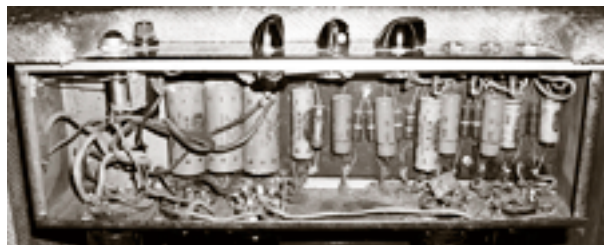


foam overflow stain running down the grill cloth, a slight orange stain on one side from pine knot bleed, and assorted scuffs and light abrasions. He also repaired the baffleboard, filling the old holes for the speaker mounting screws.

We hate doing this to you (again), but truth be told, we have to give the nod to the Tremolux as the most toneful and inspiring amp in its power class (18 watts) that we have ever heard or owned. It's ascension to Numero Uno status was a bit of a surprise, but then again, we considered the initial source of our inspiration for finding one – Neil Young, via his tech, Larry Cragg, and in hindsight we should have expected as much. With all the attention paid to the tweed Deluxe as the big time bonerizer of the tweed family, the Tremolux seems to have been overlooked for the usual reasons... In the nose-to-butt-crack daisy-chain march to mediocrity, the masses never seem to acquire a view beyond the first lazy dumb-ass directly in front of them. In the immortal words of the great hoosier educator and smack-down artist Earl Dosey, they are "stepping' over dimes to pick up nickels." Let's hope the lemmings continue to keep their heads down.



So here's the move... Sad as we are to share this, our strategy was as obvious as it seems. Forget about original speakers, don't let a replaced tranny run you off (we've never replaced one with a Mercury that didn't sound better than the original), and deliberately track down the fugliest old girls you can find from the tweed era. Busted baffle boards? We luv that... Ricky-ticky cabinets are good, and the coverin' don't matter. What you want is a beater with a totally neglected chassis and as many of the original fat Astron caps and original resistors present as possible. Yeah, some of them may have to be replaced, but it's far better to allow a prudent and judicious amp tech determine that rather than buying an old amp that has been raped by a hard chargin' cowboy hooked on Sprague Orange Drops. Buy one of those and your old amp will sound new, never to sound old again, and that's most definitely not the play you want to make here. A little component drift is good.

There is luck involved, too... not all vintage amps were created equal. Some of them left the birthing bench endowed with incredible tone – a happy accident created by the melding of variable components that resulted in extraordinary sounds. Others were created by the same roll of the dice, but with a different outcome altogether – mysteriously dull, flat, or sim-



ply lacking whatever you wish to call it... *that tone*, mojo, bloom, the harmonic complexity of your first Schlitz, depth, fatness... *whatever*. To experience the blissful afterglow of unanticipated discovery, you must be willing to risk something, which is another way of saying that faith must be exercised in the absence of a guarantee. In this respect, buying old amps is a lot like life itself... The greatest obstacle to discovery is the flawed perception of an impossible challenge. And the window of opportunity is closing on these great old amplifiers faster than you may think. Like vintage guitars, the best old amps are being taken out of circulation by collectors willing to pay prices that are based on *potential future value* (more than they are worth today, perhaps, but less than they will be worth tomorrow.) For you, *hombré*, the time to bust a move is now. *Quest forth... TQ*

“that Amp Looks Like God”

–Danny Flowers

This may be our last riff on vintage Vox JMI AC30s absent of a chat with The Edge, Peter Buck, Mike Campbell or Daniel Lanois. We've spared no ink alerting you to the great AC30 in the past, and having flirted with a couple of stellar, early



'60s candy panel heads for years, this final chapter of our story is indeed icing on the cake. But before we reach our unveiling, let's briefly revisit the road that brought us here.

Our first AC30 score occurred in late 2001 – an early '60s non top-boosted head bought on eBay from a Nashville cat for \$1300. Todd Sharp ultimately optimized it with his usual magic touch and subsequently wrote a priceless article on the vintage Vox JMI AC30 and reissue Vox TBX in the May 2002 issue of TQR. It's a great read on a technical subject, perfectly voiced for less technical guitarists.

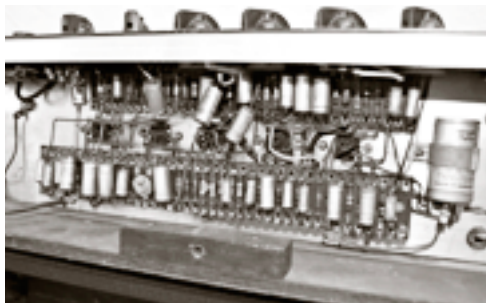
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Gregg Hopkins also restored an original Vox beater 2x12 cabinet we acquired to match the head, and

since the back panels were already missing, we asked Gregg to build a “football” back. Add a couple of poorly reconed, original silver Celestion G12s that were sent to A Brown Sound for one of their first hemp recones, and we had assembled a very, very bad ass rig. We ultimately sold the entire thing to finance another vintage purchase for review, and yes, we lived to regret it – deeply.

But old habits die hard, and in the summer of 2006 we began trolling for another early ‘60s JMI candy panel head – the



ultimate bargain buy for AC30s, since intact vintage 2x12 combos usually sell for

twice the cost of a head alone. Remember that. It wasn’t long before we had found just what we were looking for – a straight, early ‘60s non top-boosted candy panel AC30 head that had been recovered (wrong) but otherwise remained original and intact, including most of the original British tubes. Believe it or not, we were the only bidders, and we scored the AC30 for the minimum bid of \$1,500. We added a top boost kit from Don Butler (Toneman), and began to ponder just how our cosmetic makeover of this AC30 might take shape.



We had known about custom cabinet builder and co-owner of DST Amps, Jeff Swanson, since we had first introduced the Balls 18W amps in our October 2003 issue. Balls founder Danny

Gork had Jeff build a gorgeous 18W head and 2x12 cabinet from Baltic birch with Marshall-style levant covering and white cotton grill cloth that was featured in our debut of the



Balls M18. Staring at our newly acquired AC 30 head in need of a correct recover, we began thinking about Michael Guthrie’s incredibly toneful vintage fawn AC30 and AC15s we had photographed for the May 2002 *Working Class Hero* issue... Was the original fawn Vox tolex still available? An Internet search eventually led us to an eBay auction titled “VOX AC-30

style fawn/beige tolex Original JMI AC30.” The auction was posted by Music Ground, Leeds, England, a very well-known store specializing in vintage guitars and amplifiers in the U.K. A link in the auction description also led us to a related Music Ground site – www.jmiamplification.com. where we found a complete line of vintage recreations of the original Vox JMI amps, as well as a separate category of “spares” that included the same fawn/beige Vox tolex, leather handles and brass vents offered on eBay. We contacted Music Ground and acquired the fawn tolex and handles needed to recover our AC 30 head *and* cover a new 2x12 cabinet to be built by Jeff Swanson. The fawn covering is made in the U.K. by the same company that first created it for JMI.

We shipped the old AC30 head cabinet and the material from Music Ground to Jeff, who would build an additional 2x12 combo cabinet that would allow us to use the head separately or slide it into the 2x12 as a standard combo rig. The results far surpassed our expectations, and you’ll see them soon, but first, it’s time you became formally acquainted with Jeff Swanson. Enjoy...

TQR: How did you learn to work with wood, glue and fabric, Jeff? Did your initial interest stem from a curiosity about woodworking, or more from the perspective of a musician with no money?



This goes way, way back to my early youth. I did a lot of work for my grandfather (Benjamin Harrison Franklin – really!) on his farm in Indiana.

Basically, lots of cutting down trees, clearing brush and putting up fence line. Many of the trees

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were 3-4 feet thick – old oak and sassafras, birch and elm. I remember the smell of the sassafras root and trying to make our own tea from it. Guess it got into my blood from that. Wood has always been something you can shape and work with your hands.

TQR: As you began to explore cabinet building, did you study old cabinet designs and materials from Fender, Vox, Marshall, etc.? Describe what you learned and observed specifically from various examples... unique designs, materials, and the good, bad and the ugly uncovered in your research.



Before

In the early days it was get a hold of anything you could use and then try to copy it. There were books in the library (do you young guitarist remember that place?) that went into great depth on the design of speakers and enclosures.

During the 60s and 70s, this was, for the most part, MATH! Hence, my early belief that I should be an engineer. As I read and studied, a lack of advanced math became apparent, so I just stuck with fractions. I spent a lot of time designing a line of stereo cabinets in the mid 70s whilst in school, called “JSCs,” and I actually built a few and sold them. As the band at school was playing the frat houses and my college budget did not allow the purchase of nice equipment, rehabbing old cabinets was a requirement. As always, you learn from the mistakes of others, and in comes the “bigger is better” scenario, like a silverface Bassman and the large 2x15 cabinet made in the late 60s. No bass, no wide dynamic range, and no way to fit it in a car! So yes, I did both research and trial and error and listening to what sounded right.



After

The good, bad and ugly? Some of the old amplifiers coveted today were made in the most horrible way. You want to know why some speaker cabinets are hard to find? They were only held

together by the baffle and back panel. Take them off and the cabinet can be easily broken by pushing with one hand. You see many amps with triangular pieces of wood inside to help keep the corners together, or square bracing following each corner. This is just a bad idea. Make the corner correctly and the cabinet will last a lifetime.

TQR: Summing up your experience, what are some of your favorite cabinet designs from the past and why, in terms of both design and sound?



The DST cabinet we designed for the U34-CL is among my favorites. It is familiar with a few twists to keep the controls separated without any gimmicks. Going back to my experience with my old

Fender 2x15 cabinet, the feeling of “bigger is better” is just not true. When our band in the ‘70s was on the road, a shop in Kalamazoo, MI run by Charlie Wicks (ProCo Sound) had a line of bass cabinets that were 1x15 using a computer-designed ported cabinet and an EV 15B or L speaker. They were small, made of particle board and weighed a ton! But they packed a nice controlled bass sound, covered the low E string (40hz) and being very directional and low to the ground, helped keep stage volume down. That was a great package. If you remember the old Mesa Boogie 1x15 Diesel, this was really the same speaker. For guitar, a smaller 2 x 12 with an oval back – that’s my favorite. Most 4 x 12’s in the Marshall size can get boomy easily and are just huge. I still make a lot of them, along with my Hylight style 4 x 12, but I suspect most don’t go on the road.

TQR: Describe the variety of cabinets you build today – the most popular – as well as some of the custom requests you receive.



Today, the number one request is a 2 x 12 combo cabinet. Could be a DST amplifier, Marshall Bluesbreaker, Vox, Fender or even the Marshall 18 watt. The 2x12 is the number one request by two fold. What I

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build is almost everything that has been done and a number of custom builds, and almost all of them are really the same. Without degrading the art of speaker cabinet building, a box is a box until you get to the strength part. Butt joint, dado, finger, dovetail, biscuit, dowels, reinforced etc... manufacturers have used everything. I use dovetail joints and the bracing is set into a dado cut inside the cabinet shell. I can build a solid cherry Bandmaster Reverb head cabinet, put a Mesa Boogie combo bass head into its own head cabinet, or make a Marshall look like an old tweed narrow panel combo from the '60s. I have built a speaker cabinet that looks like a rack for my effects with a removable grill to hide them. One of our best customers had me build him a pair of Hiwatt-size speaker cabinet shells in shelves so his Hiwatt DR 103s sit inside them. Two cabinets and two amps sitting inside each and one amplifier sitting on top. Talk about a wall of sound, but way cool looking. Black basketweave tolex up the ying yang!

TQR: How much of your work is in recovering and restoration versus new construction?



This goes in spurts. The most common rehab is a simple tighten of the grill cloth or replacing it. I've spent lots of time talking customers out of recovering an old Marshall that had small pieces of tolex missing and lots of nicks. Just clean the tolex and use some super glue to get as much back in place as possible. But some cabinets are so far gone that you have to strip them to get the cabinet shell back into solid shape so they don't

vibrate apart. Old glues in the '60s and '70s and even those made now don't do well in damp basements for 30 years. The moisture is sucked in and the joint falls apart or the cabinet take a big shock and the shell shifts and the old, obsolete tolex/levant is ripped along the whole edge of the cabinet.

TQR: With the exception of exotic designs, most cabinets are built from white pine or Baltic birch. What are the characteristics and sound qualities of each? Is one "better" than the other for specific applications (or styles of music, i.e. blues vs. rock)?

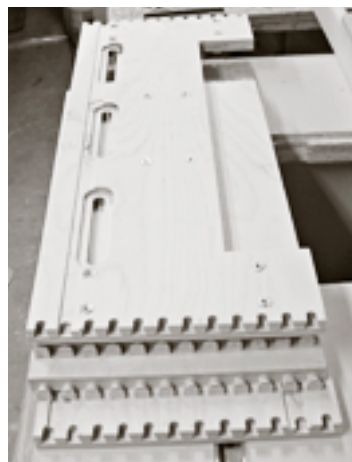
It was very apparent that England had run out of low-cost pine at some point and California had lots of it. I believe that both Jim Marshall and Leo Fender did not always pick materials because they were the "best." They used what was at hand and could help them turn a profit. Plywood is stronger and more stable, and pine resonates in sympathy with the

speakers more. Different sound from essentially the same amp. The Bassman 5F6A and JTM 45 were really identical circuits aside from the transformers, capacitors, resistors, steel/aluminum chassis and tubes. All the specs were the same, but they were different. Now put in different speakers, cabinets and voltages from your wall outlet. All of this works together to make a different sound.



I use 3/4 inch stock for pine or various other exotic hardwood cabinets.

I like the thicker stability of the wood, and why argue with the success of Leo Fender and 2 or 3 million cabinets built and shipped? On the Baltic birch side, for the most part I use 9 ply 1/2 inch stock for the cabinet shell, which is very strong, lighter weight and a bit livelier. The 13 or 15 ply is reserved for the



4x12 or some AC30s, Orange and HiWatt cabinets. We have done 4 x 12s for DST and for custom orders out of 1/2 inch shells, and it works fine when coupled to a 3/4 inch back panel and baffle.

Which is better for rock or blues? Neither, as it is totally in the hands of the guitarist. Gary

Moore uses Marshall amplifiers and Eric Clapton uses Fenders. I'd say both could play the blues a bit.

TQR: Can you generally summarize how you would advise a customer in choosing between a closed back or open back cabinet?

I get this question with almost every person that has not defined their own tone. The question raises a lot of questions back to the guitarist – type of music, home, stage, recording, volume, speaker selection, etc... In general, a closed back will support lower frequencies and be more directional. An open back will produce a fuller sound closer to the cabinet, but lose a bit of low end. There are a number of variables here, but if all is equal (never is) that will hold true. Most people buy open back 2x12 cabinets and the 1x12s are usually open as well, but we do some ported. Very rarely are they sealed. What I do offer is an oval back to get to more of a mid-point between open and closed or our split back option.

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This allows you to convert the cabinet from open to closed easily, for a dramatic change in tone. This has been done by a number of cabinets builders and I'm certainly not the first, but it isn't done that much in the mass production zone.

TQR: For those of us lacking a road crew (and not getting any younger), weight is an increasing concern. We've reviewed some 1x12 and 2x12 combo amps built with Birch ply that seemed to be extraordinarily heavy for their size, and not due so much to big transformers. How much can the relative weight of wood used for cabinets vary? Can you pay more for lighter wood with the same strength? Are there design features that can be utilized to build a durable, great sounding but lighter cabinet?



The average 2x12 cabinet weighs between 25-32 pounds depending on the thickness of the baffle, weight of the tolex, and thickness of the shell. The weight is really in the speakers. Put in a pair of G12H30s and you just added 20.5 pounds and the cabinet is now between 45 and 52 pounds. Make it out of solid 3/4 shell, baffle, back panel and bracing like my Hylight 2x12 and you're up to 65 pounds. I'm in the process of finishing up a custom BB combo cabinet made of 3/4 inch pine (yes, Marshall and pine.) The weight before covering is 26.5 pounds, Levant is 2.5 pounds and the grill cloth is 8 ounces. The only thing missing is 6 ounces of glue and 10 ounces of screws and washers. So the total is 30.75 pounds before the speakers and chassis. This is a big 2x12 coming in at 31 x 23 x 11.25, so you see, most of the weight is from the chassis and speakers when it comes to combos.

TQR: How important is the type of wood used and the thickness of baffle boards, and are there any specific benefits related to the way the speakers are mounted?

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Great question! People have told me you must use 3/4 wood for baffles and it can be either plywood or particle board/mdf. This is as wrong as saying you can only play blues with 6V6 power tubes. Remember the old Bassman 4 x 10... I've restored a number of those beautiful old amplifiers and some had 1/4 inch thick baffles. Again it comes down to what you want to hear. A thinner baffle will interact with the air movement more than a thick baffle. Is this good or bad? I know what I like and it is different for different types of music, different volumes, different speakers, different guitars, and different cabinets. Most of my smaller cabinets for low power amplifiers use a 3/8 inch baffle, with the mid range power using 1/2 inch baffle and the higher powered amps using either 5/8 or 3/4. You also have to keep in mind that the baffle has a grill cloth frame permanently attached to it and this acts to stiffen the baffle as well.

TQR: If someone had an old Pro Reverb 2x12 for example, could you build a custom head cabinet that could be used to mount the chassis and reverb tank in to make a more portable rig?

Been there and done it – lots of conversions from combos to head cabinets and the reverse, Marshall, Fender, MesaBoogie, Hiwatt and even Peavey. There is no reason you can't do this with any amplifier.

TQR: Speaker choices are so important, yet it's difficult for players to try even a fraction of what's available. Do you advise your customers on speaker decisions, what are some of your favorites for specific 1x12, 2x12, 2x10 and 4x12 applications, and why?



That's a question I can't really answer. When someone calls you and asks, "What speaker do you suggest?" I can only suggest what I like. You have to ask a lot of questions, but man, it is really hard to answer, and Eminence has only made it more difficult. We have over 250 speakers to choose from between Eminence, Celestion, Jensen and Fane. When you add in the smaller vendors the number is staggering. You like British rock? Use Celestion. American rock? Use a Jensen. You can't go wrong with a Celestion G12H30 for lower powered amps. A pair of them sound great in almost any open back cabinet – Marshall, Fender, Vox and yes, DST. **To**

www.swansoncabinets.com, 978-578-0532

God Speaks



We received the recovered head and 2x12 combo cabinet fully expecting extraordinary work, but when you actually behold something created with the level of craftsmanship and care achieved by people like Jeff and Gregg, it changes the way you view such work forever.

Tight, substantial and overbuilt is the best way to describe Swanson's construction of the new 2x12 cabinet. Unlike the original Vox cabinets and other reproductions we have bought, Swanson uses one inch bracing to further support



the baffleboard and split back panels – a critical feature that prevents the back panels from buzzing with a fully- cranked AC30 moving so

much air. The 15-ply Baltic birch used in our 2x12 was clearly premium stock, void-free, highly figured and tinted with a thin, transparent charcoal stain.



The classic design of the original 2x12 Vox combo involves a plywood shelf that is bolted to the bottom of the amplifier chassis, enabling the entire chassis to slide into the cabinet on two inside braces.

It's common to see vintage AC30 and AC50 amps in which the wooden shelf bolted to the chassis has cracked or splintered, or the flimsy plywood rails have become loose, misaligned or broken off due to the effects of rough travel. Jeff's bracing for the chassis mount shelf is bullet proof, overbuilt and destined to last a lifetime. You can also drive yourself nuts trying to align an AC30 chassis in some reproduction cabinets due to the way the mounting screws for the upper back panel seat in retaining nuts mounted in the chassis frame... The slightest misalignment of the screw holes in the back panel with the nuts



seated in the chassis will skew the positioning of the chassis and control panel, preventing the back panel from

fitting snugly against the chassis and virtually guaranteeing vibration and buzzing. Jeff's calculations for orienting the chassis to the back panel and mounting screw holes were spot on, as was the position of the rectangular opening in the back panel for the top boost controls. If this sounds like more information than you need, keep in mind that we've been down the wrong side of the road in this quest already. The pitfalls we describe are very real and best avoided. You'll thank us later.

Cosmetically, the authentic fawn Vox tolex is the Bentley of amp fabrics – cotton backed, with just the faintest suggestion of reptile skin in the pattern, set off by the brown diamond grill cloth, white piping, gold hardware, dark mahogany leather handles and the vintage red control panel of the AC30. Surely this is the British equivalent of a blonde Dual Showman – the ultimate ride to Liverpool, Dublin, L.A., Athens, GA, and Mount Juliet, Tennessee. Jeff Swanson's work betrayed not a single wrinkle or flaw in the covering of either cabinet – every corner and seam faultless to a fault.

When it comes to tone, these old AC30s have no equal in producing sweet compression and chime rooted in an exceptionally thick and heavy foundation. Hundreds of new amps have been "inspired" by the original AC30 – some outstanding in their own right – but an old JMI in good working condition possesses an authoritative and confident voice that can't quite be matched with a new amp. Mounted in the Swanson 2x12 cabinet, our AC30 sounded full, rock solid and even bigger than it looks. The standard open back design seems to throw nearly as much sound from the back as the



front of the amp, creating an ambient surround-sound feel

that suspends harmonic-laden chords forever, once again reminding us of the stark difference between 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary.' If we just had some tilt-back legs...**To**

the DST 30 “Redhead”

Bob Dettorre co-founded DST Engineering with Jeff Swanson, Bob being the amp builder of the group. When we discovered that Bob had been building his personal tribute to one of his favorite amps of all time – the JMI AC30 – we jumped at the chance to ask him a few questions about the DST30 and review his work. Bob’s description of the DST30 follows, accompanied by our review.

The ‘Redhead’ we sent is one of the amps from my personal collection. I built this one about a year ago after making a few for various customers, and it has several of the



most common mods that I do for my Vox customers. The circuitry is very close in detail to a JMI 6 input Top Boost with the following changes:

The Vibrato speed control is a pot with a fairly wide range of speed compared to the average AC 30. The Vib/Trem switch has a center Off position, which allows you to disable the effect without the footswitch. The Vib/Trem are also enabled by turning the switch to either Vib or Trem, footswitch not required. Most everything else in the circuit and on the control panel are standard issue Vox, except for the standby switch and the lack of a voltage selector. The amp can be set up for any AC input voltage, however, it is a hard wire change. And yes, I know the standby isn’t really needed, but everyone asks for it, so why not? We now also offer the DST30 with a rear panel IEC inlet option for detachable cords like many modern amps use, and a Marshall-style voltage selector switch.

This amp is based on the 6 input AC30 with the later Top Boost, which added a gain stage, bass and treble controls. So



as you move along the channels, the Brilliant channel has the highest gain due to the extra gain stage. The Normal channel is a bit less, and the Vib/Trem a bit less again. This has become a popular configuration with my customers, and they



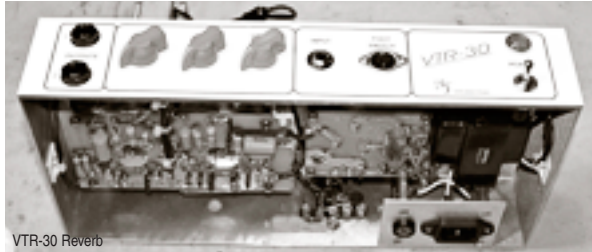
tend to use an A-B box to channel surf. Because of this, the outboard reverb unit I make to match this amp now has a built in A-B select circuit.

The rear panel incorporates dual speaker outputs and a locking-type toggle impedance selector switch. I will also do a rotary switch on request. On the rear panel are the Vib/Trem footswitch jack and a Vib/Trem depth control. The depth control is simply the internal adjustment of the old AC-30 brought out to the rear panel. It intentionally has a lot of range to allow good depth for the Vibrato and a nice range for the Trem, and it can go a little overboard for those with a quirky sense of humor. Finally, there is the infamous half power switch using the two-tube/four-tube approach. I’ve done it as a triode/pentode selector, but the two-tube version actually sounds better with the output transformers I use. I call these “tribute amps” rather than “clones,” but interestingly enough, some of them actually do go out as “clones.”

Think of me as a harmonic whore. My personal playing style (reflected in most of my designs and builds) requires an amp with a fairly wide dynamic range and a tight low end (this can be accurately interpreted to mean I’m heavy handed and sloppy at times). I also live for the volume controls on my guitars and insist that my amps can roll into a more distorted sound from a fairly lively rhythm by using the guitar volume. In order to do this, I focus on power supply and output stage design issues quite closely. I won’t bore you with the math, but the load line/transformer of the DST is a little different than a standard issue AC30. This is one of those cases that sort of proves that every aspect of an amp does affect the sound – power supply, output stage, pre-amp, and how they all work and play together. Heavy sustain and gain are never a part of my amp designs, because I honestly feel that it just clouds the tone of an amp, although I do make a couple of interesting pedals for those moments when I want to do the Santana-meets-the-Spirit-in-the-Sky thing...

I also recently built a head with an EF86 in the Normal channel. The Vib/Trem and Brilliant/Bass Treble remain the same,

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VTR-30 Reverb

and I'm very happy with the results. I replaced the Normal channel single-stage 12AX7 with an EF86 channel found in the earliest AC30s, including the Bright switch. This is a nice mod to the amp that produces gain similar to the Top Boost circuit, which is our Bright channel, but the tone of the EF86 is totally different – even with the EF86 Bright switch engaged. This new addition produces a more robust tone with a very unique drive sound when pushed. For those that like the Normal channel clean sound, I am currently working out the details of a scheme to allow a switch selection between the Normal and EF86 tones. Oh, and contrary to popular belief, the EF86 is just as quiet and hum-free as the rest of the amp when using a good quality NOS tube.

Oh, one last thing – I am also building a matching reverb unit for the BD30. Picture this in a small red cabinet that matches the amp head. The reverb is based on our VTR series, but incorporates an A-B switching circuit to allow you to jump between any two of the channels of the head (I use the V/T and Bright myself). And the VTR incorporates an adjustable gain boost of up to 10dB just for fun. I also take special requests, and quite often change my builds to give the customer what they want. **to**

www.dst-engineering.com, 978-578-0532

Review

DST 30



One of the most enjoyable and satisfying

aspects of playing through an AC30 is its straightforward simplicity – a total of six inputs (high and low) for three channels – Vibrato/Tremolo, Normal and Brilliant, a Vib/Trem speed control, Vib/Trem switch, separate volume controls for each channel, and a global tone (cut) control (add treble and bass on the top or back panel for top boost.) The

beauty of the original JMI design is that you simply pick yer channel, set the volume and tone to taste and go. Them British blokes got one thing wrong, though... Rather than screening 'JMI' on the control panel, it should have read 'NFA' – *no fucking around*. And like the vintage AC30, we admire the DST30 for the same reason. That, and it does a crackerjack job of delivering the goods as well as any new amp possibly can. All that's missing is the funk of ages that permeates an old AC30 after it's been hard-cooked for four decades, steeped in the pungent effluvia of Rothmann's and bitter ale. Unless Bob has a pub annexed to his shop, we don't imagine you'll be smelling much of anything from the DST30 other than a faint whiff of hide glue, vinyl, and new tubes burning in, but we were otherwise mightily impressed with this amp as a very worthy alternative to an original JMI AC30. Here's why...

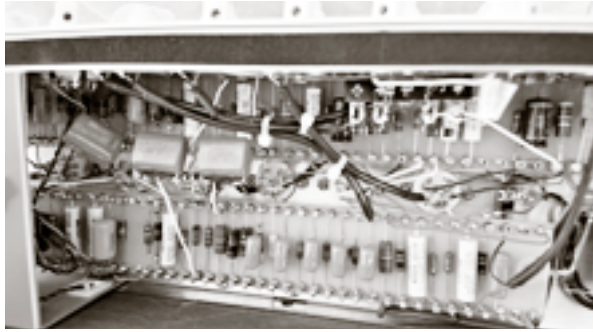
Like our AC30, the DST30 is a study in simplicity, meaning you'll have your tone nailed in, oh, about a minute. The Vibrato/Tremolo effect is every bit as surreal as the original circuit and then some, yet far more flexible, the Brilliant channel is all that, but with a bit more spank and gain than the JMI, and the fat Normal channel (our favorite) is a fine pull of Guinness... black as Northumberland coal with a



thick, rich head. Neither the DST30 or a non top-boost AC30 can be naturally coaxed into intense, Marshallly overdrive – if that's what you want, bring a pedal, or call Bob and beg him to build you an AC50 brick house, Mr. Sharp Dressed Man. The beauty of the DST30 lives in it's soft compression, lush second and third order harmonics, the miraculous way that full chords bloom and hang in the air, and the solid low mids and lows that hold it all together, never faltering an inch. Since the DST30 mirrors the JMI AC30 in it's ability to seem louder than a mere 30 watts, Bob Dettorre's choice of a two tube/four tube half power feature is a sound and useful one, and it sounds infinitely better than the pentode/triode trick. We approve on all counts.

Dettorre's skill at laying out a complex circuit and putting it all together is good enough to have been revealed in a clear plexi cabinet, with nothing but clean, precise workmanship throughout. This amp thrives on bawdy single coils at all volume levels, and the Brilliant channel marries nicely with warmer humbuckers. Clean tones are plentiful, and at higher

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volume levels you can manage the clean/dirty paradigm neatly from the volume pot on your guitar. This amp will also thrive with the right boost effects – need we say it again? Get a Klon, and add some kind of reverb while you're at it.

Normally, we'd close by cautioning you that an AC30 is not exactly a neighbor-friendly bedroom amp, but with true half power designed into the DST30, you get a DST15 as well, and that makes two... two... two amps in one. **To**

Review

the KS 336

"If I'm going to buy a new guitar, I take it to a good 'hot' room, like a tiled bathroom, and listen to the wood. If tone comes off the neck, you can bet it's gonna sound beautiful through an amp." – Dickey Betts



Thanks to all of our loyal readers (and you in particular), we find it necessary to troll

music stores often. Fortunately, there is one nearby that specializes in custom one-off's, limited custom shop runs and all kinds of cool, new guitars you won't often see in the typical chain or mega-web retailer. Imagine our surprise when we ducked into Midtown Music one more time and spied *this* lurking in a stand on the floor... What is *that*? we wondered, approaching for a closer look. Well, of course, it's from the Inspired By Series at Gibson – the Kiefer Sutherland 336. We had no idea.



Tee Vee doesn't get much play here, although we will admit to becoming hooked on the Discovery Channel's *Dirty Jobs*... Where else can you see how the inside of cement mixers are cleaned, or how Nevada pigs are fed hotel banquet slop cooked into piggy gruel? We did know that Kiefer Sutherland collects guitars, but the KS336 had blown right by us until we stumbled on it face to face. We're glad we did.

The KS 336 is built like all of the Custom Shop ES336s, with a carved maple top and chambered mahogany back and sides rendered from a single slab of wood. The vintage-style, Super



400 pearl fretboard inlay sets the visual hook, contrasting with the gold top, cream binding and aged nickel hardware and pickup covers. "The classic axe that never was" certainly applies to the KS 336 – a prime candidate for a Tom Murphy beat down. Add stock, medium-jumbo frets, bone nut, lightweight, nickel-plated aluminum tail-

piece and '57 Classic Plus humbuckers, and you've got a truly rare and distinctive guitar with staying power and huge "play me" appeal.

We brought the KS home and ran it through an assortment of amps with outstanding results. Our take on the 336? While it may look like a smaller version of a big, plywood 335, the sound is different – less boxy and acoustic sounding, with the more focused sustain you'd find in a solid body guitar. You still hear *some* of the acoustic qualities that f-holes promise, but with a more direct attitude, even at lower volume levels.