

preamp tubes are available, while coupling capacitors are by Mallory and Audience Auricaps, along with electrolytic capacitors by JJ, F&T, Rifa, and Sprague.

To the heart of the matter at hand – the amp's sound – we used a late-'70s Ibanez Artist with Wolf-tone humbuckers, and an early-'70s Fender Stratocaster. We plugged into channel one with the Ibanez and set the tone midway.

Moving the volume control toward maximum, we were greeted with the expected increase in overdrive saturation; great vintage plexi tone, especially with the volume knob between 8 o'clock and 10 o'clock, with even breakup and fantastic note separation.

Looking to dial in a bit more "fatigue,"

we plugged into the B channel and again set the tone midway. The tone again fattened as the volume knob moved clockwise. But then, as the knob approached 8 o'clock, the BAC 18 revealed just what British tone is all about – and why the original Marshalls are so sought after: full and fat, with smooth, balanced overdrive and fabulous note separation. The notes practically jumped out of the amp! "What about harmonics?" you ask. How 'bout rich and completely in-your-face? Presence is downright addictive regardless of pickup position, and touch sensitivity is stunning.

Backing off the volume, the amp cleans up nicely. This amp doesn't have – and doesn't need – a true clean channel.

As we backed off the tone control of the

bridge pickup, we discovered definitive "woman tone." The BAC 18 doesn't produce a lot of gain, but with a good overdrive pedal, it should do so very well.

Going in, we were skeptical about how the BAC 18 would sound with the Stratocaster. But we plugged it in and were again greeted with fat and full, but with an added clarity and sparkle. Notes popped with a responsiveness we haven't heard in any amp before. The neck and middle pickups sounded best.

We found the tremolo circuit very smooth and pulsing. We couldn't slow it down to the point where some may like, but again, here the BAC 18 resembles the Marshall 1958. Besides, tremolo is *not* what this amp is all about. And in case you're wondering about volume, this is a *very loud* 18 watts! It would provide enough volume for most any situation. – **Bob Tekippe/Phil Feser**

**HANDMASTER PLUS**

The Handmaster Plus exerciser is designed to offer a convenient hand and finger workout that focuses on all 19 flexor (squeezing) and the extensor (opening) muscles of the hand in one simple, continuous motion. For more, visit handmasterplus.com.

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60-Watt Combos to Go!

Tech 21 Trademark 60 and Bronzewood 60 Guitar Amps

TECH 21 HAS LONG BEEN the purveyor of cool solidstate gear that replicates the sound of tube amps, like the famed SansAmp pedals and their wide array of preamps and amplifiers. Here are two of their combo amps, one for electric players and the other for acoustic folks. Let's fire 'em up.

Trademark 60

In a snapshot, the Trademark 60 is a 60-watt combo with two channels and one 12" speaker. That may sound like the same features on a lot of other amps, but believe me, any similarities end right there.

For example, you'll find a powerful active EQ with mid controls on each channel (in Channel 1 it's called "Punch," in Channel 2 it's "Growl"). Channel 1 also has a Bite control for brightness, a gain knob and master volume. Channel 2's control selection also has one called Weep, which adds a bit of that Class A singing tonality to your guitar.

The master section has another round of "Low" and "High" knobs to tweak the tone to fit whatever room you're in, along with Reverb and Boost. In my opinion, Boost is one of the most practical amp features of all time – I mean, how many times have you wanted to have a crunchy rhythm tone, but then a real volume boost for solos? This circuit can add up to a 9dB boost for leads. When I was a kid, I spent years trying to figure out how to do that; on this amp, you just step on the footswitch and – voila – there it is! This Boost can also include reverb if you push the Link button. Then your volume increase can also be accompanied by a new

reverb sound. Very cool.

Back-panel features include an effects loop and a SansAmp DI output for recording or playing through a PA without mics. A triple-function footswitch is included, so you can activate the effects loop, switch channels, or the Boost/Reverb functions.

As for tone, the Trademark incorporates the company's SansAmp technology into its preamp to create that "tube-like" sound. Now, many companies – no, wait a minute – every company that makes solid-state gear claims that their products "sound just like tubes, man!" Actually, most of them don't, but Tech 21 has long had a secret circuit to give their analog boards a pretty realistic tube sound. It's hard to describe, but when you crank up the gain you get some tube-like compression and interesting low and mid frequencies which further give it a valve flavor.

There are great hard-rock tones to be found, but more impressively, the softly overdriven "Stevie Ray" tones are here in abundance. Pair this amp with a good Stratocaster (and I mean a *good* one) and you'll find fabulous Texas blues tones in here. I feel confident that in a blindfold test,

a number of players would swear this is a 100 percent tube amp. It certainly sounds better than many "hybrid" amps I've tested (i.e., those with a solidstate power amp and preamp featuring one or two 12AX7 tubes).

Soo listen for yourself. The Trademark 60 is a very impressive little amp. It sounds great as it is and I'm sure it would be devastating if you added a 1x12" extension cabinet. Nice job, Tech 21 (they also make a 2x12" version as well as a smaller 1x10" combo).

Bronzewood 60 Acoustic Combo

The Bronzewood is a compact, 60-watt combo for acoustic-electric players. Right off the bat, it has a few obvious things going for it, namely a separate microphone channel (for you coffeehouse performers who sing) and a guitar channel packed with performance-grade tools to optimize your tone.

As someone who's tested most of the so-

called "acoustic amps" on the market, I was impressed with the wide array of EQ controls on the Bronzewood. For acoustic-electric guitarists who use instruments fitted with piezo pickups, this is helpful, since piezos can sound either very good or very bad, depending on what kind of preamp they're going through. Among the controls on the Guitar Channel are an active three-band EQ with semi-parametric, sweepable mids and a Sansamp tube/mic emulation circuit to help tame that nasty piezo quack. There's even a Blend knob, so you can dial in just the right amount of SansAmp and direct guitar signal. There's a Phase switch, too.

If this sounds like techo jargon to you, in simple terms, the Bronzewood gives you several knobs to tweak the tone of your guitar, so you can find the sound that suits you best. This definitely is not a one-tone amp – it has a Whitman's Sampler of acoustic tones, which is a tremendous asset to the performing guitarist.

Okay, the Bronzewood has EQ controls up the wazoo. "But," you ask,

TECH 21 TRADEMARK 60

Features	Single 12" speaker, two channels, spring reverb, SansAmp tube emulation, effects loop, three-band active EQ.
Price	\$695 (list).



“What else you got?”

Well, it's got two more essential tools for acoustic players, namely a built-in compressor and a footswitchable reverb. The adjustable compressor does a respectable



job of taming the highs and lows of the acoustic signal (ranging from 1:1 to 5:1), while the reverb is a full-length, six-spring unit that sounds nice. And to round off the guitar channel, you have a notch filter to kick the crap out of any offending feedback squawks.

Over to the Mic channel, treats include an XLR mic input, another three-band active EQ and a Reverb Mix knob to control the bal-

ance of reverb between the guitar and vocals. For microphones, Tech 21 supplies a +24 volt phantom switch to fuel a powered microphone or an another phantom-powered device. Keep in mind that most powered mics are calibrated for +48 volts, so it's possible that your specific mic won't work with this amp. Solution? Bring your mic along when you test one. On the other hand, many dynamic vocal mics don't require another power source, so perhaps it's a moot issue.

Finally, on the back of the amp is an

effects loop and a SansAmp Direct Out jack for recording or going direct into the PA. Its cabinet houses a single 12" speaker and a special high-end horn.

How does it sound? Darn good. I spent quite a bit of time looking for the sweet spot, since I had so many tonal options to choose from. But when I found the magic tone, it was quite pleasing. Another acid test for acoustic amps is “headroom,” i.e., how loud you can crank it before the sound starts breaking up. I'm happy to report that the Bronzewood got pretty dang loud before I heard any clipping. Remember, an acoustic guitar amp is in some ways like a mini-PA system, so you want as much headroom as possible.

Any-hoo, I give the Bronzewood a big thumb's up for functionality and tone. Plus it comes in a cool brown-alligator vinyl covering that adds to its allure. — **Pete Proven**

TECH 21 BRONZEWOOD 60

Features	Single 12" speaker with separate horn, spring reverb, analog compressor, effects loop, three-band active EQ on both channels
Price	\$645 (list).
Contact	Tech 21, phone (973) 777-6996, www.tech21nyc.com.

Bring It On, Pre-War D!

Martin's D-18VE threatens the domain of legendary old acoustics

THE C.F. MARTIN COMPANY has been around longer than any instrument manufacturer. It's an icon whose guitars have consistently set the standard by which production (and often custom) acoustics are judged. And if you're into *vintage* acoustics, you know that few guitars make a collector perk up like an old Martin. It's that vibe that inspired the company's D-18VE, featuring the new Fishman/Martin Ellipse Blend pickup system.

The D-18VE is built to vintage specs and boasts magnificently executed vintage-style touches in its bracing, rosette, headstock shape, pickguard, fretboard position markers, neck profile, bridge saddle, and more. The same impec-

cable workmanship is evident inside; braces are scalloped, and top bracing is forward-shifted to duplicate old-school construction methods.

The D-18VE's playability is perfect. The smaller frets are extremely comfortable to the touch, and with a nut width of 1¹¹/₁₆", this neck should suit most anybody.

And tone? Well, we certainly weren't surprised with the D-18VE's deep, woody sound, loaded with sparkle and punch. It was what we've come to expect from Martin. But what did surprise us a bit were the low-end tones, which are easily big enough to please any bluegrass player. And the midrange tones give up nothing, punching with the same authority. Acoustic guitarists often speak very highly of

the “golden era” of Martin guitars from the 1930s and early '40s. But our test D-18VE will go toe-to-toe with an old Martin dread, straight out of the box. It's an impressive display of what dread-nought tone is all about.

And after a few years of playing... well, stand by!

Combined with Martin's Thin-line Goldline Plus bridge pickup is Fishman's Ellipse Blend system, a new design that uses a condenser

MARTIN D-18VE

Features	Solid Sitka spruce top, solid mahogany back and sides, ebony fingerboard and bridge, adjustable modified V-shape mahogany neck, vintage forward scalloped X bracing, vintage-style tortoise pickguard and binding, Gotoh vintage-style butterbean tuners, aged gloss finish with aging toner on body, bone nut and bridge saddle, abalone pearl vintage style fingerboard inlays, Fishman/Martin Ellipse Blend pickup system.
Price	\$3,299 (retail).
Contact	Martin & Co., 510 Sycamore St., Nazareth PA 18064, phone (800) 633-2060, www.martinguitar.com.

