

# Shadoogie Wonderland

**Price: £469** **Sessionette AceTone:** A hand-modified production version of 'the British Boogie', aimed squarely at fans of Hank and The Shads...

AS WE'VE SAID MANY times before, the majority of any guitarist's signature tone comes from the fingers and is only coloured by the equipment they use.

One of the most sought-after tones is that of Hank Marvin and, if the number of calls received by the *Guitarist* office is anything to go by, a great many of you are still to find just the right set-up.

Enter Award-Session's Stuart Ward. He's taken the standard Sessionette 75 combo and hand-modified its innards in an attempt to make it sound like that classic Marvin tone. But, instead of attempting to mimic the tone of a Vox AC30 or even a Matchless DC30, this AceTone is designed to reproduce exactly the guitar sounds heard on Shadows' recordings.

## Foot tapper

"We took a standard amp and hand-modified it to come up with the sounds you hear on the records," says Stuart, "not to mimic the the Vox AC30.

## Roger Newell plays Dawnbreaker...

FOR THE RECORDING OF THE demo of the AceTone, Roger used his Japanese Fender Hank Marvin Strat loaded with Custom Shop Relic single coils. The Strat was fitted with an Easy-Mute tremolo arm as currently favoured by Hank Marvin.

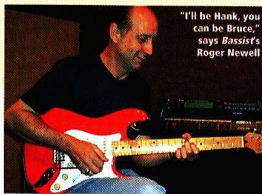
We used the AceTone's recording

"I noticed that there's a real resurgence of interest in 60s music, and that of Hank and The Shadows in particular. I thought I could satisfy needs of older guys, like myself, who like that music but don't like or can't afford Voxes.

"It's not meant to suit everybody but it's aimed at those guys. It's a hand-built, hand-modified amp with a distinct tone in mind."

*Guitarist* has reviewed the Sessionette 75 in the past, and the features remain the same here; two solid-state channels punching 100

output, which also features Sessionette's cab simulation, and used a selection of patches from an Alesis Quadverb 2, modded by Echos From The Past.



"I'll be Hank, you can be Bruce," says *Ensign's* Roger Newell

watts through a 12-inch Celestion G12T-100. The excellent Accent switches are still in place, although there are differences in the characteristics of the channels.

"Clean channel does the same as an AC30TB does," Stuart explains. "When you turn the bass up full, the last ten percent of travel sucks out all the mid, which gives the classic 60s tone. "The overdrive channel isn't as dirty as before, and is more able to be set up as a clean channel. This is great for a Shadows boogie area tone - it's more Fendery."

## The rumble

In order to evaluate the authenticity of the sound, I naturally used the appropriate gear; a re-issue Fender Statocaster played through an Alesis Q2 with the Echoes From The Past system to provide the essential delays. Using the guide provided for the echo settings and a moderate tweaking of the tone controls; those distinctive sounds came thick and fast. The authentic quality is immediately noticeable and

## Spec check

**SESSIONETTE ACETONE**  
**PRICE:** £469 **ORIGIN:** England  
**POWER:** 100W **FEATURES:** Two channels, FX loop, reverb, bright switch, Drive and PAFtone Accent switches  
**SPEAKER:** Celestion G12T-100  
**COVER:** No **FOOTSWITCH:** One-way F/S included  
**CONTACT:** Radius International, Box 3, Basingstoke RG24 9QA Tel: 01256 477222

actually comes as a bit of a shock. What's more, it doesn't change character when you crank up the volume. What is apparent is that slightly distorted edge; a noticeable factor of those early Abbey Road sessions.

If further proof were needed, just play along to a Shadows track and this combination will blend in so effectively that the lead guitar all but disappears. So for authenticity of sound this Session gets the thumbs up. Incidentally, the Alesis Q2 is sadly no longer in production, but Echoes From The Past are now using the replacement Q20 as their base unit.

## Oh boy...

As long as you have an interest in The Shadows, then this is the amp for you - no question. It's cheaper and more portable than a Vox AC30, and would be perfect for bedroom use too.

Whether your technique is up to Hank's is another question, but the AceTone is one step closer to that tonal Holy Grail.

**Simon Bradley**

**ACETONE**

BUILD QUALITY ●●●●

PLAYABILITY ●●●●

SOUND ●●●●

VALUE FOR MONEY ●●●●

VERDICT ●●●●

**WE LIKED** The accuracy and consistency of the tone.

**WE DIDN'T LIKE** Resonant to Shadobuzz, but not too bad.



If you're looking for that Marvin tone without expense...

# Brit award

**Price: £469** **Award-Session Retrotone Hi Flex 140** Are transistors finally beating valves at their own game? The return of the 'British Boogie' puts another nail in the lid...

KNOWN TO EVERYONE IN the industry as 'The Session Man', Stewart Ward's solid-state designs have transformed many questioning minds in the long running valves vs transistors debate. The original Sessionette 75 was a huge success, and there was a time when it seemed like everyone was using them. Today, after a nine year break from the limelight the Sessionette is back in production. However, this isn't the standard model; the Retrotone HiFlex 140 is a special-order version that was originally designed for Jerry Donahue, with a different overdrive and EQ and a much beefier power stage driving an inviting choice of Celestion or Eminence loudspeakers.

## Build quality

Compact and clean lines give this amp a neat professional look and up close the construction is very tidy. The high-density chipboard cabinet is nicely covered and the plain black grille cloth is very much to my liking, although there is a little too much 'give' in the material. As for the chassis, it is the

usual open-ended tray, but much heavier than most amps of this type. Inside the circuitry is spread over three PCBs - one for the preamp and front panel knobs, one for the rear panel sockets, and a board for the power stage, which is heatsinked directly to the chassis. All the connecting wires are hand soldered for maximum reliability, and a large toroidal mains transformer keeps a radiated hum to a minimum.

## Features

The Retrotone's front panel has numerous components. Working from left to right we start with channel A, which has a gain knob followed by two 'accent' push switches - Crunch/Heavy which affect the amount of distortion available, while the second button brings Stewart's 'PAFtone' humbucker emulation circuit into play. This changes the overall voicing, pushing the midrange to the fore, but

## The rivals

- H & K Tour Reverb **£359**
- Tech21 Trademark 60 **£499**
- Peavey Revolution Transtube **£399**
- Crate GX120 **£399**

sustaining a sweet top end. A conventional treble mid and bass tone stack bring us to Channel A's master volume, and then it's over to channel B, which has treble and bass tone controls, a volume knob and a bright switch which is

ostensibly the same as a regular Sessionette 75, but the voicing and EQ have been given a very serious tweaking. On the far right are two

masters - for overall volume and the amps spring reverb. At the rear there's provision for two extension cabs, a series FX loop, and a power amp input as well as a very handy speaker emulated recording output.

## Sound

The Retrotone packs massive tonal flexibility. Channel B's deceptively simple EQ goes from plummy jazz to crystalline country with ease, and higher volume settings deliver a really satisfying Vox-like 'cranked-up' crunch. Channel A's overdrive has more than enough gain to cope with anything, from mildly driven blues to singing Boogie-like sustain, all delivered with authority, even at big volume levels. The PAF tone effect works well, adding punch to the weediest single coil pickups, and the tone controls are extremely powerful; a millimetre or two of travel can make an audible difference, so it's worth experimenting. Almost any

## Spec check

**AWARD-SESSION RETROTONE HIFLEX 140**  
**PRICE:** £469 **ORIGIN:** UK  
**CABINET:** High density chipboard **DIMENSIONS:** 530w x 470h x 250d **WEIGHT:** 20kg  
**OUTPUT:** 100watts RMS (capable of 140watts peak)  
**LOUDSPEAKER:** Celestion G12T100 or Eminence Legend  
**TYPE:** All solid state  
**FEATURES:** Twin channels with separate EQ, switched drive levels and 'PAFtone' humbucker emulation on channel A, bright switch on channel B, 'G12T' loudspeaker emulation recording output, series FX loop with -20db level (okay for pedals)  
**REVERB:** Accutronics 3 spring **FOOTSWITCHING:** Yes, channels only **COVER:** No  
**WARRANTY:** Three years (limited RTB) **CONTACT:** Radius International Ltd, Box 3, Basingstoke, RG24 9QA **TEL:** 01256 477222 **E-MAIL:** sales@radius-intl.demon.co.uk

sound you can think of can be dialled in with practice, and the manual gives sample settings.

## Value and verdict

Any guitarist playing '60s or '70s covers should give this one a go. The Retrotone has power and delivers all the right sounds. It's not that cheap when compared to some tranny amps out there, but bear in mind this is probably the only solid-state 'boutique' amp in the world. Many tranny amps promise a sound that can compete with valves, but only a few deliver, and this is one of them. Plug in, play, and enjoy.

**Nick Guppy**

**HI FLEX 140**

BUILD QUALITY ●●●●

FEATURES ●●●●

SOUND ●●●●

VALUE FOR MONEY ●●●●

VERDICT ●●●●

**WE LIKED** Great range of tones and features, compact and loud too.

**WE DIDN'T LIKE** A bit on the pricey side, and the front panel graphics could be clearer.



**Both still in production**