

## JCA Circuits GR 1.6

Jason Arthur is a custom amp builder in Pottstown, PA. You probably haven't heard of him or his amps, nor had we, until he called one day last year and asked if we would be interested in reviewing one of his amplifiers. Although our music room was crammed with gear to be reviewed when Jason first called, he cheerfully agreed to keep in touch. Three months later an amp arrived, packed in a carefully sculpted sarcophagus of multiple layers of heavy duty bubble wrap. Dude did not fool around with the bubble wrap. You never quite know what to expect when someone you don't know offers an amp for the probe... we've sent a few back over the years with a polite "thanks but no thanks," and as we carefully peeled away layer after layer of bubble wrap, we held our breath as the GR 1.6 finally emerged... Pretty sharp looking amp, eh? Sounds even better.



The GR (Golden Ratio) 1.6 tag refers to the numerical value 1.618, or Phi, which Allen informed us is "found throughout the universe

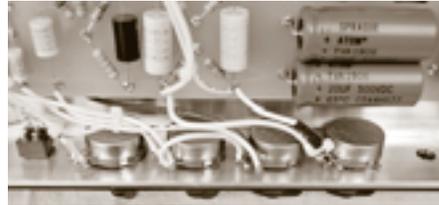
in things as diverse as logarithmic spirals, music theory, cathedral architecture and the human body. It is considered a proportion of aesthetics and beauty." To us, it is among the best sounding 1x12, 20 watt amps we have ever reviewed.

First of all, the GR 1.6 is built like a tank, yet weighs just 45 pounds (and feels lighter). Visually, the design works – a cross perhaps between a Marshall and blackface Fender combo. Allen also offers a 'brown' look. The GR 1.6 ships with a Celestion blue Alnico speaker, and in this amp, it really shines.

From left to right, front panel controls are Volume, a Hi/Lo Tilt switch that boosts midrange and treble, Lean/Plush (fat)



switch, a Trim pot that acts as an intensity control for the Lean/Plush circuit, Treble, Bass and Cut (treble) controls. 4, 8 and 16 ohm speaker jacks are provided on the back panel. The chassis is a work of art – the thickest chunk of aluminum



we have ever seen in any amp, and the handwired detail is equally impressive, utilizing 2

watt military-spec carbon comp PEC pots, 1/8" G-10 Garolite circuit board, Sprague ATOM power supply filter and bypass caps, Mallory 150 coupling caps, Cornell Dubilier small value coupling capacitors and 3 and 5 Watt Vishay/Dale wire-wound power supply resistors.

Allen told us that he designed the GR 1.6 to produce the tone and feel of some of his favorite small vintage amps, such as the Marshall 1974X 18W, 5E3 tweed Deluxe, 6G3 brown Deluxe, AB763 blackface Deluxe, Vox AC15 and Trainwreck Rocket, while also consulting with the late Ken Fischer on many of the ideas behind for his unique amplifier designs.

But here's what you really need to know... The GR 1.6 seems hard-wired to the volume pot on your guitar in a very unique and 'right' way. This amp can produce as much clean headroom as any dual 6V6 amp, and more than most, yet it can also simultane-



ously launch into tremendous overdriven tones that meet and easily exceed the natural overdrive present in any blackface Fender, and the difference can be explored merely by roaming between '6' on your guitar volume and '8' - '10.' The Bass, Treble and Cut controls offer lots of flexibility for dialing in different guitars and pickup combinations, the Hi/Lo Tilt functions as a useful treble boost combined with warmer pickups, and the Lean/Plush switch acts as an organic thickener in the mix, further controlled by the Trim pot. If you relish the prospect of jumping from the sound of a blackface Deluxe (without reverb) to a high gain Marshall short stack with all the dimensional bloom and harmonic character of a hand-wired tube amplifier, the GR 1.6 performs this nifty trick better than just about any amp we have reviewed. A Marshall PA20 can't do it... the reissue 1974X 1x12 combo can't do it... and the AC15 won't do it. The DR. Z MAZ18 comes close, as does the Balls M18, but both lack a bit of the Fender DNA we hear in the GR 1.6. This is an extraordinarily toneful amplifier, created with an equally extraordinary voice, feel and attitude. We also love the look of the GR 1.6, and how it completely succeeds in avoiding the appearance of pretending to be anything but what it is – a truly great 1x12 rocker. [www.jcacircuits.com](http://www.jcacircuits.com)

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