough to be heard on small to medium stages with a band, and it’s overdriven character is outstanding within the volume settings we’ve recommended. Peavey should be credited for having the foresight to design this amp with the musical character of EL84 power tubes in mind.

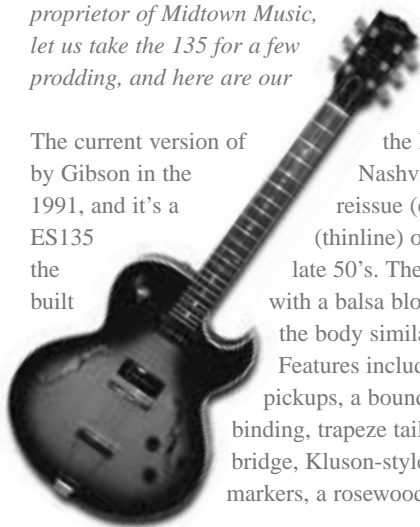
They deliver the sweet tone of 6V6's with the added chime unique to EL84's, and while the stock Sovtek and Ruby tubes are entirely respectable, an upgrade to NOS tubes might smooth out the tone even more. At 30W, The Delta Blues is not an appropriate tool for really big rooms and stages, and we would hesitate to push it too hard with an array of effects devices—particularly overdrive units. The Eminence 15" speaker does its job very well, and this amp is built with heavy-duty construction that has become increasingly uncommon in amps at this price range. Leave the onboard effects off, and you'll have a good, if not spectacular amp that should prove to be extremely dependable and well-suited for a wide range of applications. By the way, The Delta Blues is backed by a 5 year limited warranty, and when we contacted Peavey via telephone for technical information we were connected to a very knowledgeable regional service manager *immediately*. We can think of a few companies that could definitely take a cue from Peavey in the customer service department. The Delta Blues may not be the holy grail, but you could do a whole lot worse for the money if you're intent on buying a new amp in the "affordable" price range. And you already know how we feel about those 15"s...**To**

The Road Less Traveled a quick take on the GIBSON ES 135

Strolling through our favorite local used outlet again (boy, are we lucky to have even one great small independent shop nearby in these days of MegaStores) we stopped to consider a nearly-new Gibson ES135 hanging on the wall...took it down, plugged it in, and immediately thought, "Now, this guitar has potential." As usual, Dave, the proprietor of Midtown Music, was kind enough to let us take the 135 for a few days of picking and prodding, and here are our conclusions.

The current version of the ES135 has been built by Gibson in the Nashville factory since 1991, and it's a reissue (of sorts) of the ES135 (thinline) originally produced in the late 50's. The modern version is built with a balsa block in the middle of the body similar to an ES335.

Features include a single cutaway, 2 pickups, a bound body with no neck binding, trapeze tailpiece, tuneomatic bridge, Kluson-style tuners, dot fret markers, a rosewood board, laminated



carved maple top and, in our case, a nicely flamed 3-piece maple neck. Well, for you woody-tone freaks, what's not to like here? Our model was equipped with Gibson P100 pickups, although 135's can also be found with Classic PAF humbuckers. The P100's were OK, but they won't send you into an altered state of consciousness (as we believe all new guitar purchases should for at least a week or two). Try the humbucking model, or replace the P100's with your favorite after-market brand of P90's. Contacting Seymour Duncan or Scott Petersen at Harmonic Design would be a start in the right direction.

Our 135 left the factory with jumbo frets (thank you) that had been expertly installed and profiled, and the guitar had been setup very well. The appearance of the vintage sunburst finish was outstanding—*really* well done for assembly line work, with the "burst applied to the back of the neck as well (love that). The current models are available in standard antique sunburst and ebony finishes, although limited runs have also

"For you woody-tone freaks, what's not to like here?"

been produced in wine red and natural, with gold-plated hardware. We also briefly sampled the tone of an ebony 135 equipped with a factory Bigsby. Nice look, but a lot less vibe...Our guitar weighed about 6 lbs. and it was extremely comfortable to play, with a neck shape that was neither too clubby or too narrow. The 24 3/4" scale length will restrict you from doing much beyond the 17th fret on the 135, but otherwise, it played extremely well.

We were able to coax some top-induced feedback from this guitar depending upon our position relative to the amp, but we weren't handcuffed by it to the extent that a fully hollow ES330 will howl at moderate volumes. In fact, we were fully capable of hitting the front end of our amps with a hot, bluesy signal without feedback. Need a comparison? The tone of this guitar would suit Ronnie Earl *just fine*. You can move from edgy blues tones to a rich and subtle archtop vibe very nicely with the 135, and the bridge position could even yield some fiery stuff with a pair of great replacement pickups installed. We concluded that this guitar had the potential to be a real eye-opener in terms of its unique tone, timber, workmanship, and playability, but as is often the case with stock pickups, the P100's left us wanting more. Properly equipped, the ES135 will definitely take you beyond the Strat and Les Paul crowd in a hurry, and we believe that could be a very good thing—especially these days. Dare to be different, check it out, and let us know what you think. **To**



The Quest for Tone Revisited Todd Sharp

Welcome back to my little corner of *The ToneQuest Report*, and thanks to all of you who have been in touch in response to my previous ramblings on *tone*. This month, let's start by considering two points:

#1 Yeah, we need the right gear to enable us to do what we want to do.

#2 Sometimes we need to put #1 to rest and just play some music.

If there is anything I know, I *know* guitar players, and for us, the quest for tone is never over. The sound is never quite good enough, and we're always looking for *something else*. "It's close, but I want it *fatter* but not *woofy*. I need that *clear ringing bell sound*, but with *sustain*" etc., ad infinitum. I get it. After all, I repair and restore amps in *Nashville* of all places, in addition to doing my regular road gig with Delbert. And believe me, The ToneQuest bug is alive and well in Music City, USA—always has been. But here's my present dilemma in all of this. I know both sides pretty well—I've learned all kinds of stuff about amps and amplifier electronics, and I am what you would term a "veteran player." It's just that every time I sit down to write on this topic I am compelled to go in another direction to shake you up a bit.

Yes, if you lose the JBL's and install Celestions, your amp will sound more "British." Oh, *behave!* If you put NOS Tungsol 5881's in there instead of those Chinese 6L6's your amp will probably squash and roar a little better. But consider this too...almost no one will be affected by this but *you*. The guys in the band probably won't know, the producer will most likely say something like "It sounds like a Fender Twin to me," and virtually no one from the audience will ever come up to you after the gig and say "By the by, your amp sounds *much* better since you put the Mullard 12AX7 in the mixer stage, and you even play better for it." My point is that most guitarists I know will eagerly spend 95 percent of their time, energy, and money trying to fix something that might make a 5 percent difference overall, and that's fine...*if it helps you play better, too*. Now, some of you are probably thinking, "Yeah, that's the 5 percent I want, and maybe I'll sound like Jeff Beck with that 5 percent." Well, go for it. There are a zillion products out there, and a thousand amp techs (of which I am one) willing to help you. Yes, every little bit helps, but don't overreact to all the hype and marketing rhetoric generated in today's high-tech marketplace. This really isn't rocket

science. For the love of Pete (Townsend), no one has ever even *touched* Hendrix, and he got that tone in 1969!

And The Wind Cries...Larry

I could use the same vintage strat, string it upside down, plug into an Arbiter Fuzz Face and a Roger Mayer octave divider, use the same gauge strings as Hendrix and the same vintage Marshall. Hell, I could plug into Jimi's favorite Marshall, *the very one*—and I'd still sound just like Todd Sharp doing Hendrix. That's as good as it will ever get.

Here's this month's tip from your friendly veteran ToneQuest Explorer and Solder-Sniffing Guitarist:

Find a specific setup where the fretboard of your guitar feels absolutely right in your hands. If you're playing a Strat because your hero played one, but deep down inside you just can't make piece with it—if it doesn't feel as if it was meant for *your hands*, then you've got the *wrong tool*. STOP THERE. I can't tell you how to find it, and neither can anyone else. This is a *personal thang*. But stop and get yourself the right guitar *first*. If it's right, you may only need *one*, and that's precisely the number of guitars I take out on the road with me today after 25 years of doing this for a living. Until then, don't tweak or change anything. (Well, OK, maybe you can have one pedal if your amp doesn't have an alternate sound channel option, but that's it). Work with that for a while. AND PLAY SOME MUSIC.

Consider This:

LIMITATIONS ARE GOOD! They help me do things with my hands that come more directly from my heart rather than my head. Limitations make me play more creatively. I find new ways to do new things and I discover more cool sounds as a result. I can enjoy a better connection with the audience when I don't have so much crap up there to fiddle with all night. More people come up after the gig and compliment me! If they ask what I'm using, I tell them anything I can think of at the moment just for laughs and say, "Uh, thank you. Thankyouverymuch." It really only matters to me. (But just in case I'm wrong here, I'm using a vintage Strat and an Ampeg VT40 with a minimum of tone-devouring gizmos in front of it).

A long time ago Eddie Van Halen came over to my house and we sat and jammed awhile. He took my old SG, plugged into a Gibson GA20 and set it down on his legs and played it like a *piano*. The amp wasn't loud at all, yet he made it ring and sustain and all kinds of other cool stuff that remains indescribably imbedded in my memory. Some time later, once I was able to get my tongue back into my mouth, it occurred to me that he was just *goofing* with it, and nothing more. I thought to myself, "Whatever gave him the idea to even *try* that?" Well, why not? He made the best of his limitations.

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Well, gang, our time's up. Please pay the receptionist on your way out and we'll resume our little chat next month.

—Dr. Todd Sharp
www.amprepair.com

from the *Temple of Tone...*

www.tonequest.com

BOZE & SHARP ON AMPS

DON'T EVER USE A SHIELDED GUITAR CABLE FOR EXTENSION SPEAKERS...EVER! You could (and will) fry your output transformer. Yeah, some of you are laughing right now and thinking, "Duh...who doesn't know that?" Well, please bear with us while we briefly speak to the rest of the class for a moment...

Best bet...go to your local hardware store and buy a quantity of 18 gauge ripcord (you know....lamp cord, 2 wires laminated together). For anything under say, 25 feet, you're *gold* with that stuff. It gets NO BETTER. Spending any more is simply overkill and a waste of money. You'll get a huge imbalance using shielded cable, (and for a lack of a better term) it will cause a wad of constipation at your output transformer and it can (and will) cause it to burn up. Using 18 gauge ripcord is the best and most cost-effective way to make speaker cable. Just solder 2 male 1/4" plugs to each end and you're done!

Dave Boze, djmboze@ameritech.net

? I have a Hiwatt Custom 50 and would like to put a bias pot in it. It's an 81 two input with PCB. Also, I just bought a Gibson RTV 35 Lancer with 7591 output tubes. It rocks, but I have to do a tune up on it. Are the Sovtek 7591s OK? How about NOS 7591? Or should I mod it to 6L6s or EL34s?

—Anon

Ah, the Gibson Lancer... your best choice here is to stick with NOS 7591A's if you can find and afford them. From what I hear, the Sovtek version is their 6L6WGC/5881 with a different base. Not a bad tube, but not a 7591, either. You could try some and see how you like a "6L6" in your amp. You should check and adjust the bias voltage in either case for best results. I don't think the Lancer's power transformer will handle the EL 34's large heater current requirement, so I'd forget that idea. By the way, Gibson had different names for the same amps and different amps under the same name! I think the correct "schematic" name for yours is GA 35 RVT. After taking a quick look at the

schematic I see a B+ of around 410 volts on the output tube plates....maybe some EL 84's could go there? This would definitely require some new tube socketing and maybe a little power supply fiddling, but it could be a better-sounding option to consider. Another option could be 6V6's; same socket as the 7591 (with some minor rewiring). Also worth mentioning— this amp uses a coupling (and phase inverting) transformer instead of a tube stage...kinda kooky. I've had a few of this series of Gibson amps come in with bad transformers here and there. Sometimes they get real noisy (crackly) and have to be replaced. Not exactly an off the shelf item these days. Jeez, this amp repair/restoration can get complicated, huh? So, like I said at the top, the 7591A is your best bet if you like the way it sounds now *and* if you can afford them. Otherwise, you could go down quite a few other alleyways to get to main street with this fella. You'd be best off taking it to a good amp tech with the ears & chops for the job.

The Hiwatt 50:

A bias pot is a fairly simple addition to the existing circuit. I'm not exactly sure what the 81 model looks like inside, but I can tell you that most of the Hiwatt's I've seen have benefited from the addition of a voltage-doubling rectifier configuration, followed by an adjust pot. The older ones didn't really have enough bias voltage available to keep the output tubes from burning up (as noted by the late great Red Rhodes in *The Tube Amp Book*). It's not a difficult a job for an experienced solder jockey. If you're thinking about doing this yourself, email us back and perhaps I could outline a procedure for you to follow.

With kind regards,
—Todd Sharp
www.amprepair.com

? I just purchased a '65 Fender Super Reverb that appears to have been well-played but never modified in any way. The amp has not been serviced in a while, I'm sure. What would you recommend before I start gigging with it?

Thanks for your help.
—Brian

Brian—Now, this is what I'd do, but I certainly can't vouch for anybody else, since some techs just "fix problems." There are also "mills" that specialize in fixing electronic gear of all kinds, and they are not necessarily going to meticulously check everything that I would. That's the way it is in the repair business, so please keep that fact in mind. Here are some basic checks that should be performed on any amp when it's on the bench to be "tuned up":

1. Replace filter caps as needed.
2. Check values of voltage dropping resistors and change any that are off more than 10% (heat and time destroy them).

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3. Re-tension all tube sockets
4. Check and replace tubes as needed.
5. Set bias current on power tubes.
6. Clean all pots, jacks and switches.
7. Check all coupling caps for leaking DC (especially in tweed and brown/white Fenders and any other '50's amps). Replace as necessary.
8. Replace all pre-amp electrolytic caps (on the cathodes).
9. Replace bias electrolytic cap.
10. Check values of screen and grid resistors on the power tubes and replace any that are off in value.
11. Replace cheap components, such as the brown chocolate-drop coupling caps in Fender amps.
12. Inspect for cracked solder joints and repair if needed (several key spots are always suspect, and I've learned which ones they are).
13. Inspect all grounds for evidence of problems, re-solder as necessary.
14. Check all key voltage points in the amp.
15. Inspect the speaker cone for evidence of cracking or a rubbing coil. Clean out any dirt accumulated around the surround (otherwise it acts as sandpaper to destroy the outer edges of the cone).
16. Check the polarity of the speakers. You'd be surprised how many speakers are wired out of phase in multiple speaker amps where the original speakers have been changed.

If an amp has a two-prong plug, I usually leave it as is unless I'm asked to do otherwise. I HATE replacing power cords, but I do them all the time (I just don't volunteer).

-Dave Boze, djmboze@ameritech.net

Ibanez Tube Screamers!

Prices of vintage Tube Screamers have gone *screamin'* and we'll be turning you on to some inexpensive alternatives that don't sacrifice an ounce of tone in future issues. In the meantime, check this out...Have you ever seen a vintage *Super Tube Screamer*? We tested one (STS 9 pictured below, left) against a more common vintage TS 9 recently, and we have to agree—the STS 9 has got some super mojo workin' that the lowly TS 9 can't touch, including more output, smoother compression at lower settings, bigger, fatter tone all around, and an extra midrange control that never appeared on the TS

9. With TS 9's selling for \$250.00 and more, we shudder to think what an STS 9 would set you back in today's market, but should you stumble upon one of these turquoise jems, now you know...it's a very cool tool!



'65 Blackface Pro Reverb GIVEAWAY!!!

And the Winner Is!

We're pleased to announce that Hiram Stephens, NY, NY was the lucky winner of the 1965 Vintage Pro Reverb Giveaway drawing. The next ToneQuest Victoria 35310 Bandmaster Giveaway drawing will be held on April 15, 2000.



TQR is honored to announce these additions to the ToneQuest Report Advisory Board:

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<i>Albert Lee</i>	<i>Sonny Landreth</i>	<i>Buddy Whittington</i>
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Nate Kramer, Mojo Musical Supply
Don Young, National Reso-phonic Guitars

CONTACT INFO FOR THE GUITAR WHIZ UPDATED!

Due to heavy e-mail response, René Martinez has asked that he be contacted in the future via e-mail at guitarwhiz@hotmail.com. TQR apologizes to those of you who were previously unable to reach René.

BACK ISSUES AVAILABLE BUT GOING FAST!

If you've recently subscribed to TQR, back issues are still available at \$5 each, beginning with the November 1999 *Premier Issue, Vol.1, #1* through February 2000 *Vol.1 #4*. Place your order today by calling 1-877-MAX-TONE toll-free. Credit card orders accepted, or send check or money order to: TQR Back Issues, Box 717, Decatur, GA 30030. Please specify the issue numbers you need when ordering.

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the
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Sonny Landreth

FEATURE ARTICLES: **THD Electronics**

Tube & Pickup Reviews
With Sheryl Crow Guitarist Peter Stroud

AMPLIFIERS: **Champs**
The Supro Thunderbolt
The Ampeg VT 40

EFFECTS: **The Klon Centaur**
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