

and definition, even when playing with heavy distortion through an amp or assisted by a pedal. The cleaner sound of the Zero just makes for a clearer tone that we prefer, and especially when playing through our '58 Tremolux cranked on 7, the GA-40 blondie, or the Germino 55LV. When you start with a cleaner tone straight out of the guitar, it's just a better sound, period. Single notes on solos retain the presence and clarity of a great Telecaster pickup, anchored in our case by the rich mahogany tone of our Les Pauls.



The Zero neck pickup also displays the smooth compression and reedy vocal quality we always hope to hear in a rhythm humbucker – warm and woody with clarity on the lowest bass notes, smooth upper midrange, and snappy treble presence as you move up the neck on solos (imagine Dickey). In both positions, expect a transformational

experience. The output and perceived strength of the Zeros doesn't hit your amps as hard as a set of Burstbuckers, for example, but that doesn't mean they are by any means 'weak' or underpowered... Their tone is rich and full, and whatever you lose in output is more than adequate compensation for the clarity gained.

### VINTAGE RELOADED P2

RD offers a range of Vintage Reloaded sets with graduated output, beginning with the Zero set, followed by the VR P1, P2 and P3. Switching from the Zero set to the P2 humbuckers produces a big leap in output and distortion, yet the clarity of the Zero set remains – you're just hearing a more overdriven, hotter tone in both positions without a detectable loss of treble or presence. The sound of the P2s isn't our personal favorite, but for players who enjoy a more intense 'rock' sound, this set will do the job while still preserving the essential tone of your guitar rather than smothering it in gritty distortion. The VP2 impressed us as is simply a hotter, meaner version of the Zero set, and as hotter humbuckers go, you'd be challenged to find a set with better clarity and fidelity. Treble isn't rolled off, and the tone remains chimy and detailed with harmonic depth and character, which seems to be the 'trademark' sound of RD pickups overall.

*All RD pickups are available with four conductor or vintage style leads, zebra, double black or double white bobbins,*

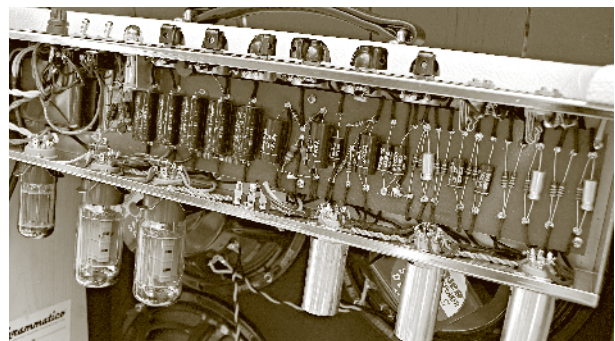
*nickel, chrome or gold plated covers. Unplated and aged covers will also be offered soon. RD also offers an unconditional satisfaction guarantee – really. See the web site for details.*

[www.rdpickups.com](http://www.rdpickups.com)

## Tonequest Grammatico Kingsville... Plush!

*It was just a year ago (TQR May 2009) that we first reviewed Austin amp builder John Grammatico's take on the narrow panel tweed Bassman – an exceptionally worthy performance amp richly endowed with a ton of tone. Since then Grammatico's obsession and obvious quality of listening compelled him to further tweak his original design with the assistance of Telecaster wizard Redd Volkaert, culminating in Grammatico having his own proprietary polyester/aluminum foil coupling capacitors made and sourcing bypass caps in Austria after evaluating virtually everything available in the USA. We asked John to describe the process and results he achieved in further tweaking his Bassman circuit...*

I explored virtually every type of capacitor currently available or ever made for guitar amps, and I have examples of them all – new and old. In my discussions with engineers involved

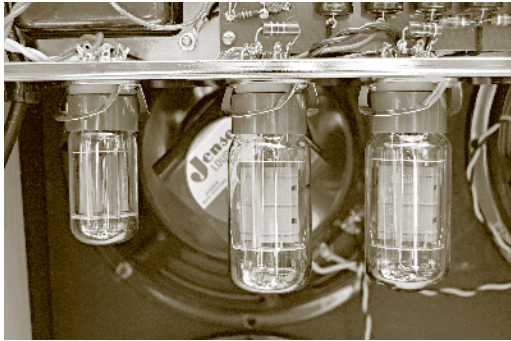


in current capacitor production and considering all the possible variables, I had caps made to my specs by six different manufacturers and of those, two sounded really special. Once I heard what these caps could do, I was able to free up the negative feedback in the circuit, which gives the amp a little more shimmer and sparkle than a vintage Bassman. Just to make the amp more versatile and give it a range more into the blackface era, I also changed some values on the cathodes and the input of the phase inverter. The original Bassman amps can have this stark directness to them, but lacking bloom and shimmer... Players that don't care for that Fender sound often like the Vox sound because those amps have all that extra shimmer and sparkle, while the old Fender amps can sound too dry... They have warmth and roundness, but the notes decay quickly without enough bloom and depth. My original

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idea for having these caps made was to use them in future models, but they sounded so much better that I felt I had to use them in the Kingsville.

**TQR:** We noticed that you are also using Winged C 6L6s, probably not by accident either...



No, not at all. They have a beautiful sweetness on the top end that most

other tubes lack, still with a tight low end and lots of mid-range complexity, and they nicely cover a wider range of sounds and styles. When I first designed the Kingsville, I think I went too far to the left, making it warm and full and round-sounding, but kind of out of the guitar frequencies. So I found a way to give it life and bite and cut while still being very musical and bell-like by testing it live with players like Redd here in Austin. You want to really feel each note, and the response from players has been great. Phil Brown used the Kingsville on his latest recording, and Jimmie Vaughan also heard about the amp from a few people in Austin... He has been playing a tweed Kingsville and just ordered another for his upcoming summer 2010 tour. The first time he played the amp he put his hands on my shoulders and said, "You've created perfection. Will you take a check?"

### Kingsville II Review



*With so many players migrating to smaller, low powered amps these days, it's easy to forget just how jaw-droppingly good a lush dual 6L6 amp can sound, and John Grammatico has indeed perfected the original*

*concept of the 4x10 Bassman in a contemporary package. Seriously. Look, we're on the receiving end of the ever-changing hot list of new products that gain altitude amongst guitar players... We receive a steady stream of calls and e-mails alerting us to the next life-changing tremor rattling Tone City, and Grammatico's Kingsville isn't yet on the list. Why? You*

*don't want to know, but you can probably guess. He's just a one-man operation with no marketing budget to speak of and he isn't posting in chat rooms in the wee hours to cultivate a cult following. For the time being, his 'fan base' simply consists of renowned pro players in and around Austin of no little distinction whose familiarity with exceptional guitar tone really isn't open to debate. And they are buying his amps, not playing them for an endorsement fee or for free.*

The bottom line on the Kingsville is this: Yes, it is inspired by the original Bassman that inspired the first JTM 45s. The difference is, this amp sounds fresh, lively and happenin' with an elegantly crafted voice that will blow your mind. Grammatico has deftly slipped in between the tweed, brown and blackface eras with his design to produce an amp that possesses the rich dynamic touch-sensitivity of the tweed Bassman, further enhanced with a richer, more open, airy and bouncing blackface tone. The Normal channel is exceptionally thick and middy without damping treble or sounding too dark, and the Bright



channel is snappy and stout – perfect for working out of the neck pickup on a Stratocaster or dialing in stellar tones with humbuckers. You can also jump both channels with a Y cord for a plush tone that can be mixed to taste. Trust us, the Kingsville is just so much smoother and toneful than

what we have become accustomed to hearing in modern replica amps. As always, it's a question of

'compared to what,' and in the realm of the vintage Bassman, the Kingsville is incomparable. Pull the back panel on the Kingsville and you'll be blown away again by the level of care and skill Grammatico devotes to building his circuit and the array of costly components, including his own proprietary caps. We wouldn't really care what was under the hood, but it's obvious that Grammatico's obsession with sourcing capacitors has paid off. Even the normally sharp Alnico Jensen P10R speakers sound warm and juicy... If our opinion isn't compelling enough, perhaps the fact that Jimmie Vaughan – one of the most accomplished Bassman players ever – cut Grammatico a check the first time he played his amp might mean something to you. It does to us. Best of all, you can score a Kingsville for \$2400 – a very fair price for a truly exceptional performance amp and a testament to the quality of John Grammatico's listening. Quest forth... **to**

[www.grammaticoamps.com](http://www.grammaticoamps.com), 512-535-3985