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HOT NEW GEAR! RADIAL TONEBONES, VALLEY ARTS BRENT MASON, SAVAGE MACHT 6 & BBE DI-1000/DI-100X



TONEBONE CLASSIC

Type of Effect	Distortion.
Features	14-gauge steel chassis, 12AX7 preamp tube; controls for level, high, low, filter, and drive; switches for top end, mid boost, and drive gain; true bypass on/off switch with LED indicator.
Price	\$299 (retail).

TONEBONE HOT BRITISH

Type of Effect	Distortion.
Features	14-gauge steel chassis, 12AX7 preamp tube; controls for level, high, low, contour, and drive; switches for top end, voicing, and mid boost; true bypass on/off switch with LED indicator.
Price	\$299 (retail).

TONEBONE SWITCHBONE

Type of Pedal	A/B/Y amp switch with boost.
Features	14-gauge steel chassis, isolated to eliminate ground loops, output to ground and polarity switches, tuner output.
Price	\$299 (retail).
Contact	Radial Engineering/Tonebone, 1638 Kebet Way, Port Coquitlam, British Columbia, Canada V3C 5W9, phone (604) 942-1001, www.tonebone.com.

"Bad" to (Tone)Bone

Radial Engineering's Classic, Hot British, and Switchbone pedals

RADIAL ENGINEERING'S Tonebone distortion pedals have been making serious "noise" in the few short months since their introduction. Whether online or in print, the good word has spread quickly, and followers have come in droves.

Radial, creators of the trio of Tonebones—the Classic, Hot British, and Switchbone—was founded in 1978, when Denis Rozon met Peter Janis. As a sideline, the two founded Forest Electronics, and started building tube pedals and a three-channel amp. In the '80s, Janis left and briefly worked for Fender, then started a distribution company. There, he developed the Radial Engineering Product Group. Meanwhile, Rozon continued working with musicians, focusing on product development for Forest. In 2001, the men were reunited when Rozon was hired as chief engineer at Radial. Tonebone pedals became part of

the line in '02 and quickly started gaining a rep for their great sound.

But, being hardcore gear skeptics, the only ears we believe are our own. We reserved judgment on the Tonebones until we got our grimy hands on a set.

Out of the box, the pedals immediately impress. They're housed in well-built 14-gauge steel chassis, painted black and silkscreened with individual color schemes. The Classic and Hot British distortion boxes use a 12AX7 tube to drive the circuit, and both use true-bypass on/off stomp switches. The Classic features potentiometer controls for Level, High, Low, Filter (used to balance the high-frequency ratio between the pedal and the amp), and Drive. And it has three-position switches for Top End, Mid Boost, and Drive Gain. Standard 1/4" input/output jacks and an on/off stomp switch with LED indicator are also employed.

The Hot British features pots for Level, High, Low, Contour (adjusts the balance of low and high frequencies in the notch and fat voicing mode), and Drive. It also has a three-position Top End switch, Voicing, and Mid Boost switches, as well as the 1/4" input/output jacks and on/off stomp switch with LED.

The Switchbone features a stomp switch for running both amps simultaneously, a toggle switch (with indicators) that allows one or the other amp to be on (and allows a choice of which amp it defaults to when the "Both" switch is turned off), and a "Boost" switch that engages a boost circuit (also with indicator light). Output two has switches for ground lift and polarity. The "Power Booster" section has two slider switches; one selects gain or mid-only boost (or mute), the other is a mid-boost switch that can be turned off or set to 5 db or 10 db. They combine to allow solos to be boosted in various ways. Jacks include input, two outputs, and tuner out. Sharing space along the top edge are controls for "Gain" and "Drag" (which the company describes as "load correction for the pickup").

Our test setup consisted of an early-'80s Tom Holmes solidbody with Holmes pickups, an early-'70s Fender Stratocaster with stock pickups, and our trusty mid-'60s Vox

GEAR

Berkely Super Reverb 2x10" combo.

First up was the Classic, starting through the Holmes pickups. For a blues tone, we set the Level to 2:00, High to 12:00, Low to 2:30, Filter to 10:00 and Drive at 9:00. Top end was set to Bright, Mid Boost out, and Drive Gain low. We were greeted with fat, natural-sounding tone in all pickup positions, with no loss of low-end and minimal coloration, and the distortion cleaned up well with the help of the guitar's volume pot.

As we pushed the Drive control and adjusted Drive Gain settings, we experienced unbelievable gain, as much than anyone would want, and then some. Pushed to the extreme, the gain did start growing fuzzi, but it's unlikely the Classic would be intentionally used to get that tone. By taking off some Top End and pushing the Mid Boost, we got a great Santana tone. Even at higher-gain settings, this pedal is pretty quiet.

Next we plugged in the Strat, used the same tone settings, and were met by a very natural Strat blues tone – very fat. With the Drive boosted, it almost sounded like a humbucker! With the Top End switch on Flat or Dark, we experienced even more of this phenomenon. And sustain? Forever! The tonal variations this pedal produces is unbelievable. From very slight gain to all-out saturation, this pedal won't hold back.

Next up, the Hot British.

We were skeptical after hearing the Classic, wondering if this pedal could sound all that much different. But our skepticism soon vanished.

This is British, and it is different. Using the Holmes guitar, we set the Level at 2:00, High at 11:00, Low at 2:00, Contour at 12:30, High End to flat, voicing notched, and Mid Boost out. Wow! Talk about British tone! We easily dialed in the famous Cream-era Clapton sounds, to a tee. Varying the drive gave us great heavy metal Marshall-like tone, with as much gain as anyone could want. This pedal isn't for producing mildly overdriven tones, but it does clean up somewhat if you back off the guitar's volume. But this one's for going all-out. Still, it handles the nuances and subtleties with aplomb. Even at high-gain settings, it doesn't get fuzzy. And the low-end stays strong.

Plugging in the Strat, we tweaked it and smiled as we found our favorite Blackmore tone: our "Smoke On The Water" lick never sounded more authentic! Then we played with the contour and switched the top end to bright, and were rewarded with yet another famously familiar tone: Hendrix's Strat-through-a-Marshall blues!

If you want to capture that famous "British tone," you'll not find a better pedal!

Finally, we ran the spankin' new Switchbone into the Vox and a Marshall Vibe State. We were able to switch between amps with no ground loops or hum. We

also tweaked the Drag control, and were pleased to hear it deliver as promised. After switching from amp to amp and deciding this could well be the best A/B pedal on the market, we started playing with the variable boost section.

With the switch set to Gain, the Mid Boost turned off, and the amp set to clean, we got a substantial boost in volume, with just a hint of gain added – very transparent indeed. With the amp distorted, we noticed a dramatic gain boost that added sustain while staying transparent.

If you want to color your tone for soloing, you can add just a mid boost (without gain boost) or do both. You can also use the Boost switch as a mute.

The Power Booster section essentially makes this two pedals in one; this is the most versatile A/B/Y-style amp switch on the market.

Overall, the features, versatility, and tones make it easy to recommend all three Tonebone pedals. The Classic and Hot British units capture the sounds they set out to capture, and with the options offered by each, they'll capture any discreted tone you desire. And the Switchbone does its jump marvelously, with no tone degradation, and an extra, transparent (or not so transparent) boost if you need it.

Tonebone pedals are not inexpensive. But they may well be the best and most versatile pedals in their class. – **Bob Tekippe/Phil Feser/Ward Meeker** 