

Tweed Indeed



Either we're hallucinating, or Phil Harris has found something new that gets his juices flowing as much as a vintage classic

Although certain reissues have their place in the scheme of things, pretty much all of them are a poor man's imitation of the original. I've certainly never come across a modern update of anything, whether it be a guitar, an amplifier or an effects pedal, that has surpassed the original at its own game.

However, all that changed last December when my old friend Jesse Hoff stopped off to see me. He told me he couldn't stay long because he had to deliver an amp he'd made for Dennis Greaves

from Nine Below Zero. I was surprised to hear that, because although Jesse was (and remains) a fine repairer of amps, I'd never known him to actually build one from scratch.

He asked whether I wanted to check out his take on a late '50s Fender tweed Deluxe, so I happily plugged in... and it nearly took my head clean off my shoulders.

Before I start in with why this Lazy J amp rocked my world, I just want to make clear that apart from buying one from Jesse with my hard-

earned cash, I've got nothing to do with these amps, and I certainly won't be making a penny. Jesse's a mate, certainly, but I'm very picky when it comes to risking my reputation and recommending things to people.

The reason why the virtues of this Lazy J combo need to be looked at in this column is because it proves that my wishes can come true – namely, a new piece of equipment can be produced that truly recreates the soul of a wonderful original.

Better yet, as was the case with the Lazy J, it should sound *better* than the original. By that I mean if you've got, say, an old Gibson ES-335 that's 40 years old, the wood will have changed and any war wounds sustained through playing means it's not like it would have been on the day it was made. Ideally, if you could get all the right parts put together in the right way, a new version would be the equivalent of transforming a tired old fighter back to his prime.

The Lazy J does all this: it sounds tighter, and it has more response and zing. Tweed Deluxes are no mean amps in the first place; for me, and a lot of other people, there are four key amps – the Vox AC30, the Marshall rig, the high-powered Fender tweed Twin and the tweed Deluxe. There are lots of other great amps, of course, but if you took these four amps away, the history of music would be very different indeed.

So many famous guitarists have used them and most session players have some kind of Deluxe to call upon, so most people have heard the sound more often than they realise. I've got a '58 Fender tweed Twin which has been hired by the likes of Keith Richards and Eric Clapton. Now Keith and Eric are supposed to have several, but



California? Texas? No. The Lazy J comes from the south of England



The original Fender Deluxe's brutally simple layout -Volume, Volume, Tone - hid a high degree of control interactivity

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they're so good and so rare that neither Keith nor Eric will risk taking them out for fear of anything bad happening to them.

This makes the quality of the Lazy J even more of an achievement. Once again, I'm getting paranoid and feel the need to state that this isn't a big ad for Jesse's wares. He certainly isn't sourcing rare parts from super-secret locations. As you can see from the pictures, my combo contains a Sovtek valve and a Celestion speaker - great for the job required, but not exactly hard to get hold of.

What's special here is the attention to detail and the skill with which the ingredients have been chosen and put together - such as the

volume controls being interactive, so if you're only playing through one channel, the other one can still provide a boost. Of course you can do things quicker and cheaper - you can buy ready-made cabinets, but the Lazy J are all handmade by the man himself from blocks of wood. If you took the covering off you'd see the dovetail joints and not just simple blockboards that have been stuck together.

Now Jesse is a one-man band rather than a big company, and I don't think that this kind of quality can be achieved on a production line: when you're purchasing the materials you need to really know about wood construction, the timbre of the baffle, wiring and so on, as



Sovtek valves aren't anywhere near as hallowed as expensive NOS items, but in the right hands they can work a treat

yesteryear. With the hire company I now find myself more than ever dealing with good modern gear rather than great vintage stuff we all know and love. When I started out 25 years ago, the people I was hiring to didn't need to be told why a late '50s tweed was better than a new one: they knew. However, a young kid in a band now is much less likely to care about whether a guitar or an amp was made back when King Henry VIII was on the throne.

Regardless of what I think, they're completely entitled to that opinion. I did a hire to Hugh Harris of The Kooks a while back and sent him a bunch of top guitars. He was polite, but distinctly uninterested in the history behind them, or whether Jimi Hendrix or Jimmy Krankie had played them. He chose them

well as having a picture of how everything is going to work in relation to everything else. What you need is someone who can drive the vision forwards rather than worrying about spreadsheets or quotas.

If anyone could do something similar, like an update of a '59 Les Paul, I'd be happy for them to get in touch. I'm now on a real mission to discover new gear that compares to the best of

solely on how they worked for him - and there's nothing wrong with that at all.

The only way vintage-style gear is going to survive is if it can be used in a modern context. When I first tried Jesse's combo, I plugged in a Les Paul and played that great Eric Clapton part on *All Your Love* from the 'Beano' album. But the Lazy J would also be a blank canvas that will work for guitarists who've never heard of Clapton and will never play any kind of blues-rock (hard to believe, I know, but it's true).

I love every aspect of the history of vintage equipment, but I don't expect every guitar player to be as anorak-y as myself. I want the magic and power of these old instruments to live on, but if they can be improved upon, then so much the better.



At £150 a pop, the Celestion Blue is a recreation of the Alnico-magnet speaker used in the earliest Vox and Marshall amps