

Gear

factor in its exposed tubes. On top is a blue "pilot light" and a robust-looking output transformer. The amp is housed in a cast-aluminum Hammond chassis, which beyond looking cool, has the added bonus of shielding it from RF interference.

Amps with octal preamp tubes *do* sound and react differently than amps with their progeny. Octals went by the wayside after their smaller/9-pin friends came along and offered not only more gain, but occupied less space on a circuit board. In terms of tone, octals offer lower gain and a stronger

fundamental/more linear tone with less "fluff."

Using a PRS Swamp Ash Special with stock humbuckers, the Red Iron plugged into a 4x12" cabinet with Celestions offered a pure, raw clean tone. Labeling it "hi-fi" or it "low-fi" would be difficult, but as its Volume knob is rolled up, the amp very gradually becomes more aggressive, as its lone 6V6 is pushed ever harder. Fully cranked, the 5-Watter retains its fundamental tone, but layers a smooth, overdriven overtone. Plugging in a Fender Telecaster doesn't provide the same drive



without a pedal, but its single-coil shines nonetheless.

An open-back Celestion Gold-loaded 1x12" naturally produced less low-end, but gave back some of the airiness (or "fluff") missing from the closed 4x12. With the Telecaster, you don't necessarily feel the need for a Tone control – kudos to Sanchez for

doing an extraordinary job voicing this amp.

The 5-Watter is not just another entry into the very crowded "Ten Watt Or Less" boutique-amp club. It offers singular tone, hand-wired touches, top-of-the-line construction, and a fetching package that'll get you either noticed or arrested! – **Zac Childs**