

AMPTWEAKER TIGHTDRIVE JR

REVIEW BY **YOEL KREISLER**
STREET PRICE **\$159.00**



James Brown is no stranger to amplifiers, working with Peavey and Kustom for a good number of years before starting his own company, Amptweaker. Perhaps one of his greatest claims to fame is being the lead engineer on the hallowed Peavey 5150, a legendary amp most famously used by Eddie Van Halen, with whom Mr. Brown worked closely to design.

With a passion for gain and experience that almost nobody in the industry can match, James Brown has taken what he learned from Peavey and Kustom, while applying a unique blend of

his own knowledge and the requests of his customers to create truly unique musical tools.

The TightDrive Jr. is one of his latest designs, which was built with the space-conscious guitar player in mind. I had the pleasure of reviewing the TightDrive Pro a few months back, and many if not all of the best things about the TightDrive Pro were migrated and even improved upon in the Tight Drive Jr. It's a refreshing design and take on a classic model, with bulletproof reliability and tone that rivals even the most expensive boutique overdrives.

For those of you worried that Mr. Brown abandoned his aesthetic while aiming for the pedalboard real estate-centric market, think again. Using non-standard and quite beautiful enclosures, he miniaturized what made the larger Pro series so great in terms of form, while keeping the essential look of his pedals intact. The classic slanted front, roller bar, and knurled knobs are still here, just shrunk down for the folks who work with tighter spaces. It feels like a solid piece of equipment, and closer resembles a piece of military technology, not a guitar pedal.

On the front we have standard overdrive controls, with Volume, Tone, and Gain. Right under that, there are some voicing and response switches, which help tailor the tone to different playing styles and preferences, which were migrated over from the TightDrive Pro. The EQ has either a Plexi-style EQ curve, or a "smooth" EQ curve, which rolls off the highs and brings forth the warmer lower mids. The stock setting is somewhat of a happy medium between the two, which balances the highs and brings out the lows nicely. The second switch alters the response, with "Fat" adding low mid grunt and "Tight" reeling in the lows and highs for a more mid-focused tone. Again, the stock position on this switch more or less lets the pedal do its own thing without the Tight controls in place.

The TightDrive Jr. is very much based around a Marshall sound. I found everything from 18-watt Bluesbreaker and JTM-45 to full on JCM 800 tones in

here. It felt and responded like a good amp, and surprised me more than once with how accurate and impressive it sounded when compared to tube based pedals or even other tube amps. As soon as I turned it on, my studio was filled with the sound that we all know as rock n' roll. It was loud, brash, and had more detail than any Marshall-style pedal I've played. It played like an intimate snapshot of a real tube amp, with its clear dynamics and hi-fi harmonics. Clearly Mr. Brown's intimate knowledge of tube amp circuitry went into play here, which in my opinion propelled this pedal beyond many I have played.

It's hard to find anything bad to say about this pedal. It gives you so many options at a price and sound point you can't find at the lower end of the market. It's dead silent, has different powering options for more or less headroom, response and EQ switches, and a sound that is stellar in its recreation of cranked vintage (and otherwise) amp tones. Highly

recommended!

WHAT WE LIKE

Clear and hi-fi tube amp sounds without sounding too dark or too bright. Excellent price point, build quality, and tons of options for further making this pedal's sound your own.

CONCERNS

None.