

## Vase Trendsetter 60 Deluxe \$3

A genuine back-to-the-future shot at an Aussie classic *by Steve Hendel*

Everything old is new again and the Vase Trendsetter is the perfect example of this. Cool, retro stylings and vintage tones, the Trendsetter is an Aussie classic whose time has come.

It's great to see a part of our musical history return to the stage better than ever – because the Trendsetter isn't just a re-issue. For the sake of reliability, the circuitry has been updated while retaining the fundamental sound and the straight ahead control layout. This hand-wired head looks great on paper and even better

in person. The power stage is based on a pair of EL34's in a Class AB configuration and this drives a truly solid, semi-open backed cab loaded with three 16 ohm Celestion Greenbacks. And let me tell you, this amp has some juice – with a delivery that has no latency or cabinet compression, although the Greenbacks tend to squash a bit (that's a good thing) when pushed.

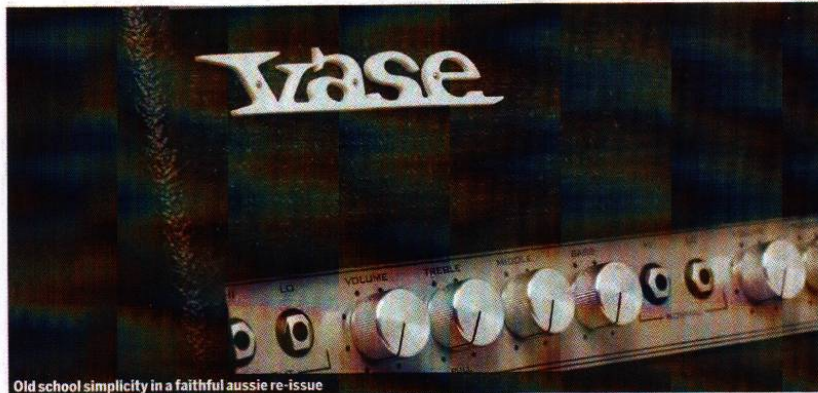
When Pommy ex-pat Tony Troughton started Victory Audiophonic Sound Equipment in the early 1950s, he did so in order to provide Brisbane bands

with top quality sound equipment at reasonable prices. By the end of the decade, Vase gear was a fixture on pop music bandstands, with major artists like pop act Normie Rowe & the Playboys and heavy blues band Chain regularly using Troughton's gear. The amps were hand-wired, loud enough to fill a surf club and built to last. Even now, half a century later, there's a solid market for the trading of old Vase amps – and it takes little more than a grease and oil change to have them sound like they should. Now re-launched, the new

### Test Gear

'62 Fender Strat (all maple)  
Fender Tele, G  
Gibson Les Pa  
Firebird, Gret  
Falcon (Filter  
green Scream  
Boost, Hermic  
Zendrive, Rad  
Boss DS-2, MI  
Box, Suhr Shi





Old school simplicity in a faithful aussie re-issue

owners have kept the retro livery (complete with the funky knobs), the in-your-face delivery, and the broad tonal range. While not being feature-laden, the 12AX7-powered preamp has plenty of sonic scope in its straight up control layout. This is old-school simplicity: a bright channel with volume (with boost), treble, middle, bass, and a normal channel with volume, treble (with boost) and bass, and a global vibrato with speed and depth. Too easy! (And, yes, with a patch lead, you can bridge the channels!) The tone controls are interactive and, although fairly passive, do the business quite nicely. (The brushed aluminium knobs are the coolest of retro cool. Even the on/off switch is an old-school rotary type.) There's not a broad tone change within the range of each pot but they are at least as useful as the tone controls on most Marshalls. And the vibrato – ah... the vibrato – a lovely, rich, organic pulse that is so trad that we kept sneaking it back on for long periods, just because it's there! Gretsch guitars always seem to work with vibrato but our Falcon sounded positively chewy, even at really slow settings. With all our test guitars, the vibrato never sounded contrived or mechanical. It didn't even sound like an effect – more like it was just meant to be there, rather than an add-on. Think Creedence or Neil Young... you'll get the idea!

### Sounds

The Trendsetter's solid state rectifier provides a lot of headroom. There's no master volume so any distortion comes from running the amp pretty

hot – but, with a 60 watt power amp, it's not such a problem. The open-backed cab has oodles of presence and a surprisingly generous amount of bottom end. Greenbacks are a great match for EL34's, and the medium wattage allows these speakers to do a bit more work than you'd normally expect in a cab like this. It was easy to get a big, bold sound with any of our test guitars – especially with humbuckers and filtertrons. Single coils offered a naturally brighter sound but also provided a more scooped mid tone – and rather than mess with the mid control, we boosted the bass and found a fantastic, woody bottom end with loads of sustain.

The tone falls somewhere between a Marshall and a Fender (certainly the vibrato circuit suggests a certain influence) and could be described as a little limited in tonal variety. But what it lacks in this area it more than compensates for with great tonal quality (and that vibrato!). It has that Celestion/EL34 crunch with a good dose of Twin-style presence and poke. Also, this is as pedal-friendly a head and cab as you'll find anywhere – the big, clean tone ate up whatever stomp box we fed it. The open backed cab really enhanced the overdrive units; with distortion boxes, we cleaned up the pedal tone and let the amp do some of the work – too easy.

Three speakers is quite an unusual load but not unheard of. There have been a couple of Fender amps (and others) along the way that have had this arrangement, including the Vibro King with its three 10's. The other unusual thing is that the box is roughly the size of a

quad and this contributes to the substantial girth and sweet top end. There's plenty of volume on tap – even though a pair of EL34's suggests a 50 watt amp, the Trendsetter sounds like every bit (and then some) of the 60 watts that Vase claim.

### Verdict

It's great to see an Aussie classic re-emerge as a viable alternative to the imports. Unlike the re-launched Strauss marque a couple of years ago (nice, great value amps but not at all re-issues), Vase has made a real attempt at an honest reproduction. There's no doubt that this amp will appeal to the nostalgic fans of yesteryear but the Trendsetter has so much more going for it than just re-visiting the past. This is a rock amp, pure and simple, without any frills (well, except for the vibrato) but with a timeless attitude. It is so retro in its vintage simplicity and vibe that, like the Deluxe Reverb and the Plexi, it has become contemporary again. The superbly-made (and Australian made) Trendsetter 60 Deluxe has everything that a great amp needs (including road cases) to do the business out on the road – and to do it with style. **■**

### The Bottom Line

**We like:** Simple to use, toneful amp, great vibrato, road cases..

**We dislike:** No presence control.

**Guitarist says:** This is a well-built, great sounding piece of Oz history