

INSIDE

The Jeff Beck Issue!

The early years...
heroes,
bands
& gear

The
Yardbirds...
How they
shaped rock music
for decades

Breaking out
at the Fillmore
with Ronnie & Rod

Questing
into the unknown...
Deaf & Dumb at
a mega-decibel
cage match with BB&A

What's
that chord?
The enduring
influence
of Max Middleton

2010 Tour...
Our interview
with Beck's tech,
Steve Prior

The Gear...
An inside look
into Jeff Beck's
guitars, effects
and amplifiers

Tube & speaker
recommendations

19
Fargen Hot Mods,
plus our interview
with Ben Fargen

21
2010 Custom Shop
'60 Relic Stratocaster

25
Lee Jackson's
Active Gain
Boost

26
Eminence's
Alnico Blue Frame 10s

the ToneQuest

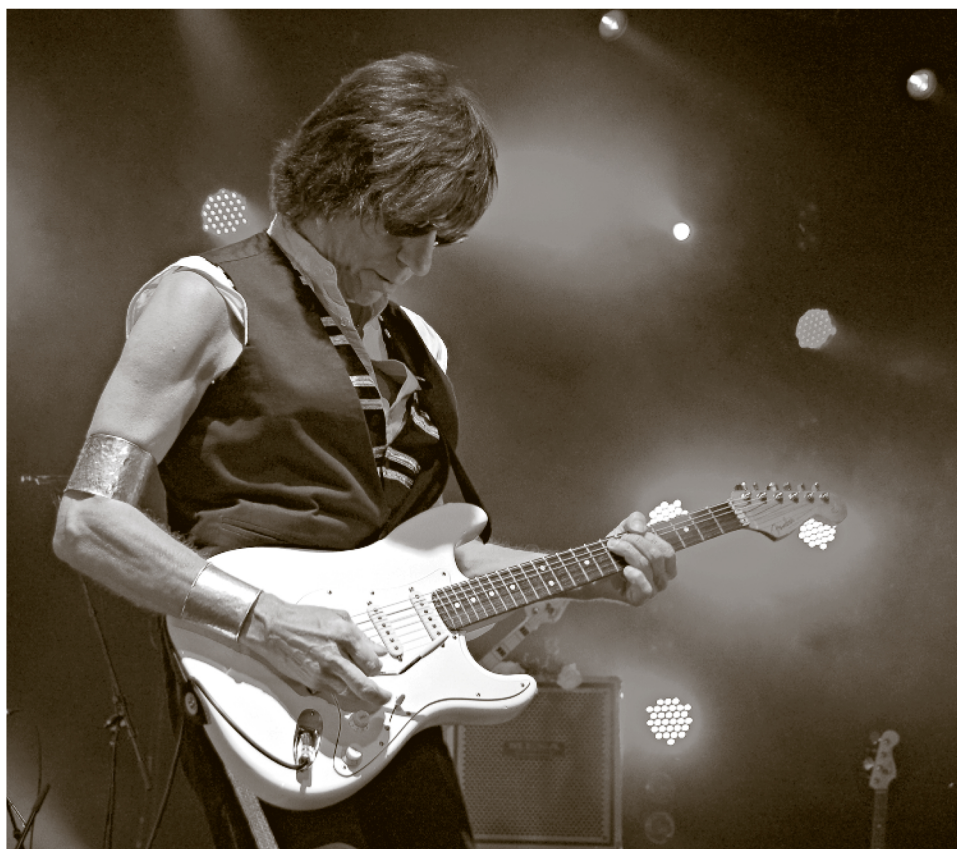
The Player's Guide to Ultimate Tone Report™

\$10.00 US, July-August 2010/VOL.11 NO.9-10

Jeff Beck

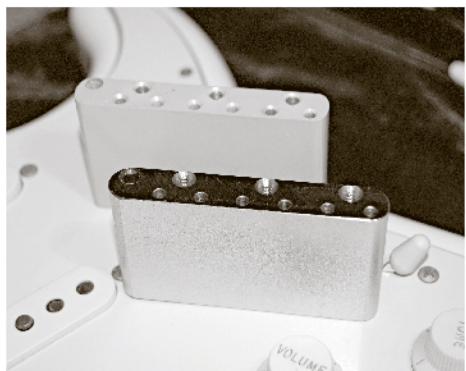
*"I don't care about the rules. In fact, if I don't break the rules
at least 10 times in every song then I'm not doing my job properly." – Jeff Beck*

Over the past four decades and change, a river of ink has been spilled by giddy music wags struggling to describe the genius of Jeff Beck. Comparisons to his peers have been useless, since it is abundantly clear that his ability to render the full range of human emotion and fantasy from a guitar is incomparable, nor does his mind linger long within the traditional framework of



rock and blues. The use of adjectives to describe the sounds Beck coaxes from a guitar is laughable, and his mischievous sense of melodic composition and timing simply cannot be adequately described in words. You're either present to experience Jeff Beck's high wire performance or not, and once consummated, nattering pillow talk seems awkwardly impotent and unseemly at best. A hearty cheer and a satisfied smile will do, as you return home, log on to Amazon and arrange to savor every crumb of Beck's music you can find, if not the music that first inspired his own inspiration, too.

www.tonequest.com



Well, few of us will ever bend a tremolo arm as Beck does, but it is nice to use one that doesn't have any wobbly play in it (unless you like the

wobble), and you'll hear the effect of the Callaham trem block with the first chord... It creates a different type of intense, resonant string vibration and range of dominant harmonic overtones due to the unique steel alloy used, and Callaham's enhanced trem blocks are made to fit virtually any model (including lefties). A few imports require a repro Callaham bridge plate, but all the details on getting the right fit the first time are clearly listed on the trem block page. We installed an enhanced trem block on our new '60 Strat and noted again how it produces a different and unique range of dominant harmonic overtones and qualities of sustain – slightly stronger with sustaining overtones present on the top three strings. Think of it as a resonance and sustain boost device for your Strat. You'll also note that Steve Prior is using cryogenically treated pots from Callaham. What's up with that? Callaham has been experimenting with cryo'd hardware, wiring harnesses and pickups for years, and we have reviewed them in the past. Like a well-made, non-stranded guitar cable (Evidence Audio), cryogenically treating components the signal passes through results in enhanced transparency and clarity, as if a veil had been lifted from your guitar. The effect is not unlike wiring a pickup straight to the input jack in the style of David Lindley. See the Callaham web site for details.[To](http://www.callahamguitars.com)

www.callahamguitars.com, 540-678-4043

www.rsguitarworks.net, 859-737-5300

www.jmrolph.com, 859-448-9463

Lee Jackson's Active Gain Pedal

Distortion is Truth

We were first turned on to Lee Jackson by Phil Brown, who is a big fan of Jackson's VL Series amps designed for Ampeg in the early '90s. Now based in Austin, Jackson's long career spans time spent on the Fender R&D team with Paul Rivera in the late '80s where he was involved in the development of the Twin II, Concert, Deluxe Reverb II and London Reverb. In 1983 Lee launched Metaltronix Amps in Los Angeles in response to the ongoing demand for his Marshall modifications, developing the Blues '59 head, Maniac distortion pedal



and rack mount guitar and bass preamps. In 1991 Jackson was asked to design amps for Ampeg in St. Louis, where he

created the powerful VL Series, and the Stealth line for Ampeg's Crate division. In 1993 he launched Lee Jackson Amplifiers, building the XLS-1000 and XLA-1000 Series, which included exact copies of the amps he had built for Steve Vai, George Lynch and Zakk Wylde. Lee continues to build custom guitar effects and amplifiers at his shop in Austin, and the first Jackson pedal we heard was the Active Gain/Boost, sent to us at Phil Brown's urging. We reviewed this pedal briefly on page 19 of the December 2004 issue, and by now surely that short review has been forgotten. But that's not why we are reprising it here...

In addition to the key strokes that are required to knit this issue together, there has also been a lot of pacing involved, and caffeine-fueled soul searching in the music room, where our



attention has been fixed on rendering tones worthy of an issue dedicated to Jeff Beck. It isn't something we take lightly. We could conveniently throw in a new pedal (we have half a dozen yet to be reviewed) just to hit the required page count and be done with

it, but we have always left such deadline-driven wank fests to others. In fact, we had hoped to also review a new boost pedal in this issue barely out of the prototype phase, until we heard it. Had to tell the builder "Thanks, but no thanks." Uncomfortable? Yes. But not nearly as much as if we had reviewed it anyway, leaving the worst bits off the page and dressing up whatever could be salvaged in a positive light. Can't do it. Won't do it. So, we systematically rammed our guitars through Blondie and what has become a sizable collection of overdrive and boost pedals, and while many of them are very, very good, Lee Jackson's Active Gain/Booster remains exceptional. First of all – the design is simple and intuitive. Two vintage Marshall-style knobs (no coincidence) for Volume and Gain, with a toggle in the middle for two different levels of clipping. For a cleaner boost like a Klon, turn the Volume all the way

-continued-



up, drop the Gain to zero with the clip switch in the middle (off) position, then slowly dial in the amount of Gain from the zero setting. The beauty of this pedal is that it will not add a midrange bump or otherwise exert

unwanted changes to your EQ and overall tone. What goes in is what comes out. The Active Gain pedal functions brilliantly as a clean boost that can make your rig sound as if your amp is set at a higher volume level, and that alone might be enough to justify acquiring it, but Jackson's box is way more than just a 'clean boost.' You can literally dial in varying levels of distortion and dynamics that range from the sweet, edgy sound of a tweed or blackface Fender rumbling on 5-7, to a moderately jacked Marshall JTM45 plexi, the more strident crunch of a smaller Marshall PA20, all the way to the more intense overdriven sound and gain of a late '60s metal panel 50 or 100 watt, right on up to a JCM800 or Silver Anniversary. Yes, you can throw a party with Freddie King, Michael Bloomfield, Roy Buchanan, Clapton (from Beano to Disraeli Gears), the Voodoo Child, Santana (with the SG), the Rev, all flavors of Jeff Beck and even the ever-slippery Audley Freed all rolled into one little box. Chops, of course, not included.



And if this weren't enough to tip the scales on versatility alone, Jackson's Active Gain really stands tall in its ability to create such a wide range of classic distortion levels endowed with extraordinarily musical clarity. This, of course, is where all gain and boost devices are not created equal. It's

pretty simple, really. If you have your rig lovingly fine-tuned and sounding smooth, rich and sweet, you still want to hear those qualities you've worked so hard to acquire when you step on a pedal. Some boost and gain effects chop off high end by pushing mids too far forward, and others create a gritty grind that just doesn't wear well over time. What's bigger than the new pedal market? The used pedal market. So should you now be teetering on the brink of succumbing to the tempta-

tion of buying still another boost pedal, well, that's the point, in't it? The Quest for tone... Lee Jackson also provided us with an update on the Active Gain pedal: "I'm also making a version with two in one – it's called the IntelliGain – same analog circuitry, and you can preset two different gain and clip settings. I have used that same setup and loved the way my Pro Junior sounded with the gain pedal. I have two Active Gain pedals on my pedalboard... Victor Johnson from Sammy Hagggar's band turned me on to using two – one on the front of the pedalboard and one at the end."

We've done our homework with due diligence and six years of comparative reflection, and Lee Jackson's Active Gain pedal absolutely rocks. Quest forth... **To**

www.leejackson.com

ToneQuest Paint It Blue

There is no shortage of legend and lore when it comes to classic gear, and for many experienced players, the Eminence Alnico blue frame 10s are legendary. Most of us first experienced them in reissue tweed Bassman or Vibro-King amps, and as you now know, two of Jeff Becks early Pro Juniors are packing them as well. We've had a number of discussions with Jeff Bakos lamenting the end of the blue frame era, and plenty of other players have reverently mentioned them with the same affection reserved for their first dog, girlfriend, or... well, you can imagine. Is this another case of an extinct product achieving exalted status merely because it is now unobtainable, or were the original 20 watt blue frames with paper bobbins really all they were cracked up to be? Such questions call for credible answers, so we first sought out former marketing manager and now Eminence CEO Chris Rose, and Shane Nicholas, Senior Product Manager for Guitar Amplifiers at Fender. Both play guitar, by the way...

Chris Rose: We've been building the Fender 10" Alnico (Spec 10446) for many, many years and continue supplying Fender with it today. As far as I can tell, it remains faithful to the original....blue basket, same cone, same magnet, paper former and 20 watts. The Alnico model we currently offer is the Legend 1028K. It is the same, except that it uses the Kapton bobbin and handles 30 watts. For a number of years we offered both models, but sales were very low on the paper bobbin model and we stopped stocking it for branded product sales. Fender is the only source now for that model.

I'm sure you are wondering how different they are sonically! Frankly, I think it would be very difficult for me to be able to pick one over the other in a blind listening test, but a more discerning ear and/or touch sensitive player may well be able to

-continued-