

# PRO AUDIO REVIEW

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BY JOE BECK

**O**n paper, the Talos Basic tube combo did not generate a lot of excitement. Here was a \$4,207 boutique amp, and it did not even have a reverb or any tone controls.

But as soon as I opened up the box, I was hooked on the quality of this made-in-USA, hand-built guitar amp. The Talos Basic, I discovered, is an amp to use when you need to know what your guitar really sounds like!

## FEATURES

With the solid-pine cabinet with two top ports starring at me from the cabinet box, I immediately envisioned George Burns flicking his cigar ash into the port. (Just kidding, guys). Since I am a guitar player, I am not up on all the technical specs, but this

## Fast Facts

### Playing Styles:

(any kind of guitar music that requires amplification)

### Applications:

Studio recording, live gigs - PA or ramp

### Key Features:

Class A push-pull tube amp (50 watts max.), three-way pentode/triode modes, hand-built construction, audiophile-grade internal parts, effects insert/return, single Jensen neodymium speaker with twin 1-inch Audax tweeters, cooling fan

### Price:

\$4,207 (as tested)

### Contact:

Talos Instruments at 703-764-7005, [www.musictechnology.com](http://www.musictechnology.com).

## Talos Basic Tube Guitar Amplifier

amp is so obviously well thought out that even I was impressed.

The tested unit was a beautiful-looking, three-color sunburst finished, solid-pine cabinet (cedar, redwood and 13-ply Finland Birch are the other wood options). The Talos was designed by two former Conrad-Johnson engineers, and this audiophile pedigree is evident in the design of the Talos.

The signal path is not complicated with a lot of extras. The Class A push-pull design utilizes a pair of Ruby 6L6MSTR output tubes and a 12AX7 and 12AT7 in the preamp.

The hand-built amp is chocked full of high-spec parts including carbon comp and metal film resistors, and nickel alloy transformers. The amp can operate in the pentode mode (50 watts) partial pentode (35 watts) and triode mode (20 watts). A fan keeps the amp cool and prolongs component life by drawing air from the top of the chassis. The fan can be switched off if the amp is being used for recording.

The short signal path means only volume and gain controls (which pull up for more tonal options) and no tone controls except for a "bright/fat" switch. Besides the guitar input jack, there is also an external effects insert via a TRS 1/4-inch jack - if you want to run external reverb or other desired effects.

The amp configured for this review con-



tained a 12-inch Jensen neodymium woofer operated in tandem with a pair of Audax neodymium 1-inch soft done tweeters. Crossover is 5 kHz with 12 dB per octave slope. The amp can be ordered with out the tweeters, which is a \$600 upcharge.

## THE AUDITION

With only a volume control, there would only be two possibilities - loud or soft. Well, the subtleties possible with the combinations of tube modes and input and output gain are numerous with the Talos.

My first audition was using my signature Cort Joe Beck model jazz guitar. The Talos brought out more wood tone and depth than I ever knew was there. I have always liked the sound of these guitars, and this amp confirmed it

First, I used a JB model with custom-wound Kent Armstrong humbucker pick-

ups. These humbuckers sounded fantastic but lacked a little output level. I switched over to a stock model and almost blew the wall down - still with a great jazz tone!

Next, the Stratocaster test. The amp now took on the characteristics of a sixties Fender Super or Pro Reverb. I set the Fat/Bright switch to Bright, cranked up a little gain and the Strat was screamin' E. While I can't imagine an amp this expensive being dragged from gig-to-gig in a tour bus, any funk or country rocker would kill for this sound. (Actually, twanger Bill Kirchen uses the Talos extensively with a Telecaster - Ed. )

Already impressed by the Talos, I went to my guitar room and got out my 1951 D'Angelico electric. Unfortunately, Don Arnone, the guitar's first owner, had the original P-90 pickups replaced with humbuckers, but it is still a world class jazz guitar.

To hear this instrument through the Talos was hard to describe. With fairly heavy (.013) strings, this is a very punchy guitar. Combined with the Talos amp, it was phenomenal. Long, unwavering tone. Instant response. Nothing phony anywhere. That sound could, possibly, cure me of my addiction to processing. I am pretty sure this is the way

we were intended to hear jazz guitar.

## SUMMARY

If you got the bread, the Talos Basic is totally recommended. Any player will hear more of the guitar and pickup's tones and the nuance of playing that often gets masked by overly complex amps with too much signal processing.

*Joe Beck has been a professional jazz guitar player for more than 30 years, making a number of acclaimed recordings and regularly performing live gigs around the world. He now is a regular contributor to **PAR's** Studio MI section.*