I play the way I do because it allows me to come up with the sickest sounds possible.

That’s the point now, isn’t it? – Jeff Beck

It wasn’t all that long ago when offering to take an old Gibson amplifier off someone’s hands was greeted with profound relief disguised as gratitude – as if you were doing the poor bastard a favor… and you were. While frugal Leo Fender shrewdly developed a manageable number of tweed circuits that could be economically upgraded every few years and unveiled as ‘new and improved,’ the crew of flat tops at Gibson’s Kalamazoo factory apparently preferred burning the midnight oil over a game of euchre by the fire during the long Michigan winters (pass the Cheezits and a cold Pfeiffer’s please, Helen).

Yes, compared to the Fullerton outfit, Gibson engineers churned out a vast and arcane assortment of amplifiers utilizing octal dual triodes, lusty 5879 pentodes, Baxandall tone circuits, bass and treble boosts, bizarre configurations like the 6x8 GA90, the rare GA55 and GA400, and many other unique, even freaky home-brewed designs. The Gibson team was also an odd bunch when it came to the pompetus of style… How do you feel about the color brown? While Fender’s amps were downright cheerful with their chrome-plated control panels and straw-colored tweed, early
Gibson’s were covered in a moody shade of brown with dull, utilitarian control panels, as if destined for Rust Belt row houses full of overstuffed chairs with lace doilies on the arms and cheap cuckoo clocks hung on gray plaster walls – trophy kills from the annual Thanksgiving pilgrimage to Santa Claus, Indiana… Houses where proud polka kings once lived in coal-fired neighborhoods with a bar on every other corner… Where the sons of European immigrants played the accordion in celebration of every conceivable milestone in life, or simply just another Saturday night, and spicy Utopenci were always free.

As time passed, various Gibson models were dressed up in brown and cream two-tone, while others were covered in Alpine white, and in the late ’50s Gibson finally rolled out their idea of tweed – a tacky variant covered in thick, rubbery lacquer as repulsive as your great aunt Velma’s plastic covered sofa (and you still weren’t allowed to eat on it). And so, despite the remarkable energy and output of Gibson’s zany engineers, their amplifiers remained largely viewed as a poor man’s Fender for decades. But no more…

In Flagrante Delicto…
Our first petting session with a Gibson amp was, like most early explorations of the flesh, awkward and disappointing. Bill Clark, the other guitar player in the Broad Ripple super group known as the Early Times, ran his Melody Maker through a robust-looking mid-’60s Gibson Falcon that was, in truth, a completely uninspiring piece of shit. No gain, no distortion, not much volume, and no tone. The memory of the Falcon burned so deep that we avoided all Gibson amps from any era until we acquired the ’50s GA20 that became known in these pages as The Cooderizer (see TQR, February 2002). A one-trick ankle biter to be sure, the bite of the GA20 is nonetheless infectious, but the experience costs twice as much today than the $300 we threw down in 2002. Since then, many new amps have enjoyed the attention of the fickle, flavor-of-the-month crowd, vintage Fender, Vox and Marshall amplifiers continue to anchor the market for classics, while the buzz on old Gibson amps among collectors has slowly but steadily grown louder. Still, we can recall having seen an old Gibson amp played on stage only once, when Doyle Bramhall II played a GA40 Les Paul on the 2004 Clapton tour. The number of different models Gibson produced in the ’50s alone (essentially their golden era) is considerable, varied and confusing, requiring careful study and reflection. While certain model designations were produced for ten years or more, Gibson was known to revise and modify circuits on the fly, with little surviving documentation.

It wasn’t until we heard El Riverhorse’s GA40 that we were inspired to begin digging into old Gibsons again with gusto, and a $600, 1960 GA40 beater fell in our lap compliments of a tip from Cocheese and the seller, David Ell, the “Rhodes Man” – one of the foremost restoration experts on Fender Rhodes pianos (www.therhodesman.com). David’s amp had already been recapped by a pro, and the original tweed had been covered long ago with chocolate fudge house paint.

Further trolling on eBay turned up an extremely rare, 1960 GA77 Vanguard 1x15 advertised as “not working, only hums” in the auction description. You’ll recall that the GA77’s high gain channel inspired Dick Denney’s Vox AC30 top boost circuit… in fact, the two are identical, including an error in the original circuit that grounded one side of the bass tone pot that should have been left floating. Perusing the auction pictures for the GA77 revealed a 47 year-old virgin. With the exception of some old water stains on the bottom of the cabinet, the old girl appeared to have led a monastic life, so we ran a white pages search on the seller’s name, found his phone number in Battle Creek, Michigan and made the call. Lonnie Newby turned out to be a friendly older Bramhall amps –2004
gentleman still working at “the plant” in Battle Creek, just 30 minutes east of Kalamazoo. As Lonnie explained, he had been running “wanted to buy” ads in the local paper for old LPs and console hi-fi’s. Occasionally, he would arrive at someone’s house to look over whatever they had to sell, and other things would turn up... like a ’53 Bassman in one instance, and now, the GA77. According to Lonnie, an elderly lady called who had so many old records that he had to make two trips in his car to haul them away. When he returned for the second load, she directed him to the basement, where the GA77 had sat for decades, telling him, “You just take it.” Since Lonnie is a gentleman, he insisted on paying her $100 for it. We won the auction at $1,250 DOA, and the amp arrived completely unmolested since the day it had left the Gibson factory in Kalamazoo in 1960.

Both of our Gibson amps are reviewed in this issue, but as we pondered our impressive new finds, we wondered if anyone was building faithful replicas of vintage Gibson amps. Well, of course... Imagine our surprise when Victoria founder Mark Baier casually (actually, he was panting) mentioned that he was building his version of a GA40 called the Electro-King... Mark enthusiastically agreed to send an amp for review and be subjected to the probe for an interview. His interview follows, which is in turn followed by reviews of the Electro-King and our 1960 GA40 and GA77 Gibson amps. Enjoy...

TQR: What inspired you to build the GA40?

This one kinda fell in my lap. It took a lifetime to realize, though. I’ve been enjoying little Gibson amps for years, and I think the very first gig I ever did included a Gibsonette of some ‘60s vintage in the ragin’ backline... BR-6 or BR-9? Killin’ tone – the kind of tone that inspires you to play licks you previously only heard in your head. My very first foray into yanking amps apart was the little brown BR-6 that habitates the shop... Another seminal experience with Gibson amps was at a guitar show 20 odd years ago (pre eBay, when guitar shows meant something). A shifty dealer had a GA-20T with the original Jensen tagged at $200, and I made the mistake of deciding to test it first. I plugged in a snarfish sunburst Strat and spent the next 20 minutes in a blissful world of Sonic Sleeper Love Bomb. Sweating, I put the Strat down and said, “Shheeeet – I’ll take it!” Guitar dude says, “Sorry pal, it’s not for sale anymore. I didn’t know it sounded that good.” I was a bit stunned, and reiterated that we were at a guitar show, I was a customer, he had a booth, and in the booth was the amp with a price tag on it.

Snatching the price tag off, he retorted, “Nope, I hadn’t even plugged it in yet. Just traded for it.” I then offered to buy the Strat, too, if he would sell me the amp with it. “Nope.” I left infuriated (very uncommon) and empty handed, but I never forgot that amp. Over the next 20 years, I’ve coddled, nursed, milked and poked around dozens of old Gibsons; Gibsonettes, RVT77’s, Lancers, EH-185’s, BR’s etc., many if not most, requiring extensive restoration, but when my good friend Sam Hubbell brought in his pride and joy – a bone stock five knob GA-40 from the ’56ish era, I knew things were gonna get interesting. Man, it is a striking visual amp – great cabinet. This particular amp still has the bake-o-lite Les Paul Model shield on the bottom, and in it’s original state, it had issues. Seasoned repair guys will relate.

After painstakingly blueprinting the circuit, we restored the GA40 to playable/giggable/as original as possible condition. Upon first plugging it in, we knew we were in for it. Perceptions of ideal tone shift... The concept of touch sensitivity, and dynamics meant something different – harmonic distortion, drive, blues tone, rock tone – all these things that I thought I had my head around were now all mixed up. This was one amp that was not going to let me walk away from it.

TQR: There are more amps being built today than at any time in history. Was your decision to build the GA40 partially driven by your desire to carve out a new niche that hadn’t been exploited as much as tweed Fenders are now?

Well, if you know of a business that is more driven by, “What...
have you done for me lately?” as the music biz, let’s discuss it. I’m not trying carve out a new niche per se, as I’m trying find a product I can build that inspires me, allows me to continue building a company and have fun doing it, and make people happy about owning a Victoria Amplifier. I’ve knocked off Leo’s designs and it was good. I’ve introduced my own designs and they’re good, too… There are many terrific old vacuum tube amps built by a dozen different manufactures that deserve similar consideration. Whether they make sense to invest in as a manufacturer and introduce as successful products is another story. The GA-40’s time has come. It has too many positive attributes not to reintroduce to guitar players. As someone with the resources available to build any amp I want, well, it would be irresponsible of me not to manufacture this particular amp. It makes me a better guitar player, and that’s not something you can say about many amps.

_TQR:_ Describe the R&D process that was required, and what you learned from it.

Well, this one didn’t reveal itself easily. There are a number of different versions of this GA-40 model, and I am by no means the Rosetta stone of information on this or Gibson amps in general. Many more guys have studied these things down to the type of solder they used, I’m sure, but we learned a lot. Of course, our particular benchmark amp was different from the schematics that are available… For one thing, the inputs are quintessentially un-Fender. 5879 pre-amp tubes? Very provocative, Orville! The majority of the schematic discrepancies are in the 5879 circuit. The tone knob is placed rather oddly in the midst of the paraphase inverter, making parts tolerances and pot tapers kinda important there, as the paraphase inverters are fairly touchy. Aping the original construction techniques didn’t arouse me much, either. A Gibson amp’s Achilles heel has always been the slipshod construction and iffy parts quality, so I didn’t see a real need to preserve these aspects. I wanted to add some value for modern players, so I endeavored to construct the amp with a traditional Leo-esque point of view – make it neat and tidy and actually easy to service.

Although this particular model and vintage did utilize a circuit board of sorts, it’s not anything a Fender-phile would recognize. Order and beauty were not high priorities when laying this thing out in 1955… resistors on one side of the board, caps on the other, and lotsa wires snaking hither and yon, unseen to human eyes for decades. In redesigning the layout we encountered some parasitic issues related to our lead dress and parts proximity. After hours of humbling epiphanies hunched over the oscilloscope, we cracked the code and had a stable, workable layout, but it took some smart-guy thinking to get it straight that was unnecessary with Fender tweed amps. The on/off switch is similar to a Fender amp of the day, but that’s about it. There isn’t anything else even remotely similar… maybe the first filter stage, but even there, Gibson (like all their ‘50s and ‘60s amps) insisted on using what I call the brown “party caps.” You know… those waxy brown tubes with three or four colored wires coming out of one end? The absolutely worst filter/electrolytic cap ever made. No one wanted to take credit for them even when they were new. They fucking knew, man! I have no doubt that these old Gibsons had a wicked power supply hum two weeks after they were born, and the worst parts quality of any major manufacturer. Those party caps are the star of that show, and the problem arises because any normal, decent quality power supply cap is twice as big as the party cap and you need three discrete caps to replace one party cap (God, I love saying party cap). In a restoration project this is a drag due to a lack of usable real estate under the hood, but on a whole new build platform, we moved all the power supply caps to a separate filter board that’s safely tucked under a cover to prevent intentional and unintentional electrocution. No freakin’ party caps here, Orville Seth McCarty!

_TQR:_ What were the major hurdles you faced in building the amp and dialing it in?

Well… building it is the easy part – deciding exactly what to build is the nuts innit? An obvious fork in the road right from the get go are the discrepancies from the archival schematic. We opted to let our ears be our guide and went with the oddities present in...
our inspirational example. The differences also give you ideas and clues into the designers’ minds. It becomes a bit of a cut and paste job. The looks I’ve had at pictures of your 1960 example represent yet another variant, by the way. I think McCarty and Co. all knew that Leo had the pack lapped when it came to amplifiers; subsequently, they approached it a little differently with a little more chrome and fancy designs, space age tremolo circuits and dee-luxe tone shaping controls labeled “fidelity” instead of “tone.” What does that mean to a traveling musician, anyway? Fidelity? Not after last call, honey! The Gibson amp was supposed to feel like a Cadillac… A comfortable, mellow ride rather than the racy, street smart feel of a Bel Air, like a Fender. Gibson was trying to target the sophisticated guitarist first and foremost – a cat in a jacket and tie driving a Continental to a supper club gig. So the designs were likely created out of a need to be very un-Fender, and more at home with a big archtop jazz box. I guess the major first hurdle is to dial in the thought process that allows the amp to fully reveal itself – to look beyond the resistors and caps and into the McCarty muse. After all, these are ‘Golden Era’ amps we’re talking about, meaningful in a historic as well as a performance context. So there is a certain challenge in having the discipline to take a deep breath and let it come to you. Once that happened, I can tell you that this amp had a profound effect on how I hear things I had often taken for granted. As the amp developed, so did my awareness and perception.

**TQR:** How did you go about reproducing the transformer set?

I’ll come completely clean on this one… For the big iron, we used one of our highly-evolved Victoria power transformers – a “1022” special unit with sleepier voltages and extra copper for cool operation. It’s bigger than the stock Gibson unit, to be honest. Again, I didn’t feel the need to copy everything about a ’56 GA-40 to exact details. My opinion has always been that these Gibson amps would have benefitted from better overall build quality from top to bottom.

The power transformer is certainly much nicer than any Gibson ever priced out back in the day. The output trans-former on every GA-40 I’ve ever seen is the same one, labeled GA-40 (or 10). We measured the DC resistance and calculated the turns ratio and found it was a classic 8000 ohm to 8 unit, layer wound. An examination of the stack showed it to be exactly the same as a tweed Deluxe mounted 90 degrees differently than the Fender. Do you see where this is going? I used a Victoria 1010 output transformer, which is the venerable 1258 “Deluxe” type. Flog me with a swing choke, but I didn’t tear apart an old tranny to copy the windings down to the beeswax. I didn’t see the need. The point has been reached where we’ve over-thought the output transformer, I’m afraid. No doubt that it’s important, but when it has come down to ‘Trannys Are Us’ stocking four or five different versions of a simple tweed Deluxe transformer, well, thanks for taking some of the fun out of it, guys. The heart and soul of this amp is not the trannies… This amp is not about the transformer – it’s about the 5879 preamp tubes. You could swap trannys all day long, blueprint the old one with optical precision, and there would be no discernable difference. Swap the RCA 5879 for a Sylvania? Bingo, Ringo! There’s where the money is in a GA-40/Electro King.

**TQR:** Describe in detail what you were hearing in the old GA40 you restored that you feel has been captured in the Electro-Dick.

An explosion of sounds and textures. It compresses like the most intuitive Keeley pedal imaginable. We were hearing the whole package, and it happens according to your needs and abilities – super sensitive to pick attack and dynamics thanks to the rocking-hot 5879 in the Normal channel, and more subdued and polite in the ‘Bright’ tremolo side. The tremolo is incorporated in a delicate way, and the response from the trem is just that – a delicate, fragile explosion. For all the pretzel logic that makes up the trem circuit (it uses a 6SQ7 after all, ya’ll) it produces a thumpy wobbly, Lonesome Sundown kinda vibe, but not really the star of the show. Very effective, but easily forgotten after tearing off the definitive version of “Mississippi Queen.” Barney Kessel songs sound nice, too – nice and mellow like Ted McCarty would have loved. When you’re done with that, you can turn it up and nail “Strangle Hold.” YEEEEAAHHHYEEYEEEE-HHAAAHAYEEEETHUMBO!
Victoria’s timing with the planned introduction of the Electro-King at the January 2008 NAMM show is especially timely now that the collector market has already driven the price of desirable ‘50s Gibson amps beyond reason. At one level, yes, anything for sale is worth precisely what just one person is willing to pay (or two who are prepared to do battle on eBay). But come on… Just a year ago you could have scored your choice of virtually any ‘50s Gibson amp for well under $1,000. Now, you can expect to peel off as much as $2500 for a clean GA40, GA77, or many of the bigger Gibson amps from the ‘50s. Of course, this may change… People have short attention spans in this age of multi-tasking, and we’ve seen prices settle back down to pre-buzz levels within a year of the fever catching hold on specific vintage amps. Remember the ‘62 brown Fender Vibrolux? When our reviews hit in 2005 these amps shot up to nearly three grand… Now, they can be found for $1600-$1800 again. Regardless of what you pay, all vintage amps present certain challenges and pitfalls. If you lack the patience, resources and motivation to properly restore a 50 year-old classic, a new amp just makes more sense, and it offers the promise of immediate gratification, rather than immediate aggravation. A certain style and mindset are required to feel comfortable rolling the dice on old amps, which is why it is always gratifying to see a classic faithfully resurrected.

As expected, the Electro-King captures much of the magic found in the original GA40 fun box, with none of the quirky challenges that may dog owners of a vintage piece. Custom amp and cabinet builders are clearly operating at a much higher level of quality and consistency today than in the ‘50s, and the Electro-King is built to the standards we take for granted in 2007. The solid pine cabinet is light-weight and contributes substantially to the sound of the amp, which weighs a very portable 37 pounds – super light for a 1x12. Cosmetically, the 2-tone mid-’50s style with creme tolex and brown faux gator re-creates an instant classic without being too showy or gaudy, and the amp itself offers a modern and improved version of the GA40 that nails the unique tone and punch of the original circuit while relegating technical compromises to a historical footnote.

Like all comparisons of new and old amplifiers, you’ll usually find a certain audible patina in the sound of an old amp that a new version can’t reproduce, and the same can be said for comparisons of pickups and speakers. These disparities are the widest and most unpredictable with amps, because the old ones often age with dramatically varied results. It is the task of the modern builder of ‘replica’ amps to identify and obtain an exceptional example upon which to base their new alternative, and then apply the due diligence necessary to build repeatable examples of their vintage prototype. The Electro-King fared well when evaluated side-by-side with our ‘60 GA40 – a formidable example by any measure. Of course, the Victoria is quieter, the pots are smoother and more responsive, and as we observed in our review of the Fender ’57 Deluxe, the Jensen P12Q speaker defies our tendency to reject new reissue Jensen speakers off-hand, although we selected an older British-made G12H 70th Anniversary Celestion for our GA40.

But we aren’t going to tell you that the Electro-King flawlessly mirrors every funky, time-warped nuance found in our 1960 GA40… Our amp is old, with original trannies and most of the original circuit intact, and as such, it sounds old… wooly… woody… broke in from decades of use, and there is a bit of magic in the old boy, as if the notes are served up with an extra helping of gravy and hot sauce. The Electro-King sounds new, but the essential DNA is definitely there, waiting for you to break it in.

The tamer Bright (tremolo) channel on the Electro-King serves up a clean and interesting tone that meshes well with a variety of popular pickup types while remaining true to the original vibe of the bright tremolo channel in the GA40. This channel stops well short of the grease fire burning in the Normal channel, but it is quite usable for capturing a classic, old school, clean bluesy tone for rhythm and leads, and you can really open up the amp without dominating the mix on stage. The Normal channel is where the GA40 earns its reputation, -continued-
courtesy of the dual 5879 preamp tubes that create one of the most uniquely thick and intense distortion envelopes you’ll ever experience. The tone is infinitely wider, fuller, richer and dynamically responsive to pick attack than what you’re accustomed to hearing from a typical 20W EL84 Marshall, Vox or a narrow panel tweed circuit. Where these types of amps often sound more linear and tight, the Gibson develops a much fuller sound from top to bottom, plenty of touchy-feely sag from the 5Y3 rectifier, and a smooth dynamic touch sensitivity that can be deftly managed with fingertip precision. Single notes sound as if they are being blown rather than picked, and chords and slide riffs create an orgy of harmonic texture and incestuous sustain. Back off the volume on your guitar a bit and the party rages on as individual voices become clearer and more well-defined. The original amp and the Electro-King truly are instruments… a bizarre extension and sonic enhancement of the guitar that was never intended to be used or explored by Gibson’s buttoned-up designers. What we’re describing here is fundamentally what would have been considered a very flawed and compromised distorted tone that had no place in the music being played in the ‘50s. That these amps were never intended to be turned up beyond ‘4’ on the volume control simply reveals the limitations that were imposed on any company building ‘affordable’ products in the mid-’50s. The idea that players would ultimately wallow in the obscenely distorted, outer limits of the GA40 was simply unthinkable.

In addition to the Bright and Normal channels sharing a single tone control, the Electro-King is endowed with the GA40s deep tremolo circuit, and deep it is, with a good range of slow to fast speeds and depth (intensity). Overall, the Electro-King is to the GA40 what Victoria’s amps have been to Fender tweed… honest, accurate and extremely well-built tributes to the originals, and we suspect this isn’t the last vintage Gibson model you’ll be seeing from Naperville.

www.victoriaamp.com, 630-820-6400

**You Don’t Always KNOW Tone… you just think you do**

There are more than enough undiscovered tones lurking in the weeds to inspire us all… finding them simply requires patience and an open mind. Who’s mind? Your mind. When you think in terms of possibilities, what do you see? Are You Experienced? Has your long journey left you jaded or resistant to ch-ch-ch-change? Are you afraid of making a mistake, or has a healthy curiosity kept time with your evolving grasp of tone? For us, little has changed; just when we begin to think we’ve heard it all – that every possible seductive sound and desirable tone have been discovered, registered, consid-

ered and catalogued, something new comes along to remind us that there is no end in the quest for tone until we believe it is so. Case in point – we have hardly put a scratch in the depth and breadth of Gibson amps, but what we have heard through our experience with just two has definitely rearranged our perception of the possibilities lurking in such an innocent term as “tone.”

**GA77 Vanguard**

What’s this? A Van-guard? Is there an alarm in it… a screeching, howling trip wire deal that’ll go off if the band van is trifled? Noooo, when it was conceived in the honeymoon suite at Gibson’s Kalamazoo luv factory in 1954, the GA77 was truly one of Gibson’s big boy ‘jazz’ amps, named for the enduring Village Vanguard club in New York. Get you some Jazz Messengers vinyl with Art Blakey and learn some of that on your Strat… Go ahead – we dare you. Jimi woulda eventually gotten’round to it – guaranteed.

The GA77 Vanguard was built from 1954-1961, not to be confused with the very different and tonally inferior GA77RV (reverb) built solely in 1961. Except for its cowboy motif, the GA70 Country & Western is identical to the GA77, and it was built in far smaller numbers. There are no ‘bad’ years for GA77s, and they too, are mighty scarce. Annual production totals peaked at 247 in 1955, and averaged just 137 between 1956-1961. The schematic specifies a 12AY7, 12AX7, 12AU7, two 5881s and a 5V4, but you can run it with all 12AX7s and a 5AR4, or tamp it down with the spec tube configuration. Rated at 25 watts, the GA77 was originally equipped with a Jensen P15N speaker, and we blew ours in about an hour on ‘4’. We’ll recone it at A Brown Soun in San Rafael, shelve it for posterity and leave the Eminence Legend 15 in permanently. You can’t do better (we’ve tried them all), and if you want to get yer -continued-
When the GA77 first arrived from Battle Creek, it was dead as advertised. We delivered it to the King of Ponce, Jeff Bakos, and he called within a couple of weeks with dire news... “I replaced the original caps that were smoked, but I can’t get the power transformer to come up with the Variac... it may be shot.” Knowing that a replacement transformer would be tough to find without altering the chassis mounts, we hesitated... “Are you sure?” “Well, man... I’ll get the transformer out of there and take a look at it. Sometimes I can find a short in the windings if it’s not too deep... I’ll call you back in a couple of hours.” And he did. “I found it. The shielding on one of the transformer leads was loose and the lead was shorting out against the chassis. It’s good to go now.” While Jeff’s troubleshooting and repairs ate an entire afternoon, many techs would have simply written off the Gibson’s power transformer, leaving us with only two options – subbing in whatever we could find as a replacement (and no doubt tapping holes in the chassis for a new mounting), or sending the blown power transformer to Mercury to be cloned – a very expensive proposition. Being an amphead himself, Jeff knew what the stakes were, and he stepped up to the plate as usual. We should all be so lucky.

The Gibson GA70 and GA77 are unique for the high gain channel they share – again, the very same circuit copied for the original JMI AC30 top boost circuit. These amps are also interesting and unique in their use of 5881 output tubes and a single 1x15 speaker. The majority of ‘50s Gibson amps utilized 6V6 output tubes, although 6L6s appeared as early as 1937 in the Gibson EH150. The original Tung-Sol 5881s had remained in our GA77 for 47 years, doggedly hanging on, but way past their prime. We first replaced them with current production Tung-Sol 5881s, but we ultimately preferred the fuller sound of NOS JAN Philips 6L6WGBs. Mike Kropotkin at KCA NOS Tubes claims to be holding “a good supply.” We’d stock up now.

Our GA77 is a formidable stunner featuring an instrument and accordion channel with two inputs each, bass and treble controls, a global tone control that works in the hot instrument channel only, and a ‘frequency’ knob that acts as a subtle presence control. The instrument channel begins to gradually swell up at about ‘4’ on the volume control with the type of clean distortion that allows notes and chords to bloom without being dominated by buzzy pre-amp distortion. Increasing the volume coaxes the GA77 to open up and breathe with a guttural roar that is thick and saturated, yet still remarkably clear and defined. Unlike many smaller Gibson amps, the GA77 remains bright and trebly instead of turning dark and sodden with dominant midrange frequencies as the top end disappears. The tone controls also exert a dramatic influence on bass and treble balance that works very well with the boost circuit and virtually any guitar you care to throw in the mix, from funky Harmony and Kay models with DeArmond pickups to Fender single coils, P90s and humbuckers.

The accordion channel renders a completely different vibe. The relationship between volume and distortion is similar to the instrument channel, but tone control adjustments create an exaggerated EQ response at anything more than moderate volume levels. In fact, percussive pick or finger attack transients were literally sending shocks through the original Jensen that audibly rocked the entire speaker and cabinet. The Eminence Legend is far more capable of gracefully handling such extremes, and we found the accordion channel to be a gorgeous and extremely articulate conduit for clean playing, but you do need to watch the volume on the amp – especially with powerful pickups like humbuckers.

The most striking features of the GA77 are its naturally bright, musical character, full, rich clean tones, and an exceptionally smooth, busted up, overdriven voice that is simply -continued-
amps

the shit for hard rockin’ rhythm, chunky blues and stinging solos. You can run the gamut with this amp, from Kenny Burrell to Eddie Cochran, vintage Buddy Guy and Hubert Sumlin, classic Bluesbreakers tones, Degüello… whatever you want short of a Triple Rectifier, and all at a very usable 25 watts that sounds like more. Oh, and the GA77 is, of course, a fine, fine tool for polka kings.

GA40T

Where the GA77 throws a mean clean framed in brilliant treble tones, big lows, solid midrange and the earnest rumble of a horned-up king bee, the GA 40’s dual RCA 5879 pentodes burn a path to glory where the meek shall perish in a smoldering heap. The brazen sound of the 1x12 GA40 inspired us to reflect on what you are, and what you are not likely to see in the vicinity of such an uncultured and threatening beast… You won’t see a PKS Ten Top with bird inlays anywhere near a GA40… Never. Nor shall you see Robben Ford, Eric Johnson, Steve Howe, C.C. DeVille or Reb Beach snogging a GA40, but we’re betting Twisted’s Jay Jay French will be choking one like a sacrificial chicken on a full moon soon…

1x12s is the extraordinarily full sonic range of the 5879s and the thick, top-to-bottom melt-down they produce. The GA40 is endowed with nearly zero clean headroom, and the tone is heavy, chunk and satisfying. If you haven’t heard one, we can confidently promise that you have never heard anything quite like it. We should also add that the tremolo creates a hypnotic soundscape that floods the room with an eerie, swirling, blue-veined throb of dramatic proportions that lends weight and purpose to whatever you might feed it.

Unfortunately, the status of our two Gibson models presented here has skyrocketed well beyond the abilities of many who can afford them. As much as we would enjoy seeing a fully vested professional play the cockaroo with one of these rude boys, they seem destined for suburban mausoleums to be irregularly tortured in private, if at all. But you yourself could alter this grim prognostication, should you merely drink the kool-aid proffered here and snatch one for yourself. Let’s be frank, shall we… What exactly are you afraid of? Can you not digest the idea that anything worth owning and playing could have escaped your attention this long? Pride before the fall, my brother… Faith is believing in things not promised—perhaps even things completely unknown to you. **Buy the fucking amp,** new or old. At the very least, we may inspire a new era in which proud immigrant songs may once again gush from the bowels of a mighty Gibson.

“Yes, I have journeyed...”
to the Tuesday night Norteño jam in Huntington Park with my GA77 and Gabbanelli to be challenged by the gum-smack, siren whine of the three daughters of the L.A. river god, Cholo Holmes – Misty, Blue Mountain, and Bolita… “Hey, main… we’re feelin’ the Asadero and Cali Skunk tonight, the stupid margarita machine is broke, and we wanna dance. Can you play some Los Tiranos del Norte on that thing, or what?”

Los Tiranos Del Norte:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=bV5RsNvzp5E

Web Resources on Classic Gibson Amps
Official schematics:
Overview and Production Totals
www.superiormusic.com/page199.htm#TwoTone2
Commentary on Gibson’s Golden Age
www.rru.com/~meo/Guitar/Amps/Gibson/
Gibson Garage www.informatik.uni-bremen.de/~dace/gg/

GA77/AC30 Top Boost Article
www.geocities.com/vintage325/topboost.html

Editor’s note: Certain Gibson amps have long been prized not so much by guitarists, but by harp players. While many amps built in the ’50s featured both ‘mic and ‘instrument’ inputs, the fact is that single guitar amplifiers of the day were often abused simultaneously by guitarists, bass players and vocalists. But coping the blown-up magic of Little Walter through a guitar amp isn’t as easy as plugging in a bullet mic and counting one, two, three, as Paul Linden explains...

In a recent discussion with an established tube amp guru (who has threatened legal action to keep me from mentioning his name), the topic du jour was, “Is there a vintage amp that let’s a guitar player move between clean and dirty tone?” This question got me thinking – not so much about guitar players, since most of them would be better off trying to set a new record for cramming themselves into a VW Beetle; but about their much maligned cousins – the amplified harmonica players. How is it that these “bullit-harpists” plug in to a guitar amp and then don’t understand why it doesn’t sound like James Cotton or Little Walter records? Didn’t those guys record with guitar amps, too? Well, among other factors, it naturally has to do with the amplifier – but how in particular?

As far as using one amp for clean and dirty guitar applica-
tions, I think this is to be expected from any vintage amp worth having. But this is not always the case for harmonica players, who generally like to get a fat, distorted sound from their amps. This article is to help such fun-seekers avoid creating a shrill, feedback-ridden cacophony the next time they hunker down on a “bullit harp.”

A huge difference between amplifying a harmonica and a gui-
tar is that part of playing a guitar involves manipulating instrument’s volume, tone and pickup controls to get the desired effect. From the perspective of a harp player, the closest equivalents are soft versus hard attack, a shallow versus a deeper cup – or an opened / one-handed cup, for that matter. Beyond this however, conventional wisdom regarding harmonica tone is only beginning to turn to a more thorough manipulation of the amplifier – beyond simply turning it on and screeching through another effort at “Whammer-Jammer.”

First of all, bias and pre-amp tube choice are criti-
cal to get a guitar amp to behave more respectfully for use with harmonica. Keeping in mind this is an application they were NOT designed for, its no wonder that walking around stage with a hot mic (sometimes without an on-board volume control) is vastly different from walking around stage with a guitar with pickups with tone and volume controls. This is to say that a guitar amp set up for guitar (w/ hi gain 12ax7s in the preamp section, and with bias around 35ma on each power tube) results in a “bad tone” threat for a harp player with a hot mic. Not only is it very easy for such an amp to feedback for a harp player, but the amp hardly gets going when you are unable to turn it past 2. Hence the “bad rap” suffered by many beginner amplified harpers who’s “wicked solo” usually results in a sonic wave able to drive all rodents and insects from the premises.

Here are a few changes to tame that unruly guitar amp into the general vicinity of pleasant tone for amplified harmonica. Changing the bias to a cooler setting of approximately 20ma reduces the feedback threshold and gives the amp an earlier breakup and an overall dirtier sound. Most harp players are just dyin’ to get down and dirty – that’s why we insist on a leather bullet belt that’s ACTUALLY stuffed with harmonicas! Sincerely though, dirty tone is very important to amplified harp precisely because of the fact that it requires a lot of -continued-
skill to get a diverse pallet of sounds out of the instrument. A few nasty tunes, and the audience is ready to hear some acoustic tones – like some tasteful Sonny Boy II riffs through the vocal mic/PA.

Secondly, changing the preamp tubes to ones with less gain (the 5751 or 12AY7 is preferred here to the 12AX7) further accommodates the needs of amplified harp. The type of pre-amp tubes used in any given circuit varies widely from company to company. A typical vintage Fender design, for example, employs 12AX7 or equivalents for Preamp, Vibrato, Phase Inversion, and even Reverb if your amp has it. So it’s important to identify the tubes in the pre-amp section. Using late 50’s/early 60’s Fender amp design as a reference once again, these are usually the tubes at the far right of the amp when looking at it from the back. Consulting your amp’s schematic is another way to locate preamp tubes – or just ask your local tech; the answer should run in the $65-$75 range.

Other tube substitutions may result in some interesting variations, or it may result in an unexpected trip to the repair shop – so stick with the pre-amps until you learn your way around the circuit a little bit. Other than just pre-amp tubes though, there is another safe substitution that can be performed on the rectifier tube. If your amp is tube rectified, it can be interesting to switch from the 5AR4 to the 5U4 as this results in more “horn-like” sag and a less vicious attack. If your rectifier calls for a 5Y3, then switching to the 5U4 works in a similar fashion. Do NOT however try this in reverse by putting a 5Y3GT in place of a 5AR4 or 5U4.

In sum, these mods result in a quieter or less powerful amp, which is important to recognize in a band situation where decibels can be important. In response to the volume dilemma, let me say that choosing a larger but not too large amp (like a 2L6, 35-50 watt model for example) lets you sacrifice some power but still retain plenty of room on the volume knob. If you can’t get your volume control past 1 or 2 without a hair-raising screech of feedback, these mods are for you. If, on the other hand, you prefer to use a small amp, turn the amp down to the point where you can stand in front of it without feedback, then put a mic on it and LET THE PA DO THE WORK. Fill the room, not the monitors.

If you opt for the harp-modded amp and it turns out that someone will be playing guitar through the amp again, its important to switch it back – or just watch the guitar player grimace as they are unable to get a loud, hot or “screaming” guitar sound out of the amp. When they ask what’s wrong with the amp, remind them that a good carpenter never blames their tools or suggest they should practice a little more. In any case, a harp-modded amp will perform much more quietly and with early and somewhat muffled breakup when used for guitar again. By the same token, if you take the amp as it comes from the factory (with bias around 30-35ma and all 12AX7 tubes – at least for Fenders) then trying to play harp through it results in a tone that is too hot and prone to feedback. The tone is thin and a harp player is almost never able to get the volume knob to work well, since the amp is squealing with feedback before you even get to 3.

Naturally, there are a thousand and one mods for an amp (negative feedback, output transformer substitutions, different speakers, rewiring parts of the circuit), but tube and bias mods are easy, inexpensive, easily reversible, and guaranteed to confound guitar players who want to use your amp. What more could any “bullit” harpist need?

Paul Linden is a disgustingly talented keyboard and harp player who has toured and recorded with the great Sean Costello. He is also a dedicated brown Fender amp freak.

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If you’re gonna play Gibson amps, how about a cool Gibson guitar that’s beneath the radar of most Gibson afficionados? The Gibson Les Paul Deluxe goldtop was introduced in 1969, equipped with Gibson’s new mini-humbuckers, or traditional soapbar P90s. The aftermath of Eric Clapton and Michael Bloomfield’s adventures with late ’50s sunburst Les Pauls left many play-
ers craving these instruments at a time when Gibson had abandoned the original Les Paul design, lobbing the name off on the SG, much to the real Les Paul’s chagrin. Legend has it that at the 1967 Gibson Christmas party some of the veteran line supervisors invited a few executives to join them in slamming Old Crow and Stroh’s boilermakers. Before the night had ended, the Les Paul Custom was granted new life by the suits who made such decisions, and to celebrate their victory, the line workers skidded cross town to bowl a few frames and gobble platters of turkey hash and eggs at The Corner Bar on Mills and Vine St.

In 1968 the Les Paul Custom was re-introduced, and the Les Paul Deluxe soon followed. One need only read a few artist interviews in past issues of TQR to appreciate how popular the goldtop Les Paul Deluxe was with aspiring guitarists for whom the Deluxe represented an affordable approximation of the guitars played by their heroes. Of course, these new Les Paul models had also been dramatically re-designed with a 3-piece neck and a 4-piece mahogany and maple ‘pancake’ body that more often than not produced a significantly heavier guitar when compared to the nine-pound average of true ‘50s Les Pauls. Still, by some odd twist of logic, it apparently made more sense that Gibson now glue together multiple pieces of wood to make a solidbody guitar once comprised of essentially a one-piece neck, body, and in the case of ‘50s goldtops, 2-3 piece maple tops.

Gibson continued to tinker with the Les Paul Deluxe throughout the ‘70s, offering cherry, wine red, walnut, tobacco sunburst and cherry sunburst finishes, and standard humbuckers were also eventually added before production was suspended in 1985, but the image of the Deluxe is best remembered as the original goldtop model with mini-humbuckers or P90s. Although you won’t find a current production goldtop Les Paul Deluxe on the Gibson USA web site, they have built them in the recent past and do today, sold exclusively by Musician’s Friend for $1699.99. We acquired a 2007 goldtop Deluxe through Gibson for review, and our anticipation was rewarded with a guitar that definitely deserves your attention. Our review follows, but first, let’s address another popular myth founded in the belief that mini-humbucking pickups are the ‘same’ as Firebird pickups. They aren’t, and we asked Jason Lollar to explain…

TQR: The original Gibson mini-humbucker was developed for certain Gibson-made Epiphone models, and as original equipment on the ‘69 Les Paul Deluxe. Yet many people still confuse them with the original Firebird pickups, which appeared years earlier. Can you describe the specific features and differences in construction, materials and tone between mini-humbuckers and Firebird pickups?

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The obvious difference between the two is the minibucker has adjustable poles and the Firebird has no visible polepieces, with a solid metal pickup cover. The minibucker is similar in construction to a full size humbucker, with one magnet that is located underneath both coils with one side of the magnet touching the bottom of the adjustable poles and the other side touching a steel slug inside the other coil. The screws (adjustable poles) are much smaller in a mini than in a full size humbucker, and the fixed-pole coil has a single piece steel blade or bar rather than six individual slugs located under each string in the non adjustable coil, like a PAF. Another difference is the bobbins (the plastic spool-shaped former the coil is wound on) are smaller and have a narrower, taller profile than a PAF bobbin.

A mini is 1-1/8” wide compared to the 1-1/2” width of a PAF. This means the coils are approximately 1/2” wide compared to the 3/4” width of a PAF bobbin. Consequently, you can’t put as much wire on the
mini, and the pickup is narrower, which is partially responsible for a brighter tone than a wider pickup. My Minis sound similar to a typical full size PAF, but they are a little brighter overall. They also have a lot of the smoothness in the mids and bass and share a similar quality to the distorted tone of a full-size PAF type. In some cases, the mini can outperform the PAF in a guitar paired with a darker amp that has more midrange. The mini will jump out and beat you over the head where the PAF will sound buried or somewhat laid back and subdued. Old Gibson minis typically have a little brighter overall tone and a little less output than the pickups I wind.

Firebirds have a bar magnet in each coil. The absence of steel inside the coil changes the inductance, which in turn affects output and frequency response. The overall tone of the Firebird is more like a single coil – less bass, brighter tone, more defined, and as you push your amp into distortion, the bass remains more focused and tighter than the mini-humbucker.

Mini-humbuckers played dirty have more of a grinding tone to the distortion that most people would quickly identify as a great “rock and roll” sound. Firebirds are a little more Fendery sounding and percussive.

Mini’s played dirty have a more aggressive tone, while Firebirds are a little cleaner. Played clean, the mini has a smoother attack with fuller bass response – similar to a PAF. Firebirds are more of a “fat Fender tone” but can sound smooth if you play in a manner that accents it. The overall tone of the mini is more focused, like playing in a small room, and compared to the Firebird, it feels a little more compressed. The Firebird has a bigger soundstage.

TQR: Do you have any theories on why Gibson developed the mini-HB in the first place? Would it have been significantly cheaper, or easier/faster to make? Do the same considerations apply to the Firebird?

I don’t know the history of either one – when or why they were released. I do know there are several versions of each, with different turn counts. There are also some construction variations. I always assumed that they made the mini so it would retrofit into a P90 route, but I have no proof of that. Les Paul Deluxes use a modified P90 cover that the mini hangs in, and a mini retrofits into a P90 route easily. All Les Paul Deluxe models I recall seeing had a metal plate in the bottom of the pickup route that is drilled and tapped to take either mini or P90 mounting screws. There is also a similar pickup called the “Johnny Smith” model, which is different internally and has less output. That model was possibly the shortest old-style humbucker made and was specifically for mounting on archtop guitars so that the pickup would “float,” hanging from a bracket attached to the end of the fingerboard.

Was the mini humbucker cheaper or faster to build? I don’t see that. I find them harder to make than a full size humbucker. The bobbins are made of extremely thin plastic, and if you over tension the wire just a little bit, the bobbin will fall apart; too little tension, and the coil will be too fat to assemble the pickup. The only thing holding the pickup together is the pickup cover soldered to the bottom plate. Take the cover off and the pickup falls apart. The parts fit so tightly together that they are difficult to take apart without ruining the pickup. I would guess it takes 20% longer to assemble a mini humbucker than a full size humbucker, although I’ve never done a time comparison. Firebirds are even a little harder to do. Minis have polepieces that thread into the base plate, which indexes one of the coils into the proper place. Firebirds are just loose, and you have to work at it to make them fit together correctly.

TQR: How did you establish the specs and materials for your pickups relative to the originals? How are they similar and/or different from the vintage pickups, and did you set out to improve on the older examples you’ve heard?

Having repaired many of each gave me a chance to thoroughly examine them, and in the ‘70s I used to go around and buy minis that people were removing to install full size humbuckers. I could get them for $20 a set and I built several guitars with minis, so I know how they sound, the materials that were used, the ranges, resistance and wire gauge used. When designing my own, I start out with a certain spec, keep track of all the variables, listen to it and -continued-
decide which way I want to take the sound. I will make changes to the wind or magnets or both, and listen again. I have two guitars that sound pretty close to the same, with matching caps and pots, so I can install my first sample and the next and hear the difference directly. I keep all samples and continue to compare any new versions until I find something I really like. Not all initial prototypes sound good… Sometimes you’ll only realize that it sounds bad when you have something better to compare it to. Occasionally, I find combinations that just don’t work well. It seems like a simple conclusion to reach, but it brings up a point about custom winding pickups… I can design a pickup to sound its best using this method of winding, listening and comparison. Winding something based on a past outcome rather than changing a spec to another and not actually listening to the finished pickup is not reliable. And just because a pickup is “handwound” doesn’t mean it will sound good.

TQR: It would seem that the materials you use for these pickups might be uncommon or more difficult to source – magnets, wire, etc. Are there any challenges specifically unique to making mini humbuckers and Firebirds?

Yes, I requested a couple of quotes to have a stamp made to punch out metal humbucker covers, and just the stamp alone is around $30,000. That doesn’t include any materials, or the actual stamping, polishing and plating. For a pickup like a mini that doesn’t sell in huge quantities, its not worth the investment. If I can’t find the part somewhere else, eventually I’ll just have to stop making it. Fortunately, there are enough already made, so I’m able to find something that will work. The only part of the mini I was unable to locate that wasn’t an exact replica were the covers. Original covers were 1/8” shorter than the new covers that are available, but they are good quality in all other aspects. The extra 1/8” doesn’t really affect anything. If you install the new pickup into an older guitar originally fitted for minis, you will need a new ring cut, but the old pickup rout is usually long enough to fit the new cover.

Assuming you know what you are looking for in the first place, finding high-quality parts is always a challenge, and equally important is obtaining a consistent and reliable supply. It’s one of the most difficult aspects of this industry.

Parts and supplies are the number one liability for guitar builders, pickup makers and amp builders. For example, the magnets for the Firebirds are a specific size that are not a stock item, so I had to have several thousand made in different grades of Alnico. So even though I managed to find the right parts, I still had to lay out a lot of cash to get the magnets made to spec. I could only do that because I had a good feeling about the potential demand of the Firebird pickup design over time, and we have made a lot of them.

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Review

Gibson Deluxe

The current Les Paul Deluxe is “weight relieved” (chambered), and our review guitar weighed a very friendly 7.75 lbs. The mahogany body is constructed of two quarter sawn, matched pieces with a not-too-obvious center seam on the back, stained with the classic, light brown filler and bound with aged binding. The top is maple, and we directly compared the goldtop finish with several Custom Shop examples with no glaring differences in color or appearance revealed. Well… should you gaze deeply into the finish on the Deluxe you may see a hint of orange peel lurking beneath the top coat that isn’t evident in a Historic, but you will have to look for it – it ain’t gonna jump out atcha screaming, “Cheap bastard!” The top carve isn’t exaggerated, either – flatter in the proper style of an original Les Paul. We liked the nitro finish and overall workmanship of the new Deluxe just fine.

The Deluxe neck is traditional one-piece mahogany with the standard 17 degree peghead pitch and a more vintage-style, smaller peghead shape than the larger headstock found on early Deluxe models. The shape of the neck also departs from the slim taper, 3-piece with volute found on the original Deluxe – a good thing in our opinion. The neck on our guitar was a very comfortable and well-proportioned full C that is neither flat on the back as found on Les Paul Classics, or extra-clubby with big shoulders like a Historic Junior – a classic ’59 shape with virtually no taper.
The Deluxe is wired like most new Gibsons today, allowing treble to plummet when the volume is cut from either volume pot. While the Gibson-stamped pots exhibited a smooth, even taper and actually measured between 490K and 520K, we continue to wonder why Gibson doesn’t change the wiring in their guitars to enable treble to be preserved when the volume is cut, rather than producing a muffled imitation of the tone of the guitar with the volume on ’10.’ You can spend days pondering alternative wiring schemes for your guitars, but fixing this single issue is one of the most satisfying and useful ‘mods’ you can do, and it’s a very easy fix. For the umpteenth time, please refer to the diagram we’ve included here. What you will need to do is heat the solder on the right outer lug on each tone pot that has been bent back and grounded to the pot at the factory. As the solder melts, carefully pry the lug away from the pot with needle-nose pliers. Remove the tone capacitor lead from the center lug on the tone pot and move it to the lug on the right that you just pried away from the pot. Connect them with solder, then bend the center lug previously connected to the tone cap toward the pot (a small gap will remain) and ground it to the pot with a small amount of solder. Moving your attention to the volume pots, simply move the lead from the tone cap to the center lug, leaving all other existing connections intact. Now, instead of your volume pots acting as tone ‘cut’ controls, they will merely cut volume – not treble.

If you’re hesitant to attempt this, it’s time to grow a pair. Get one of your wife’s nice, fluffy hand towels and lay it over the back of your guitar beneath the area where your soldering iron will be hovering (one of those 20 watt Ace jobs won’t cut it – invest in a decent soldering station like Weller or Hakko). If you’re really nervous, mask off the top edges of your control cavity with blue painter’s tape to avoid any accidental burns on the finish. While you’re at it, place small pieces of tape over any wires adjacent to the area where you’ll be working, and if any wires impede your access to the parts described, confidently but gently push them to one side or the other and tape them out of the way until you’re finished. You can do this, and you will be glad you did. Of course, ToneQuest takes no responsibility whatsoever for any egregious damage you may inflict on yer guitar. If your palms are sweating just reading this, please seek the services of a professional. You can always claim to have done it yourself later.

The Sum of the Parts

The featherweight goldtop impressed us as a very solidly-built and attractive axe right out of the case; our task was to discover its full potential on your behalf. The Deluxe seemed a bit too loose, unfocused and jangly when we first played it, and we immediately turned our attention to the bridge and tailpiece. The bridge appeared to be a Gotoh type with open partitions at the bottom rather than the solid metal base found on a typical Gibson ABR-1. Having experimented with this type of bridge before, we recognized the effect it had on the sound of the guitar, somewhat dampening and dispersing sustain, leaving the guitar sounding a little neutered and weak. We contacted Dwight Devereaux at TonePros and arranged to have a replacement tailpiece and bridge sent. The stock Gibson bridge utilizes larger diameter posts similar to a Schaller bridge, so Dwight sent a custom bridge with the larger mounting holes at each end, and we requested not the ultra-lightweight nickel-plated aluminum stop tailpiece, but a slightly heavier TonePros version. Why? We’ve found that the additional weight produces a more desirable, authoritative sound with chambered and semi-hollowbody guitars. Once the new bridge and tailpiece were installed, the goldtop responded with improved focus, sustain, bass and midrange presence, resonance and bite. Yes, it did.
mini-humbuckers. Fortunately, we had access to Jeff Bakos’ favorite 1972 Les Paul Deluxe that has seen frequent use among his studio clients, including William DuVall of Comes With the Fall on the album titled Beyond the Last Light, and Sean Costello’s upcoming new release, as yet untitled. To Gibson’s credit, the stock minis in the ‘07 Deluxe sounded very similar to the original pickups in Jeff’s goldtop – bright and snappy with a ton of personality and attitude, but lacking the typical girth of a standard humbucker. We decided to experiment with two different sets of replacement pickups, and this is where a lot of players might completely miss the unique benefits of the Deluxe… The factory pickup routs allow the use of your choice between mini-humbuckers, Firebird pickups, or P90s, with no modifications. The old bridge pickup in Jeff’s Deluxe sounded fine, but tended to squeal through certain amps at high volume, so during our evaluations we sent the pickup to Jason to be potted (a quick, 60-second wax immersion). We also arranged to receive a set of Lollar mini-humbuckers, Firebirds and P90s, and Jason suggested that we be sure to try the mini-humbucker in the bridge with a Firebird in the neck…

It’s All in Your Mind…

Comparing old guitars with new ones always foments a cubic shitload of hooah, doesn’t it? We create a mythical, magic benchmark that supposedly defines the true vintage sound of a particular guitar model (as if they ever were or are now identical) and then draw qualitative comparisons to how well new versions of the same model compare to the old ones. Wank, wank, wank… As if the most expensive old guitars (Les Pauls, anyone?) cost what they do today solely because they sound so much better than a new one… TQR advisory board member Gordon Kennedy chose his ’59 “Sebastian” Les Paul from four others – two ’58s and two ’59s that were laid at his feet at a private audition arranged by a dealer. Were the four he didn’t choose ultimately worth any less because in Gordon’s mind, none of them came close to sounding as good as the one he bought? Hardly. Besides, none of you will be taking any precious, ultra-collectible guitars far from home any time soon, or optimizing them with non-original parts. Reality dictates that we are all better served by focusing on how we can squeeze the very best sounds from more affordable, newer guitars.

Would you willingly pay $2,200 – $5,800 for a “vintage” Les Paul Deluxe to play, or $1,700 (new, less for used) for a reissue goldtop Deluxe that you can lovingly tweak without fear of devaluing your instrument? We can vividly recall plugging into old goldtop Les Paul Deluxees with minis when they were new and being profoundly repulsed (an Ampeg V4 didn’t help), as if someone had carelessly bred a Telecaster with wretched spawn imitating a real Les Paul with real humbuckers, which mini-humbuckers decidedly were not.

Jeff Bakos’ ’72 goldtop is clearly a ‘player’ – honestly reliced through years of hard thrashin.’ How does it sound? Like the old Les Paul Deluxees we remember – raw, unapologetically strident and blustery, with little of the big midrange presence or aggressive power typical of standard humbucking pickups, and less harmonic depth and content. The voice of a vintage Les Paul Deluxe is mean and comparatively thin. Is this ‘good’ or ‘bad?’ Depends on the player, the amp and your musical intention, we think, and both the ‘72 and the unmodified ’07 goldtops sounded very similar, if the edgy attitude on Jeff’s pickups was understandably a hair more rounded off. Still, very, very close. Which guitar would you rather play? We’ll gladly take the ’07 on comfort and playability, thank you. No contest, really, unless the beater vibe of the ’72 will somehow inspire you to cop an air of legitimacy that you just can’t muster with a new axe.

“Tone… Yeah!!!” – Johnny Winter

With the tone of the Deluxe thus pegged for what it was and is, we moved on to the set of Lollar mini-humbuckers, and as your first real girlfriend surely warned you, ‘doing it’ changes -continued-
huge, corpulent and all swelled up, while preserving the saucy snap of the originals. Unlike the Gibsons, Lollar’s pickups manage to fill in most of the low and midrange frequencies missing in the stock pickups, while hitting an amp audibly harder, too. Resistance readings reveal little, as the new Gibson minis measured 6.1K ohms and the Lollars 6.4K-6.8K. However, pleasant surprise turned to all-out shock when we plugged the goldtop into our now-famous ‘62 brown Fender Vibrolux, which suddenly produced absolutely ass-kicking, hall of fame Marshall tones with the amp set on 6 in the Normal channel (ha, ha, Leo – that channel is anything but normal). Where some full-sized, standard humbuckers can plow chunks of indistinct, mushy low mids and spew them in your face, the Lollar minis create a wall of sound anchored by mind-altering clarity, harmonic depth and fat, punchy treble tones you’d kill for in a Telecaster. Played clean at more modest volume levels, the minis maintain their rich character and sparkle. The bridge is plenty bright, but stops short of sounding thin, and the neck pickup is warm without mushing out or throwing a wet blanket on all yer highs. Unless you’re specifically aiming for the raw, stripped-down and sharp tone of the original mini-humbuckers (they can create a very cool and effusive blues tone with the right amp), the Lollars would be considered a huge step up for players seeking a more versatile sound. As for the Firebird in the neck position, it produced a tighter overall voice with stronger treble presence and a more solid, well-defined bottom end that we deemed an improvement over the Lollar mini-humbucker. Now, of course, you’re curious about the Firebird bridge pickup in the Deluxe… The Firebird bridge actually took us a little closer to the sound of the stock mini-humbuckers – a third of the way, perhaps, still endowed with lush upper mids and harmonics, but with more Johnny sting on the top than the Lollar mini. Frankly, we could live happily with either set of Lollars, or P90s… or even the stock Gibsons through the GA40 or GA77 for blooze. And the idea of having one affordable, well-built, no excuses guitar that can produce such a variety of tones via a quick pickup swap is compelling. You could make all the same moves we’ve described here with any Gibson routed for soapbar P90s, including ‘54 and ‘56 goldtops and Les Paul Specials.

What’s In a Pound, More or Less?

Our ongoing experience with solidbody guitars of varying weight has led us to reach a few general conclusions, understanding that as such, they fail to account for variables in pickups, different strings and string gauges, hardware, choice of amplifiers, EQ settings, and most importantly… who’s playing…

Lighter weight solidbody guitars often seem to naturally produce a slightly higher pitched voice than their heavier brethren, and you can hear the difference unplugged. Taken to extremes (6.5 pound Strats and Teles, 8 pound, fully solid Les Pauls) you can even reach a point where certain essential low and midrange frequencies seem diminished, sustain can sound uneven along the length of the neck, and odd, dominant frequencies compromise a more pleasing, harmonically rich and musically balanced tone. Lighter solidbody guitars and those built with thinner necks with less mass naturally tend to vibrate more freely in response to string vibration. As the strings vibrate and the guitar neck and body vibrate in response (and out-of-phase to varying degrees) string vibrations at specific frequencies can be diminished or canceled. A neck with too much bow or relief can also produce a tone that is markedly indistinct and soft compared to a more rigid and stiff, straighter neck. This point was underscored in no uncertain terms by Neil Young’s tech, Larry Cragg, in the September 2006 issue of TQR, and it is also discussed on pages 198-199 of Yasuhiko Iwanade’s The Beauty of the ‘Burst.

Nevertheless, “light” always sells, as if your tone will benefit as much as your back from a super-lightweight solidbody guitar. Our ears often tell...
us something different… Somewhat heavier instruments often sound heavier, with a deeper, more complex, confident and authoritative voice. We’re not suggesting you seek out 12-pound padauk Schecter Strats from the ’80s, clear Dan Armstrong Lucite guitars or ’70s 12 pound Les Pauls, but the difference in tone between eight and nine pound Les Pauls or a 6.5 versus 8 pound Telecaster might be significant enough to matter, should you care to notice. On the other hand, if you’re playing through high gain amps and cranking pre-amp or output tube distortion and ramming multiple effects through a carefully crafted hot mess, the subtle nuances we’re discussing here mean absolutely nothing. You’re not hearing whatever the guitar alone has to offer anyway, and if that’s what you like, that’s OK.

As for the chambered Les Paul Deluxe, yes, lifting a 7.75 pound goldtop off the wall elicits the same response from nearly everyone… “Oooh, it’s light!” And it is, but in this case, the chambered Deluxe does not seem hobbled so much by the weight-relieved mahogany as some fully solid, ‘featherweight’ Les Pauls we’ve owned and played. To quote Billy F Gibbons (a featherweight player himself), “What’s up with that?” Damned if we know – we can only guess. Could the naturally dense, heavier mahogany that is specifically selected for weight-relieved, chambered guitars possess a certain authoritative mojo that the less dense wood selected for superlight, solid mahogany bodies lacks? These are questions that people who really know something about wood and guitars will tell you no one fully understands, while people that don’t know squat will happily hand you an iron-clad, ready explanation. The bottom line is this: we liked the vibe of the chambered Deluxe quite a lot. The airiness of the chambered body is not so airy that it fails to perform well with the sharp mini-humbuckers, which are already bright and ‘light’ sounding, and the tone ramped up quite nicely with the Lollar pickups, as described, plus our hardware adjustments. Our ongoing experiments with fully solid versus chambered guitars have continued with a chambered ’58 Historic and fully solid ’59 Historic Les Paul, to be reviewed in an upcoming article on Les Pauls new and old. Meanwhile, if you’re craving new tones from a familiar form, loosen the hounds! Find your own modern version of the Les Paul Deluxe – new, or used. With patience, we’re betting you’ll find a very versatile guitar that can be easily optimized, personalized and transformed via simple, reversible modifications, and your choice of pickup swaps. The rather ‘forgotten’ Les Paul Deluxe is definitely worth a good, long look.

As builders of high end guitar amplifiers, DST Engineering is highly aware of the importance of quality construction and components on both reliability and good tone. Using proprietary circuitry developed by founder Bob Detorre, DST is in process of introducing a new line of guitar effects pedals, anchored by the Fat Acid overdrive.

Like their guitar amps, the first thing you notice about the Fat Acid, the Half Acid and the Mercury ABY switch is the quality of construction. Twist a knob and you’ll realize that the potentiometers that go into these units are the same high grade pots that DST uses in their amps. Housed in die cast aluminum shells with gold Marshall-style knobs set over the navy blue DST graphics, these are physically attractive pedals with a clean look that makes the user think “hand made” versus “home made.” But the real fun starts when you plug ‘em in and crank ‘em up.

I was sent a Fat Acid prototype earlier this Spring, and after about 10 minutes of twiddling knobs, I was able to get the exact sound I was looking for, and this pedal soon found a permanent home on my pedalboard. The DST folks simply call this unit an “overdrive” but that is analogous to saying that the Mercedes McLaren SLR is just a “sports car.” By adjusting the three controls (Level, Contour and Gain), I was able to get tonal variations ranging from a relatively clean overdrive boost to an “end-of-the-world” type of sawtooth harmonic distortion (which is how I’ve got the Fat Acid set up in my pedalboard).

For the tone comparison, I tested both the Fat Acid and the Half Acid with two guitars (a ’64 Stratocaster and a’59 dot neck reissue ES-335) into three amplifiers, my ’65 AC30TB, ’69 Marshall PA20, and ’66 Vibrolux Reverb. There are commonalities between the two pedals: The Fat Acid and Half...
effects

Acid both responded well to the Strat and the 335, and were very quiet to operate in both the on and off modes true bypass. In addition, these pedals seemed to retain the individual dynamics of each guitar, and work well in conjunction with all three amplifiers, as if they were an extension of the amp itself. Whether or not this is because DST knows amps or simply a happy accident I don’t know, but when switched on, my guitar didn’t feel or sound like it was going through a pedal. Neither pedal seemed to mask or color the sound of either guitar, meaning that when engaged, a Strat still sounded like a Strat and a Gibson still sounded like a Gibson. In summary, I simply could not get a bad or unusable sound out of these units. I was also struck by the amount of low end “whoomph” that I got out of them, something that other overdrive units seem to wipe out. In addition, both pedals seemed to be very sensitive and responsive to pick attack.

Housed in a standard MXR-sized box, the Half Acid features a single volume knob, a cool blue LED and a +20/+35 db boost switch, and offers a bit less gain than the Fat Acid, but is an incredibly simple pedal to operate. By simply setting the Level knob in the 11:00 position and the db boost at +20, it provides a tone reminiscent of the Dallas Arbiter Rangemaster, with a lot less background noise, sending all three amps into clipping mode – perfect for bluesy leads. Flip the switch up to +35db and it sounds that you’ve just added another 50 watts of headroom to your amp, while retaining a degree of clean clarity. This same clean boost effect can be achieved on the Fat Acid by simply turning the Level to 10:00, the Contour to the 2 o’clock position and keeping the Gain around 12:00.

The Fat Acid differed from the Half Acid (or any other pedal for that matter) in the amount of tonal variety it can achieve. By placing the Level at 11:00, the Contour at 8:00, and the Gain at 4:00, the Fat Acid provides a sound reminiscent of mid-period Tony Iommi / Black Sabbath. My favorite setting was a variation on this… By turning the Contour up to the 1:00 position, you get the richness needed for pinch harmonics and smooth creamy leads on a single coil guitar like the Stratocaster. Incidentally, you can turn the gain down to about 2:00 and still get this tone for a humbucker equipped guitar. For those interested in an “end-of-the-world” sounding fuzztone, you can turn the Fat Acid’s Level at 12:00, the Contour at 3:00, and the Gain to the 5:00 position, strap on your favorite Strat and dive bomb till your heart’s content. I had a lot of fun going crazy with this setting, as well.

The Mercury AB/Y switch, also housed in a standard MXR-sized box, is well-constructed, and features 2 LED’s (for amp A, B, or both). I tried this with a few different amps and it was transparent with no noticeable “pop” when switching channels. To have both amps on simultaneously, one has to bend down and flip the toggle down from “A/B” to “Y”, which might be an issue for us lazy guitarists. Bob Dettore has informed me that he is in process of researching the feasibility to have both the A/B and Y controlled by two footswitches.

Both effects pedals are 9V and 9V wall wart compatible. The Mercury AB/Y uses a 9V battery only to power the LED’s.

HALF ACID: $79.99 MSRP
FAT ACID: $149.99 MSR
MERCURY SWITCH: $69.99

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Best holiday wishes to all from The ToneQuest Report!
Acme Guitar Works offers a comprehensive selection of top-quality pickups and guitar electronic components. Their signature service is providing complete pre-wired electronic assemblies, with or without pickups, that allow you to easily upgrade the electronics in your guitars. Whatever your skill level may be with regard to wiring and electronics, these turn-key solutions offer a real benefit by allowing you to concentrate on the fun part of your craft (playing your guitar!) rather than spending your day off with a soldering iron in your hand.

Assemblies are available in a number of different configurations. Opt for Fender parts - such as pickguards and control plates/knobs - or order your assembly on a template and use your existing plastic. Pickup options include Lollar, Fralin, Suhr, Van Zandt, Fender, and Duncan. Assemblies for many guitars are available, including Strats, Teles, and Les Pauls, along with Fender basses. If you don’t see what you want on their website then give them a call.

Acme also stocks a complete selection of top-quality wiring kits. These kits include the finest components at reasonable prices, with no hype involved. Just the good stuff, no fluff.

A Brown Soun The all-new Hemp E Cones, Bass 10’s, and 10’s for guitar are here! In addition to A Brown’s original hemp cones, John Harrison has created a new “E” cone that is a bit brighter than the original hemp cone. Killer tone for Fender amps, or in combination with the original Hemp Tone Tubby speaker. The bass 10’s have received rave reviews from none other than Tommy Shannon, and the 10’s for guitar will knock you out in your Princeton, Vibrolux, or Supers. A Brown Soun was founded in San Rafael, California in 1974 by John Harrison – a working musician who refused to settle for the few recombining choices that existed when he first needed speakers repaired in the Bay Area. Since then, John has been recognized by artists such as Carlos Santana, Neil Young, Pearl Jam, Van Halen, and many others as California’s top speaker reconer. In addition to its famed recombining services, A Brown Soun also custom builds speakers and cabinets for virtually every application. The renowned Tone Tubby speaker developed by A Brown Soun has received rave reviews from top professionals around the world. Brown’s recently released series of speakers for guitar and bass featuring hemp cones is setting a new benchmark for guitar and bass speaker performance, with dramatically improved clarity, note definition, frequency response, durability, and power handling. Whether you need new speakers, custom built cabinets, or vintage speakers rebuilt and sounding right, A Brown Soun is your professional resource. As the Tone Tubby logo says, “We’re committed to tone,” and that means yours.

AllParts Top players and guitar builders rely on AllParts for the right guitar and bass parts they need, in stock and ready to ship. AllParts offers a complete range of finished and unfinished guitar dealers and manufacturers serve top woods, including alder and swamp ash, with optional highly figured maple tops. Finishes include all of the most popular vintage colors, including see-through blonde! Premium necks are also available with maple, rosewood, and ebony fingerboards in a variety of neck shape profiles, with or without binding. Custom design your next guitar with AllParts, including tailpieces, tuning keys, bridges, nuts and saddles, pickups, pickguard (that really 60’s), knobs, hardware, and electronics for many popular models. Bass players and lefties can also find the parts they need at AllParts! You can also rely on AllParts for hard to find parts, along with vacuum tubes and amplifier hardware.

AllParts, Houston, TX
www.allparts.com 713–466–6414

Analogman TQR readers are invited to save $25 on the Sunface NKT with Sundial Fuzz, or receive free shipping on all handmade Analog Man brand pedals. Foxrox, Teese wahs, and the PedalPower2! Mike Piera is one of the premier guitar effects builders and manufacturers serving professional players worldwide. Analogman is unique, since it manufactures, modifies, buys, sells, repairs and modifies vintage and new guitar effects. Specializing in vintage and high-end effects, you won’t find cheap Taiwanese “happy meal” style, toy effects there. Analogman is dedicated to helping you successfully pursue your quest for tone, and every customer is treated as a prospective friend. Analogman can meet all your effects needs, including: Buying and selling vintage, new, and custom built effects, and modifying pedals to sound and function better. A full repair service, including referrals to specialists. Creating the best new effects with vintage values, schematics, and original owner’s manual copies. FREE help with effects problems by e-mail or in our Web Forum, plus professional consultation and technical services. Analogman specializes in pedal modifications for the Ibanez and Mason Tube Screamer and several Boss pedals (SD-1, DS-1, BD-2, DDS, etc.). They also modify Fuzztectores to vintage germanium specs. Analogman hand-built pedals include the Clone chorus, Compressors, and Sun Face fuzz pedals. There are 3 versions of the Compressors available, based on the Ross style and/or the Orange Squeezestyle compression. Other hand-made pedals available from Analog Man include the FOXROX Captain Coconut and TZF flanger, Teese RMC wahs, Z Vex, Black Cat, Tube-Style, Pedaltrain and George L cables. Jim Weider recently collaborated with Mike on the King Of Tone overdrive pedal, which is being introduced in December 2003! Please check the web site for more information, and e-mail if possible. If you must call, please mention ToneQuest and they’ll make time to help you.

Avatar Speakers was founded in 1991 by Dave Noss and is known for selling well-built, high value guitar and bass speaker cabinets loaded with the best speakers in the world from Celestion and Eminence. We also offer the best prices on raw speakers from these fine companies. Avatar recently introduced the new G2112H Premier cabinets available in Red, Orange, Green, Brown, Black or Blonde tolex, loaded with your choice of speakers. Features include 13 ply Baltic Birch cabinets with superb dovetail corner joints and your choice of open, oval, or closed back. Grill cloth colors include Wheat, Black, Vintage Fender and Oxblood with white piping. We also offer a Premier Vintage cab modeled after the ’60s Bluesbreaker.

Antique Electronic Supply Antique Electronic Supply carries the largest selection of parts for guitars, amplifiers, high-end audio, antique radios and amateur radios.

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Along with vacuum tubes AES has a wide range of parts for Ampeg, Vox, Fender and Marshall amplifiers, carrying such items as speakers from both Jensen and Celestion, tolex, handles, grill cloth, reverb tanks, resistors, capacitors, transformers, knobs, switches and other much needed parts. Antique Electronic Supply also carries Korg keyboard parts, as well as components for Leslie cabinets and a variety of books, software, test equipment, soldering supplies and chemicals.

Antique Electronic Supply has a great selection of parts for guitars and basses. They offer a full range of parts for both Fender and Gibson, stocking such items as bridges, pickguards, knobs, potentiometers, and tuning knobs. They have recently started carrying Badass Bridges, and they also sell Pro Co and Mason effects pedals. Information and images are available for all of their items on www.tubesandmore.com.

For 22 years Antique Electronic supply has been in business and they know how to please their customers, offering same day shipping on orders placed before 2:00 p.m. MST. Catalogs are available upon request.

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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 arm springs, 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 plates with premium pots, capacitors, and cloth-cover 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.

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Check out the ALL NEW Carr Mini-Merc! The Mini-Merc is an extremely versatile combo with all tube Reverb, 3 position Boost switch, Treble cut switch, and a built in attenuator yielding 8, 2, .5, or 1/10 watt output. 100% hand wired and every amp is rigorously test-ed before leaving our shop.

The Mini-Merc offers tones and big amp ‘feel’ ranging from lush 60s American reverb to modified ‘brown’ 70s British crunch at almost any vol-ume. The cabinet measures a friendly 19.5” wide by 15” tall by 10” deep at the bottom sloping to 9” deep on the top. Our new Mini-Merc has the same electronics as the standard 1-12” Mercury differing only in its smaller cabinet and its warm and smoky 10 inch Eminence “Lil Buddy” hemp cone speaker.

Plug into any Carr amp and you’ll immediately understand why we said in our first very first ToneQuest review, “Finally, somebody got it right.” Right, as in the perfect marriage of classic Fender balance, clarity, and head room, with innovative overdrive features that produce natural, sweet tube distortion, but never at the expense of the tone you’ve worked so hard to capture in your instru-ments. Lots of small-batch amp builders use pre-mium components and labor-intensive, point-to-point construction, and Carr is no excep-tion. The Solen filter caps used in Carr amps alone cost more than the sum of the parts in many bou-tique circuits!

Carr amps are professional tools and works of art that will inspire you for a lifetime. Check the many stellar reviews and dealer locations for Carr amps at their web site, and contact the boys at Carr for more information about which Carr model is best for you.

Carr Amplifiers, Pittsburg, NC
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Celestion Ltd

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For high-volume OEMs, Celestion Originals repre-sent outstanding value for money. We have the spe-cialist experience coupled with the most advanced, high-volume manufacturing techniques to deliver Celestion tone, quality and brand appeal at extremely competitive prices.

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For OEM Enquiries, contact Andy Farrow at Celestion America, 732-683-2356

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The Chicago Bluesbox

Butler Custom Sound is a series of amplifiers built with the blues player in mind, but is also compatible with virtually any style of music — from traditional to pro-gressive blues rock. The Chicago Blues Box delivers clean, clear, harmonic complexity with head-room to spare, to thick, authentic, in-your-face crunch.

The flagship of the Chicago Blues Box series is the Roadhouse model, an all-tube, point-to-point, hand-wired, single-channel 50-watt tone machine hand-built in the USA right in Chicago. The straight-forward design makes this a favorite among players seeking authentic, full-sounding tone across the entire sound spectrum.

Over 60 hours of hand-built assembly goes into every Chicago Blues Box. Butler Custom Sound starts with a sheet of rubber impregnated fiber board, drills and tapes over 150 solder eyelets. The board is then assembled with electronic compo-nents and soldered from the bottom side for a reli-able connection. The custom-wound, paper bobbin transformers, pots and switches are installed into the 16-gauge steel chassis which provides road-worthy strength. BCS then installs their pro-prietary Magic Wing ground bar system and the final wiring process begins. Before any tube is installed, each undergoes a stringent hand-selec-tion process. The boards are vibration-tested for intermittent connections, lock-tight is applied to hardware, and wires are twisted and bundled.

Before any amp leaves the Butler Custom Sound factory, each undergoes 60 hours of sound and quality testing. “We’re players, not only engineers and technicians, so part of our job is to plug in to each amp and test for output noise levels, vibration and most importantly, tone,” says BCS president, Dan Butler. The Chicago Blues Box has captured the elusive 3-dimensional, harmonic rich tone that is missing from so many of today’s new amplifier designs. This amp is alive and ready to help inspire any player’s art form.

Chicago Bluesbox, Butler Custom Sound
www.chicagobluesbox.com 630-832-1983

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offers Fender, PRS, National, Taylor, Gretsch, Guild, Hamer, Vinetto, Ernie Ball, Rickenbacker, Martin, Santa Cruz, and many other fine new and used instruments, plus new and used amplifiers such as Fender, Marshall, Line 6, Carr, Matchless, Victoria, Bad Cat, DeZ, Savage Audio, Ampeg, plus hundreds of guitar effects, aftermarket 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 reissues, 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 they sell, because they’re 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.

Butler Custom Sound
www.davesguitar.com 608–785–7704

Doug’s Tubes

Doug Preston founded Doug’s Tubes in 2002. It became an evolution originating from his passion for music, guitars, and tone. We are now serving thousands of satisfied guitar players and audiophiles internationally. It has been my intention from the beginning to seek out the most reliable and great sounding current production tubes, and to help influence manufacturers into reproducing many NOS tubes to keep our vintage amps going, such as the JJ 7591. We offer the most common choice NOS, currently manufactured, and hand selected used tubes at a fair price. If you need help in selecting tubes for your particular application, call Doug at Doug’s Tubes, your one stop tube shop. Making music sound better, one amp at a time.


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Avatar also markets their great sounding Hellatone line of 12” guitar speakers – aged Celestion G12H30’s and Vintage 30’s, both of which have received stellar reviews.

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Celestion is missing from so many of today’s new amplifier designs. This amp is alive and ready to help inspire any player’s art form.

Butler Custom Shop, Racine, WI 606-785-7704

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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 Mosritos to our top-selling AERLINE - 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 and play better - so the average musician can experience the excitement of playing one of these beautiful vintage guitars as their every day player.

**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 counterparts. It is hard to find a guitar these days that oozes more vintage style than an Eastwood! All Eastwood Guitars are hand manufactured at our setup professionally before shipping to our customers.

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**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

Eminence is proud to present the Patriot and Redcoat series of guitar speakers. Incorporating both British and American cone technology into speakers that we manufacture in the USA gives us the ability to provide you with virtually any tone you desire. Be it British or American, clean or dirty, big bass or screaming highs, we have a speaker that will allow you to “Pick Your Sound.” Choose from one of seventeen new models! Eminence has been building speakers to custom specifications for nearly every major manufacturer of guitar amplifier and sound reinforcement products since 1967. Their new Legend Series of guitar speakers captures the essence of the vintage American and British speaker designs that are held in such high regard today by so many discerning players. The Legend Series includes classic British and American design elements (10", 12", and 15" speakers using ceramic and AlNiCo magnets, British or American cones, and kapton polyamide voice coils for superior heat dissipation and durability. Best of all, because Eminence has been successfully competing for years with other speaker manufacturers as an OEM supplier, the Legend Series speakers are priced far below those of many other popular manufacturers - "reissue" and custom speakers. The Eminence Legend Series delivers all of the tone and durability you need, at a lower price, with no compromises in quality. To locate genuine Eminence dealers in your area, please visit their web site or call Eminence Speakers.

Eminence Speaker LLC, Eminence, KY
Contact: Chris Rose

Evidence Audio was founded in 1997 by Tony Farinella to supply the MI and Studio community with performance-based cables at reasonable prices. The most well-known cable is the Lyric HG (High Gain) guitar cable. Readers of Guitar Player Magazine voted the Lyric HG as “Best Accessory of 2004” supporting the opinion drawn by editors of magazines from around the world. In simple terms, cables from Evidence Audio are built different; as a result, they sound different. The Lyric HG features two solid core high grade IGL copper conductors and a braided shield that is grounded at the amp end only. This is the correct way to “drain” spurious noise. By using solid core conductors strand interference is eliminated as well. Designed to be neutral and honest, the cables don’t actually “improve” your tone, they simply replace a cable in your signal path which was likely destroying it. What you hear is a tighter more muscular bottom end, a cleaner more complex mid-range and a sweeter more detailed high end. Dynamics and harmonics are improved and sustain is no longer masked. Overall the guitar becomes more three-dimensional sounding, cuts through the mix and at the same time takes up less space in the mix.

The Silver Speaker Cable and The Source AC Power Cable compliment the Lyric HG. They offer a solution to distortions caused by cables in other areas of the signal path and power supply. The effects of the speaker and power cable are consistent with that of the Lyric HG: you hear the guitar and amplifier, not the cables.

While not inexpensive, cables from Evidence Audio are still one of the most cost effective ways of improving your tone. It is like changing pickups or a bridge or a small detail with big results. Please visit the Evidence Audio website to locate a dealer near you and demand a demo!

Fishman

Fishman is 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. 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-Dr(tm) magnetic soundhole pickup, as well as passive undersaddle, classical, archtop, and resonophonic 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.

Fargen Amplification Inc was founded by Benjamin Fargen in 1997 to accommodate the needs of working guitarists that want pure vintage hand crafted tube tone, quality, modern features, reliability and value. Fargen Amplification started out from day one building custom one of a kind amps that fill a niche in the market for those looking for a “tone match”…some of those early one-of-a-kind amps have become staples in the Fargen Amplification product line such as the “Blackbird” and “Bordeaux” amplifiers. We still offer full custom “one of a kind” builds from our Fargen Custom Shop.

“Rather than just building nice vintage clones…I set out to improve upon what I thought were the best tube amp designs ever built and then put a signature spin on them. The signature elements that have been added were drawn from years of gigging around town with my own vintage gear as well as vintage tube amp service work. I kept notes on all the mods, tweaks, adjustments and repairs that I made over the years while also noting the comments and overall wants of working guitarists. This allows me to tweak a “clone” into a “tweaked clone” into a “tweaked and modified clone”…I can then improve a typical vintage amp into a modified and updated clone that is better than the original!” Check out our full hand wired tube amp product line @ www.fargenamps.com and find the tube amp sound you have been looking for!

Fargen Amplification, Sacramento, CA
916-971-4992, www.fargenamps.com


Utilizing cutting-edge Acoustic Sound imaging(tm) technology, Aura(tm) features the most innovative acoustic amplification technology available today. This stombox-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.

Since its inception in 1994, Klon has been a top choice for guitarists who want the best graphic equalizer. The company continues to redefine the benchmark of acoustic sound. For more information, please visit www.ghsstrings.com.

GHS – The String Specialists

Who plays GHS strings? Artists as diverse as Eric Johnson, Martin Barre, Charlie Sexton, Will Ray, Warren Haynes, Tom Morello, Ritchie Sambora, Steve Howe, Brent Mason, Junior Brown, Zakk Wylde, Tommy Castro, Rene’ Martinez and TQR advisory board member, and AC30/Telecaster stud Mr. James Pennebaker, to name just a few! GHS has been manufacturing guitar strings since 1964, and whatever your musical tastes, GHS has the right string for you. You're invited to try a set of GHS classic Boomers, brilliant Nickel Rockers, Burnished Nickel strings for a warm, vintage tone, Compound Nickel strings for electric arch tops, and the recently introduced Infinity Bronze coated acoustic strings for extended tone and brilliance. All GHS strings are available in a wide range of gauges to appeal to every player. Refer to the GHS “Brightness Bar” found on select packages of strings and at our web site. It's your guide to determining which strings will produce the specific range of tone you're seeking.

Gibson Gibson Repair & Restoration

Among the services offered are: Pro Set Up – Acoustic or Electric Fretwork – Fret Dress to Plane & Refret Custom Wiring/Pickup Installation Structural Repairs – Body Cracks, Bracing, Broken Headstocks Neck Resets Custom Paint/Finish Repair/Relics Total Restorations

So whether it's an acoustic or electric guitar, mandolin, banjo, ukulele or oud, if it has strings and it needs attention, we can help. It doesn't even have to be a Gibson – we're an equal opportunity Repair Shop! Call, write or e-mail. We'll guide you through the process and we'll help with shipping and insurance information so your instrument gets here and back quickly and safely. We'll tell you upfront what your costs will be and no work is begun before what is to be done has been explained and approved by you.

KCA NOS Tubes

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 603-889-7026 or telephone at 603-889-2664.

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

JustStrings.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-tech 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!

KCA NOS Tubes, Sterling, VA 703-430-3645 www.kcanostubes.com

Klon Since its inception in 1994, Klon has been a one-product company, and given the overwhelming success of that product, the Centaur Professional Overdrive, it’s not hard to see why. Designer Bill Finnegan, assisted by two circuit-design specialists, set out in 1990 to create an interactive and ultra-transparent overdrive, one that doesn’t put its own stamp on your sound, but rather brings out in a very organic way more of what your rig was already giving you. Bill’s premise was that there were many players who, like himself, had great guitars and amps, and who, as he likes to put it, “were not looking to reinvent the wheel,” and the fact that he’s sold some four thousand Centaur units (as of November 2002) attests to his intuition, as well as to the perfectionism that led him to spend over four years developing a single product. That perfectionism, of course, is also evident in the production unit: Bill builds every Centaur himself, by hand, using only the finest components and assembling them with meticulous care. Each unit undergoes a series of rigorous tests before shipment, and each is backed by a comprehensive ten-year warranty. Given the ongoing demand for the Centaur and Bill’s disqualification to let anyone but himself build them, expect a wait of several months for delivery, but also expect your Centaur, when you receive it, to...
manifest a sonic superiority, a construction quality, a physical beauty, and a conceptual righteousness beyond your expectations.

Klom, Boston, MA 617 666–1551
www.klon-siberia.com info@klon-siberia.com

K& M Analog Designs — Two Rock
K&M Analog Designs, LLC, was formed in northern California in 1988 by Bill Kremer and John Mologanski. The company brings a combined 65+ years of experience in tube amplification and guitar tone to the boutique amp market. As talented designer/engineer and seasoned guitarist (respectively), Bill and Joe have developed a uniquely toneful, dynamic and affordable line of hand built vacuum tube amplifiers that are instruments designed to completely complement your individual playing style. Each amp is equipped with proprietary custom transformers and coupling caps, the best available new and NOS tubes, and each model has unique build architecture and layout not found in other modern hand built designs. Early K&M customers such as Carlos Santana helped launch the company to the forefront in its earliest days. Current K&M and Two-Rock devotees include John Mayer, Steve Kimock, Mitch Stein, Barney Doyle, Mark Karan, Michael Kang, and Volker Striffer, among others. The company launched its line of Two-Rock amps in the summer of 1999. Past models include the Amethyst Special Indoor Storm Model, Emerald 50, Onyx, Opal, and Ruby and LTD recording amplifiers. Recently Two-Rock introduced their Signature series of amplifiers, by far the most popular of any Two-Rock product. These models will include a single channel clean amp in various power levels. A number of customized versions of the aforementioned have also been built for players seeking the ultimate personalized tone machine.

Koch Guitar Amplification was founded in 1988 by Dolf Koch in the Netherlands and are known worldwide as a manufacturer of high end boutique guitar amplifiers. They have many models for all styles of music from the new 20W Class A Studiostage combo to the 120W Powertone II head.

All amps are channel switching with two or three extremely versatile channels. They are recognized for having both tube drive/gain channels and wide varying drive/gain channels. They were the first to utilize trim pots on their heavy duty circuit boards enabling anyone to adjust bias with only a screwdriver and voltmeter. Speaker damping switches which when toggled from high to low alter the tone to a more scopped sound. Rhythm volume switch on the footswitch (included) which when engaged drops the level to a pre-determined “Rhythm” level. It’s the opposite of a boost and does not alter the lead tone as a result. It is so useful guitar players tell us that they’re surprised that no has done this before. All amps have Accutronics reverb and Koch designed speakers that have a sweeter more extended high end. These speakers also handle more power and have a better bass response than almost any guitar speakers available. They are an integral component to the KOCH sound.

Other products include the Loadbox which attenuates a tube amplifiers output without destroying its tone, i.e. no huge loss of high frequencies. The Pedalton is a semi-four channel, foot operated preamp which has four 12AX7 preamps and tubes. One of these tubes acts as a .5W power tube! It has many patch points and output options for almost any application.

Some famous people that use Koch are: Paul Reed Smith, Al Di Meola, Randy Bachman, Buzz Feiten, and Jimmy Bruno to name a few. KOCH also manufacturers the 300W EDEN VT300 all bass head and the 200W Sadowsky SA200 bass head on an OEM basis.

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 pickups for guitar greats such as Billy Gibbons, Peter Stroud, Kevin Russel, Rick Vito, Elliot Easton, Duke Robillard, and the Beasty Boys, among others.

Jason is always happy to personally consult with his clients via phone and e-mail to determine the pickups that are right for each player, and TQR recommends Lollar pickups without exception. His Lollar Special Strat pickups are standard equipment in our custom built ToneQuest guitars.

Call Jason or check out all the options available on his web site.

Mercury Magnetics
The basis of every tube amp’s characteristic sound is the unique design of its transformers. Mercury transformers are legendary for their stunning tonal superiority, build quality, consistency, and reliability. We believe in old-world customer service and single-minded focus. Transformers are our only business, allowing us to concentrate on providing you with the best-sounding guitar amplifier trannies in the world.

If your amp is suffering from bland and unexciting tone, then it’s time for a transformer upgrade or repair. Here are your options:

ToneClone™ Best-of-Breed Series Transformers: Behind every great-sounding vintage guitar amp is a piece of transformer history. Within any amp line there are usually a large number of transformer variations, inconsistencies and just plain ol’ building errors that can affect their sound (good or bad). At Mercury, we seek out, study, blueprint and replicate only the best-of-breed transformer designs (including their all-important anomalies) and add these discoveries to our catalog. And make us these incredible tonal selections available to you through our ToneClone™ line.

Axiom® Series Next-Gen Transformers: Next-
The brand name PLEK stands for a technology which allows the best fret dress and setup work, based on a computer controlled scan. The PLEK is a computerized tool that scans an instrument string to string, generating graphic views of the fretboard, fret heights and placement, fingerboard relief radius, humps and bumps — basically everything that luthiers and repair pros have wanted to see well but couldn’t.

Until now. Besides having measurement and dressing capabilities many times more accurate than the human eye allows, the PLEK has two particularly great advantages over manual fretwork.

First, it scans and dresses a guitar while it is tuned to pitch. This is a major breakthrough, since necks are subjected to approximately 100 pounds of string tension. This string tension invariably affects the shape of the fret plane, creating curves and humps that change when the strings are removed for a fret dress. The PLEK identifies precisely what needs to be done for perfect results when the instrument is re-strung, whereas even the most skilled luthier or repair professional must guess about how to compensate for the effect of string tension when dressing the neck with the tension released.

Secondly, the PLEK applies very sophisticated formulas for optimum neck curve or relief, adjusting the calculations for the actual string height and individual string gauge from the treble side of the fingerboard to the bass. Achieving these same results by hand would be lucky and extremely rare at best! The PLEK is now in use by some of the top repair and restoration experts worldwide. We invite you to contact the PLEK repair shop nearest you, or learn more about PLEK technology at www.plek.com.

Nash Guitars

Mojo Musical Supply

Midtown Music, Atlanta, GA

Mercury Vintage™ Transformer Service

Free Transformer Testing And Evaluation Service: Do you think there might be something wrong with your transformer? Send it to us. We’ll test it in our lab and report back to you. Our evaluation procedures are thorough, complete and reliable, and always free. The only transformers that come with a 10-year Manufacturer’s Warranty and a Money-Back Toneal Guarantee. Made entirely in the U.S.A. Mercury Magnetics www.MercuryMagnetics.com Sales@MercuryMagnetics.com 818-998-7791

Midtown Music is one of our very favorite stores for guitars, amplifiers, effects, and accessories. Midtown opened in 1988 as a small vintage instrument store, and they now offer a lot of new items in addition to high end used gear. They have a large selection of new custom shop instruments by Gibson and Fender, and they also stock other fine instruments by Martin, Guild, PRS, Larrivee, and Gretsch. The back room is lined with hand wired tube amplifiers by Carr, Dr. Z, Victoria, Fender, Savage, Two Rock, and HiWatt. The staff is experienced and helpful, and they’re all players, too! Midtown Music is highly recommended and definitely ToneQuest approved! View a sample of their inventory online or call the store for prices and availability.

www.midtownmusic.com

404–325–0315

Nash Guitars Have you ever thought, “If they would just make a Tele with…” or “I love my Strat….” “I want more strat but it just doesn’t…” “Why don’t they make a Jaguar that could…” Well, you’ve come to the right place. From exotic woods, custom paint, unlimited neck types, custom designed logos, pick-up selections, Timewarp aging, or any other feature imaginable – Esquires with hidden neck pickups, Strats with interchangeable pickup assemblies, Custom Shapes — whatever… If you can dream it, we can build it.

Each guitar is a unique work of art, handcrafted by me. The use of 100% nitrocellulose lacquer, high quality vintage hardware, superior woods and a wide variety of pickups and options produce magi-
custom build complete guitars, including our “Old Friend” Series, “Step-Side” and “Artist Replica” models.
RS Guitarworks Premium Wiring Kits offer a dramatic and immediate improvement over the factory electronics found in even the most expensive guitars. During a year of research and development we tested over 20 different tone capacitors and nearly every type of potentiometer made before developing our upgrade kits, which feature measured CTS pots within 10% of their specified value, and RS Guitar caps in .022uf and .047uf values made expressly for us by Hovland. Our customers tell us that our 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 and sorted and labeled as a neck/volume, neck/tone, bridge/volume or bridge/tone control.

Wiring Upgrade Kits are available in 5 different styles for various Les Paul type guitars, as well as Telecaster, Stratocaster, and PRS guitars, and Explorer and Flying V types. Nearly any other configuration can also be built with a call to our shop. RS Guitarworks is also an authorized Fender, Jackson, Charvel, Guild and Gretsch Service Center. Please call or visit our web site for complete information on finishing, refinishing and aging of new and used guitars, custom wiring kits, vintage reto parts and repairs.

Ruokangas Guitars
Located in Hyvinkää, Finland, Juha Ruokangas is a custom designer and builder of unique, handmade electric guitars. Many companies today use the terms “hand-made” and “custom-built” to describe expensive guitars that are built in large numbers in a factory - Ruokangas’ vision has always been to design and build instruments completely by hand in a low-production environment using the finest materials available in the world, and uncompromising craftsmanship. Ruokangas guitars are available with a variety of unique custom options, including four standard neck profiles, three fret sizes and a wide range of finishes, binding, genuine pearl inlay and hardware combinations. All instruments are built using Thermo-Treated wood to impart a vintage look and sound even when new, and specific models feature genuine Arctic Birch figured tops combined with Spanish cedar – an exceptional wood with properties similar to Honduran mahogany. Models include: The Mojo
Inspired by many requests received by our customers, the Mojo delivers all the twang you will ever need! Standard features include an Alder body, Rock Maple neck, Thermo-treated wood, high gloss finished body, satin finished neck, 25.5” scale length and 12” fretboard radius. The latest additions to the series - Grande and Supreme - have proven to be the most popular models with the unique semi-hollow Spanish Cedar body and Arctic Birch top.

The V.S.O.P.
All of us at Ruokangas are big fans of vintage guitars, and the V.S.O.P. offers fans of vintage Strats a bolt-on instrument that plays, feels and sounds like a classic. The V.S.O.P. can be designed with traditional single coils, humbuckers, or both utilizing split coils, and all models feature a Wilkinson tremolo tailpiece. The VSO Supreme takes the Strat concept to the extreme with the Spanish Cedar body and Arctic Birch top, fretboard and pickguard.

The Duke
The Duke Series covers all the bases – from the stripped-down solidbody Sonic, to the original carved top design that started the Duke Series as the Standard, the striking appearance of the Deluxe with highly figured maple or Arctic Birch top, to the vibrant, woody, semi-acoustic style of the semi-acoustic Artisan.

The best way to experience and appreciate the entire range of Ruokangas models and options is to visit our web site and take the tour! You can custom design any guitar we build online with all available options, and of course, we will be happy to answer your questions and offer our advice via e-mail.

Ruokangas Handmade Guitars
www.ruokangas.com
US contact: Eero Kilpi, New York, 1-914-316-2414

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 just started getting 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 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.stewart-mac.com, 1-800-848-2273

ToneMan
Veteran working guitarist Don Butler is an experienced tech who specializes in servicing and restoring JMI-era Vox tube/valve amps as well as many other vintage British amps including Marshall, Selmer, Hiwatt, Sound City and Orange amps. Don also services and restores vintage tweed, blonde, brown and blackface era Fender amplifiers. Don’s modifications and upgrades to vintage reissue Vox, Marshall, and Fender amps have earned him a solid reputation among players throughout the country for achieving dramatically improved, authentic vintage tone from reissue amplifiers. Don uses hand–made Mercury Magnetics Axiom Tone Clone transformers, along with the correct, premium signal path components to bring reissues to vintage specs. He also modifies reissue Vox walls to vintage specs, and he offers upgrades to Vox Valve Tone pedals and reissue Ibanez T’99’s. For the past 6 years, Don has been building the famous Rangemaster Treble Booster, which is an exact replica of the original Dallas Rangemaster unit from the early 60’s. In addition to the original treble module, Don builds a full range model and a switchable model combining the features of both Rangemaster units. Don was also the very first dealer for Pyramid strings, and you can count on him to maintain a full inventory of Pyramids at all times.

Don Butler, Newhall, CA
www.tone-man.com, 661-259-4544
10–6 PST, Tuesday–Saturday only

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 “skein” 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 “tongue 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 resonance and sustain. 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.guitarpartssdepot.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.

www.marquisdistribution.com, 209-845-9579

Victoria Amplifier
From our first Victoria to the one we build for you, every Victoria amplifier is meticulously crafted for real musicians and built to be played for a lifetime. We utilize components and manufacturing techniques that are chosen for their proven ability to meet both the sonic and real world gigging demands that musicians depend on.

From the real Allen Bradley resistors (new manufacture, not surplus) to the finger jointed pine cabinets, every aspect of a Victoria Amplifier is designed to provide years and years of faithful service and superior tone. With the addition of our new Victorlux and Sovereign amplifiers, Victoria now offers amplifiers with features like reverb, tremolo and high gain circuits that will surpass anything currently available and define the word “tone” for years to come. But manufacturing new amplifiers is not all we offer! Our restoration and repair department is equipped to turn the most heinous, hacked up old amp into an inspiring gem.

Our obsession with period correct components and our real world expertise are your assurance that an investment piece or an old road hag will leave the shop with all of its tonal potential maximized.

The job gets done right at Victoria Amplifier. You can be sure that we at Victoria Amplifier Co. will continue to provide the finest guitar amplifiers available anywhere.

www.victoriaamp.com, 630-820-6400

Visual Sound
Founded in 1995 by guitarist Bob Weil, Visual Sound is pleased to announce that its product line of high-quality effects pedals has increased, with the release of the V2 Series of effects pedals.

In addition to new, improved versions of the best-selling dual effects pedals – Jekyll & Hyde, H2O, and Route 66 – the V2 Series also boasts a brand-new dual effect pedal, Double Trouble, which accurately reproduces the sound of the TS-808 Tubescreamer, but with a Bass Boost switch and far more output volume than the original.

However, the new V2 Series doesn’t stop there. Bob, along with chief engineer R.G. Keen, have designed single-effect pedals from the favorite effects that have made Visual Sound a growing hit in the guitar-playing world; Son of Hyde is the same distortion channel found in the acclaimed Jekyll & Hyde pedal; COMP 66 takes the compressor channel from the Route 66 and lets it ride solo; Liquid Chorus is a wonderfully-voiced effect for electric, acoustic, or bass guitar, taken from the H2O pedal, but with the second output being a true stereo output – ideal for spacious sounds when used with two amps or a PA system; Route 808 is designed to take the sound from the TS-808, but with a bass boost switch and greater volume output – along with Visual Sound’s proprietary tone-sweetening ingredients.

Last – and far from least, the Angry Fuzz is an original effect that will blow away any other fuzz pedal out there; although it has an octave circuit which can be blended with the fuzz, it is not at all like an Octavia or other vintage pedal…playing angry has never been so much fun!

As if that weren’t enough, the 10th Anniversary edition of the Visual Volume pedal and the Workhorse amps (30W 112 Pony and 60W212 Stallion) continue to find their way onto pedal-boards and rigs all around the world. Expect to see new things from Visual Sound, amp-wise, in 2008.

After a series of successful exhibitions at NAMM, Musikmesse and guitar shows in Dallas, Boston and Arlington in 2007, Visual Sound will once again be making a splash at the Winter NAMM, Anaheim Convention Center, January 17-20, 2007, Booth #5721, Hall B.

For more information about Visual Sound, mp3 downloads and product information, please visit the Visual Sound web site or MySpace site, or contact Bob Weil personally.

www.visualsound.net
www.myspace.com/visualsoundusa
931-487-9001

Warther Carving Museum
The Warther Carving Museum of Sugarcreek, Ohio is a unique art exhibit located in Ohio’s Amish community. David Warther II, a fifth generation carver of Swiss heritage is continuing his family’s carving legacy in the heart of Ohio’s Amish country. Carving can be traced in the Warther family to David’s Great-Great-Great-Great-Great grandfather, who was an accomplished wood carver and cabinetmaker in Switzerland in the early 1800’s. David’s grandfather, Ernest “Mooney” Warther, was known for his wood and ivory carvings of “The History of Steam Engines.” As a fifth generation artist, David Warther is actively carving his own niche in the family tradition.

David also makes hand-crafted bridge saddle blanks, nut blanks, bridge pins and strap buttons from bone, pre-historic fossilized Wooly Mammoth ivory, and legal, pre-ban elephant ivory. For details on ordering, please visit the Warther Carving Museum website or call to place your order.

www.ivorybuyer.com/sales, 330-343-1865
e-mail: instrumentparts@roadrunner.com

Willcutt Guitar Shoppe
Located in Lexington, KY, Willcutt Guitar Shoppe is one of the world’s premier boutique guitar and amp dealers. Customers may select from guitar lines such as PRS, Hamer USA, Fender, Gibson, Mcilortuff, Gretsch, McNaught, Nik Huber and Taylor. With a vast inventory of over 1500 guitars always on hand, Willcutt’s staff of experienced guitarists can reliably assist you with the purchase of your next dream guitar or amplifier.

Recognizing that a superb electric guitar requires an amp of equal quality, Willcutt offers a tremendous selection of handbuilt amplifiers, including Dr. Z, Victoria, Carr, Bad Cat, Bogner, Mesa, Fuchs, Rivera, and Koch.

Willcutt’s staff of veteran, working guitarists has the hands-on product knowledge necessary to assist players at every level in finding just the right guitar or amp the first time. The store’s website features high quality digital photos of nearly every item in stock, and 99% of all high end instruments are kept in their cases – not on display – insuring that every instrument remains in the best possible condition prior to sale. Pictures and detailed, in-hand descriptions are always available on request.

Willcutt Guitar Shoppe, Lexington, KY
www.willcuttguitars.com
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Spoil yourself or your friends with a custom-made ToneQuest guitar strap now. Available in chestnut brown or black, our 2.5" wide all-leather straps are custom-made in Franklin, Tennessee from the finest milled leather in the world and tastefully embossed with the ToneQuest logo. Order now for the holidays online at www.tonequest.com or call 1-877-MAX-TONE. $50 each, includes Priority Mail delivery. Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery. Quantities are limited. Order today!