



AMPTWEAKER TIGHTDRIVE

In the spirit of his namesake, electronic product designer James Brown has been injecting soul into various guitar amplifiers since 1986. Starting at Peavey, he helped create the respected Classic, DeltaBlues, and TransTube lines, was the lead engineer for the original 5150, and worked with Joe Satriani to develop Satch's signature amplifier. Currently Chief Engineer for Kustom, he is responsible for the '36 Coupe and '72 Coupe amplifiers.

As a side venture, Brown has started Amptweaker, a company that employs "crowd sourcing" to help design products. To this end, the website encourages players to submit their own ideas for pedals or amps. The initial result is the

TightDrive gain pedal (\$180 direct), tested here with S-type Fernandes and Les Paul Studio guitars, through my Egnater Rebel 30 and Orange Tiny Terror amps.

The glut of overdrive/distortion pedals on the market makes it hard to imagine anything truly new coming down the pike, but the TightDrive manages to come up with a few fresh twists. The rock-solid housing incorporates a battery switch so you don't have to unplug the cable between sets to preserve battery life, a roll bar to protect the already sturdy knobs, and a magnetically held, easy access battery drawer. Requests for an overdrive/booster pedal that can deliver tighter low-end led to the pedal's Tight control, which adjusts the amp's attack and provides varying degrees of sag—from soft and pillowy to hardly any. The control was perfectly voiced, and at no setting did the sound descend into mushi-

ness or become overly taut. Surprisingly, the TightDrive's Volume control ranges from below bypass level to barely enough push to overdrive the amp input—so it will work as a boost, but only if you set the Gain knob fairly high. Note that the TightDrive can be used with 12- to 18-volt power supplies, which, according to Brown, enhances its ability to deliver cleaner and more dynamic tones. The Tone control provides plenty of bite at one end, with a subtler but still substantial high-end roll off at the other.

Brown tells us that player requests for multi-effects or "combo" pedals led to the idea of adding an onboard effects loop. Bypassing the TightDrive bypasses whatever pedal you have in the loop, while the Pre/Post button underneath the pedal let me move an outboard effect in front of, or behind, the TightDrive's gain section. I found that putting a Guyatone Micro Delay after the gain stage let me kick in a dedicated ambience along with my solo setting, which sounded cool.

The TightDrive provides a wide range of dynamic, natural sounding gain—from subtle drive to singing sustain—in all ranges of tightness, from loose to taut. The overall response is edgier than that of Tube Screamer-style overdrives, but it's not harsh, and the TightDrive also sounds fat yet articulate whether driven by single-coils or humbuckers. Proving that with some help from the public you really can teach an old effect some new tricks, the TightDrive is a welcome offering in the crowded distortion pedal market.

—Michael Ross

KUDOS Natural sounding overdrive textures. Effective Tight control.

CONCERNS Could use more level increase in the clean boost mode.

CONTACT Amptweaker; amptweaker.com

See DigiTech's Matt Culler demo the JamMan Solo at GP headquarters.



Find out more about the CryBaby JC95 wah.



Watch Electro-Harmonix' in-house demo of the Ring Thing.



Sample some sound clips of the Odelya Overdrive.



Get these links and more at www.guitarplayer.com/september2010