

biased for them. All we can say is, *you really, really need you one of these. Really.* **TQ**

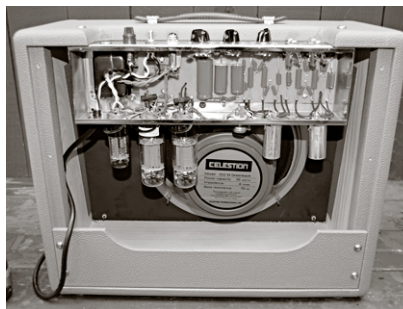
The Buster



We're introducing you to two stellar amps built by Lou Rosano in this issue – both outstanding choices for different reasons, depending on whatcha need... or *want* (two entirely different criteria).

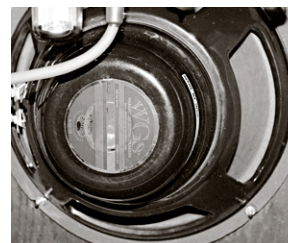
'Buster' is all the name implies – Rosano's unique take on a muscled-up tweed 5E3 Deluxe that, as Lou put it, "You can throw in the back seat, play at a gig in a decent sized room and hang with the band – something you can't really do with a stock 5E3." And how do you do that? Beef up the power section to a full 25 watts with much bigger transformers designed for dual 6L6s and a 5AR4 rectifier rather than the Deluxe's 6V6s and 5Y3, voice it with a normal and bright channel that can be jumped and mixed with a 'Y' cord, and design the circuit to respond dynamically with a guitar, enabling you to deftly roam between cleaner tones at stage volume and sweet over-driven distortion and sustain, all from the volume pot on yer axe. Add exceptional tubes, a rock solid pine box, and for just \$1,599 you've got a bread & butter rig that absolutely eclipses every 5E3 knock-off we've ever played. Now, before you consider calling to ask if it's really that good... yes, it's really that good. Best of all, there is no better or more transparent platform than the Buster for further honing your tone with optional speakers and tubes... Our review model was loaded with a Celestion 25 watt Greenback, matched Ruby 6L6s, Sovtek 5AR4 and a RAM 12AX7 in the bright channel. What's a RAM tube? Custom selected and matched tubes from a fellow by the name of Roger Modjeski in Santa Barbara. For the full scoop on what Mr. Modjeski is all about, log on to www.ram-labs-musicreference.com, and for his tube store, see www.tubeaudiostore.com.

We couldn't resist loading the Buster with an assortment of tubes and speakers – the bias pot allows versatile tube replacements, and we tried NOS GE 5881s, Philips 6L6WGBs, and a used-but-good pair of RCA blackplate 6L6s. The result? How much cream do you want in your coffee? They're all good – just different, with the 5881s being a little edgier and mean on the top, while the RCAs are clotted cream. We actually preferred the brilliant yet warm and musical sound of the Ruby 6L6GCMSTRs – highly recommended, and the Buster



bloomed and boomed even more with a pair of silky, old-but-good RCA 12AX7s. The Greenback is what it is – a little middy with a snappy, detailed top end and solid if

not lush bass response. We tried one of our reconed '60s vintage silver Celestion Alnico G12s, a reconed '66 Jensen C12N, Eminence Red Fang and Warehouse Speakers' version of a Vintage 30 – the Veteran 60. As we expected, the silver Celestion Alnico and Red Fang seemed too thin as a single in this amp, the Jensen was the loudest of all with brilliant treble



and upper mids, but tilted a tad too far in the high frequencies, and the Veteran 60 was rich, detailed and beefy with slightly rolled-off highs on the very top. We were truly torn between the Veteran and the Greenback (they'd make a

stunning couple paired in the same box...) A very pleasant toss up, and we'll happily ramble on with the Veteran 60 for now since we're on another single P90 Les Paul Junior binge.

Louis Electric

KR 12



If the Buster is Lou Rosano's answer to the club player's dream, the dual EL34 KR12 head & cab bring another twenty watts to the party with master volume, four footswitchable gain stages, and a nifty negative feedback adjustment. The first 1x12 version of the KR12 was

built for Keith Richards, and Rosano has tweaked up the head version as follows:

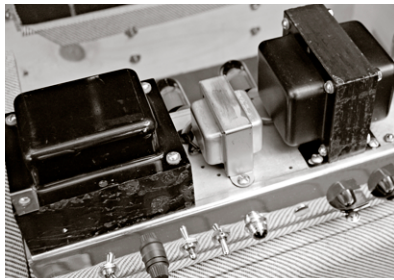
TQR: How would you describe this amp, Lou?

It's the KR12 amp that was originally designed for Keith Richards, but in a head and 2x12 cab. The combo has gone through some changes since then, and when Robben Ford began using it, I had made some slight changes for the head.

-continued-

It also has a feedback loop dampening control. Instead of using a fixed resistor value for the negative feedback, it has an adjustable range from 27K to 250K. Some players like the sound looser, others don't, so this allows you to change the dynamic character of the amp.

TQR: Are you still having your transformers custom wound?



Yes, by Chris Merren of Merren Audio, and the transformers for this amp are custom-built for this design. Everything we do with transformers are unique to my amps.

TQR: For the sake of comparison, it's always helpful to understand which if any familiar models from the past may be similar to this version of the KR12 head... Was it inspired by any other amp we may know?

Yeah, the tweed Twin. The transformers are different and there are some differences in the circuit, but still, it's similar to the narrow panel, low-power tweed Twins I've built in the past, starting with Danny Gatton.

TQR: Robben Ford is using a 100 watt version, correct?



He started out playing the same 45 watt amp I sent you while I was working on his Dumble. He was touring this past summer with Jorma Kaukonen, who really liked the KR12, and

when Robben got the Dumble back, I told Jorma to go ahead and use it for the rest of the tour. Robben now has a 100 watt version of the KR12 and Jorma just bought the 45 watt.

TQR: You shipped our review amp with EL34s, but can you also run it with 6L6s?

Sure. What I've noticed is that you get more gain with EL34s and the tone has more midrange. With 6L6s it has more bloom. I can also build it with a tube or diode rectifier, and you can order a 2x12 or 1x12 cabinet. I originally used G12H30 70th Anniversaries, which sound great, but I've also recently loaded a cabinet with Vintage 30s and I liked that

sound, too. Basically, you can have whatever you want. [To](http://www.louisamps.com)

www.louisamps.com, 201-384-6166

KR12 Review



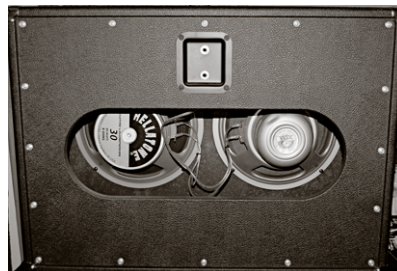
What you're getting with the KR12 head is a more powerful and versatile platform that delivers variable levels of selectable gain from a single footswitch

plugged into the gain or normal inputs, additional control over dynamics and touch-sensitivity via the feedback control, and a well-designed master volume circuit that manages decibel levels without ramming the signal into a progressively narrow and compressed voice. The KR12 does indeed possess the room-filling, proud voice of a low-power tweed



Twin, but endowed with far more versatile tone and gain shaping features. We played the KR12 for hours with nothing more than Lee Jackson's brilliant Mr. Springgy reverb pedal adding a bit of space, and the sound with all of our guitars was gloriously, extraordinarily rich and lush – less scooped in the mids than a typical big Fender, yet lacking nothing throughout the entire frequency range of the guitar. Fans of both Marshall and Fender amps will be equally thrilled with the KR12 and its ability to deftly roam from big, clean tones at moderate volume levels, to subtle-to-intense, thick sustain throttled down with the master volume or wide open at 45 watts. This amp impresses us as a cleverly designed hybrid covering the best attributes of British and American classics, pure and simple.

The 2x12 cabinet loaded with Celestion Alnico Gold speakers is an inherently bright and bold rig that sounded best with humbucking pickups or a little treble rolled off on single coils. We also ran the KR12 with our own Avatar 2x12 'football' back cabinet loaded with a G12H 30 70th Anniversary Hellatone and vintage Celestion silver Alnico G12 – hard to beat, and the kind of exceptional sound that immediately com-



pels listeners to look in the back of the cabinet to see what's inside. Happens every time.

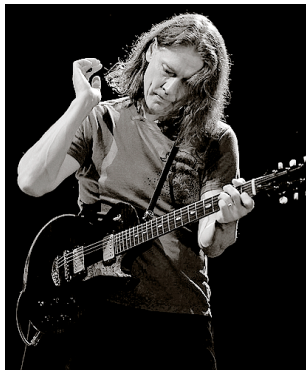
It's also interesting to note that after

-continued-

sending his Dumble Overdrive Special to Lou Rosano for some TLC and using a KR12, Robben Ford is now enjoying a 100 watt model while Jorma Kaukonen has embraced the 45 watt KR12 reviewed here. Well, in response to many requests over the years, this seems like a fine time to offer up a very special lagniappe – Part 1 of our ninety minute interview with one of the most accomplished and admired guitarists of our time, Robben Ford. For those of you thirsting for the source of Robben’s magical touch and tone (is it in his hands... the gear... a combination of both?) we offer the following quote from Robben: *“I always knew if I wanted to do something, I could do it.”* Attitude before altitude, people. *Enjoy...*

Part One

Robben Ford



TQR: How were you initially exposed to music, Robben?

I was so open to music that it seemed I liked almost everything. My parents bought a record player, joined a record club, and received a stack of records that I remember included Ravel’s Bolero and some kind of big band percussion record, among other

things. My father also played a lot of Hank Williams stuff on the guitar and sang... he had good time and a very good voice. The radio in the late ‘50s and early ‘60s was also very eclectic, and whatever was on the radio I would listen to – from “Walk in the Black Forest” to the Beatles. Everyone in my family was like that – there was a lot of love for music and a lot of support and encouragement for playing music in my family.

TQR: How did you become interested in the saxophone?

That was one of the few epiphanies I had when I was about nine years old. My older brother Patrick played drums in the junior high school band, we went to a performance where a



Paul Desmond

guy that played alto saxophone was featured as a soloist, and that’s when I had this complete spiritual experience. I got an alto sax and that was the first instrument I was really serious about. Surf music was very popular at that time and there was a lot of tenor sax in that music, but the first

truly great sax player I heard was Paul Desmond, who was on Dave Brubeck’s “Take Five.” I consider him one of my main musical influences to this day, although you might not know it by hearing me play the guitar. The guitar really came into play after I heard Mike Bloomfield, which would have been in 1965 or ‘66 on the first Paul Butterfield Blues Band album. But the first time I actually got to see Michael Bloomfield was with the Electric Flag... I saw the Electric Flag and the Paul Butterfield Blues Band both on the same night at the Fillmore. The opening band was the James Cotton f’ing Blues Band, and those were my three favorite bands, all on the same night! I’d been playing guitar at that time for about a year and a half... I’d joined my older brother’s band and we had horns, because we wanted to be like the Electric Flag. Initially, when I first started, my father showed me a few chords, and a friend of mine eventually showed me how to play a 9 chord, which was very exciting, since those were being played all over that Bloomfield record. Beyond that, I was listening to records and learning Mike Bloomfield licks from the records, just banging on the guitar.

TQR: Do you recall when you felt as if you could finally play what you were hearing in your head – when you felt like “I got it?”

I think I was relatively impressed with myself after a couple of years on the guitar, but that was just based on a certain amount of ability and a natural inclination toward the guitar... and being hormonal (laughing). I eventually went from there, to depression and a hatred of my own playing, because what I was trying to get to I couldn’t get to. With the blues, I kind of learned it pretty quickly, but my interest was drawn more and more into jazz, and I couldn’t figure it out – it was over my head. I started playing jazz tunes – not things like “Stella By Starlight”... more like things on Blue Note records – Wayne Shorter and Joe Henderson tunes. But for some reason jazz guitar never really appealed to me that much. I had listened to Kenny Burrell, whom I liked, and Jim Hall, who I loved, but I wasn’t buying those records. I liked tenor saxophone players and blues guitar players, and I was trying to fuse these two things together.

TQR: Based on your fluid playing style, it seems to have worked. Once you got past the crawling stage with the guitar, before jazz imposed a brick wall, what did your gear scene look like?

I don’t think I even owned an amp in the first group I played in at 13. We had two guitars, bass and drums, I played the guitar with another guy, played saxophone and sang, and the other guitar player’s parents were kinda wealthy, and I think I plugged into his amp. I had a very cheap Orpheus electric that I had gotten for Christmas, so we’d all plug into one amp, and then I moved to bass for a while. Back to the other guitar player... one day his mom bought a Fender piggyback

-continued-