HI-TONE HT50 JP

ONE GLANCE AT THE HI-TONE HT50 JP and fans of the bolder, punchier verges of British tone will know exactly what they are looking at; or nearly, anyway, since this hand-wired, American-made amp revitalizes a rare variant of the fabled Hiwatt DR504 circuit. Hi-Tone is the progeny of Hiwatt fanatics Clayton Callaway and Mark Huss, with assistance in "U.K.-based component sourcing and circuit accuracy" from Glynn Reeves, the son of late Hiwatt founder Dave Reeves. If you think all this implies that Hi-Tone goes out of its way to render its amps as accurately as possible to the original Hiwatt designs and build techniques, you'd be right: components are hefty and of high quality, the wiring work is impressively tidy, and Reeves-certified build techniques are adhered to throughout the HT50 JP chassis.

The JP differs, however, in an entirely sensible refinement of one of Reeves Sr.'s rare custom modifications of the circuit, bringing to it what can only be described as an improvement. (The "JP", by the way, stands for Jimmy Page, and represents the variation of the classic DR circuit as built for the Zep guitarist back in the day.) Using another 12AX7 tube as a cathode-follower to drive a line-level signal, the preamp follows the first Gain control with a Balance control, which can be adjusted to provide a second, footswitchable volume control (with no tone suckage thanks to Hi-Tone's use of Vactrol switching, rather than sending the signal all the way out the footswitch cable and back, as Reeves's original design did). The result is not so much a high-gain lead option, as two selectable levels of volume from what is otherwise a standard single-channel Hiwatt-style circuit. "However," Huss from Hi-Tone adds, "most of our users don't seem to bother with the footswitch, and just use the Balance control as a mild gain control." While these amps' cosmetics and control layout always made them look much like high-end Marshall wannabes, a poke around the Hi-Tone reminds us that they were anything but, as the amp employs an entirely original circuit, tweaked at every turn to maximize punch, clarity, and headroom, with an EQ stage that is very different from—and arguably more flexible and effective than—the JTM45's or plexi's traditional tweed-Fender-derived cathode-follower tone stack (the cathode-follower before the Balance control is used very differently).

Fane has earned a reputation as the speaker brand of choice with this style of amp for reasons that were immediately apparent once I plugged the HT50 JP into the Fryette cab. The combination is bold, clear, and thumping, and a fast track to that pummeling Pete Townshend rhythm tone circa *Live At Leeds* (albeit in 50-watt, smaller-venue form), or, with an Xotic BB-Preamp and EP Booster stacked in front, a throaty, singing David Gilmour-ish lead tone. Whether footswitch-selected or just set and forgotten, the JP's Balance control does indeed offer a useful, if subtle, extra. The classic DR504 circuit is still there in all its glory, but the added stage helps to tease out further nuances of gain staging, while adding an extra dab of flexibility. Cranked through the TopHat cab, the HT50 JP also copped other flavors of classic Brit-rock tone, and it's one loud 50-watter by the time you hit the breakup zone. The Master helps some, but the amp really sounds its best with that knob rolled toward its higher numbers. All in all, this is a powerful and well-built amp at a very good price, and a great option for serious fans of Dave Reeves' Hiwatt legacy.

SPECIFICATIONS

HT50 JP

CONTACT	hi-tone-amps.com
PRICE	$2,049 direct
CHANNELS	1
CONTROLS	Input Volume, Balance, Bass, Treble, Middle, Presence, Master
POWER	50 watts
TUBES	Three 12AX7s, one 12AT7, two EL34s
EXTRAS	One-button footswitch for remote Balance (dual input volume) level. Dual speaker outs with 4/8/16Ω switch (buffered FX loop available for a $250 upcharge)
WEIGHT	42 lbs
BUILT	USA
KUDOS	A boldly authentic take on the classic Hiwatt DR504 circuit with a useful modification. Excellent build quality
CONCERNS	Some unused holes in the chassis top should probably be closed off for safety considerations.