

and expensive), Mullards impart a girth and musical richness that other tubes just can't muster, although we can certainly live with the NOS Teslas, which are still available for now from KCANOSTubes.com.



While the DR504 will, as Webb observed, "part your hair," it is also a very

pedal-friendly amp that allows the volume to be cut somewhat, rendering outstanding clean tones that can be pushed into variable levels of the nasty with a good overdrive pedal. The Hiwatt does exhibit a natural tendency to push British mids forward, but you can also expand the tone by cutting the mids slightly, nudging the bass and treble EQ, and working with the presence control. Most of the time, we've been running the Hiwatt through our Avatar 4x12 cab loaded with two Celestion Alnico Gold G12s and a pair of Celestion G12H 70th Anniversary Hellatones. It is indeed a hellava tone.



Unlike vintage Marshall, Ampeg and Fender amps, a comprehensive

'History of Hiwatt' book has yet to be written. The best web resource we've found is Mark Huss' History of Hiwatt web site at www.mhuss.com/Hiwatt/index.html. Spend twenty minutes on this site and you can quickly reference technical specs, dating and serial number information, and the murky post-Hylight Hiwatt era in which the "Biacrown" Hiwatt amps were built from 1981-1984 by a group of former Hylight employees, and later models built in California and England as the rights to the Hiwatt name changed hands. The "mid-Atlantic" tone conjured by Webb Wilder is definitely a hallmark of the Hiwatt DR504, and as we just observed, a faint dab of reverb or delay adds a 3-D quality that enables the Hiwatt to deftly cover far more territory than the bold and midrange-heavy tones of British rock so often associated with these amps. What's that? Yes, they are loud, and bold as luv, but this is 2007 and there are workarounds for your volume-challenged fans, real or imagined. We'll get to that next... In the meantime, know this – Hiwatts are collectible, one-of-a-kind works of art that sound like no other amp ever built on either side of the Atlantic. *Rip forth, Jack...*

Louis Electric

Custom Amp Bizarre

It isn't getting any easier to filter the hype surrounding custom built amps these days. For many, online forums are the engines that herd players to the next hot amp builder, and the hype is usually fueled by players fully vested in whatever booteek tubeyard they so fervently push online. Fair enough – sharing one's enthusiasm is no crime, but we suspect there is more than a little self-validation going on as well. The best time to evaluate a product is not immediately after you've just dropped two or three grand on it; time often provides a more measured perspective that is rarely shared after the first blush of hot amp sex melts away. In other words, buying an amp is a courtship, and first impressions can and do change. So while giddy marriage announcements are routinely posted when players buy a new amp, the divorce is most often consummated in glum silence. The most desirable amplifiers develop lasting appeal and real staying power, and no matter how our tastes may vary, it is these we all seek.



Lou, Keith and Hubert Sumlin

If you've been reading TQR for a while, you're already familiar with Lou Rosano – an underground cat who first

earned his stripes building tweed Twins for Danny Gatton. Lou doesn't hang out on the Gear Page, nor does he spend much time otherwise humping his amps, preferring to let the work speak for itself. The fact that his customers include Keith Richards, Hubert Sumlin and Duke Robillard, among others, is adequate validation.

Lou sent us a "baby Bluesbreaker" 1x12 amp for review several months ago, and while we were discussing it over the phone, we mentioned our '58 tweed Tremolux featured in the June 2007 issue of TQR. Like most, Lou hadn't really paid much attention to this particular model – the 5G9 fixed bias Tremolux. Given the remarkable tone of our amp, we suggested that he consider building one, he did, and like the baby Bluesbreaker, he completely nailed it...

Louis Electric Baby Bluesbreaker

The "Baby" Bluesbreaker is a lighter, scaled-down version of the giant Louis Electric 2x12, 45W Bluesbreaker. Shipped with dual KT 66 output tubes, Rosano's Bluesbreaker is a

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faithful reproduction of the original Marshall, featuring three 12AX7 preamp tubes and a GZ34 rectifier, Bright

and Normal Channels sharing 4 inputs, and Treble, Middle, Bass and Presence controls. The compact cabinet measures 20" H x 24" W x 9 3/4" D and weighs 40 pounds.

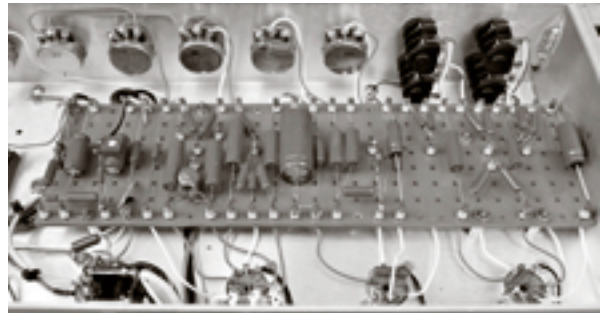
The Bluesbreaker is also a powerful 45W performance amp that far exceeds any "bedroom" categories (although you can re-bias with a pair of 6V6s for 28 watts.) Come to think of it,



does anyone actually play their electric guitar in the bedroom? The KT66 tubes produce a thicker, wider, fatter uncompressed tone than most EL84

amps, including many of the the modestly powered Marshall vintage reissues. Frankly, we've become a little weary of sorting through the glut of dual EL84 18 watt amps being built today. Clean headroom is minimal at best, and as much as we appreciate the sound of an overdriven amplifier, the narrow compression and handcuffed tone circuits present in most of these amps essentially succeed in producing one narrow sound – as if a rainbow were only green – the color of money, perhaps? Consider this... Could the mass appeal of dirty little dual EL84 amps be driven in part by players of meager skill for whom compression and distortion serve to hide and obscure their shortcomings with fizz, framp and fwap. *Ya think?* Is there not more than one essential sound that deserves to be pursued through an electric guitar besides the gloriously, riotously busted-up ones? You are hereby put on notice to play clean for a week – let's call it the "Distortion Diet." Trust us – you'll be better for it.

But when we allude to clean tones, do not mistakenly assume that you are being sentenced to vapid jazz tones... nope, not for a minute. Save that for your golden years. *How about 'clean' through an f'ing Bluesbreaker, mate?* Big valves beget big tone, and there is a cleaner side of dirty that can reveal all the considerable potential of the guitar for those willing to seek it out. Remember that gorgeous, classy girl who was so good at making you think she *might* be willing to be as bad as you



so desperately wanted to be? *That's what I'm talkin' about.* At 45 watts, Lou Rosano's Bluesbreaker can surely tickle your fancy for 'Beano' tone, but roll back the volume on your favorite guitar or the amp itself, and you'll also discover a sweeter, clearer, more melodious tone that evokes an entirely different range of emotions – one that seems eminently more mature, evolved and complex in its pristine purity. Oh, the tubes and transformers are still working their magic... but the



fundamental girth of each note is enhanced and allowed to bloom rather than being masked and obscured by rizzy distortion. There is something unseemly and crude in becoming a slave to just one tone, and even if you may never need or want the maximum power and turbo-crunch available in an amp like the Louis Bluesbreaker, there is so much more lurking beneath the surface, should you only be willing to look. Well, are you? An open and curious mind is the most valuable tool of all in the enduring Quest for tone, but to find yourself, sometimes you must first lose yourself, and all the baggage you brung witcha. Like too many notes crammed into every solo played, a monotone approach to playing the guitar is boring at best, and we're being kind. Check out Ronnie Earl, who deftly changes tones constantly in a song to create tension and relief. When the smackdown ultimately comes, you feel it alright... and *no one* does it better. What's missing in too many guitarists' sets today is not enough *fore-play*... A forty minute climax is no climax at all.

The Tremblelux



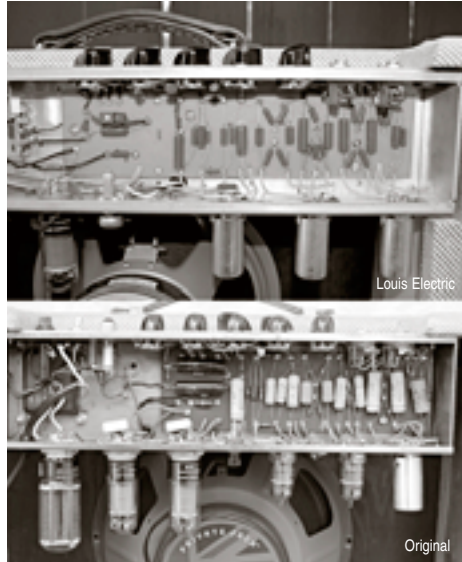
You know the story... inspired by Neil Young, we trolled eBay for a late '50s tweed Tremolux, found a '58 with a stripped cabinet and

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amps

replaced output transformer for \$1,082.00 and it ultimately rearranged our perception of exceptional tone in a moderately-powered 1x12. With its larger tweed Pro cabinet and a bigger power supply than the 5E3 narrow panel Deluxe or the earlier 5E9A Tremolux, the 5G9 routinely stuns all comers.

Unfortunately, clean examples have recently sold for as much as \$4,000, making the 5G9 ('58-'60) and even the 5E9A ('55-'57) a heady move. And that is precisely why we urged Lou Rosano to build a 5G9 Tremolux.



Rosano is no stranger to tweed circuits, having built tweed Twins for years, but like every amp builder, tech and guitar player we had spoken to, the Tremolux had escaped his attention. Looking over the schematic,

Lou quickly said, "No problem," and within two weeks the prototype had arrived in Atlanta. Lou faithfully followed the original design, with the exception of the custom-wound power transformer, which is roughly 15% more powerful than the original specs. Experiments with different speakers led Lou to choose the Celestion G12H 70th Anniversary, and the amp was shipped with current production Tung-Sol 6V6s, EH 5U4 rectifier and assorted 12AX7s.

Lou had already let the cat out of the bag by exclaiming, "I can't believe how good this fuckin' amp sounds!" when he first fired it up (we were used to hearing that with our own '58) and that sentiment was soon echoed by Hubert Sumlin when Lou was able to take an amp to a couple of Hubert's



shows in the northeast. Grinning and hopping around the stage with the Tremolux pumping the good



thang, Hubert came off stage, looked at Lou and said, "That amp sounds old, man... like they used to sound." Our first session with the Tremolux wasn't much different, although we

lacked Hubert's mischievous presence in the room. The magic of the Tremolux lies in its ability to produce a big, round, clean Fendery sound at modest volumes, and the most beautiful broken-up tones imaginable, gorgeously endowed



with rich harmonic overtones, extraordinarily touch-sensitive sustain, and astounding clarity. Add a little reverb and it's game over... Of course, the actual tremolo effect is all hot tone sex – a deliciously

liquid, warm, hypnotic throb, and we'll say this one more time – as a versatile tool and as an instrument, the Tremolux absolutely buries the tweed Deluxe. But, of course, you're waiting for the ultimate comparison...

Hearing the Louis Tremolux immediately motivated us to pull the excellent Eminence Private Jack speaker and try a Celestion 'Hellatone' from Avatar. Lou's amp was producing slightly fuller bass and mids, and while the Jack is no slouch (you might even prefer it, depending), for the purposes of comparison we were obligated to load the Hellatone. While our '58 does possess a raw, aged quality that a new amp can't really do, the similarities between the two amps are remarkable. The Louis is capable of throwing 21 watts rather than the '58's 18, but this is actually a good thing, in our opinion. If anything, Rosano's Tremolux offers all the qualities of our tweed Tremolux, but with a slightly bigger sound. As close as you can get, with just a little more of everything available. With the deeper Hellatone mounted in our Tremolux, both amps were clearly cut from the same rich, heirloom cloth.

We are completely in love with the 5G9 for its easy portability, simple controls, astounding touch-sensitivity, clean and dirty talk, and *tone, tone, tone*. Whether you choose to go old or new, find a way to acquire one now. You'll never regret it. **To**

www.louisamps.com, 201-384-6166