

least expensive amp modifications you can ever do. We enjoy an abundance of riches when it comes to replacement speakers today, and while your choices are vast, well, that's the problem, isn't it? How in hell do you decide what to buy when there are dozens and dozens of choices built by multiple manufacturers? Speakers are in many respects, *tone filters*. Nearly every guitar speaker manufacturer offers descriptions of the sound of their speakers accompanied by graphs that illustrate response curves and data for resonance, usable frequency range in Hz, dB sensitivity, and Thiele & Small parameters like resonant frequency, DC resistance, coil inductance, mechanical Q and electromagnetic Q. That's fine if you're an engineer, but fairly useless for most guitarists. You just want to know how it sounds. What can you do to make the right choice the first time without experimenting with dozens of speakers that lose half their value when you sell them, even if only used for an hour? At that point you have ceased being a musician and become a speaker nerd. Most of us just get online, surf, read, and pick a speaker that has the most compelling description, whether it's on a forum thread or a manufacturer's web site. Throw the dice, basically. Pickups are no different.

Well, we can't magically remove all chance and uncertainty in your life, but in addition to making some very carefully considered recommendations, we can offer a few suggestions that may clear the air a bit... Consider this: If you don't know what you want, you're probably not going to get it. Yeah, that's funny, like Yogi Berra funny, but true. But it does help to consider what's missing based on what your amplifier is giving you as a means of determining what you want. Do you want a brighter or darker speaker, or one that is sonically neutral with a wide and balanced frequency response? Do you need the clarity and power handling of a larger voice coil and magnet, or the more vintage sound of speakers that are rated for lower power? Are you interested in the classic American tone of a Fender amp, or something more British? It's perfectly OK to mix alnico with ceramic magnet speakers, or 'British' and 'American' tones. Listening to your rig 'as is' can give you valuable clues as long as you are willing to trust your ears. Or, you can just follow our lead as we experiment on your behalf...



WGS G12CS

The smooth-cone G12CS is described as an alternative to a classic Jensen C12N, but with slightly smoother and less sharp treble tones that are appropriate for taming a

bright amp. We agree. The difference between the G12C we reviewed last month and the S model is subtle. We would be happy with either, but if you are indeed interested in taking the edge off the high frequencies in your amp, the G12CS succeeds while retaining the full depth, brightness and character of the G12C. If you crave the sound of a vintage Jensen speaker but can't embrace the sharp tone of the reissues, the WGS C12C and S models are both simply exceptional. You are very likely to hear the same deep and lush, 3-D character that was completely missing in our '64 Princeton Reverb by comparison, even with a vintage Jensen C12N. Whatever mojo WGS is putting into these speakers, it's working.



WGS INVADER 50

As the name implies, the Invader 50 is one of many speakers in the WGS Invasion series designed to deliver classic 'British' tones. Like the

G12C and G12CS, we would be very happy with this speaker in just about any amplifier imaginable. While low and mid frequencies are prominent and bold, they do not overpower or obscure smooth and musical highs, clarity, presence and harmonic color. The Invader 50 also gracefully handles distortion with no grinding or jagged growling in the mid frequencies, ghost notes or cone cry. It's just a solid, fat, bold and musical speaker perfectly balanced for bright Marshall, Vox and Fender amps. It turned our '66 Deluxe Reverb into a hard 'rockin' beast, but with a midrange pot installed it's pretty much a hard rockin' beast anyway – just better with the Invader 50 for that kind of luscious 20 watt plexi-blackface sound that you'll never get from an 18 watt dual EL-84 amp. No, you won't. You could also use one Invader 50 with a G12C or G12CS in a 2x12 cabinet with spectacular results, the G12C adding extra snap for humbucking pickups.

www.wgs4.com, 270-321-1003

ToneQuest Lollartrons

What could be better than adding the vintage sound of a set of classic '60s Filtertrons to your tone stash? Well, what if you could nail that tone without actually playing a Gretsch to get it? Let's face it, the classic Gretsch models old and new just

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don't resonate with a lot of players. Like Rickenbackers, for example, they are an acquired taste for a select few. If you happen to play Gretsch guitars and you've found your signature tone with them, we offer our sincere congratulations. We have devoted plenty of space in these pages recently to Gretsch guitars, and we too love their sound, but we would find it very difficult to rely on a Gretsch as our main guitar. It's not a matter of tone, but a matter of feel... There are just too many styles of music we aren't comfortable playing on a Gretsch. The big 6120s feedback, the solidbodies just don't do much for us, and the later Chet and Tennessean guitars seem awkward and unwieldy. But we do love that classic sound for the right things...



Jason Lollar must have experienced the same feeling, because he has developed a new set of LollarTron pickups that are designed to fit a standard humbucking rout. And why not? When we received the LollarTrons for review, we pondered where to put them... In a goldtop Les Paul? Sure, but our instincts kept leading us elsewhere – to a semi-hollow or hollow body guitar, and it didn't

take long for us to eye our recently acquired ES-333 reviewed last month. We laid the LollarTrons over the humbuckers in the 333, stepped back and the answer was obvious. Perfect! Lollar's new coils looked like they absolutely belonged on the 333, and that's where they went. The results produced one of the most rewarding pickup swaps we have ever done, but first, here's Lollar on the genesis of the LollarTrons. Enjoy...

TQR: What inspired you to create a FilterTron-type pickup?

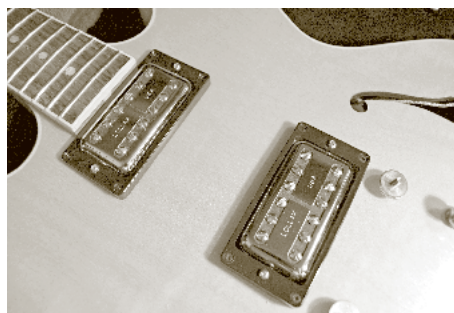
I bought a – I think it was a '64 Country Gentleman, because good luck finding a set of original Filtertrons that have been pulled from a guitar that haven't been tampered with. I tried. Anyway, you take the pad off the back of the guitar, unscrew a plastic plate and the pickups unplug with a connector on the wiring harness – easy in and out and there is no damage to the originality of the guitar.

The original '64 Filtertron pickups sounded warmer, rounder and they distorted a little faster than I remembered. I installed the originals into a Tele for comparison to our new Lollartrons because the sound of the Country Gentleman is so unique that I needed to be able to compare the new pickups with the old



ones in two of the same guitars – the same in every way that I could possibly make them. The rest was done by measuring the gauss

of the magnets, comparing other old Gretsch magnets I had, comparing the new magnets I had made, testing turn-per-layer and relating that to inductance readings. Yes, I use an inductance meter more often today, and my ears, of course, making changes using trial and error. I also had a set of the other popular, non-Gretsch Filtertrons to compare, which didn't sound much like my originals at all – very bright and almost metallic. Having talked to a few Gretsch guys since, I found there is a segment of people that feel the previously available Filtertron types were not in character with the old ones – too bright, and I didn't want to recreate what someone else had already done, anyway.



I was slammed by a couple of armchair experts on Gretsch forums who know enough to sound convincing

to people, but don't really know much at all. One said, "They are just standard humbuckers made to look like a Gretsch." Well, the truth is, the internal components and design are completely different. Someone else said, "The narrower spacing between the two rows of screws on a Gretsch are what makes the pickup sound like a Filtertron." The pole spacing on a Gretsch is 1/16" closer together between the two rows. I found the 1/16" made very little difference and the small amount it made I dealt with by turns-per-layer. Also, the bobbin size and shape is entirely different than a standard humbucker and has more to do with the resulting tone than the 1/16" difference in pole spacing. I also heard that "The ohms are too high at 4.4K – originals are 4K." My original Gretsch Filtertrons are 4.4K measured with the pickups disconnected. Measuring with the pickups installed will give you a lower reading. There are lots of reasons the resistance can vary, including the air temperature at the time the reading was taken, but more importantly, *measuring resistance as an indicator of the true sound of a pickup is futile.*

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I wasn't interested in making a Gretsch-size pickup because there just aren't that many Gretsch guitars out there, while there are a lot of standard-size humbucker guitars that can give you a viable alternative sound.

LollarTron Review



As we mentioned last month, the access to the wiring harness from the back door of the 333 is a real game changer for those of us who enjoy experimenting with pickups. We had the

LollarTrons installed in 30 minutes using the existing pickup rings, and they fit perfectly. Of no less importance is how they *look* on the 333, and we think you can agree that they actually look as if they almost belong on the Gibson. They would also be appropriate for a Telecaster routed for humbuckers, and any number of semi-hollow bodies like the ES137.

Best of all, when we hit the first chord on the bridge pickup the effect was stunning. The smooth and jangly, full treble tones of the LollarTron urged us on playing rhythm chords and finger-style transitions as we listened to the complex harmonic overtones and transparent clarity of the treble strings ringing over the top of the reedy, baritone voice of the wound strings. To put it plainly, the LollarTrons produce quite an amazing 6-string choir – and especially in the 333. The bridge clean tones attain the bell-like chime of a 12 string. Moderate distortion adds sustain but the chime remains, and as we gradually increased gain, harmonic overtones spilled over into subtle feedback that can be controlled with your hands. You've heard this jangle & grunge Gretsch tone on lots of Neil Young and CSN&Y records. Very cool.

Adding the neck pickup throws in more mids and lows, but



the loose treble presence remains with the neck pickup set just lower in volume than the bridge. *Another classic tone.*

The neck pickup is warm, smooth, and very hi-fi for a neck pickup – clear, and neither rude or overpowering in output. Although they are hum-cancelling, both LollarTrons sound more like single coils than humbuckers, just as Ray Butts intended when he was tasked with taking Gretsch beyond the DeArmond pickups of the '50s while losing the hum to keep pace with Gibson. We haven't played enough great old Gretsch electrics to draw a direct comparison between authentic Filtertrons and the Lollars, but they definitely possess more depth and rich harmonic textures than any of the Filtertrons we've played in modern Gretsch reissues. Installing them in our ES-333 resulted in one of the most rewarding surprises we have ever experienced with a simple pickup swap, but who would have thought to install Filtertrons in a Gibson thinline? Now you can. **TO**

www.lollarguitars.com, 206-463-9838

J. Rockett

Animal Overdrive



This is our third review of a J. Rockett pedal. If we weren't the first to review Rockett's overdrive, we weren't far behind, and his early pedals were distinguished by a unique array of unlabeled intensity and EQ controls that made them very versatile, and also capable of running from beneath you like a wild stallion. That's not a criticism by any means, just the truth.

There always seemed to be a 'hold on!' factor at work with his first copper-clad overdrive, and the subsequent Afterburner. Nothing timid in either, and we admired the fact that Rockett made no attempt to label any of the switches and knobs on his early effects. *Labels? We don't need no stinkin' labels...* And you didn't, really. In fact, the no-label look made a statement – 'for professionals only,' and we always got a kick out of turning someone on to a Rockett and watching them figure out for themselves what it could do. If there had been a label on a Rockett, we might have suggested just one – 'Hold On' stamped just below the on/off switch.

Phil Brown arranged for us to receive a Rockett Animal