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# the ToneQuest Report™

*The Player's Guide to Ultimate Tone*  
\$10.00 US, April 2005/VOL.6 NO.6

## Coils, Spiders & Cones

*Changing speakers is one of the easiest amp "mods" you can do in your quest for killer tone, yet there actually was a time when players simply bought an amp and played it "as is" until something broke, melted or blew. Tube amp circuits were uncomplicated, vacuum tubes were built to provide a lifetime of reliable performance, and the most common service problems encountered by guitar players were usually blown speakers. As rock & roll guitar evolved into distorted, overdriven tones on singles like The Yardbirds "Over, Under, Sideways, Down," scores of original speakers were soon shredded by neighborhood rock stars-in-training across America, but it wasn't too difficult to locate a new replacement speaker for your Fender, Ampeg, Gibson or Silvertone amp. It might have been a Utah ... but who cared what it was as long as it worked? Speaker repair remained an obscure craft, and the cult of tone had yet to fully develop (although there were many accomplished practitioners on vinyl). For twenty years or so after The Big Rock Explosion, Celestion continued to chug along fueled by*



*British amp builders, Jensen went under right after the introduction of the excellent Vibranto speakers, and CTS, Oxford, ElectroVoice and JBL stayed in the game as long as they could. Meanwhile, a former Magnavox and CTS engineer named Bob Gault patiently nurtured his OEM business named*

after the town in which the company was founded – Eminence, Kentucky. Eminence filled the need previously served by Jensen, CTS and Oxford providing amplifier manufacturers with economical, reliable speakers to “spec.” Competition being what it was (stiff and unforgiving), builders could specify price points for their original equipment speakers and Eminence delivered the goods while continuing to develop efficiencies in speaker manufacturing that preserved their competitive edge. Ultimately, the guitar speaker business was pared down to just three major players ... Celestion, Eminence, and the Jensen reissues made by Recoton Corporation in Italy.

When it comes to modern guitar speakers, there are essentially Jensen players and Celestion players (sorry JBL and EV freaks ... you are a tiny minority of contrarians). Jensen players generally find Celestions too dark and unruly, while Celestion players think Jensens are too bright and thin. Yes, this is a gross generalization, but true nonetheless. Eminence now straddles both worlds, and they have even developed hybrid designs that capture the open, airy, warm tone of a vintage Jensen-style speaker with the heavy attitude of a Celestion. We’ve never had it so good.

Which brings us to the present ... If you need a speaker today you can buy an old and very expensive original and play it until it blows, buy an old, expensive, reconed vintage speaker of dubious tonality, have your own vintage speaker reconed (careful now ...) or buy a new speaker made by Celestion, Eminence, Jensen, Weber, Tone Tubby, or the darkhorse in the pack, Fane. Yes, changing speakers is indeed the easiest amp mod you can do, and it can be a very rewarding move. With this in mind, the goal of our *Quest* is to celebrate the coming of Spring with new and zesty tones that will inspire you to grow as a player and become eminently more toneful. As the blossoms bloom in the warmth of Spring, so should your music, and we’ve carefully planted the seeds for you in this issue. The rest is up to you. If you don’t try you’ll never know, so by all means, *Quest* forth ...

### EMINENCE® Patriot & Redcoat Series

No doubt you’ve heard the buzz about the new line of 21 guitar speakers developed by Eminence. We were fortunate to have published the only interview ever given by the late Bob Gault, founder of Eminence (*TQR* July 2001) and we have asked Chris Rose at Eminence to elaborate on the genesis of these superb new speakers. Our reviews follow Chris’ interview ...

**TQR:** What inspired the development of the Patriot and Redcoat Series? What did you want to accomplish, specifically?

Despite the fact that Eminence had been making speakers for

virtually every major guitar amplifier manufacturer for over 30 years, very few of those speakers were branded as Eminence. We had never really put any marketing effort into guitar speakers and there was no real notoriety for Eminence with the end consumer. To support all the manufacturers using Eminence in their amps, we felt we needed to establish ourselves as the guitar speaker of choice and make the products very recognizable with consumers. Thus, there would be added value in an amp that was Eminence loaded.

Beyond that, we had been contacted by multiple amplifier manufacturers who were complaining that our most formidable competitor had moved the production of many of their key speaker models to China. They were telling us there were delivery issues, quality issues, inconsistency and tonal variations with core models. While at the 2003 Frankfurt Musik Messe, one of the worlds most well-renowned guitar designers and manufacturers sat down with us and said, “If you guys don’t take this opportunity right now, you will be missing a once in a lifetime boat.” We came home from that show, immediately had a meeting with all our key people and decided the time was right to initiate a project that would ultimately lead to the launch of the Patriot and Redcoat Series.



We had several things we wanted to accomplish: First, we knew we had to develop a few key speakers that would mirror the tonal characteristics of our competitors’ core models in order to answer the call of our customers. Second, we knew we needed a wide

assortment of tonal characteristics and speakers that were worthy of obtaining longevity in the market. We also knew that we had to be better than anyone else at explaining the characteristics of each speaker. Probably more than anything, we wanted to educate the consumer about how easily they could change their tone by changing speakers. Finally, we wanted each speaker to be unique cosmetically and easily recognizable by everyone as an Eminence product.

**TQR:** Describe the R&D process that went into designing the new speakers. Were there specific players involved in addition to your engineering staff, and if so, how were they involved?

Eminence engineers have probably designed more guitar speakers than any other group of engineers on the planet. They knew exactly where to start with matching the competi-

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tors' models. It was simply a matter of using the same components and the same manufacturing methods. As loudspeaker manufacturers, we all have access to basically the same components like cones, spiders, magnets, baskets, etc . . . , so that part was pretty easy. We also knew we wanted to soup up some of those models based on comments we'd been hearing over the years. The Stonehenge is an example of that effort.

For most of the Patriot models, we either used designs that were already popular with some of our endorsing artist like Tab Benoit (Delta Demon), or created new designs based on cones manufactured in the USA. Of course, our Cannabis Rex is a hemp cone model. We loved the marketing implications with that cone! Many thanks to John Harrison at A Brown Soun for letting us use it. I think we made him proud with the finished speaker design.

Throughout the design process, we sent samples all over the world to key amplifier manufacturers just to confirm that we had nailed the Red Coat (British) tones and confirm their continued interest. Their input was invaluable. Early on there were some things we didn't have exactly right, but with their help, we quickly discovered how to make the necessary changes. We also wanted to make sure we developed speakers with superior power handling. There was a considerable amount of testing involved for us to reach those goals.



We are also very fortunate to have some awesome guitar tone gurus right here in our backyard. Greg Martin, lead guitarist for The Kentucky Headhunters is an endorsing artist and always willing to come spend time with us listening to new designs. Greg brought his guitar tech, Paul McGarry and Steve Wilson, the head sound engineer for The Headhunters and former Stevie Ray Vaughan guitar tech. Everyone involved with the project here at Eminence spent hours with these guys confirming the validity of the various designs and describing the tonal characteristics of each speaker. They were very instrumental in the development of the "Eminence Tone Guide."

**TQR:** Can the sound and construction of specific speakers in the new Eminence series be compared to the sound of vintage speakers of the past?

It would probably be inappropriate for us to mention the name of our competitors' speakers for which we have designed tonal matches. As far as we know, they are still offered on the market today. We have the utmost respect for those designs. What I can tell you is that our Red Fang, Private Jack, and Governor speakers are all models with British tonal characteristics that will be easily recognized by your readers. This year at NAMM we released four new British flavored models to round out the series. The Wizard could well be one of the best sounding guitar speakers I've ever heard. Man-0-War, Red Ryder, and The Tonespotter have also been getting favorable reviews.

Our Patriot Black Powder is a souped-up version of a speaker many may be familiar with from several Fender amplifiers of the past such as the Slant 4-12S, Straight 4-12S, Roc Pro GE 412 MKII, Ultimate Chorus, Princeton 112 Plus, Princeton 65 and Roc Pro.



Our Red Coat Tonker is a modified version of a speaker that was used in "The Twin" by Fender. The Copperhead is a highly modified version of our blue frame Legend 102.

The rest of the models are truly new and unique designs.

**TQR:** What are the major differences (advances) in construction materials and/or techniques used in the new Eminence speakers compared to the traditional archetypes among vintage speakers?

Eminence continues ongoing development of the loudspeaker voice coil and related manufacturing processes. There have been marked improvements in coil handling during the winding process, adhesives, former materials, processes and improvements in insulation. As a result, a coil wound in our coil department today may handle twice the power of one we made 30 years ago.



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Most of the adhesives that were used in vintage speakers have long since been replaced with much improved or different glues altogether. Such improvements have also impacted the attachment of surrounds to cones, cones to baskets, cone edge treatments and the durability of cloth spiders. Cones are probably superior to those in most vintage speakers as well ... especially their suspensions.

Our e-coat and powder coatings are far superior to paints used years ago. The evolution of speaker building techniques has of course taken a different path for different manufacturers. For Eminence, our techniques today mean that when a speaker comes off the end of the assembly line, it is ready to be shipped to the consumer. Thirty years ago, the speaker likely had to sit for at least a day while the adhesives cured before it could be tested and packaged. So really, the speaker is much



the same as it was 40 years ago. There have been no real major changes in technology with the loudspeaker ... only with

the improvement of components and manufacturing processes, resulting in better power handling and durability.

**TQR:** There has been some controversy over recent developments involving the manufacturing of “British” speakers in China. We’ve been getting calls from our subscribers asking us which speakers if any are still made in England ... Eminence continues to exclusively manufacture its products in Eminence, KY, but do you source materials exclusively from the U.S. as well?

The controversy you describe is one of the things that precipitated our drive to introduce the Patriot and Red Coat lines. We’ve made efforts to find out which of our competitors’ speakers were still made in England and which ones are now made in China. We frequently get asked the same question and we still don’t really know.

All Eminence speakers are indeed still manufactured here at our facility in Eminence, KY. When we have a domestic choice for a component, we will always choose that component provided it allows us to remain competitive on the finished product. The Patriot series cones are all provided by domestic suppliers, as are most other components. For the Red Coats, we specifically sourced British manufactured cones. We wanted the tone to be a direct match to the original.



In the past several years, we have been forced to source some parts from outside the USA ... usually when a viable US source no longer exists. Our philosophy at Eminence is to always keep our employees employed, support our vendors, support our industry and community, and demonstrate our pride in US manufactured products. This gets harder and harder for most all industries as consumers more willingly accept an import alternative. We have no intention of changing our philosophy though. There are over 200 families right here in Central Kentucky that depend on the continued success of Eminence and our ability to conform in an ever-changing market.

**TQR:** How can players, amp techs and builders actually hear and experience the new line of speakers first-hand?



As I mentioned before, changing speakers is a phenomenal way to change your tone. It is second only to changing your guitar or amplifier, and a whole lot less expensive. The hard part is really demonstrating

to anyone how dramatic these changes can be. We spent a great deal of time trying to figure it out ourselves. For anyone to get a viable picture of the difference a speaker makes in their tone, several factors have to remain constant. First, you should be using the same amplifier, guitar, and enclosure for listening tests. Second, you need to be able to switch between speakers in the same enclosure while playing. Preferably, you want to do this with your favorite guitar and amp.

For winter NAMM 2005, Eminence introduced a point of purchase speaker switching system package. We intend to market the package to key guitar shops across the US that are interested in becoming Certified Eminence Tone Centers and willing to help customers “Pick Your Sound.” It will include a 16 channel switching device and the dealer’s choice of cabinet(s) for demonstration purposes. The customer will be able to bring in their favorite amplifier and guitar or choose one from the dealership to try out all the various speaker models.

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## Guitar Speaker Tone Guide

Models	Application	Configuration	Low End Response	Low End Shape	MidRange Response	MidRange Shape	High End Response	Volume/Flex	Overall Character	Break-Up Notes	Power Range
The Crocodile	10" Open or Closed Back	1.1 or 1.1 X 3"	Neutral	Tight	Aggressive	Warm	Maximal	Loaded	Extremely balanced average tone with a little extra bark and a touch of classic blues tone.	Medium	Up to 75 watts
King Cobra	10" Open or Closed Back	1.1 or 1.1 X 3"	Aggressive	Chirpy	Neutral	Crisp	Aggressive	Loaded	Very loud, touch sensitive and responsive with nice full sounding top end and a little bite.	Medium	Up to 75 watts
Delta Queen	10" Closed Back	1.1 or 1.1 X 3"	Neutral	Relaxed	Neutral	Soft	Neutral	Low	Excellent overall, but a little more mellow.	Low	Up to 30 watts
Blue Tail Hound	10" Open Back	1.1 or 1.1 X 3"	Neutral	Tight	Neutral	Warm	Maximal	Low	Very smooth, with a little more presence than the Delta Queen, and a more open and airy.	High	Up to 75 watts
Black Panther	12" Open Back	1.1 or 1.1 X 3"	Subdued	Tight	Neutral	Crisp	Aggressive	Loaded	Not as bright with a little more midrange and a touch of bite.	Medium	Up to 75 watts
Swamp Thing	12" Closed Back	1.1 or 1.1 X 3"	Aggressive	Relaxed	Aggressive	Dark	Maximal	Loaded	Very powerful, thick and chunky tone. Very touch sensitive with good sustain. Awesome bottom end.	Low	Up to 100 watts
Red, White and Blue	12" Open or Closed Back	1.1 or 1.1 X 3"	Neutral	Tight	Neutral	Warm	Aggressive	Loaded	Not as bright with a little more midrange and a touch of bite. American sound to the extreme.	Medium	Up to 100 watts
Swamp Dog	12" Open or Closed Back	1.1 or 1.1 X 3"	Aggressive	Tight	Neutral	Warm	Aggressive	Low	Not as bright with a little more midrange and a touch of bite.	Medium	Up to 75 watts
Steel Head	12" Open or Closed Back	1.1 or 1.1 X 3"	Aggressive	Relaxed	Neutral	Crisp	Maximal	Low	Not as bright with a little more midrange and a touch of bite. American sound to the extreme.	Medium	Up to 100 watts
Grassland Fox	12" Open or Closed Back	1.1 or 1.1 X 3"	Aggressive	Relaxed	Neutral	Warm	Maximal	Loaded	Clear and full, with a touch of bark and a little more midrange and a touch of bite.	Low	Up to 100 watts

Normal	10" Open or Closed Back	1.1 or 1.1 X 3"	Aggressive	Chirpy	Neutral	Warm	Aggressive	Loaded	Very loud, juicy and smooth tone with a little more bark and a touch of classic blues tone.	Medium	Up to 75 watts
Private Jack	12" Open or Closed Back	1.1 or 1.1 X 3"	Neutral	Tight	Neutral	Warm	Aggressive	Loaded	Thick and smooth, with a lot of mid and selected highs. Very well balanced speaker. Classic British sound.	Medium	Up to 100 watts
Stonehenge	12" Open or Closed Back	1.1 or 1.1 X 3"	Neutral	Relaxed	Neutral	Crisp	Maximal	Loaded	Not as bright with a little more midrange and a touch of bite. Very bright.	Medium	Up to 75 watts
The Governor	12" Open or Closed Back	1.1 or 1.1 X 3"	Neutral	Tight	Aggressive	Warm	Maximal	Loaded	Classic British tone. Thick and chunky with a little more bark.	High	Up to 75 watts
Red Fang	12" Open or Closed Back	1.1 or 1.1 X 3"	Neutral	Chirpy	Neutral	Warm	Aggressive	Loaded	Not as bright with a little more midrange and a touch of bite.	High	Up to 100 watts
The Tanker	12" Open or Closed Back	1.1 or 1.1 X 3"	Neutral	Relaxed	Neutral	Warm	Maximal	Loaded	A very big, clear and warm British sound. A somewhat heavy tone with a lot of bass and smooth highs.	Medium	Up to 100 watts
Big Ben	12" Open Back	1.1 or 1.1 X 3"	Aggressive	Relaxed	Subdued	Dark	Maximal	Loaded	A very big, clear and warm British sound. A somewhat heavy tone with a lot of bass and smooth highs.	Medium	Up to 100 watts

In the meantime, we are adding sound clips to the Eminence website on a regular basis. There have also been reviews with sound clips on CD in the September 04, October 04, and November 04 issues of *Guitar One*. These three reviews covered 12 different Patriot and Red Coat models. I would also direct readers to <http://thegearpage.net/board/showthread.php?s=d81c10c2d15c47d5ba747782d07a988e&threadid=34065>. This is, what has become a rather large thread on The Gear Page discussing the entire Patriot and Red Coat series. Not only does it provide guitarists with objective opinions on the tonality of the new speakers, there are also some clips that have been contributed by participants.

**TQR:** You continue to design OEM speakers for many of the largest amp manufacturers and small builders, too. We've noticed that Victoria has been using Eminence speakers in some models, and Fender is using the Legend 15" in the hand-wired Vibroverb reissue. Did you also design the speakers found in the new hand-wired, low-power '57 Twin?

Yes, we participated in the '57 Twin project. Those speakers are 2-12" Fender Special Design Ted Weber/Eminence®, 8 ohm Speakers with AlNiCo magnets. We also participated in the Vibroverb project with a 1-15" Special Design Eminence®, 8 ohm Speaker with ceramic magnet. Eminence is a custom manufacturer first and foremost. Our branded product line was implemented to improve consumer perception of Eminence loaded products. Ninety percent of our business however, is still building speakers for amplifier and PA cabinet manufacturers big and small. The development of custom speakers is different for virtually every Eminence

customer. We are always flexible and willing to work with the customer in whatever capacity they deem most appropriate for their particular situation. In most cases, we are given an application, a set of parameters or other criteria the customer wants us to meet. We produce a sample and it is either approved or the project goes back to the drawing board. In other cases, the amplifier manufacturer may have a very clear idea of what they want us to engineer, we build it for them and it is approved. That all sounds very simple, but it can be a very long and time-consuming process for engineers at Eminence and the amplifier manufacturer. The end result is almost always much more rewarding than just choosing a speaker off the shelf or a speaker based on name recognition alone.

This is also a good time to mention and reiterate ... Eminence builds custom products to spec. That means if a customer wants the very best speaker money can buy, we can build it for them. It also means that if they want an affordable speaker in order to be competitive, we can do that as well.

**TQR:** What's ahead?

This project has given us a lot of renewed confidence both in the validity of these specific designs, and the huge replacement/upgrade guitar speaker market. We certainly intend to continue development of new designs for these lines. We also have some really cool new bass guitar speakers that will become part of the Patriot line and will make their debut soon.

We just finished working with Fender on their new Steel King amplifier with the 1-15" Custom Eminence® 4 ohm

Cast Frame Speaker with Ceramic Magnet, p/n 0064398000, (Based on the now collectable JBL® D130F speaker used by Fender in the '60s and '70s). Jeff Genzler recently chose the Private Jack for his Genz Benz, El Diablo amplifier. Speedster is using the Legend GB1216 and The Stonehenge. Krank Amps is enjoying huge success with our Legend V1216 and the Texas Heat in their Dimebag Darrell signature model. Jody Dankberg of Krank told us that Dime fell immediately in love with the tone of that model. These are just a few recent projects involving Eminence branded models.

You will continue to see the Eminence participation on purely custom designs for our all our OEM customers. Most of those customers are really happy with our focus and direction on guitar speakers right now and they are giving us opportunities we may not have had in the past! You may also be surprised at some of the places you start seeing our branded products.

[www.eminence.com](http://www.eminence.com), 502-845-5622

*We're about to lay some rock-solid speaker recommendations on you developed after many months of carefully evaluating various speaker and amp combinations (nearly a year in all). But first, let's clear the air in regard to speaker reviews, subjective comparisons, and the bias that exists among some (but not all) builders of expensive, hand-built amps.*



## EMINENCE® REVIEWS

Historically speaking, the most highly prized guitar speakers of the past have been made by Jensen, CTS, JBL and Celestion. Oxford, Utah, Altec and Electro-Voice are also historically significant, and there are fans of all types – even the fragile and obscure Goodmans speaker made in England. The problem we are confronted with in playing original vintage speakers is that the glue at the surround eventually dries up and breaks down over time. Sooner or later, your original old speakers are going to give it up. This was particularly frustrating



when the alternatives among available new speakers were limited (they aren't now), and you already know how we feel about the majority of recones.

Fortunately for us all, speakers are being built today that exceed the tone, performance and durability of the most cherished original vintage models *as they sound today*, but an important variable exists that is rarely mentioned in speaker reviews online and in print. To say that a particular speaker possesses “tight low-end with strong, aggressive mids and moderate brightness” for example, risks missing a critical element in the chain – the *amplifier*. Will a single speaker sound the same in six different amplifiers? Do your preferences and expectations change when evaluating a speaker that is intended for a Marshall 50W versus a 12W Fender, a 60W Boogie or an AC30? Will your favorite speaker mounted in a 2x12 cabinet remain so in your old Flot-a-Tone? In our experience, specific speakers often seem to compliment specific amps or similar *types* of amps, so there will always be a bit of mystery and chance involved in identifying your ‘signature sound’ through speaker swaps. For the most seriously afflicted tone freaks the question remains, “Is this is as good as it gets? Can I stop screwing around now, or am I still missing something worth pursuing?” Given the depth and breadth of the choices available among new speakers today, this is a question you need to be asking.

During our evaluations of Eminence speakers, we had access to a large number supplied by Eminence as well as other brands we had bought earlier or that are mounted in amps and cabinets we already owned. We also shared speakers with trusted and experienced tonehounds like Jeff Bakos from Bakos Ampworks and Peter Stroud; both gave us the benefit of a valuable second opinion. Jeff was also able to share the feedback he received from actual customers that had specific Eminence speakers installed in their amps as permanent replacements.

If you are influenced by the types of speakers you see in expensive, small-production “boutique” amps, understand that some builders of expensive, hand-built amplifiers continue to use modern versions of classic speakers simply because they feel that their customers will accept nothing less. To put it bluntly, you could subject these builders to a blind test of their preferred ‘vintage reissue’ speaker versus an Eminence Red Fang, Private Jack or Governor, for example, and they still wouldn't mount an Eminence speaker in their designer amp regardless of the results. We believe this often has less to do with tone and more to do with image. Eminence speakers have traditionally cost less than their competitors and frankly, their image has suffered for it among some fans of pricey “boutique” amps. No, the matte black and red Eminence paint jobs aren't thick and glossy like a car finish, but we urge you to drop any biases that may prevent you from fully experiencing the incredible range of flavors and extraordinary value that are available to us today from the speakers made in Eminence, Kentucky. To assume that Eminence speakers are just cheap knock-offs of the real thing is just plain wrong.

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In our tests we repeatedly listened to a single speaker model in the *same* amplifier during each session. We also listened to identical speakers in “identical” vintage amps (the

brown ones) to experience the variation among amplifiers. Over a period of eight months we tested each speaker in separate, extended review sessions with our blackface Deluxe, Pro Reverb, Balls 18, 1969 Marshall 50W and most recently, the trio of brown Vibrolux amps. Our extended review period was intended to allow first, second and third impressions to develop into solid conclusions over time.

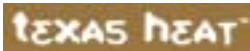


### Coils, Spiders & Cones ... *A Guide to Wicked Good Tone*

The Patriot and Redcoat names reflect the two most recognized styles of guitar speakers from the past. ‘American’ speakers are generally considered to be balanced, warm and clean with a more prominent high frequency response, scooped or flat mids, and solid, tight bass. ‘American’ speakers also contribute less harmonic detail, coloration, and ‘growl’ than British-style speakers, which are known for their rich harmonic

content, midrange/upper mid emphasis, and a more assertive, aggressive character. Yes, we’re simplifying things a bit, but that’s the point of this article. If you wish to study speaker response curves and specs for each of the 21 speakers that currently comprise the Redcoat and Patriot Series, please reference the Eminence web site. It’s all there...

### EMINENCE RECOMMENDATIONS



This speaker was a real surprise. Perhaps the name initially influenced our expectations (wrongly), but the Texas Heat proved to be an extremely versatile speaker that will be appreciated by most guitarists. This is a BIG, LOUD sounding speaker – very open and wide-glide with excellent low end, moderate midrange presence, and highs that are strong and clear without being overbearing. Eminence describes the Texas Heat as “fat and chunky,” and we agree. Among all the speakers we

tested, this one seemed to excel at what it does with every amp we own, which surprised us even more given its 150W peak power rating. Price: \$59.99

### *The Wizard*

In our opinion, the 75W Wizard is the British cousin to the Texas Heat. It’s another big sounding speaker, very well-balanced and clear with excellent lows and mids and smooth treble tones that are neither masked or strident. Like ‘The Heat,’ the Wizard makes a very bold statement. Perceived loudness and presence is at the upper range of all the speakers we tested. And like the Texas Heat, the Wizard’s versatile character makes it an excellent choice for a wide variety of personal tastes and musical styles. The Wizard’s lower power rating and efficiency results in a slightly more dynamic and responsive tone in lower powered amps. A stout British classic with panache, Eminence describes the Wizard’s tone as being notched between the Private Jack and the Governor. You’ll love it. Price: \$79.99

### *The Copperhead 10*



Nothing else sounds quite like a great 10” speaker (except four), and the Copperhead is just that. Warmer and fuller than the familiar

Eminence blue AlNiCo 10’s commonly found in Fender reissue Bassman and early VibroKing amps, the Copperhead throws just the right level of midrange push and crunch at higher volume levels. The bass is tight and solid while the highs are less piercing and strident than vintage CTS AlNiCo speakers found in old Supers, for example. Overall, this speaker is voiced in the upper mids – terrific for 2x10 and 4x10 applications, and two would be an excellent match with the Eminence Ramrod 10. Price: \$49.99

### *The Governor*



This isn’t a speaker for ‘Jensen guys’ or anyone that craves screaming treble tones, but man, do we love this speaker! One of the thickest, most aggressive in the Eminence line, the Governor is chock full of complex harmonic midrange detail and

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smooth, thick bass response that doesn't mask higher frequencies. Highs hold up well on fat chords without dominating them. Rated at 75W, the Governor works equally well in small combos and bigger head and cab rigs, and it calms down the sharp glassiness of single coil pickups very nicely. Running it with our '69 Marshall made the idea of pulling the original Greenbacks in our 4x12 very tempting, our Balls 18W roared with authority, and the Brown Vibrolux amps were simply unbelievable for great rock tones. The Governor will also match up very nicely with the Wizard, Red Fang or Private Jack in a 2x12. Price: \$89.99

### Red, White and Blues



If you prefer stinging, sparkling top-end with low-end snap and less intense midrange emphasis for true American spank, here's your speaker. Rated at 120W, the Red, White and Blues immediately reminded us of Stevie's big, huge, roaring tone with those EV-loaded cabs in the later years of his short career. This is one of the

cleanest sounding speakers we tested, and the clarity and wide-open tone works particularly well with humbuckers for the Blues. Another big-sounding speaker with great presence and depth voiced in the upper mids and higher frequencies, our Pro Reverb and Deluxe delivered the righteous tones of Texas Flood with this one, and it luuuuvvs pedals ... Price: \$64.99

### Cannabis Rex™

Nothing mines low and midrange frequencies like hemp. This speaker captures harmonic textures that no other speaker in our tests produced, and the Cannabis Rex is your secret weapon for creating captivating rhythm tracks, slithering slide riffs and greasy fills, head-turning solos and a bold attitude that will add a new dimension to your music. This speaker will challenge you to get creative with its thick, low-down vibe, but if the idea of high frequencies being cloaked in a darker shade of wail is a turnoff, keep walking – you don't get it and it's not for you. The Cannabis Rex was created for the open-minded player whose sonic requirements are not limited to the more readily accessible and familiar guitar tones of yesterday. "Rex" is the totally stoned, lead baritone in the Eminence choir – prone to brilliant performances but definitely not running with the pack. It is an instrument unto itself and a great addition to any studio. Price: \$89.99

### PRIVATE JACK

Created in the image of the famous 'greenback,' this is one of our absolute favorite speakers for both 1x12 and 2x12 combos and more powerful heads with 4x12 cabs. The 'Jack' is gloriously bal-



anced to produce highs with presence and staying power that are never too sharp, perfect midrange definition, and outstanding bass response that is neither woofy, soft or mushy. At 50W rated power, this is a best bet for small combos, although you would also be quite pleased with the sound of four in a 4x12 cab matched with your favorite 50W or 100W head. The Private Jack is not as aggressive-sounding as the Governor, but very, very British nonetheless. If you don't like this speaker, it isn't the speaker ... the problem is you, brother. Price: \$84.99

### The Red Fang 1



If the famously pricey (\$310) AlNiCo Celestion G12 'blue' makes your blood run hot and your love gun al-denté, this be your speaker. Buy the Fang and spend the savings on whatever cheap thrills may be missing on your pedalboard, proud in the knowledge that you have helped keep

America working while nailing the tone you crave. No, the 30W Red Fang isn't painted glossy blue, nor will friends and acquaintances knowingly nod at your \$600 2x12 speaker rig, but we spent hours bouncing between the Fang and a genuine Blue to discover this: while the Fang may have lacked just a cat hair of top-end chime compared to Blue, the overall difference in tone alone wasn't worth the extra \$200.00. Still, some people will throw down big money for a flamed-out Les Paul when a more pedestrian goldtop might kick it to the curb, and other guys won't sleep through the night until they have spent as much on a speaker as humanly possible. Hey, if money = tone in your world, buy a couple of vintage Celestion G12's for \$250 each and send them to A Brown for a hemp recone. With shipping charges to San Rafael, you will have set a record investment of around \$900.00 in yer speakers. Congratulations! Otherwise, it's the Fang for signature chime, complex harmonic overtones and laser-beam midrange and upper mid presence. Don't expect booming low-end from this speaker, but the complex interplay you can create with the Fang, your hands, guitar and amp is definitely not to be missed. For 2x12 applications, try a Fang and a Governor. Price: \$129.99. **To**



## He's Back! the return of... **Todd Sharp**



*There is absolutely no need to feel as if you're stuck with our speaker recommendations, because Todd Sharp is back with his own trustworthy observations, straight from the bench at Nashville Amplifier Service. Enjoy ...*

Hi TQR Readers –

Sorry for not writing for so long, but you know, I have been so damn busy tweaking your amps, playing gigs, and chauffeuring my kids around – who's got the time? I also hope to get another disc out someday, but in the meantime, if you haven't heard my 2002 release "Walking all the Way" I really do think it's time you picked it up. You can still get it at [www.toddsharp.com](http://www.toddsharp.com). PayPal works or send us an email at the website and we'll work something out.

Also in the works, of my own design are: two amplifiers and an all-tube spring reverb/tremolo/boost/bypass& output select unit with adjustable send & return preamps for all your pedals. I hope to launch production on at least one of these designs for serious guitarist consumption within about a year. They will be hand-made, expensive and worth every penny.

Meanwhile, I thought I might share a few opinions with you on some things that are out there that have mattered to me and might could matter to you. That's Nashville talk. Speaking of Nashville talk, after living here for ten years I have recently learned the proper linguistic plural form for y'all – *All y'all*. Let's talk about all y'all's speakers ...



12" available at 8 or 16 ohms. Bravo Eminence! This is a

Here at the shop, Jeff and I have been slowly but surely evaluating various speakers and we thought you might like to know what we think. There is definitely some good new stuff out there. About a year ago Eminence introduced the Redcoat and Patriot Series. One standout emerges: the Private Jack 50W

great guitar speaker. It sounds surprisingly good as a single – open or closed back – at anywhere from about 10 to 40 watts. I haven't had the chance to use them in pairs or quads but if they sound this good as singles, they could only sound better in multiples. Smooth, friendly, even, good top end, not harsh at all (allow a little break in period). Finally, Eminence rolls back on the midrange and cone cry and comes up with a real winner. Plus – it's red.

The Private Jack 12" retails at \$95 but hold on – just to show that Nashville Amplifier Service really does give a shit about you, we are going to offer these to TQR readers for a limited time and at a very special price. We are blowing them out to the bare walls at \$\*\*.\*\* each! plus shipping. (Price too low to print – call or email us and mention TQR). But that's not all! We are going to throw in a copy of Todd's newly out of print CD, "Walking all the Way" absolutely free. Just listen to the damn thing!

And there's more. Take a look at this:

Also worthy of mention is the Eminence Red Fang 30W 12". This speaker wants to be a Vox/Celestion blue – probably my favorite guitar speaker. How does it stand up to the Vox? I must proclaim that I have found myself very much in agreement with this speaker in pairs driven with 30 to 50 watts. They don't have quite the detail or pristine upper mids that the Vox/Celestion Blue has, but they do sound really good in their own right. The Vox/Celestion Blues would be blown at 50W for one thing, and they cost upwards of \$300 each. The Red Fang is less than half that price and takes twice the power. They do seem to like being driven with something close to their rated power. A Marshall looking into four of these in a quad box be kickin' some rock & roll ass.

Speaking of Vox – Fane makes a 100W version of the famed Vox Blue or Silver – whatever you want to call it – same thing as far as I can tell. The Fane AXA 12. This is a superb speaker. I loaded one in a Yamaha/Soldano 100W combo that we tweaked out for a guy. Blew my doors off how good it sounded, and I usually never like single 12's at more than about 30 watts.



Another stand-out is the Jensen Neodymium 12". Though this Speaker is rated at 100W, they seem fairly efficient and a pair of them sound real sweet driven with one of our power limited

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Twins at about 25W output. A pair of them also sound great with 80 to 100W of power.

Apples to Oranges: The low end on the Neo's is not as "aromatic" as, say, a pair of Celestion Vintage 30's – my basic benchmark guitar speaker, nor is the treble as forward. They do thicken up in a closed back cabinet real nice. Having said that, there is nothing at all wrong with their bottom end in an open back configuration. They don't flab out on you or anything like that; they just have a little bit less low end compared to the V30.

Apples to Apples: Simply put, the Neo 12's have characteristic "Jensen" warmth like the great old Jensen's of yesteryear. More so than anything in their reissue series by far. We just love 'em here at Nashville Amp Service. Plus, they weigh about 4 lbs. each, which will really take some weight out of that hoss you been dragging around. If you're anything like me, you can barely lift your amp anymore without incurring spinal damage and your upper midrange hearing is long gone – so what the hell? Why not try a pair?

Everything I said about the Jensen Neo 12" goes for the Jensen Neodymium 10". Thank God! I am so sick of loading those harsh-sounding, so called reissue series C10, P10, N, Q, R *whatever* in Super Reverbs and suffering them hurting my ears when you push them hard. The Neo is warm, sweet on top and round in the ass end. What else do you want? Hey – I could be talking about a woman, but I'm talking about speakers here! Again, rated at 100W, but you don't need anywhere near that to drive them properly. We have also had real good results mixing pairs in 4x10 amps. The Neo 10's along with a pair of C10Q's ain't bad at all – put the C10Q's on the bottom and the Neo's on top for a very *vintage yet strong when you womp on 'em* Super Reverb or Bassman type setup.

I wish I could say the same for the Neo 15" but I don't think so. I only tried one of the Jensen Neo 100W 15's in an open back and it didn't thrill me at all. But in all honesty, I have never cared for the sound of a single 15". I might if I was a jazz player, but I can't find anything like Rock & Roll in that set up, personally. They do make a 300W 15". Haven't tried it yet. Another great little speaker is the Eminence Ramrod 10". This 75 Watter is not terribly bright – as a matter of fact it has a downright *fat* low end. Real nice by itself at low wattage in a Princeton or something like that.

That's all for now. Maybe soon we can talk about some of the new production tubes that are out now. I got opinions ... Till next time. **to** —Todd Sharp

Nashville Amplifier Service, [www.amprepair.com](http://www.amprepair.com)  
Please buy my CD: [www.toddsharp.com](http://www.toddsharp.com)

## the Vibroclub Deluxe part II

*"No man is so foolish but he may sometimes give another good counsel, and no man so wise that he may not easily err if he takes no other counsel than his own. He that is taught only by himself has a fool for a master."*

—Hunter S. Thompson



Your partner in our exploratory expedition in tone is particularly sanguine this night, yet inspired. One week ago the Thin White Duke of Gonzo shot himself dead. We'll never know whether Thompson took his last shot due to an

intolerable crescendo of fear, loathing and despair, or as the last act of a pragmatist who had simply decided it was time to go. Either way, his work will stand as a cogent reminder that there are people in this world who feast on life, and there is everybody else. Let's eat.

You'll recall that we left a few unanswered questions in our last visit – questions that deserve answers. What is better ... timeless beauty so rare and fine that it renders everyman unworthy, or the honest mark of time and the imperfections it renders? And do big-legged women really got no soul?



With the pair of brown '62 Vibroluxes assembled by the fortunate troll, our goal was to maximize the responsiveness of the Beater we had

first acquired while using the Stunner as a benchmark example of virginal antiquity from The Great Fender period. Our work proceeded, and it took some unexpected turns ...

Like a homely mongrel rescued from the pound, the '62 Beater warmed to us as we to it. God, what a sound. There is a certain sweet candy shell with a soft center that forms around the notes squeezed from a great old amp that has been played but otherwise left alone. A rich patina colors the tones, and when you cut out the parts that have technically exceeded their intended life span, it's like putting a good dog to sleep because you're afraid it will die some day. Maybe

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worse, depending on the dog. Anyway, the brown Beater re-wrote the book on what is cool, brown and seductive, and it's still purring. Words cannot express how perfect this amp is for these times. Perfect. And the idea that we had no idea defines the intention of The Quest. Even when you're not looking for a new amplifier, you should be looking for a *different* amplifier...



The Stunner proved to be just that, but in need of an essential tweak. The "original" brown-bell, spaghetti logo Oxford had been reconed, badly.

Imagine Ezio Pinza singing "Fin ch'han dal vino" from *Don Giovanni* with his hands cupped over his mouth ... Or Roger Daltrey reaching for the big "Yeaaaaahhhhhhhhh" from "Won't get Fooled Again" after waking from a double hernia repair. Uh, huh. The Oxford sucked. Last time we looked, there wasn't supposed to be a half inch gap between the spider and cone... So we sent the Oxford to who else but John Harrison at A Brown in San Rafael, Peoples Republic of Marin County. We never cease to be amazed by the number of hacks calling themselves reconers, and if you pay big money for a reconed vintage speaker with no provenance, you are a fool.



John promised to pull a new seamed cone from his "Neil Young stash" – special old cones reserved for Young's famous tweed Deluxe. Meanwhile, we returned to Midtown Music to allow Page Waldrop (the Bendmaster) to

hear the re-worked Beater he had sold us. As we approached the counter Page smiled, looking at the Beater. Beaming, he pointed to a cluster of amps on the floor, which included *another* '62 brown Vibrolux just traded in. Destiny! Fate! Extreme Good Fortune! Another of the brown within two weeks when none had been in the shop for decades, if ever? What to do? Don't need it, but this is too strange, as if we are being watched over by the guardian angel of gear trolls. *We must have the precioussss ... It's ours and they musn't take it from us ...*

You know what we did. "Ray" (named in honor of the one and only) was in better shape than the Beater on the outside,



but another improper power transformer (silverface era Super Reverb) had been screwed in, all the original blue molded caps were gone, replaced with

Orange Drops, and the electrolytic caps had been replaced, which we would replace again with Astrons. The speaker was an Eminence-made Reverend – not a bad speaker at all – and we were also given a half-dead original (?) Oxford 12L16N. We replaced the power tranny from the Super with another Mercury Magnetics Tone Clone® transformer for the 6G11-A circuit,



and Jeff Bakos went over the whole thing, cleaning up a little slop from the previous cap changes and generally doing the tightening up. A bias adjustment pot had been installed – a good thing – and we re-

tubed with a Mullard 12AX7 in V2 and the Sovtek 5881's. The Reverend was replaced with the excellent Eminence 'Wizard' (similar to the Celestion G12H30). "Ray" was clearly the least original of the three browns, which further expanded the scope of our experiments.

## Answers ...



Any experienced amp builder or tech with a keen ear will tell you that it is not uncommon for "identical" vintage amplifiers built in the same year using "identical" components, chassis layouts and circuits to sound quite different when put to the test with a guitar. Modern builders operating at the highest levels of quality control today (small and large) sweat the

details to insure that their amplifiers do not vary significantly from one to the next. Their success depends on it, and lack of consistency has been the undoing of many small builders faced with rapid growth. Fail to master repeatability and success can be fatal. As a buyer of collectible *vintage* amps, one needs to be aware of the unpredictable variables that are always present but rarely reflected in the price paid or per-

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ceived market value. Our three brown Vibrolux amps provided us with a perfect practical perspective into the realities you can expect to encounter when buying vintage amps.



The Stunner was the only amp among the three with completely original transformers and internal components, excluding new Sprague electrolytics and an original but reconed speaker. It sounded 'newer' in comparison to the

Beater and Ray, with a higher threshold for clean headroom (up to 7, compared to 5 or 6 in the others) and somewhat cleaner with more sparkle on the notes and less grease. Oddly enough, each amp seemed to wind up sounding similar to the way it looked on the *outside*. The Beater is smokey and smooth with a deeper low end, more sag, and just enough rough edges to admire and explore. Ray sits squarely in-between – the new filter caps and array of orange drops made it brighter-sounding overall – not quite new, but lacking a bit of the raggedy-ass funk, sag and worldliness found in the heart of the Beater. And the Stunner seemed to present a sonic flashback to the sound of a new Vibrolux as it existed in 1962, with a crisper, cleaner sound overall (although it also overdrives brilliantly).

To the collector, of course, the bewildering clean condition of the Stunner makes it the most desirable of the three. We can't imagine finding many +40 year old amps that look as if they were literally built yesterday ... But what about *you*, playah?

We can confirm that throwing the wrong transformer in an amp and erring in favor of more power is not necessarily a good idea. Neither the Beater or Ray benefitted from the 50W Hammond or 40W Super Reverb power trannies we pulled, and this was vividly confirmed as soon as we wired in the Mercury Magnetics transformers. The amps re-acquired the dynamic feel and dimensionality that allows them to create such a profoundly rewarding connection to the player and guitar. Subtle, nuanced changes in pick attack and volume are



translated directly through the speaker with these amps, and when they are properly set up the results are shockingly good. Chalk it up to a happy accident or Leo Fender's clairvoyant ability to plumb the full potential of an amplifier design, but the brown Vibrolux has revealed a very distinct type of magic that we had not experienced before, and the Beater, Ray and the Stunner possess that magic in spades. Despite their differences, there is no doubt whatsoever that they are cut from the same cloth.



Having access to a variety of preamp and power tubes was also helpful. All three amplifiers were bought with commonly available, current production pre-amp and power tubes, and as we observed last month, simply installing Mullard, Brimar or Philips/Holland 12AX7's in V2 enabled each amp



to achieve a level of warm, complex tones and exceptionally sweet gain that was lacking with other tubes. We ultimately decided that we did not care for the new Groove Tubes 12AX7 "Mullard" reissues – they seemed flaccid and unremarkable – while a late entry, the new "Tung-Sol" tubes by Sovtek were a stellar surprise.



Our choice of speakers was also revealing. Since we were in the later stages of what had become a nearly year-long evaluation of Eminence speakers (and others), the unexpected arrival of the brown Vibrolux amps with replaced speakers was timed

perfectly. We should mention that mounting non-original speakers in a brown Vibrolux will require some thoughtful creativity on your part ... All of the new speakers we mounted collided with the outer frame of the output transformer in each amp, preventing the chassis from being aligned properly in the cabinet and secured with the four chassis screws and straps. The easiest solution is to simply remove the front-facing mounting screw on the output transformer and swing the front of the transformer to one side. Put the screw in a safe place, mount yer speaker and commence to rockin.' The OT won't fall out and this is your best *no harm/no foul* solution. Or, you could overthink this minor obstacle and, a) cut a chunk of the speaker frame out, spewing metal shavings all over your new speaker, or b) drill a new hole in your chassis and permanently alter the mounting position for the OT. But that *would* be overthinking things ...

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Let's not forget about the reconed Oxford 12K5 speaker original to the Stunner... John Harrison at A Brown Sound did indeed pull a seamed cone from his "Neil Stash" and he worked his magic in spades on the vintage AlNiCo Oxford. What this speaker lacks in raw power is made up for with crystalline harmonic detail and a delicately balanced response. The Oxford's character is restrained rather than aggressive, of moderate volume and attack, yet unusually sophisticated in its reproduction of overtones and detail. Treble is prominent without being sharp or thin, mids are neutral, and the bass is articulate, smooth, round and full. The Oxford wouldn't be the preferred sound for a contemporary die-hard rocker – it's too tame – but as original equipment in a '62 Fender, it is perfectly suited for the time in which the amp was built, and Harrison showed us once again that 30 years spent in the trenches of tone counts for something important. A typical generic recone of this vintage speaker would have delivered a magnificent dud. Instead, we received a fully resurrected, vibrant 12K5 that is fully worthy of The Brown Sound. There are no mistakes...

The gist of our experience with the Vibrolux amps was this: we found a half dozen speakers that enabled us to shape the character of each amp from variations on crunchy, thick and aggressive 'Marshall' tones, to the cleaner, dramatically opened-up and brighter American voice of a classic Fender amp, and that's hard to beat in a very portable 35W amplifier. The brown Vibrolux is a real sleeper, and someone needs to knock it off as a production amp with no compromises or shortcuts. Until then, get yours now while you can. **To**

the early – 1960 Fender Small Box

## BROWN TWIN AMP PT.II

the birth of a myth

by Paul Linden

At the summer 1959 NAMM show in Chicago, Fender debuted prototypes of its first Professional Series of amplifiers. Although many of this company's amplifiers (like the Deluxe Amp, Vibrolux, the Champ and the famed 4x10 Bassman) remained in the tweed design of the 1950's, the 1960 Professional Series introduced a new look for its larger amplifiers. In contrast to the standard amplifier design of the 1950's (chassis mounted on the top-back side of a tweed covered cabinet), the six amplifiers in the 1960 Professional Series featured a front-mounted chassis in a cabinet covered in a rough, light "pinkish-brown" or tan-colored tolex. This new design is not the only reason that the year 1960 represents an important turning point in the history of the Fender Electric Instrument Company. While the majority of the amplifiers chosen for this elite Professional Series were updates of models that were already in place (like the Super, the Pro and the 3x10 Bandmaster), there were also two new designs: another 4x10 model called the Concert, as well as a

single 15 design, the Vibrasonic. The Vibrasonic is particularly noteworthy because it was marketed as Fender's new flagship amplifier. However, the undisputed "king" of Fender amplifiers for the preceding decade had been the 2x12 Twin.



This situation has given rise to years of myth, hearsay and rumor. For better or for worse, nothing has risen above the level of unsubstantiated claims

in answer to the following question: What happened to the Twin-Amp between early 1960 and August of the same year, immediately after the shipment of the last remaining tweed Twins, but prior to the appearance of the first white Twin – the 6G8?

Was a brown, low-power Twin ever built by Fender? This article shows that it is very likely that no such amp was ever made.

To support this position, it is important to recognize the relationship between the absence of any concrete examples of a tolex Twin amp from this brief period and the ensuing myth of its existence that attempts to explain that absence. A lingering doubt remains as to whether or not Fender ever released one or more "one-off" or "special order" examples, and the existence of the brown Twin in any form has never been explicitly proven. The 1960 catalog and related Fender



literature (price guides, magazine ads, inserts) proclaim the existence of Fender's early 1960 Twin by means of a photograph and written

description of speakers, cabinet dimensions and tube configuration. On the other hand, we have a handful of articles, passages from books, testimonials and third person accounts that seem to be cloaked in a sort of impenetrable silence when it comes to actually producing an example (or even a recent photo) of a brown Twin amp from early 1960.

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## FENDER 5G\* AMPS



The importance of the distinction between early 1960 Fender amps and those of late 1960 is that, as Fender amplifier designs made the transition from tweed to tolex covering, we find a significant amount of variation on the level of circuit design,

faceplate layout, cabinet hardware and grille cloth. One of the clearest distinctions between the amplifier design of the first and second halves of 1960 is the model number codes 5G\* and 6G\* vs. 6G\*-A found on tube charts.

Take for example the 1960 tan/ light brown tolex Super. Early production models (e.g. from January to April 1960) indicate 5G4 on the tube chart – they tend to have the center-volume arrangement of controls (Bass-Treble-Volume), only five pre-amp tubes and a plug on the back plate labeled “pulse-adj.” By mid 1960, we find the standard, volume-first arrangement of controls (Volume-Treble-Bass). Shortly afterward, the new 6G4 Super appears. Although still covered in tan colored tolex and tweed-style grille cloth, the newer 6G4 sports six preamp tubes as well as a jack on the rear faceplate reading “ext. speaker” where the “pulse adjust” plug used to be.

Another noteworthy difference between these two periods is that the 6G8 Twin is in production in the second half of 1960. This is the collectible and rare, hi-powered blonde Twin-Amp with maroon grille.

Given that these blonde Twin-Amps were clearly in production by the second half of 1960, it is interesting that we see what appears to be an original tan covered “late 1960 Twin” in John Sprung and John Teagle’s *Fender Amp Book*, (p. 191). So the mystery of the brown Twin is solved then, right? Well, it is if you are looking for a 6G8 (big-box, hi-powered) Twin Amp that appears to have been covered in the vanishing stock of tan tolex and tweed-style grille cloth. However, the 1960 catalog is primarily responsible for providing fodder for the idea of an earlier, tan tolex Twin amp – a *small-box, low-powered* Twin-Amp: the would-be 5G8. What then would this early 1960 Twin be? Here we have two sources of information to draw from: Fender’s catalog and the few published documents that have been written on the topic since the mid 1990’s. Both sources point to an amplifier

that has never been seen by the public – a small-box, early brown or “tan-era” Twin Amp that has come to us only in cryptic or third-person accounts, always indirectly, like a promise, or an echo of one.

## HISTORICAL SOURCES



Turning to the Fender catalog as an apparently trustworthy source (since it is presumably published according to Fender’s wishes and inasmuch as it dates to 1960), we find a description of this Twin model that is a little unclear yet consistent with the other 5G\*,

Fender Professional Series amps. The stated tube complement consists of two 6L6GC power tubes and five pre-amp tubes; the speakers are two 12" Jensen Concert Series, and the dimensions are listed as being 19" H x 27 1/2" W x 10.5" D. The problem is in the width dimension: this width is that of the high-powered Twins. 27 1/2" W is a “big-box,” not a “small-box” dimension, but two 6L6 tubes is the complement of a “small-box” Twin. This is one inconsistency in the original catalog.

Like all of the other 5G\* Professional Series amps, the early 1960 Twin Amp is described as having only two 6L6GC power tubes, five pre-amp tubes and no rectifier tube (the tube rectified 5G4 Super is an exception here). However, the thing that isn’t clear is why the width is already that of the hi-power 6G8 – an amp that is necessarily wider to accommodate the four 6L6GC power tubes and six pre-amp tubes. Was this simply another of the errors commonly found in the Fender catalogs, (see also the 28" tall 3x10 Bandmaster from the same catalog)? Was the two 6L6 description a “cut-and-paste” typo, transferred from the description of the other five amps of the new Professional Series? Perhaps this measurement signifies the advanced state of the plans for the 6G8, which was to be debuted only a few months after the appearance of this catalog.

Outside of these possibilities, the fact is that, including the width of the speakers, the cabinet sides and the full-length vertical cleats that secure the baffle board to the cabinet, any two 6L6GC Twin amp in tolex would not need to be wider

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than a maximum of 27". This assumes that the speakers are laid out horizontally and not diagonally, like the '57 low power/small-box Twin (model no. 5E8). It is pertinent to recall that this earlier, small-box Twin-Amp is but 24" in width, and that the '59 hi power 5F8-A is only 26 1/4" wide. While these tweed amps have no cleats, it is necessary to cut away some of the cleats in a tolex Twin of this width, like Fender did with the AB763 Twin Reverb. So why does the catalog describe the early 1960, dual 6L6GC Twin as being so unnecessarily wide? Despite the precedent of the 5E8 tweed Twin, with its diagonally mounted speakers, even a side-by-side speaker configuration would only require about 26 1/2" of width, (assuming there are no full-length, vertical cleats, or that the cleats are trimmed).

A second important question to consider is this: Why would Fender demote the hi-power design of the '58-59 four 6L6GC (5F8-A circuit) configuration that helped give the Twin its authority as king? There is the "speaker-eating" reputation of this amp: apparently it advanced beyond the power handling capacity of the Jensen P12N speakers. Although the Vibrasonic that temporarily displaced the Twin as "king of Fender amps" was outfitted with the JBL D-130, Fender's relationship with JBL was still not formalized until the following year (as indicated by the "F" in later JBL speaker codes, c.f.: D-130F). Granted, the hi-power Twin-Amp was a warranty liability for blowing speakers, but does this necessarily mean the demotion of the Twin back to the low-power status it outgrew three years earlier? It stands to reason that Leo Fender needed time to verify the capacity of whatever speakers would eventually be used in the Twin Amp, and it seems likely that this situation gave rise to both a temporary suspension of production of the Twin Amp and the opportunity to introduce a new flagship – the Vibrasonic. From this perspective, it seems possible that the low-powered brown Twin amp is simply a mirage.

### CONTEMPORARY SOURCES

The contemporary discussion of the early brown Twin is the fruit of three writers – John Teagle, John Sprung and Paul Bechtoldt. Other sources include telephone conversations with Steve Soest as well as the publication of Internet sites like Ampwares' Fender Field Guide (these sources and others often replicate some of the errors found in Fender catalogs). Although Teagle and Sprung's partnership is well known, Paul Bechtoldt's perspective is independent. As we have already indicated, Sprung and Teagle's 1995 book "Fender Amps: The First Fifty Years," shows a hi-power, late 1960 tan-looking Twin on page 191. In that book, the question of the earlier, low-power "small-box tolex Twin" is based largely on the absence of any Twin amp from the 1960 Musical Merchandise Review and the subsequent, reputed appearance of one in the 1960 catalog approximately eight weeks later

(vis. May, 1960). These authors state that, even though the catalog did not include a photo taken of the backside of the Twin, "it appears that the speakers would have to have been mounted in opposite corners, as on the '55-58 models," continuing with the following, parenthetical statement: "Two reliable sources swear to having seen this configuration." Referring to the photo in the 1960 catalog, Teagle and Sprung claim that, "Fender had a few control panels (at least one) made up with the 'Twin-Amp' logo and installed them on the chassis of the other models." This is an important assertion because, as Dick Stout states in a subsequent interview concerning the 1959 NAMM show, "[...] Fender did display dummy (empty chassis) Concert, Pro, Super and Bandmaster



amps, as well," (Dick Stout: *Brown Era Amp Man*, Vintage Guitar, September 1998, p. 126).

So how far of a stretch is it to imagine the same type of dummy display for the early Brown Twin in the 1960 catalog? It is in this interpretation of the 1960 catalog photo that the myth of this amp's existence publicly takes root.

### A SECOND LOOK AT THE PAST

Closer attention to Fender's marketing literature helps us move beyond such supposition by revealing a startling similarity between Stout's description of the NAMM "dummy" display and the photos of the Twin and Super amps on display in the 1960 catalog. The unusual, diagonal alignment of



the "Twin-Amp" script on the faceplate begs a closer look. The writing literally looks crammed

together, barely able to fit in between the "Presence" control and the pilot light. Closer observation reveals the very unusual font for the words "Twin Amp." In the context of the script found on the late 50's tweed Twin name plates, the trailing edge of the "T"'s horizontal "roof" is far too thin and long. The word "Amp" itself almost looks ridiculous squeezed into the allotted space.

Why is this script so jammed together? There isn't enough space because those words were never meant to appear on that chassis. Photographic super-imposition reveals that the Twin Amp in the 1960 catalog is not only a dummy chassis –

it's a complete imposter! The image of the Twin amp is actually a duplicate of the image of the Super from the opposing page of the same catalog. The abnormalities of the script are most likely the result of an artist having touched up the photo of the Super, manually, writing in the words "Twin Amp." All on one diagonal line, this script finds cramped quarters when painted in the space allotted for the over-and-under "Super-Amp" script.

The "exact" alignment of these two images comes clearly into focus once the Twin-Amp image is slightly rotated counter-clockwise. Once this slight adjustment is made, it is clear that the images are duplicates. Notice the machined indicator dots on the rare metal control knobs set to exactly the same position! Keep in mind the likelihood of two different amps randomly showing the exact same settings over all nine controls. Notice as well the yellow stripes in the grille cloth that line up precisely, even in the slight waves caused by uneven tension around the staples. Notice finally the shadows under the handles in the images. Superimposition reveals no "extra" shading that would result from the addition of two different shadows. The images are the same, only the names have been changed.

This surprising revelation also has important consequences for the received wisdom concerning the possibility of a low powered brown Twin. With respect to the assertion that Fender had "at least one [sic] control panel made up with the 'Twin-Amp' logo," this new evidence is very damaging indeed. The catalog photo shows not only an incorrect cabinet, but the manually doctored faceplate logo in the catalog photo indicates that (possibly as late as April) Leo had not farmed out the Twin Amp faceplates along with those of the other professional series 5G\* amps.

Clearly, as of approximately April of 1960, when these images were submitted to Fender Marketing for proof and publication, there was not only no brown tolex, small box Twin Amp, but there was no faceplate to put on one-offs or prototypes. With the first hi-powered 6G8 Twins rolling off the lines in June, the window for even a one-off is terribly narrow. There would remain, however, the image and the idea of such an amp that would emanate from the distribution of these catalogs in 1960 and beyond. Decades later, this idea would again take root in the imagination of vintage amp collectors as the market started to heat up through the 1980's and into the 1990's.

### ***STRAIGHT FROM THE WOODS***

Two years after co-authoring "Fender Amps: The First Fifty Years" with John Sprung, John Teagle states that he has located an actual example of the holy grail of Fender Amps: the ultra rare, low-powered, small-box, brown Twin. In his

article "Non Tech Talk for Musicians and Collectors: An Introduction," (Vintage Guitar Magazine, Aug. 1997, pp. 38-9), we find a small subsection entitled "1960 Fender Twin-Amp w/ brown Tolex and two 6L6's (ser #00053)." Without the benefit of actual photographs, Mr. Teagle describes a low-powered, brown Twin amp with corner-mounted Jensen 12's, placed into, coincidentally, "what appears to be a converted 2-10 Super cabinet." In response to this amazing find, Mr. Teagle works to satisfy the curiosity of his readers with a description that ultimately relies on three observations (speakers, tube chart and faceplate). In the two years that followed Teagle's important article, the question of the small-box, tolex Twin got the attention of another writer, Paul Bechtoldt. In his own series of articles published in Vintage Guitar magazine, Mr. Bechtoldt addressed the history and actuality of Fender amps during the period of our interest. A good account of the history of the first brown amps can be found in his article, "Dick Stout: Brown Era Amp Man," (see reference above). A subsequent article of Mr. Bechtoldt's, entitled "Fender Amp Oddities: Follow Up," (Vintage Guitar, March 1999, p.62), concludes with an excited reference to the small-box, brown Twin:

**"The next biggie, is a possible Brown Twin one-off. This one has got our interest stirred up as much as possible. We're hoping this one turns out to be the real deal...if so, this will be the find of the decade!"**

However, there never was a follow-up article on this possible "one-off." The story of the small-box, tolex Twin returned to its shroud of silence and obscurity. In a recent conversation with Paul Bechtoldt, he mentioned that there never was any follow-up article because the "possible Brown one-off" turned out to be a fake. So what is the true story of the early 1960, small-box, brown tolex Twin, (a.k.a., the would-be 5G8)? Outside of the persistent murmur of hearsay and rumor, it remains where Paul Bechtoldt left it five years ago. This article breaks that silence in order to show how much we want to believe what we see and what we read in print. The idea of this amp's existence has really sprouted up from a questionable catalog entry. Since then it has transcended the realm of the everyday and flourished as a myth. Accordingly, the 5G8 Twin lingers in the minds of Fender tube-amp fiends as a sort of ghost – a mirage promising untold elevation in the world of vintage amplifiers. It is a fascinating but redundant study in human psychology to see how we can react in front of such mythological salvation. Just like the medieval tales of quest, chasing the unicorn, the Holy Grail or "the find of the decade, the story of the 5G8 provides an interesting window into the intention of the hunter. The poignancy of this story – the reason it still interests us – is because there has yet to be an actual example to step out of the shadows and present itself to the world. Or has there? **T**



## 1983 Gibson Spirit I



In the late '70s and early '80s, creative minds at Gibson/Nashville were busy indeed. While many instruments in the Gibson catalog remained loosely rooted in the past, there were also plenty of extreme departures, such as the curious 'RD' Series with TP-6 tailpiece, the ES Artist that shared the same fabulously bad Moog active electronics circuit with the RD's, the bizarre neck-thru-body Corvus, the Challenger, Invader, Map-shape, Q Series and XPL Standard (nothing standard about that one...) Let's face it, no matter how much you may enjoy the good smell of an old guitar, a lot of the '80s guitars in particular were just plain *wrong*. Perhaps it's time for a new category of guitars called "What Were They Thinking?" But once in a while, an undiscovered gem will emerge from the beneath the steaming heap of bad '80s guitars, and we have stumbled upon one such gem again – the Gibson Spirit *I con* curly maple top.

The *Epiphone* Spirit (built during the last days of the Kalamazoo factory) made its debut on the cover of TQR five years ago, and judging by the e-mail we received, lots of ToneQuest readers succeeded in happily hunting them down. The Gibson version made in Nashville was built from 1982-1987, but the curly maple top was only available in 1983. The minute we popped open the case, this one qualified for a full review.



Standard accoutrements on the Spirit include 22 frets and a 24 3/4" scale, unbound, 3-piece maple neck, Leo Quan "Badass" bridge and a foul-sounding, coverless double creme Gibson "Dirty Fingers" humbucking pickup. Most unusual was the Spirit's lightweight, solid poplar body and the rare, curly maple veneer top. Unlike

the typical 1/4" maple tops on Les Paul models, the top on the Spirit is a wafer-thin veneer painted with a striking 'dark-burst' antique finish (the antique finish was an upcharge on the spartan Spirits – most were finished in ebony, "wineburst" or silver).

Now, before you turn your nose up at the mention of poplar, have you ever played a poplar body guitar? We hadn't either until our first Spirit. Well, gang, in addition to weighing a shade under 7 pounds, the poplar Spirit possesses a very worthy tone – not as heavy as mahogany – but still full and authoritative with a very agreeable voice that settles nicely in the middle frequencies. There isn't much not to like and admire about the Spirit, but of course, we had to fiddle with it.



Have you ever owned an older Gibson with the flat, wide fret wire? Former Gibson veteran Tim Shaw described it as follows in our July 2000 article titled, "A Les Paul for Less ..."

"These frets were nominally .105" wide and they only started out at about .035" high, so by the time you've leveled them twice they were five times wider than they were high, and you couldn't tune the thing with a pipe wrench." How true. We sent the Spirit off to Brian McDaniel here in Atlanta, and as usual, Brian returned it to us transformed. Now we had a full crown (#154 wire)



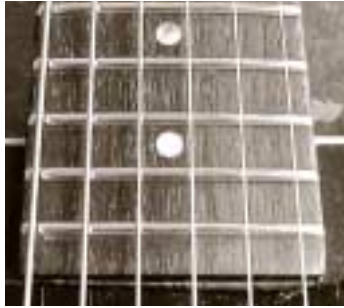
and something to work with that our "fretless wonder" had been holding back. And then there was the issue of the Badass ... Crude, clunky and butt-ugly, isn't it?

We added it to our ancient hardware collection and rung up our good friend Dwight Devereaux, founder of TonePros hardware. Dwight kindly sent us a TonePros AVT II intonatable wrap-around tailpiece with individually adjustable saddles. We wasted no time installing it and setting the Spirit up,



but we also noticed that the strings were no longer positioned properly on the fretboard. Each string had shifted slightly to the bass side of the neck, leaving a wider

-continued-



space between the edge of the fingerboard and the E string on the treble side, and too little space between the fingerboard edge on the bass side and the low E string. OK ...

We've put enough guitars together using different maker's parts to have often wondered how half the after-market stuff manages to fit properly on *any* guitar, but every TonePros installation we've done has been a breeze and sheer perfection, so what's up with this? We e-mailed Dwight early for California time, and 20 minutes later the phone rang. The man was not to be denied ... We performed several diagnostic procedures with Dwight instructing, and the next day a new tailpiece stud for the treble side arrived that was just 1 millimeter larger than the first stud. The new stud and a careful setup corrected the problem. This is the kind of follow up and expertise that Dwight is known for providing to *all* of his customers – not just magazine publishers or touring players – just so you know ...



We also pulled the Dirty Fingers and installed a CR Coils "Darkburst" humbucking pickup built by Jim Wagner.

The new "Darkburst" is smooth, musical and extremely well-balanced with great dynamic feel and sensitivity. Wagner's humbucking pickups avoid sounding overly

aggressive, compressed, tight or midrange-heavy, and it's obvious that he knows exactly what he's doing with coils. The Darkburst is very cool and *highly* recommended.

We'll be the first to agree that buying old guitars and amps carries a certain amount of risk, suspense and unanticipated challenges, but the potential rewards are considerable. The Spirit cost us all of \$600.00, and in addition to being a real head-turner, it plays flawlessly and sounds superb. Yes, it's a sleeper, built during a time that will never be considered a "golden era" in Gibson history, but the fun factor in restoring the tone and playability of an inexpensive guitar you'll actually play is a thrill you deserve to experience. **To**

[www.tonepros.com](http://www.tonepros.com), 239-337-7575

[www.crcoils.com](http://www.crcoils.com), 209-588-0621

Brian McDaniel, 678-234-3947 (cell)

## WHO'S PLAYING WHAT?

### an evening with... **Buddy Guy**



*First of all, big congratulations to Buddy Guy for his induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. He cut his first record in 1958, and two nights ago we got to see him cut loose with a '58 Stratocaster. How perfect...*



*Those of you that have followed Buddy's career know what he's about... animated, heartfelt, genuine blues delivered with conviction that can only be acquired by those who have lived the life, and scorching, loud, frenzied guitar riffs that so often take us where we least expect. And thanks to Buddy's long time guitar tech and tone-shaper Mark Messner, the gear is always being tweaked...*



Buddy kicked off the evening playing a brown '74

-continued-

## who's playing what



Telecaster Deluxe. Note the dual volume and tone controls have been sacrificed for a simpler single volume/tone rig and the extra holes don't mean a thing...



Buddy's current amps include a reissue Fender tweed Bassman for stage mojo only, set the way he likes it... bass cut and all other tone controls *way up*. The Custom Vibroverb feeding the monitors and house is set up by Mark for a full, rich sound, and one of



Buddy's old 100W Marshall JCM 800 heads is used for "the Hendrix stuff," fed into a Tone Tubby 1x12 cabinet with ceramic magnet Tone Tubby.



The other guitar player in the band, Ric Hall, is also playing ceramic Tone Tubbies in a Chicago Blues Box 2x12 rig.



Buddy had also brought a real 1958 Stratocaster to the party, which according to Mark, was brought to show by a fan years ago to be signed.



Buddy refused to sign the '58 for obvious reasons, but he did manage to work out a trade that consisted of a signature polka-dot Buddy Guy Strat, some cash, and a bottle of Remy Martin VO. Note the big-ass fret wire on the Strat (and *all of* Buddy's guitars). It also looks as if he likes his pickups jacked nice and high on the Strat (only the bridge is original – the other two died some time ago).



Buddy and his smokin' Chicago band tore up the sold out Tabernacle

as usual, and we urge you to log on to [www.buddyguy.com](http://www.buddyguy.com) to check the current tour schedule and catch a show. When you



do, be sure to say hello to one of our favorite tonefreaks while you're there – Mark Messner – and Enjoy! **To**



[www.buddyguy.com](http://www.buddyguy.com)

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**INTERVIEWS:** Dan Toler  
Bruce Zinky  
Johnny A

**FEATURES:** TV Jones

**AMPLIFIERS:** Aiken  
Hand-wired Fender '57 Twin

**PICKUPS:** Talos  
AIniCo P90's...  
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**GUITARS:** Our '62 Strat Parts Guitar  
The ToneQuest King Daddy  
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