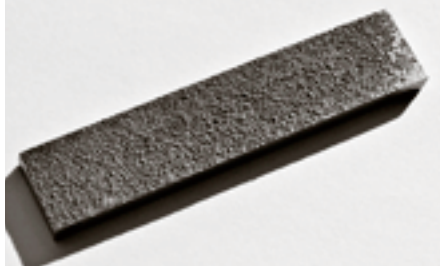


made Alnico IV magnets and 42 gauge enamel wire used in his humbucking pickups, which makes sense, since Gibson and Seth Lover used the same wire and magnets from the P90 to build PAFs. During a conversation with Lindy about his P90s, he mentioned that he likes to ‘soften’ the magnets by



gently rubbing two together, alternating the orientation of both flat surfaces and each end to very slightly demagnetize

them. He commented that many people seem to like the results, and he has had pro players request that pickups be sent with different Alnico II, IV and V magnets so they could choose which sound they liked the best. We’ll be featuring a broader discussion with Lindy on pickups soon, but for now we can tell you that his P90 set truly completed the sound of the Firebird for us. The bridge pickup seems to display more facets, as if looking through a prism rather than a flat piece of glass. There is a texture and depth to the sound that supports the dominant treble and upper midrange frequencies that also feels more responsive to pick attack.

In the neck position, the slightly underwound P90 better matches the bridge in volume when both pickups are combined, but the neck P90 alone remains clear and detailed at lower volumes, swelling to the fat and woody voice of a great old guitar turned up. And like the bridge, there just seems to be more *content* in the Fralins – an extra dimension in and around the notes played both clean and cranked. We’ll gladly give Lindy Fralin a nod for the best sounding P90s we’ve played to date – ‘vintage’ or new. **To**

www.fralinpickups.com, 804-358-2699

A Writer’s Tool

DST U84-TNT



DST founders Bob Detorre and Jeff Swanson build great amps. We’ve reviewed various models (along with Jeff’s stellar cabinet work) enough over the past ten years to expect

something uniquely appealing whenever we receive an amp for review, and the U84 is no exception. However, we will admit to being pleasantly surprised by this amp in particular. Here’s why...

The U84 is DST’s entry into the low-power, dare we say ‘bedroom’ segment of the booteek amp world – a now crowded field driven by aging boomers, the family noise police, and neighbors in urban apartment buildings and condos where the effluvia of curry, garlic, monkfish and leaky children may not be viewed as an affront to the senses, but a screaming guitar will target the owner as an undesirable reprobate to be muzzled for the good of society. We get it – two watts may not leave you feeling as if you’ve just played an encore at Buddy Guy’s Legends club, but those two watts have their place. Here’s designer Bob Detorre’s pithy description of the amp...



The U84 was designed to be a miniature version of my larger designs – Class AB push/pull, dual EL84s, solid state

rectifier, simplified tone stack and 12AX7 pre-amp and phase inverter (long tail variety). The power select is a simple passive power dump. This keeps the amp running at full power all the time so in the 2 watt mode it simply throws away 6 watts and sends 2 to the speakers. This allows the character of the amp to remain the same at lower power. The Output switch turns the negative feedback on and off for vintage tweed or more modern feel to the output tubes, while the Gain switch changes the gain at the first pre-amp stage. The pots are set up so the Gain pot controls pre-amp crunch and the Master controls output tube crunch. The idea here is to have a few features for the “tweakers” while still being simple and fun to play.

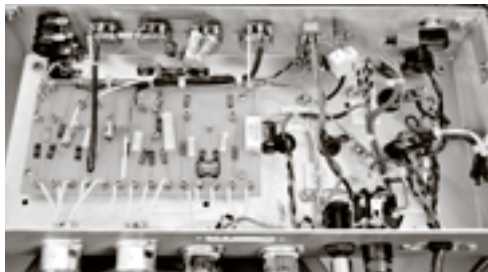
The operative phrase in Bob’s description is ‘fun to play.’ We’ve come a long way since the Pignose... It will take you



about a minute to plumb the breadth and scope of the U84’s controls, which enable variable levels of volume, gain, clean and distorted tones, plus bass and treble EQ. We plugged in the Firebird, stepped on Mr Springgy, and thirty minutes of

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liberating fun passed before we began to even think about taking notes. Yeah, that's significant. Now, we aren't going to say that the U84 shines with sparkling clean tones at all volume levels – it doesn't. You can coax some nice clean tones at low volume, but this isn't the *intention* of this amp. What you *can* do is dial up moderately busted up to intense levels of overdriven tone that actually *have* a tone, and still allow the unique character of your guitars to shine through. The reason we were so fascinated with what we were hearing with the Firebird and the U84 was simple – it sounded great – from bluesy sustain to a crunchier tone that would be perfect for writing songs that call for such sounds at relaxed rather than fatiguing volume levels. The woodiness of the Firebird endured through the U84 circuit at all settings, and at certain settings on the neck pickup you would swear you were hearing a Strat through a Marshall stack. More importantly, that's just one of many voices that can be pulled from this amp with a great guitar.



The 2 watt setting is whisper soft, but as Bob observed, the sound is exactly

the same as the 8 watt setting – just quieter. You can easily mix or emphasize preamp and output tube distortion through the Master and Gain controls, with additional control over gain via the Hi/Lo inputs and toggled preamp and output boosts. Our review amp was loaded with a 25 watt Celestion Greenback, and the tone controls enabled us to shape the tone to taste. We would happily use the U84 for writing and low volume dealing, probably selecting the 8- pound head for maximum versatility with an 8 or 16 ohm cabinet. Either way, the U84 is exceptional, available with optional speakers and covering as a 1x12 combo with 3/4 inch pine cabinet (\$1199) or head (\$999). [To](#)

www.dst-engineering.com, 978-578-0532

Adrian Legg

The Fishman Aura

Fishman Aura technology is part of a fundamental perspective shift in getting an acoustic sound loud, and works by bottling various complex EQ characteristics of body sound (as previously sampled by a specific microphone or two) and transferring them into the electronic domain.



Essentially, having led the field and established a sizeable business by developing all kinds of bugs, undersaddles, magnetics, microphones and their attendant preamps and mixers, Fishman are taking on board the many and frequent player comments that these pickups don't

reproduce an acoustic sound with an acceptable degree of accuracy. Functionally, the Aura offers us acousticati an opportunity to use electronics as a creative, additive tone tool alongside the defensive, subtractive devices we've employed in the past. Fishman's declared intent is that the Aura should be used to match its pre-tailored "Sound Image" with a guitar as similar as possible to that from which the image is sampled, and using an undersaddle that's as close as possible to the one that has been catered for in the production of the "Sound Images." Fishman get into complicated arguments over the difference between modeling and "Sound Images" – the latter is a complex EQ algorithm with some phase information, derived by sampling the sounds of particular guitars, and therefore, in their opinion, less artificial than "modeling" in that it offers a complex EQ system that will interact with the input signal. You may care to read up on Roland's COSM modeling, for



example, to get a handle on the comparative angel-to-pinhead ratios involved. Having pointed out that a guitar with characteristics that differ significantly from the characteristics embedded in the Aura might not sound too good, Fishman say that in the event of instrument substitution, "In the best cases, an acoustically neutral sounding instrument can 'put on' some of the resonant characteristics of a dissimilar Sound Image, but we can't guarantee your results."

Whatever the seeming contradictions in Fishman's presentation, the Aura is fascinating. I don't like the sound of magnetics through it – they have too much local character, fingerboard or bridge, for the Aura's internal electronics to override, but my Graph Tech piezo saddles certainly seem to benefit from it. Indeed, I have run tonally dull recorded Strat style piezo saddle-derived tracks through it from my Tascam,

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