



use with my VS set, because that would simply be too dark sounding – almost muddy. In order to achieve the fullness and volume I was striving to obtain, I needed to over-wind

the bobbin, but doing this would result in a loss of high frequencies. That's why I chose stronger Alnico 5 magnets that bring back the high frequencies. What this combination creates is a louder, richer, full-bodied pickup with the added bass properties of enamel wire and the treble gained by the Alnico 5 magnets. By over-winding the bobbin, you gain midrange and volume. I also staggered the ohm resistance values slightly to obtain a more calibrated volume balance between pickup switching selections.

**TQR:** Where do you source your Alnico 5 magnet stock?



All the magnets I use are purchased directly from Allstar Magnetics, which is located

in Vancouver, Washington ([www.allstarmagnetics.com](http://www.allstarmagnetics.com)). Mr. Rob Parr, my dedicated salesman and friend, is very knowledgeable about the products they sell. Through the years, Rob has given me an education in magnet properties and helped guide me in my selections. I'm told that Allstar Magnetics supplies magnets to several major pickup makers and well known guitar manufactures as well.

**TQR:** In your opinion, what other factors contribute to the unique sound of the SP set?

As I mentioned, the vintage enamel wire for more bass and compression, strong Alnico 5 grade magnets for the added treble gain, and over-wound bobbin coils for more pronounced midrange and volume. I also lightly wax pot the entire pickup in order to reduce microphonics, creating a pickup set that has more complex overtones and harmonics directly relates to the hand scatter-winding technique used when applying the wire layers. The varied tension and hand guided layering of the thin magnetic wire which forms the bobbin coils are what separates mass produced, assembly line production pickups from quality scatter-wound boutique pickups, lending an added shimmer which equates to better tone, in my opinion.

We'd have to agree. The Amalfitano SP recipe subtly

thickens the tone of all three pickups while preserving much of the essential treble presence and 'scooped' character of a classic Stratocaster. They are neither dark, edgy or objectionably 'overwound' sounding – just rounder, fuller and richer sounding than the Fender '57-'62 Vintage set. You do sacrifice some of the hollow, out-of-phase contrast in positions 2 and 4, while maintaining the deep, woody vocal qualities of the neck pickup, the fat midrange in the middle, and the penetrating authority of the bridge pickup. The SP set also delivers a bit more power and dynamic response. Is one set 'better' than another? No. What we're describing are two very worthy yet different options; 'better' is an individual judgment subject to personal interpretation.

Our 'makeover' of the Fiesta red took a fundamentally exceptional guitar and further enhanced those qualities to near perfection. Having owned and reviewed dozens of Stratocasters in these pages, the Fiesta red now truly seems as good as it gets – an absolute 'keeper.' **To**

[www.amalfitanopickups.com](http://www.amalfitanopickups.com) 817-917-8707

Fred Stuart's

**Rock-it-Tone**



*You may recall our May 2006 cover story featuring the work of Fred Stuart – one of the very first master builders in the Fender Custom Shop established by John Page. In those days, the Custom Shop functioned as the name implies, taking one-off orders that often resurrected models from the past with creative design details limited only by the builder's skill and creative vision. The Custom Shop also produced small numbers of entirely new designs, like the eight resonator Tele-style guitars built by Fred Stuart, one of which was destined for James Burton. Stuart also designed and built two prototypes that were presented to the marketing department at Fender for consideration many years ago. They ultimately passed on the Rock-it-Tone, and Fred is now tooled up to begin taking orders for one of his very favorite guitar designs, built entirely by the man himself at his shop in Riverside, CA. Here's our review...*

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One look at the Rock-it-Tone inspires memories of the past combined to

create an entirely unique and whimsical impression, from the headstock shape reminiscent of the old National lapsteels, to the right-angle single cutaway first seen on Nat Daniel's Danelectros, and the single coil pickups that celebrate the rare guitars and mandolins designed and built by Paul Bigsby, who some credit for having inspired the original Fender six-in-line headstock shape.

When we first opened the silver case holding the Rock-it-Tone (reminding us very much of an old Rickenbacker case), we were immediately struck by the thought that the Rock-it-Tone is clearly no 'production' instrument, nor was it designed and built by someone with a lack of skill, imagination, or reverent admiration for classic guitar designs. If you think you've seen it all in the world of guitars, trust us, you haven't. Allow us to explain...

The first question we asked Fred Stuart as we discussed the Rock-it-Tone was about the beautifully figured, book-matched wood used for the top and back. What was it...



maple? "Ash," he replied, as if this should be as obvious to us as it was to him. "Well no, Fred, now that we've seen it, we're quite sure we have *never* seen figured ash like this before. Blistered maple, frogskin alder, yes... lacewood.. bubinga... Arctic spruce... Spanish cedar... but not this, ever. But now that we have seen it, we know we want some of it on *something*..." Stuart went on to explain how the semi-hollow Rock-it-Tone is constructed with a center block joining the top and back that extends from just below the intonatable, wraparound Gotoh bridge to the top of the body, providing a solid foundation for the bolt-on maple neck (a set neck is optional). On close inspection, fine points of artful design and construction abound. Stuart doesn't skimp on the girth of the maple neck – a one-inch thick, full 'C' shape with plenty of shoulder and very little if any taper from the nut to the 12th fret – a generous shape that would be fully worthy of a great blackguard neck or a '50s Les Paul Junior. The tortoiseshell-

bound fingerboard is a Brazilian rosewood slab that extends just past the end of the neck in the style of an archtop, endowed with jumbo frets, abalone dot position markers and a hand-cut and shaped bone nut. And these are just the appetizers...

Turning our attention to the Rock-it-Tone's midriff, you'll notice that the top and back are bound with tortoise shell, and the guitar we received also featured rope binding on the top. The curvaceous red tortoise pickguard, vintage knobs and distinctive lightning bolt f-hole complete the look, framed in a perfectly conceived and applied tobacco sunburst nitro finish. Then, there are the pickups...

"Gee, Fred, that is some fine millwork that was done to create those nickel pickup covers and rings..." "Actually, that's aluminum..." "Well, I've never seen aluminum that looks so much like *nickel*..." "It can be done if you're willing to spend the time it takes to buff it out." Well, of course... Stuart's 'Bigsby' single coil pickups are, like of all of the pickups in his guitars, made by Fred himself, and he studied the original Bigsby designs to create the pickups found in the Rock-it-Tone. How do they sound? Huge and rumbling like an old P90 with less treble bite – clear, warm and woody at modest volume levels, and the strength to easily light up any amp when cranked. The Rock-it-Tone as ours was equipped sounded best through brighter 'Fendery' amps – played through our old Gibsons the tone seemed too dark, although the big 15" speaker in the GA77 relished the heaviness of the Bigsby pickups. Played through our tweed Tremolux, however, the 4-way switch in the Rock-it-Tone yielded luscious, fat and snappy bridge tones that are complemented nicely by the



neck blade pickup. The neck alone is a big, bassy beast with huge sustaining qualities, and flipped all the way over to the parallel position with the bridge, the guitar is a woody freight train that sounds twice its size. Obviously, slide players will lose their minds with this guitar and the right amp, but the Rock-it-Tone is so well set up, designed and put together that unlike many of the old guitars we reserve for slide (because they are too messed up to play anything else) the 6 pound Rock-it-Tone simply begs to be played – how you choose to use it is not limited by any issues related to feel and playability in the least. What we mean to say is, all the stuff you want in a guitar is here... great

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tones, effortless playability, pots with an actual taper, precise nickel Gotoh tuners that look like Ms.Gotoh had a fling with Mr. Waverly, perfect fret work, and all presented in a finely built and finished work of art that will never be anything but exceptionally rare.

It should also be said that unlike a lot of very unique, custom-built guitars that try very hard *not* to remind us of something else, the Rock-it-Tone completely avoids appearing or feeling odd and quirky. The finer points of fit and finish are impeccable, and the guitar just feels right, with no compromises or miscues. In a world of knockoffs of knockoffs and 'custom-built' wannabe's, this guitar is truly exceptional.

Rock forth...**to**

Options open to discussion include choices in wood, set neck, Bigsby tailpiece, binding, neck size/shape, fret size and finishes. For more information contact: [Jason Allen, www.virtualvintageguitars.com](http://www.virtualvintageguitars.com), 949-635-9797

## Citron Baritone



We first profiled the work of Woodstock, NY builder Harvey Citron in the November 2005 issue of TQR. Armed with a graduate degree in architecture in the early '70s, Harvey couldn't seem to stay out of bands or guitar repair shops, and a visit to Dan Armstrong's legendary shop on LaGuardia Place in the West Village led him to begin winding pickups.

Inevitable guitar prototypes soon followed in collaboration with a classmate from architecture school, Joe Veillette, and their successful debut at a NAMM show launched Veillette-Citron guitars in 1975. Harvey continues to build his unique basses, baritone and 6-string guitars in Woodstock, NY, and our recent encounter with one of his baritones at the January 2008 NAMM show inspired our review of this astounding instrument. Here's the story of the baritone, which is modeled after the Citron CG-2 6-string. Our review follows...

**TQR:** Can you describe the physical construction and materials used for the baritone?



The 2 1/2" thick body is Honduras mahogany – usually one-piece if I can get it. The top is curly maple on the one you have, and it is also offered in spruce. The neck is one-

piece Honduras mahogany (bolt-on), with an East Indian rosewood fingerboard, and two-way adjustable truss rod. The body is almost completely hollowed out with the exception of it being solid under the bridge, and the strings terminate in a brass block. The sides are left at about 1/2" thick. The bridge is also East Indian Rosewood with a thick, compensated bone saddle. The finish is a mix on that one, ultimately polyester on top, and the neck is a satin catalyzed lacquer. All new ones will be gloss polyester on the body with a polyester sealer coat and nitro cellulose lacquer in a satin finish on the neck.

**TQR:** And what about the pickups and wiring scheme?

The pickups are my design, hand-wound by me in my shop. I call them 'custom-blended' because they have two gauges of wire on each coil of each pickup in my own recipe, with different gauges and a different number of turns on the neck and bridge pickups. The magnets are Alnico, and they have a 1/8" thick steel blade in each of the coils. Each gauge of wire has its own intrinsic sound, and then the number of turns also affects the tone as well as the coil form shape, pole piece material, and magnet type.

I used to build what I called 'staged pickups' back at Veillette-Citron, where I took taps out of each coil and bridge across the two coils making humbucking pickups at different resistance levels. They were either two-stage or three-stage. At one point I tried making a two-stage pickup kind of like a traditional Gibson pickup using one gauge for the first stage, and then a thinner gauge over that, making it hotter and a little more midrangy, but being able to call up the original sound as well because of the switching. I liked the sound of the 'blend' the best.

**TQR:** What is the story behind this design? It is so unique that we sense one lurking in the past...

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