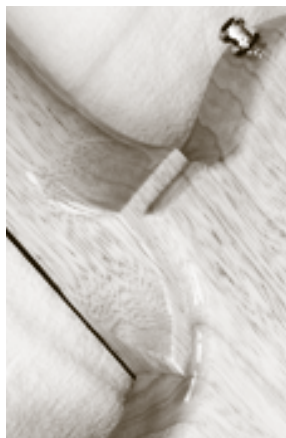




a tapped single coil tone that is very bright and snappy. With an overdriven amp, the tapped single coil bridge pickup configuration works best, but all the single coil positions produced excellent clean rhythm tones. The regular humbucker mode is still bright and extremely well-defined. Individual notes inside chords don't smear, and there is no hint of a dark or muddy honking tone. The neck pickup was also surprisingly sharp, well-defined and clear – much more so than a typical neck humbucker. But remember... as we reported in the June 06 issue on our Gibson '58 Blacktop, hardware can also influence tone, and especially top end chime and sparkle. A longer 25" scale helps, as well. How much the tailpiece, studs and bridge contributed to what we were hearing with Nik Huber's guitars we can't say (we didn't feel comfortable disassembling them and swapping out parts), but it's safe to say that the final voice of every guitar is the sum of its parts – not just the pickups. The pots in both Huber guitars displayed an exceptionally even taper that we also often find lacking in production guitars, and both instruments remained stubbornly in tune during the two weeks we kept them for review. Nik Huber's unique contoured heel is also a signature touch that makes reaching the higher frets a little less challenging, similar in concept to the tapered cutaway found on PRS guitars.



Both the Dolphin and Junior possess a unique sound that we found to be much more interesting and less sterile than some custom guitars equipped with "special design" pickups that can't be categorized as "vintage reissues" of a classic pickup design. Perhaps you too have struggled to find a place in your heart for a guitar that sounds neither like a Fender or a Gibson. Such unique sounds can either be refreshing or oddly disappointing, but we can't imagine struggling with that dilemma with regard to Nik Huber's guitars.

Our only minor quibble with the Dolphin and Orca are the name associations themselves... It's hard to imagine someone working out in a smoky Chicago blues bar or one of the clubs in Austin wielding an Orca or a Dolphin. Tumbling dice or catfish inlays might mix better with the mirrored cigarette machine and pool table décor... then again, if you failed to notice the whiskers, catfish could easily be confused with



carp, and the inlays would look as if they had been lifted from a mural in a Chinese restaurant, wouldn't they? Paul Reed Smith brilliantly mined the concept of bird inlays, and just thinking about all of this has inspired us to do a guitar festooned with roosters... Let's call it the "Cockaroo." See what we mean? With so many designs and themes that have come before, designing and building guitars today really *is* tough. No matter – inlays are optional, or you may opt for none at all, and regardless of what they are called, Nik Huber's guitars succeed as superbly playable and toneful instruments, and as uncommonly crafted, thoughtful works of art. **To**

## Stand Back! Reeves Amplification



*The original HIWATT amps designed by Dave Reeves' Hylight Electronics company first appeared in England in 1966-67. HIWATT amps*

*are known for their bullet-proof reliability, military spec, point-to-point, turret board construction supervised by Harry Joyce in the 70's, and their robust signature tone – huge, loud, and the cleanest of any classic British amp ever made. For more information on HIWATT amps and our previous review of a vintage Harry Joyce-signed DR 505 50W head, please see the May 2001 of TQR. At the time we acquired our HIWATT they were commonly available for under \$800. They are easily twice that amount now, but if authentic HIWATT tone is in your future, you still have worthy options.*

Bill Jansen began importing British-made (Music Ground) HIWATT amps re-badged as "Reeves" in 2003. Pesky distribution challenges in the U.S. ultimately motivated Jansen to create his own Reeves manufacturing company in Cincinnati, OH, where he now builds his own brand of hand-wired Reeves amps that are, with a few thoughtful exceptions, faithful in spirit and form to the original HIWATT amps built by Dave Reeves. We asked Bill to describe the development of

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his company and his handmade amps in his own words, and our review follows this interview.

**TQR:** When and how were you first exposed to electronics and guitar amplifiers specifically?

I've always had a fancy for Hi-Fi gear, guitars and guitar amps. I remember listening to *Frampton Comes Alive* at my sister's house when it was just released. She had a Marantz 2270 receiver and I was hooked on electronics from that point on. Mom, of course, never understood what all the fuss was about, but I was determined to get into electronics at some point. A few years later a friend of mine started playing guitar and I couldn't stand it – I had to start taking lessons. Mom bought me some beginner guitar that I swear had a 1" gap between the frets and the strings. The way things worked around our house was if you wanted something fancier you'd just have to work and buy it yourself. So, I worked my butt off to buy a Fender Deluxe reverb and an Ibanez Musician MC-300 in 1979. The Fender was a nice little amp, but me and my friends wanted to be Alex Lifeson, Randy Rhoads, Eddie VanHalen and Billy Gibbons, and that required something a bit more aggressive sounding, and if it was louder, even better. A friend of mine, Bob Hehemann and myself picked some of those old Crate amplifiers – the kind that look like wood crates. Well, at that point in our life all we cared about was distortion. Eventually, Bob acquired an Ampeg V-4 half stack and I sold my gear for a 1970 Mustang Mach 1. That was it until 1990 when I bought another Crate and a Japanese super Strat, and again, distortion was key. I was really off and on with the guitar until about 2000, when I started collecting guitars. Most of what I was collecting was vintage Ibanez and Greco guitars, but if you have cool guitars, you need to have some cool amplifiers, right? I began to collect some Marshall amps (Silver Anniversary 100 watt stack, 30th Anniversary stack, Slash signature) but I really wanted some cool *vintage* amps, so I picked up a 1964 JTM45 and I also bought a Kitchen-Marshall half stack from Music Ground in England. During the course of my e-mails and phone calls to Justin at Music Ground, I found out that they owned Hiwatt U.K. Justin explained how they were in litigation with Fernandes over copyright infringement here in the U.S. Basically, Fernandes owned the Hiwatt trademark in the U.S. and Japan but Hiwatt U.K. owns it everywhere else.



Hiwatt U.K. was still making hand-wired amplifiers and Fernandes wasn't offering anything but printed circuit board stuff of various designs. The problem was, Hiwatt U.K. couldn't import into the U.S. without violating Fernandes'

Hiwatt trademark. What I suggested was that Hiwatt U.K. sell me amplifiers re-badged as Reeves, (named after Dave Reeves who started Hiwatt in the 60's), to avoid any trademark issues. We officially launched Reeves Amplification in May of 2003 offering exclusively re-badged Hiwatt amplifiers from England. We started out factory direct and then went on to using a dealer network, but the dealer thing was more difficult than I estimated. It wasn't easy to find dealers that wouldn't cherry pick the line and who would pay in a timely fashion, etc. Competition is tough in the musical instrument industry, as we were finding out first-hand. A lot of end users were calling me and I was closing the sale and then they would hang up and buy from a dealer. From a strategic stand point, we were trying to keep retail prices at a reasonable level and give the dealer a fair margin. Well, I saw the writing on the wall and I knew that we would have to do one of three things: 1) Keep dealers and raise retail prices and risk less sales. 2) Go back to factory direct and lower prices because of no dealer markup. 3) Sell it all off and shut the operation down. So, in the summer of 2005 we decided to forgo our dealer network and start selling direct again. At the same time I also realized that we needed to expand our line and also better control our costs and quality control. Keep in mind that the dollar to British pound exchange rate was going in the wrong direction, thus eating right into our bottom line. From the Fall of '05 we started building all of our products in the United States to the same specs as the hand-wired Hiwatt U.K. amps, and in my opinion, better than the products we had been getting from England.

**TQR:** How did you approach expanding the models you built beyond the basic 50W and 100W original Hiwatt amps?



The decision to diversify was put

into motion at the same time we decided to go factory direct, keeping the two Classic designs that Dave Reeves put out in the 60's and 70's (Custom 50 and CP-103).

What I kept hearing on the telephone and reading in online forums was that both home and pro players wanted to get that "sweet spot" from their amplifier without all the volume. I was never satisfied with the way attenuators altered the tone of an amplifier, and we found that "Power Scaling" developed by London Power was a great solution to lowering the output volume while still keeping the tone of the amplifier intact. Power Scaling is a proprietary technology London

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Power developed to allow the maximum power of an amplifier to be dialed down to whatever level you need.

Unlike power attenuators that are placed between the amplifier and the speakers causing the amplifier to “cook itself” and seriously shorten tube life, Power Scaling allows the power output stage to be variable from full volume all the way down to bedroom levels while still achieving power tube distortion. Other advantages of Power Scaling are longer tube life at any setting less than maximum. When the Power Scale control is in the minimum position, the amplifier is now in standby, thus eliminating the need for a standby switch.

We also wanted to create some additional features that weren't present on the amplifiers being brought in from England. With this in mind, we wanted to diversify our line, but not by merely saying, “OK” here is our 30 watt, 18 watt and 6 watt versions of the Custom 50. Each of our three new models are unique in their own way.

The Custom 50 and CP-103 are faithful to the original designs that Dave Reeves developed when he operated Hiwatt (Hylight Electronics) until his passing in 1981. All of the other models we offer are designs we have developed (Custom 6, Custom 18 and the Custom 30). When you open up one of our amplifiers, you'll notice the garolite turret board layout and the meticulous “military-spec” point to point construction, just like it was done in the 60's & 70's. All of the boards are stuffed with carbon composition and metal film resistors and high quality Mallory or MOJO Dijon coupling caps. All of our transformers are made by Heyboer Transformers, and we like a lot of iron!

The Custom 50 is a classic, time-tested design based off the Hiwatt 4 input, dual-channel preamp DR-504. The transformers are a vital part of the sonic characteristic of any amplifier, and we sent Heyboer Transformers original, vintage Partridge transformers to be reverse engineered. Like the original Hiwatts, the Custom 50 is not a high-gain crunch monster – it shines in the articulate, high-headroom category and it's a natural for players who use pedals.

The CP-103 is a re-make of the model that Dave Reeves built for Pete Townshend in the glory days of The Who. The CP-103 has the same power amp section as a Custom 50 or Custom 100. What is unique about this amplifier is that it has four preamp channels, Master Volume, Bass and Treble. The four preamp channels are not internally jumpered, so we developed a special “Y-adaptor” (one female input to four

male output jacks) that we include with the amplifier. When you plug into the Y-adaptor you are able to contour each volume control to yield some great classic Hiwatt tones and a range of overdriven flavors. As with the Custom 50, the CP comes into its own when the master volume control is pushed, bringing the EL-34s to life.



The Custom 6 (only available in a head) is a basic single ended amplifier featuring a single 12AX7

and EL-84. Controls are Treble, Middle, Bass and Volume. On the back are speaker jacks for 4,8, and 16 ohms. The design works well for home, studio and small club venues. The tone of the amplifier is very Hiwatt-ish in nature and as you keep twisting the volume control to the right you'll start to get some very nice power tube breakup with out peeling paint off the walls.

The Custom 18 (head or combo) is very unique to the rest of the line in that it does some things people might not expect. It is *not* another clone of a Marshall or Vox as readers might assume when they see “Custom 18.” I really think of this amp as a melting pot of different ideas and tones we've experienced. The output transformer is wound to very similar specs as our Custom 50, and the tone stack has some very Fender-like values, while the preamp is more Marshall. We also Power Scaled this amp and added some features like a three-way bright/mid-boost toggle switch and an additional gain boost toggle. The Custom 18 really has much more overdrive and gain capabilities than our other models, and the Power Scale feature preserves that power tube saturation at lower volumes.

The Custom 30 (head or combo) was developed in conjunction with Mark Stephenson. The goal of this amp was to preserve the Hiwatt chime, add a gain control, have footswitchable reverb and lead boost, and Power Scaling. In order to accomplish this we started out with the transformers, wound to



the same specs as our Partridge Custom 50 clones. One big departure from the classic designs, such as the Custom 50,

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is that this amp is cathode biased and uses KT-66 power tubes. We are also experimenting with using dissimilar power tubes like a KT-66 and a KT-77, but the jury is still out. Part of the reason for the cathode bias is that this amp needed to sound “fat” and “warm” and we felt that cathode bias worked best. As with the rest of our amps, we have Treble, Mid, and Bass controls – I’m not a fan of a single tone control. Additionally, there is a high frequency Cut knob at the output stage.

The Custom 30 was designed as a solution for the player that wants to be able to play a dynamic, touch sensitive amp that kicks out the grind when the gain is turned up and cleans up nicely when needed.

**TQR:** Can you summarize some of the unique things you do as a builder?

Little things that we don’t advertise – maybe we should – is that we’ll install old stock preamp tubes in some of the more critical spots, such as V1, V2 or for the phase inverter, without charging any more money. All of our head cabinets from the Custom 18 on up have venting on the back *and* top to help lower internal temperatures. On the Custom 50 and CP-103 we use an aluminum heat shield to keep the filter caps from getting too much heat from the power tubes. We also use aluminum tape underneath our amplifiers to help insulate them from extraneous interference. One area that I am beginning to explore in more depth is speaker wire. My background is from the Hi-Fi side of things and I realize how different wire can influence sound. But I haven’t done enough experimenting to say that I feel the same about guitar cabinet wiring.



Aside from the amps, cabinets, components, etc., the one thing that I pride myself on is the personal touch. You can reach me either

by phone or email and get an immediate response. Since we don’t have a dealer network, we want to make it easy and hassle free as possible for someone to buy our gear – *and return it* if it doesn’t meet their expectations.

**TQR:** What was the process involved in determining the kinds of speakers you would use in your amps? Original Fanes true to the vintage Hiwatts weren’t an option.

We followed a different path in the speaker department. Remember, we were doing the “Hiwatt thing” and an important part of the formula for the Hiwatt tone *was* the Fane speakers they used back in the day. We were initially using



current production Fane speakers, but they just don’t sound like the old ones. I talked to the people at Fane and gave them the part number for the speaker that was used by Hiwatt back in the ‘70s, but they simply didn’t have any interest

in or knowledge of this speaker. Apparently, Fane must have changed ownership through the years and perhaps a fire had destroyed all the records pertaining to the old formula. Information and tooling from that vintage Fane speaker didn’t exist, but I didn’t let this prevent me from trying to get a speaker that replicates the vintage Fane sound. I spoke with the folks at Eminence and sent them an old Fane speaker with the idea of trying to get something prototyped. It took a few tries, but we feel we’ve accurately replicated the vintage cast frame Fane speaker that Hiwatt used in their cabinets. We’ve designated our speaker “Vintage Purple” since the old Fane speaker had a purple label on the back of the magnet.

**TQR:** What brands of tubes do you ship in your amps?

I’m constantly searching for the “next best thing” in tubes, and it’s almost an obsession. Tubes are such an important variable in an amplifier and I’m always trying to eek out every last ounce of tone I can. Our decision on a tube is dependent on the particular amp at hand. We’ve been using some old stock Sylvania, Raytheon, RCA and current production JJ and EH 12AX7 tubes. As far as power tubes go, we have been using JJ EL-84’s and Chinese KT-66 tubes exclusively in our Custom 6, 18 and 30 models. On the other hand, we’ve been using JJ, Mullard re-issue, and Winged C EL-34’s in our classic models.

The thought process on what tubes we use is based on tone and reliability. For instance, the JJ EL-84 and Chinese KT-66 power tubes have been flawless. I can’t say enough good



JJ EL-84

things about the JJ EL-84. Regarding the Chinese KT-66...well, we tried some other Russian KT-66’s and had numerous failures, and we also felt that the Chinese tube was a truer representation of the vintage GEC. Preamp tubes...hell, you can make yourself crazy testing different types of preamp tubes. I’ve really taken a liking to old Sylvania and Raytheon tubes because they sound better than new production tubes, and they’re almost always balanced, so I’ll use them in V1 or V2 and sometimes in the phase inverter slot – it just depends on what I have on hand. Otherwise, I’ll use JJ or EH.

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Bill Jansen

Every amplifier is burned in before it comes off the bench by my tech, and then again by me, usually over a 24 hour period. We do this for a couple of reasons – first, to make sure that there are not any bugs when the

amplifier arrives and secondly, I believe that there is a “break-in” period for an amp to sound its best.

**TQR:** What’s ahead? What do you want to accomplish in the future?

We are working on a Custom 50 amplifier with Power Scaling and some other cool features, but the prototype is not complete and there is no timetable. We are bouncing around the idea of a 200 watt bass amp that’s on the back burner. Primarily, we want to focus on bringing more awareness to Reeves Amplification in the market so that when a player is considering a new amplifier, they also think of Reeves. **To**

[www.reevesamps.com](http://www.reevesamps.com), 513-451-1071

## REVIEW Living the Hi Life

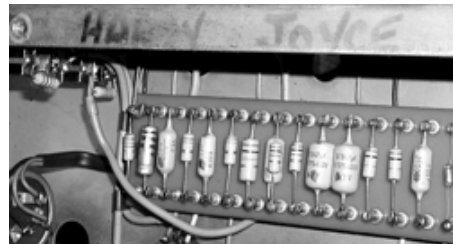


We’ve often thought about how valuable it would be to have access to a true Temple of

Tone where all the greatest rare amps and guitars of the past could be played and considered for all their attributes and shortcomings in real time, rented by the hour. If you have never played or owned a vintage Hylight Electronics HIWATT, it’s not too late... the 100W DR105 or 50W DR505 heads can be found for around \$1600 in original condition, but you’ll need to be patient – they are rare and becoming increasingly scarce.

Here’s what you need to know about HIWATTS: The only vintage HIWATT worth owning is a Hylight Electronics model built from the late 60’s throughout the 70’s. The 100W DR105 is insanely loud and stays clean to ‘10,’ making it more of a collector’s piece than an amp that most players

could ever consider playing on stage or at home without an attenuator. The 50W DR505 is a more forgiving appliance, but it too will remain clean to ‘10.’ Both amps are incredibly pedal-friendly, and we swear when you see the meticulous point-to-point construction inside you’ll be tempted to leave the chassis out of the cabinet, right next to your drool cup. The voice of a vintage HIWATT is brilliant, articulate, and endowed with indecent gobs of sparkling clear, white-hot gushers of melted wooze. HIWATTS are entirely unique amongst all the British classics, and while they too are a bit of a one trick pony, it’s one hell of a fine ride. Much the same can be said for the Reeves Custom 50.



The dual EL34 Reeves Custom 50 we received for review was a slightly crisper-sounding,

dead-nuts ringer for our vintage HIWATT DR505, and while we have never heard or owned an original HIWATT cabinet loaded with vintage Fane speakers, the Eminence-made Vintage Purple speakers roar with an aggressive voice unlike any other current production speakers we have heard – kinda like a vintage Altec 417, perhaps. Like the original, the Reeves Custom 50 is the ultimate pedal amp. It’s loud, clean, and the tone controls work much like our old HIWATT – set them at 12 o’clock and go. The Master Volume enables you to play at moderate decibel levels without losing the dynamic punch and presence of the amp, and we’re absolutely certain that a big part of the success of the Reeves lies with the big-ass transformers cloned from original Partridge trannies. Like the original HIWATTS, the Reeves 50 is also happy with all types of guitar pickups. Higher settings on the Master Volume and Volume controls will push the amp to compress a bit more, but true to the original HIWATT sound, the notes remain clean and richly penetrating. The considerable top-end capabilities of the Reeves can be dialed back for brighter single coils and boosted for darker humbuckers. We would pretty much live in the Normal Channel, using the Brilliant channel more as an effect – it is *very* brilliant, bright and chimey. The



Custom 50 is available as a head with 4, 8 and 16 ohm selectable speaker outputs, or a 1x12 combo. The Reeves 2x12 closed back cabinet we received for review is loaded with two Vintage Purple speakers and the build quality and finish detail of the cabinet was flawless. Best

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of all, the Reeves Custom 50 head costs no more than an unmodified, 35 year-old HIWATT. What's not to like? *Nothing.*



The dual KT-66 Custom 30 is a tweaked, lower-powered amp available as a head, 1x12 or 2x12 combo that is designed to offer enhanced versatility in a friendly 30W package. The Low input predictably produces less gain for super-clean rhythms

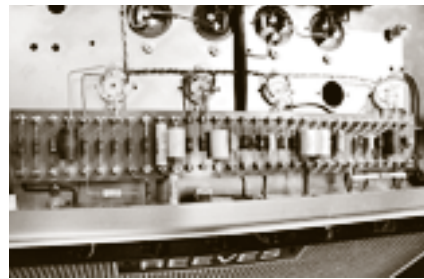
and soloing, while the High input enables far more gain and distortion than a vintage HIWATT was designed to produce, thereby eliminating the sole complaint that many players have voiced about vintage Hylight amps. The Power Scaling master volume control succeeds in providing very transparent and effective power and volume reduction that is void of the telltale audible shortcomings found in most power attenuators that make amplifiers sound progressively weak, thin and fizzy as attenuation levels are increased to reduce volume. Power Scaling actually enables you to preserve variable levels of distortion and breakup while lowering volume. It's a nice trick, and we invite you to read more about Power Scaling at <http://stephensonamps.com/fatpowerscale.htm>.

In the 1x12 Custom 30 combo the Vintage Purple speaker sounded *really* chimey, with superb low and top end definition while slightly scooped in the mids with the EQ controls set at 12 o'clock. The KT-66's thicken nicely with the Gain at 1 o'clock and Volume at 12 o'clock, and the reverb is neither too splashy or ultra-sensitive, politely hanging behind the notes. The Custom 30 reverb can't really be pushed into big surf tones – a trait that seems to suit the overall character of this amp much more than a typical Fender reverb circuit would. Low end gets a little loose with the Gain in extreme settings past 2 o'clock, causing individual notes to smear, but below that setting, the Gain control progressively thickens the tone while maintaining the signature clarity and chime of an old HIWATT. Unlike a vintage HIWATT, however, the Custom 30 is equipped with a reverb and boost footswitch. The boost circuit produces intense levels of variable distortion that can't be coaxed from a vintage HIWATT at any volume, and this is a feature that most players will appreciate. The Cut control diminishes high frequencies as it is rotated clockwise, much like an AC30. The Midrange control thick-



ens and fattens the tone dramatically, while increasing the Bass reveals the

ability of the Vintage Purple speaker to handle low frequencies without faltering an inch. All the tone controls are interactive to some extent; changing bass, treble or midrange settings alters the overall tone of the amp by degrees. But like the Custom 50, you could easily set all of the controls at 12 o'clock on the Custom 30 and the amp would sound nicely dialed in with most of your guitars. We never really felt the need to spend much time "correcting" EQ, Gain and Volume levels. Our sole complaint with the Custom 30 is that it's impossible to read the front control panel while standing in front of the amp when it's on the floor. If you need to see how each control knob is labeled, you must either bend over, or set the amp up close to eye level. The Custom 30 1x12 is compact, but no lightweight due to the big iron fashioned after the British Partridge transformers.



In addition to building a variety of hand-wired HIWATT-inspired amps, Reeves sells direct, which enables potential buyers to deal

directly with Bill Jansen when selecting an amp. Reeves also provides a 10-day evaluation policy from the date of delivery in which an amplifier can be returned in unused condition for a refund, less shipping charges. We love that. **To**

## Doug's Tubes

For amp heads and tone freaks, nothing can be more valuable than a great tube connection. We've steered you to Mike Kropotkin at KCA NOS Tubes for new old stock tubes, and Mike is working on an update on the state of NOS that will soon appear in a future issue. For current production tubes, we can thank Peter Stroud for introducing us to Doug Preston, founder of Doug's Tubes.

While the overall quality and selection of new tubes for guitar amps has steadily improved, working with a supplier who carefully screens new tubes for reliable operation, consistency and microphonics is invaluable. Experienced tube retailers like Doug who offer personal service are also willing to consult with you on the choice of tubes you buy. By monitoring quality on an ongoing basis, their customers are insulated from the aggravation of buying "identical" tubes that prove to be anything but. We asked Doug to update us on his favorite current production tubes and he delivered.

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