

# Radial Tonebone Classic & Hot British



by Mike Turner

Radial Engineering are a Canadian company dedicated to the pursuit of excellence in tone. Seems like such a simple statement right? Well, when you get the chance to play around with the Tonebone line of pedals you start to get the picture in terms of the lengths they are willing to go to. The specific pedals in question here are the "Hot British" and "Classic" Tonebones, and rest assured, they are among the best distortion pedals you are likely to find. Both pedals have phenomenal build quality and feature true bypass as well as a single 12AX7 tube to give the unmistakable tube signature that make these such good units. Because of the tubes these pedals do not use a battery and only run using the included 15 Volt wall wart. I tested them using a 1980 Les Paul Studio Standard with PAFs and a Tom Anderson Guitars hollow T Classic with the standard Tele pickup configuration going into either a '95 Mesa Boogie Trem-o-verb 2 x 12 combo or a Matchless DC 30 2 x 12 combo.

The "Classic" is the more reserved of the two but don't let that fool you into thinking that it lacks aggression. I'd guess that this was designed to emulate the vintage tube combo sound of a tweed Champ or Bassman. There are five pots: Level, High, Low Filter and Drive and three multi-position switches, Top End, Mid Boost and Drive Gain. The Level and Drive pots are just what you expect, kind of a preamp power amp relationship where the drive is the amount of dirt and level is the volume of the overall output. One note at this point, these things are HOT! There's a ton of gain so don't try anything too radical right off the bat. The High and Low controls are again self evident as to their function, in tech talk they are post distortion active tone controls that boost or cut 14.5dB from 12 o'clock position. High is active at 4.3 kHz and Low operates at 100 Hz. This leaves the Filter pot which sounds like a low pass filter. This lets you compensate for anything overly bright be it amp or guitar. Next up are the three multi-position switches: Top End, Mid Boost and Drive Gain. The Drive Gain control gives you the choice of three ranges of gain that the Gain pot attenuates, from a gentle grind all the way up to gobs of gain and sustain for as long as

you want! Top End tailors the highs in a very musical and intuitive way, just like you'd expect by the position labels, Bright (+6.5dB @ 10 kHz) offers a nice addition of "air" in the upper harmonics. Flat (flat ... duh!) does nothing ... what were you expecting? Dark (-6dB @ 1.8 kHz) is exactly that ... dark and a more dramatic change than the bright position. The Mid Boost switch is pretty aggressive, but in a really usable way. The greater the boost amount, the higher in the midrange the boost occurs. The 7dB setting is actually +6dB @ 390 Hz (interesting choice of name...) and the 12dB setting is +12dB @ 620 Hz the Oul setting bypasses the circuit (once again ... duh) I found that it really thickened up the single coils and made the PAFs just sing, great for a nice "vocal" kind of solo sound. One very telling thing that I heard with the Classic is that with careful adjustment it was able to retain the character and volume of the original tone. All of the original definition was kept and you could tailor just the type of distortion that you added, almost like a layer on top of your tone instead of the more typical A-B total replacement a distortion pedal usually performs. This has always marked the real attention to detail from a pedal maker.

In use the Classic is a great unit and with a street price of just \$229 US you will not be let down. I promise. The Hot British's manufacturer's suggested retail price is \$229 US as well.

The Hot British is the more 'slamming' of these two pedals and if I were to guess again, I'd have to go with the "big stack" as the inspiration for this pedal. Think modded Marshall or even Soldano and you're in the ball park here. The five pots are the same in name and function except that Contour replaces the Filter control and that the Gain control is a lot hotter, almost as though there is only the highest level of gain structure available on the Classic. The Top End and Mid Boost switches are the same but the other switch gives the Hot British its own character. The Voicing switch has a bypass position (guess what it does...), a Scooped position and a Fat position. The Scooped is a mid-cut passive filter and the Fat is a mid-boost passive filter. This is where the Contour pot comes into play by dialing in the centre fre-

quency that the filters boost or cut. The Hot British is definitely capable of more of the contemporary guitar tones, detune or bring your 7-string and get way down low! The level of "thump" is just earth shaking. Once again the definition is very impressive especially considering the level of gain we're talking about. Even if you choose to voice chords fairly wide, the Hot British won't turn them into mud. Both PAFs and single coil pickups loved the Hot British. In addition, I also feel confident saying that these will like any amp you feel like plugging them into!

Both pedals are great additions to your arsenal of distortion tones and, in all honesty, I wouldn't hesitate in recommending them.

For more product information, contact: Radial Engineering, 1638 Kebet Way, Port Coquitlam, BC V3C 5W9 (604) 942-1001, FAX (604) 942-1010, info@radialeng.com, www.radialeng.com.

Mike Turner is a Toronto-based producer based at The Pocket Studios, www.thepocketstudios.com, who is also known as previously being Our Lady Peace's guitarist.

## Manufacturer's Comments

Thanks for the great review! You are right; the Classic is designed to emulate the tone from great American amplifiers while the Hot British lends towards the overdriven English stack. I would like to point out that when you turn the volume down on the guitar, you will find that the tone cleans up like a real amp. This is critical to retaining the instrument's character and allows the players personal style to shine through. Finally, we work very hard at ensuring the pedals are quiet. Street price is around \$299 in Canada.

Peter Janis  
President - C-Tec, Radial, Tonebone,  
Primacoustic, Gefell, Zebracase