

bridge pickup. It's noiseless, looks like a Strat and sounds like a Broadcaster with the treble gootched down a tick — thick, focused, and plagued with none of the shortcomings common to Stratocaster bridge pickups (thin, ice pick highs) or many noiseless pickups (sterile and lacking the character that comes with the noise). Moving through the 5-way switch in the 'Classic S' position, we were also a little surprised to hear the familiar out-of-phase hollowness of a Stratocaster with the neck and middle or middle and bridge pickups combined. With the neck or middle pickup selected alone, the Legato moves into a smoother, darker Gibson-esq tone, but still with a hint of scooped mids that translates into a 'woodier' vintage tone than a traditional humbucker. Very bluesy, and very cool, like a Strat, but way more of it!

The 'Bucker T' second position on the rotary selector adds the option of combining the neck and bridge, eliminating the middle pickup altogether... another very cool, jangly-yet-thick sound that seems unique to the Legato. Somebody's been thinking...

The 'Trio' mode produces maximum jingle/jangle/inside/out tone and a discernable *thwack* when you hit a chord. Very Fender-like, but over the top in a way — perfect for Motown rhythm tracks and Robert Cray-inspired shuffles.

OK... let's review our review. The Legato is built right, looks new, and plays like an old friend. It *feels* good. Tone? Everything from heavy to bright, bouncy and even threatening, but with its *own* vibe. The Vinetto really does have a *woody* thang goin' on. Some day soon we'd like to hear the alder and mahogany models and a slab board version, too. All in all, the Vinetto is a great new guitar that we can welcome and embrace. Wait a minute... they already sound and play 'old,' so when will Vince Cunetto start banging them up again? Everything in its time...

Here's your chance to win a new Vinetto, but don't delay! Register for the ToneQuest Vinetto Legato Giveaway at www.vinettoguitars.com. The deadline for entry is June 1, 2004. **To**

LOUIS ELECTRIC *amplifier co.*

Thanks again to our good friend George Goumas for turning us on to Lou Rosano in Bergenfield, NJ. Lou has not only built custom amplifiers for players like Duke Robillard, Hubert Sumlin, Danny Gatton, Arlen Roth and Keith Richards, but he also repairs and restores vintage amplifiers. We asked Lou to send us an example of his custom work, and

he sent us a 'KR12' — the same amplifier he built for Keith Richards. Our review follows, but first, let's learn a little more about 'Louie.'

TQR: How did you begin working on amps?



Twinmaster

Well, back in 1987-88 I was playing guitar and I had really gotten interested in the sound that Jerry Garcia was getting. It was very unique, because he

was plugging McIntosh amps into his Twins and I eventually figured all of that out. There was a guy up here by the name of Jeff Block, and I used to buy amps from him. One day he called to tell me that he had an old '59 tweed Twin for sale. I bought it, and when I got it home I just thought it was the most magnificent sounding amplifier I had ever heard. At that time, no one was really building them, and I was spending a lot of time in New York hanging with players and they were all complaining about wanting better sounding amps, and I thought, "You know, I should build one of these." It didn't look that complicated, frankly. I had worked on cars, you know, and my uncle, Al Rosano, was a radio and TV repairman in the '60s and I had spent enough time around him growing up to have been exposed to all of that. So looking at the Twin, I wasn't intimidated by it, and I felt like I could build them. I got a good friend of mine and a terrific engineer, Chris Merren, to help me with the transformers. We had the original wrapping sheet from Triad, and we put an original transformer together. Chris can reverse-engineer any transformer, even without a data sheet, and he is the best transformer guy on the planet. He taught me everything I know. But I knew there was going to be a problem with the speakers... There weren't many old speakers around and it wasn't like you could go on the Internet and find them back then. I built the amp with some Jensen speakers out of a silverface Twin or something, and it sounded really good. But then I began experimenting with Celestions vintage 30's, and I found some 100W Fane AlNiCo speakers, and they were very cool. In the meantime, I got to know Danny Gatton's guitar tech, Jay Monterose, and I met him one night at the Bottom Line and gave him one of the tweed Twins I had built so that Danny could check it out. Danny just flipped over it. At that time, he was playing two '58 Twins with EV SRO speakers in them, and after he played my amp he retired both

-continued-



a JBL D120 in his Twin, and he used that amp right up until his passing.

TQR: What happened from there?

After Danny's death we did a big benefit at Tramps, which is where I met Warren Haynes and Jimmy Weider... I asked Warren if he wanted to play through the Twin and he said, "No, that's OK, thanks. I've got my amp here," etc. But the next night he decided to take me up on my offer to try the amp. When he saw it he said, "That's *it*!" He was used to playing big amps and cabs, you know? Anyway, he hit the first note and said, "Leave it right there and turn it up to '8'!" After he got off stage he literally backed me up against the wall and asked me how he could get one of my amps. He told me that he was doing a Government Mule record up at Bearsville and he wanted to use the amp on a couple of tracks, which he did. At that time, I believe he was playing Soldano amps on the road. Ronnie Earl also played two of the Twins at Danny's benefit... A lot of connections came out of that benefit, and then I did a NAMM show, but with Danny gone, I eventually took a little break and experimented more with different things.

TQR: How did you hook up with Keith?



That happened as a result of working with Les Paul. I black-faced a silverface Twin for him, and he wasn't happy (laughs). I was friends with Lou Paolo, who is the rhythm guitar player with Les...

of them. We'd go down to Tramps, and what was really cool about Danny was that we would just keep tweaking the tone. We wound up using a Vintage 30 and

TQR: The guy that always has the smokes in his shirt pocket? He is a *machine*. I saw Les at the Iridium Club in New York and I don't know who was more amazing, Les or Lou.

Danny Gatton said that Lou was the greatest rhythm player he had ever seen. I met Lou at Danny's benefit. Anyway, I did the work for Les and Lou said to me, "No matter what you do, he will never be happy — no matter *what* you do." Well, when I think about it, I'm the same way. I think that's one reason why I have never really gotten my amps out there in a big way — I'm always tweaking stuff, never satisfied. Back to Keith... I'm hanging out at the Iridium and I hear somebody say, "Get a table ready — Keith Richards is coming."



So I'm hanging out by the door and here he comes. He sits down with his guys and I said to Rusty, Les' son, "Rusty, I gotta talk to Keith about the Twin," and he says, "You need to talk to Rob Fraboni, the guy who came in with him." So I go over and I start telling Rob about the amp and he says, "That's perfect, because we're cutting this blues album for Hubert Sumlin. I'll talk to you after the show." Well, after the show there was a huge crowd gathered around Keith — his father and mother were there, too — and I'm thinking, "Shit. This could be a problem..." So I grab the amp off the stage like I'm a roadie and yell, "Coming through!" and the crowd parted and I walked right up to Keith and gave him the amp to take home (laughing). I loaded the amp into the limo and they told me they'd call me, and they did. They were very cool. So I went up to Showplace Studios and we had the amp there, Keith played it and it was great. Then I found out that they were looking for some smaller amps, too.

TQR: And that's where the KR12 came in?

Yeah, it's based on the one I built for him, although the cabinet back and sides on the amp I sent you are made from 100 year-old pine. The story about the speaker is interesting. I got some old blown frames from John Harrison at A Brown Soun, and I hooked up with Jim McGourty, who had been building speakers for Ken Fischer for awhile. Jim was building Greenbacks from the ground up before Celestion began building the reissues, and after they were released, Ken told Jim that his worst effort was better than the reissues. So I had

-continued-

all of these frames, but I didn't want a Greenback for this amp — I wanted something that could handle about 40 watts, and that's what is in your amp — the speaker that Jim built. Not that I don't like Greenbacks... we're using them in a Marshall Plexi-style amp that we're building.

TQR: The speaker in the KR12 is outstanding — incredibly warm and detailed. Tell me about the transformers and the gain circuit.



We custom wind the output transformers ourselves, and the power transformers are built by Shumacher. The amp has four levels of gain, and you can use a single or double footswitch to get two or all four, or you can just plug a 1/4 inch jack into different inputs with the guitar plugged into the gain channel for different levels of gain. And we biased it so you could run 6L6's or KT66's with that 5U4 rectifier.

TQR: In addition to the KR12, what other types of amps do you build?

I build a '54 wide panel tweed Twin with dual rectifiers, and the '58 Twinmaster is the model Danny played. The reason I call it a '58 is the cabinet dimensions are different from a



'59. The Hubert Sumlin model is very similar to the KR12 that we sent you, but the cabinet is also a little smaller and the output transformer is different. Hubert's amp is voiced to sound more like an American amp, where Keith's has

more of a British vibe. Hubert's amp has an actual covering on it too, although we build them either way. I try to steer people toward the uncovered wood cabinets because once you've heard one, you'll appreciate the fact that the tolex or tweed covering dampens the sound somewhat.



TQR: Do you use the same speaker that is custom built on the Celestion frame?

Yes, but we wind the speaker coils differently for a British or an American sound. We also build our own custom AlNiCo 'bulldog' speakers.

TQR: Tell me about the DR12 amp...

We began working on that model for Duke Robillard. He's playing it now, but we haven't actually locked into what he will be playing permanently. We've been experimenting with a combo with one 12 and a 10, and eventually we'll be building a new amp for Duke, maybe with that speaker configuration.

TQR: The V4 looks very impressive...

I always wanted Derek Trucks to try that one, but I didn't have it ready for him when I was working with him last year. Derek did play a 2x10 Gattone, and a lot of people really flip over that amp. Originally, we built the V4 with Celestion Vintage 10's, and they stopped making them. That's when I discovered another fantastic 10... it's the 10" Eminence speaker that is sold in the Electro-Harmonix catalog. We designed an output transformer around that speaker for Duke's amp, and I have never heard anything like it. I think



what makes our work unique is that every amp we build is really a custom

one-off designed for each owner. We can tweak the output transformers, the voice coils in the speakers...

TQR: So if someone came to you and said, "I'm a Strat player," or they are a Tele player, or they play P90's...

If I know that you exclusively play a Strat, I'm going to voice the amp around that. I will also choose components based on

-continued-

whether the amp will be used in the studio, on stage, or both. I like to use carbon comp resistors, but if an amp is going to be used for recording, I tend to use carbon film, because they are much quieter. I have discovered a type of carbon film resistor that is just as warm as carbon comp, but quieter. I also use Teflon wire and a G10 epoxy circuit board, and I've done a lot of experimenting in the past with high-end components, like Solen caps, for example. In our cabinets, we can use either 100 year-old pine, or something new.

TQR: What is your favorite style of amp to build?

Well, I've been building the tweed Twin amps for a long time, and I'm very fond of them. That's a very special sound like nothing else in the world. But the amp I'm building for Duke will have reverb, and I like that amp, too. I like them all, really, and as I said, I have never stopped trying new things. The sky's the limit when it comes to tone.

REVIEW

Over the years, it has occurred to us that among certain 'old school' guys who build amps for and have worked closely with legit, superstar players, there seems to be a shared concept of what



defines great tone in an amp. Now, we're not saying that they've gotten together in a back room somewhere on Mulberry

St. above Canal and conspired to promulgate a new world order... but there are similarities among their amplifiers that transcend chance or random selection... Like what, you ask? Well, low-mids and full midrange presence, for example. Remember what Joe Bonamassa said in his interview last month? "Midrange is really where it's at, but the problem with the midrange frequencies is that they can expose a lot of flaws in your playing, because now you're hearing it. If you get used to dialing in the mids, you become a cleaner player." The first time we played through Lou Rosano's KR12, we immediately noticed the warmth and smooth midrange voice that Lou has designed into the amp. Another characteristic common to exceptional amplifiers is something we have often referred to as *bloom*. As you increase the volume, distortion and pick attack, the amp actually blooms and blossoms, while losing none of the musical character that is pres-



ent at lower volume, and growing sweeter as it's pushed. The amp sounds

happy,

cranked. The KR12 blooms, and with the 4-position variable gain structure, you can dial in everything from clean Fender-like headroom (with midrange!) to increasing levels of thick tube distortion at variable volume levels.

Our review model was constructed with 100 year-old finished pine boards, which made us re-think the idea of covering cabinets with glue and fabric when we heard it for the first time. The heart pine boards in the KR12 are much heavier than typical pine, and combined with the custom-built speaker, this amp possesses a remarkably solid, throaty and confident tone somewhat reminiscent of a tweed Twin. Lou shipped the amp with a pair of the 'old' Svetlana (now referred to as 'Flying C' from the original Svetlana plant in St. Petersburg, Russia) 6L6's and a pair of Chinese KT66's. We liked the KT's for a slightly darker, more compressed tone — perfect for slide. The harmonic overtones coming off the slide were some of the juiciest we've ever heard. The 6L6's opened the tone up a bit more (picture a wider grin), and we were captivated by the KR12's ability to produce a clean, woody tone and one of the sweetest overdriven sounds imaginable, just by tweaking the volume pot on our guitars. The KR12 is the perfect foil for bright single coils, and with a little change in the EQ settings, it really plays the honey dripper with a Gibson. And the big 5U4 tube rectifier adds just the right amount of sag (you could also call it 'sweetener'). In all respects, the KR12 is an incredibly versatile stage and studio friendly amp at 35W, and it's got some major mojo workin.' The sad part of this story is that after bouncing between the KR12 and our favorite blackface Fender amps during our review sessions, the KR12 has kicked all but our tweaked and coddled Deluxe Reverb straight to the curb. Now that we've been so cruelly spoiled, we can't let the KR12 go. Is the quest for tone ever over? Absolutely not, and Lou Rosano is writing a new chapter with every amplifier he builds. *Quest forth... To*

www.louisamps.com, 201-384-6166