



Turn A Humble Fender Into The Ultimate Blues Machine

B

oy, have we got a treat for you: For a few hundred bucks, you can buy a blackface Fender Bassman head (or a Tremolux, Bandmaster, or Showman) and have it hot-rodded to John McIntyre's specs, as detailed below. If you're really handy with a blowtorch—sorry, soldering iron—you can even do it yourself.

But do not attempt to build this project unless you are intimately familiar with the workings of vacuum tube amplifiers. There are potentially lethal voltages present in these critters. Seriously:

Unless you're a qualified tech, take the schematic and these instructions to your local amp repair shop and pay a pro to do a first-class job. You won't regret it. Musitech Electronics and GPI are not responsible for you misusing this information. Or frying your amp. Or fritzing your nervous system. Okay?

We field-tested this design by

having John soup up a staffer's Bassman. We've been hauling it to gigs and can attest to its newfound coolness. Fat and squawky, with lots of sustain and guts, this head kicks butt. It's particularly magic with a Strat. The amp has enough gain to be nasty without crossing into the metal zone. Its power-tube distortion remains dynamic at all levels. If you're into

Bluesbreakers tone, you'll dig the McIntyre Bluesmaker.

—ANDY WIDDERS-ELLIS

John McIntyre's Bluesmaker Fender Amp Mod

The Fender Bassman has been around for decades. Older tweed models have achieved legendary status; many consider them one of the best guitar amps ever. But what about blackface and silverface heads from the '60s and '70s? They sound good for bass at low volume and quite cool for guitar, but by today's standards, they lack tonal flexibility. Wouldn't it be nice to add a few

more tone controls and increase the gain for more natural distortion and sustain?

You can usually find a Bassman head for a reasonable price (typically \$150 to \$300), and they're ideal for hot-rodding. For this project, we'll transform a blackface Bassman into a unique blues amp, using mid- to late-'60s English blues/rock tone as our sonic model—that's why I call it the "Bluesmaker." I've incorporated some original designs to add tonal variety and increase gain flexibility. None of these modifications involve altering the existing face-plate or chassis—we want to preserve the amp's vintage looks. Though we'll refer specifically to the Bassman in the following text, this conversion works for most other Fender heads, provided they have at least four preamp tubes.

Design overview. To evoke that English blues sound, we'll change the Bassman's 6L6 output tubes to EL34s and drive them with a 12AX7 instead of a 12AT7 preamp tube. We'll slightly modify the standard Fender tone stack for a different response. We'll also drive the tone stack with a classic cathode-follower configuration—much like the amp's predecessor, the tweed Bassman.

We'll add a Middle control to the tone stack and enhance it with a high-mid boost. This new circuit differs significantly from the traditional Fender design, as it works independently of the Treble control. I tuned the response by ear, increasing the upper-mids to add more bite and overtones to the overall sound. We'll also incorporate a Presence control, based on a standard circuit in the power amp's negative feedback loop. I modified this design, adding a push-pull switch to change presence response. With the Presence knob pulled out, the sound becomes noticeably glassier. The high-frequency re-

