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**Tone Bone!  
The best thing  
from Canada since  
the Garnet!**

# the ToneQuest

*The Player's Guide to Ultimate Tone*

\$10.00 US, February 2004/VOL.5 NO.4

## Report™

## Joe Bonamassa

**J**oe Bonamassa is one of the greatest singer/guitarists fronting a 3-piece band that we have heard in decades. The fact that he had yet to be born when most of his heroes were at their peak simply underscores his brilliant, high-powered interpretation of rock and blues for what it is — fresh, original and utterly captivating in concept and execution. Unlike many of his peers, credit Bonamassa for having resisted the temptation to stylistically succumb to his many varied



influences. Bonamassa is nobody's wannabe — not Stevie's, Eddie's, nor any of the Kings, not Clapton's, Collins', Jimi's or Jeff's. Oh, they are all present and accounted for... you bet, but Joe Bonamassa has taken the music that chose him and made it his own, and he can rightfully claim his place as the master blues and rock guitarist of his generation. Now just 26 years-old, much of the heavy lifting had been done by the time Joe was just 16, already a veteran player who had attracted an impressive crowd of mentors and admirers like B.B. King, James Cotton, Gatemouth Brown, Eddie Van Halen, the late, great Danny Gatton, and Stephen Stills, among many others. Bonamassa's 2001 CD release titled *A New Day Yesterday* was produced by another legendary

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RADIAL ENGINEERING

# TONEBONE LES TONE BONE

This will be one of our more polite reviews, simply because the people that build the ToneBone pedals are Canadians, and Canadians are generally *exceptionally* polite human beings. I have even occasionally resorted to posing as a Canadian in certain countries where the bar conversation turned to international politics and U.S. foreign policy. You need only smile, claiming you're from "Tronto" and even the surliest drunken Dutch "peace" activist will slink off to a hash house muttering about the Dew Line, leaving you to your thoughts and a warm Jonge Genever. There is simply not much not to like about Canada, and *especially* Canadians... By the way, have you ever heard a Garnet amplifier?



Well, perhaps you've heard the buzz about the Tone Bone

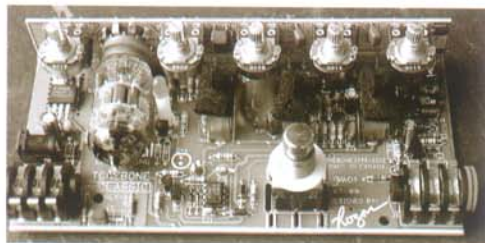
Classic and Hot British Tube Overdrive/Distortion units from Radial Engineering in British Columbia. It seems that guitarists' thirst for overdrive and distortion pedals cannot be quenched despite a deluge of highly respected pedals from Keeley, Z Vex, Analogman, Butler, Chandler, Ibanez, Boss and Fulltone, among others (we could write a book on overdrives alone), there will always be room for more — especially if there is a tube involved. Are guitarists eternally damned to pursue new stuff when it seems as if the last gizmo bought was the holy grail only two months ago? Apparently so, otherwise, the market for distortion and overdrive pedals would be contracting rather than expanding, wouldn't it? Sometimes we do wonder who is buying all of this stuff... Well, here are another couple of stellar tube overdrives for your consideration — the ToneBone Classic and Hot British. The company's slogan reads, "Tube distortion... at its best..." and that's what you get with the ToneBone — real tube distortion, just like the vaunted and grossly underappreciated Real Tube Overdrive by B.K. Butler. Isn't it funny how some players hold inexpensive gear in such low esteem? Throw a NOS RCA 12AU7 in a \$80 Real Tube and call us when you come up for air.

The Radial ToneBone distortion pedals are *not* cheap (\$299.99), nor are they built like cheap effects that sell for under \$100. The ToneBone is built to last, and other than possible tube replace-

-continued-



ment, these things look as if they could easily out-live their owners. Remember the heavy-weight design of classic '70s effects like the Mutron Phase Shifter? Apparently, so do the



chaps at Radial. Should you ever wish to replace the single

12AX7 in the ToneBone circuit, you must remove four Allen screws securing the bottom plate, and all of the hex washers for the jacks and pots. The ToneBone Classic we received from Radial was equipped with a JJ 12AX7 — a very solid choice from the former Tesla factory in the Slovak Republic.

Both of the Radial ToneBone distortion pedals excel at producing a versatile range of selectable tone and distortion levels, and this is where they really stand out from the crowd. Clean boost can be achieved by cutting the "Drive" or distortion control back to very low levels while turning the "Level" control up. The "High" and "Low" tone controls can be used as a boost or cut control from the 12 o'clock position. With our vintage Fender Deluxe Reverb and Pro Reverb amps, we felt that we needed to boost the low end on the ToneBones while leaving the highs flat. With our Marshall amps we also liked a little low end boost with just a tad added to the highs. The "high" settings on the ToneBone get bright very quickly, and high frequencies are not something you want to be too prominent with heavy distortion. Both ToneBone models have a "Mid Boost" switch that can boost mids up to 12dB — great for clean, Fender-like American amps when you want to add a little uncharacteristic midrange growl and a darker voice, and *especially* useful with Fender guitars. Additional controls include a "Top End" switch with "Dark," "Flat," and "Bright" settings, a "Drive Gain" switch with low, medium and high settings, and a "Filter" pot. We left the "Top End" switch flat and would probably leave it there. The "Drive Gain" switch boosts distortion to three preset levels,



and the low and medium settings seemed to be the most useful, although we suppose someone, somewhere would find the highest setting interesting. It's over-the-top gonzo in our world. Quoting the manufacturer, the "Filter" control "balances the high frequency ratio between the amplifier and the ToneBone." They recommend starting at the full clockwise position. We wound up leaving it at 12 o'clock and found that the filter affected harmonic content and feedback frequencies and depth more than anything else.

Neither of the ToneBone pedals are meek by any means. If you're a player looking for some clean boost to fatten up your tone but you have no use for all-out overdrive and distortion, look elsewhere. The ToneBones have not been designed to produce a wide range of subtle, variable clean boost — especially at low volume settings on an amplifier. They sound best with an amp set on at least 4-5 on the volume control. We preferred to run the "Level" control at 12 o'clock or higher on both units, which enabled us to avoid any drastic changes in the basic tone of our guitar and amp, while creating a fuller, fatter distorted tone. You've probably experienced "pedal tone" when you turn the gain or distortion up on a pedal with the level turned down and the volume on your amp set at moderate to low levels. Not good. We call it "Saturday Afternoon at Guitar Center Tone," although you also need a cheap flanger to really nail it.

The "Hot British" version of the ToneBone is just that — hotter and more intense, and while the distortion levels were certainly elevated, they also seemed a little smoother-sounding than the Classic. The Hot British also has a "Voicing" switch with "Out" (flat), "Notch," and "Fat" settings. We liked them all (think light, heavy and *way heavy* tone), and a "Contour" switch adjusts the balance of low and high frequencies in the Notch and Fat settings — more coloration and fine-tuning for those times when only *freaky* will do.

If this all sounds a bit complicated, your worries will quickly fade after about ten minutes of tinkering. You'll be pulling mucho grandé Billy F Gibbons pinch harmonics out of your axe in no time, and you won't need to use a peso for a pick to pull them off, *ahow, how, how, how...* Both ToneBones are thoroughbred, well-built rock pedals that deliver authentic tube distortion and well-designed, versatile controls for shaping lows, mids and highs as well as distortion intensity, harmonic feedback and sustain. If you like to rock, we think you'll find a permanent spot in your pedalboard or studio for these great tube distortion pedals made in Canada. The Musician's Friend online low price guarantee as of January 2004 was \$299.99 for either model. *Quest forth... To*

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