

## PEAVEY AMP

quick, easy indication of which "channel" is activated, as well as reverb status. Separate switches for the clean and overdrive modes allow preselection of the overdrive setting, so that with a single switch action, any sound may be called up and selected from any other mode. This is a definite plus, eliminating the need to do a dance when going from preset to preset.

The lead sound is really good and compares well with the Peavey VTM (which is excellent). While there is not nearly as much control flexibility here, at normal playing levels the harmonic structure is strong and thick, with particular emphasis on even harmonic overtones. And, using the mid and high controls, the harmonics can be easily balanced for even output over the entire length of the fretboard. High-octave feedback really jumps out and cuts through for a super lead voice. At really low studio volumes, however, the overtones disappear, although the gain and sustain remain strong. I really don't perceive this as a flaw, but it is worth noting, since many dealers don't allow players to try out amps at realistic volume levels, and a false impression of this amp's capabilities might result.

My only criticism is that the lead voices have very little variability in their overload characteristics. The very high gain of the tube stages leaves very little leeway in setting the gain controls for distinctively different amounts of overdrive. (With the ultra gain's pre-gain on about 2, the crunch pre-gain on 8, and equal settings of the post controls, the amp gave virtually identical sounds.) I can't be sure, since I haven't received a schematic diagram, but my guess is that the lead circuit includes some variation of Peavey's patented Saturation circuitry to achieve the overload tone. Again, I don't think most players would perceive this as a liability, as the lead tone is very, very smooth, although perhaps not as round and warm as the VTM.

With this new entry, Peavey offers a fully loaded, all-tube amp with features that make it a strong contender in the medium-priced combo category. And, all-important, the sound quality is top-notch!

**Manufacturer's Response.** Peavey Electronics president Hartley Peavey replies, "The Triumph 60 is our successful attempt to design an all-new tube amp. Currently, virtually all popular tube amps are modified copies of Leo Fender's '50s efforts, such as the Bassman, Twin, etc. The Triumph is significantly different from the old Fenders and their rehashes, enough that patents are presently pending on its unique circuitry. The Triumph 60 doesn't use Saturation to achieve distortion and sustain. It gets its tenacious sustain the "old-fashioned" way. That is, it has four high- $\mu$  [gain] triode tubes in series, yielding a fantastic amount of gain and sustain. Incidentally, we also offer the 120-watt Triumph 120, as well as head-only versions of both the Triumph 60 and Triumph 120." ■

## Ovation Thunderbolt Acoustic

By Roger Sadowsky

### Vital Statistics

**Type of guitar:** Super-shallow cutaway acoustic-electric  
**Retail price:** \$1,295.00  
**Hardshell case:** \$140.00  
**Body material:** Synthetic bowl with Sitka spruce top  
**Finish:** Polyester  
**Neck:** Mahogany/maple laminate  
**Fingerboard:** Bound ebony  
**Number of frets:** 24  
**Bridge:** Ebonized walnut  
**Nut:** Black synthetic  
**Tuning machines:** Schallers  
**Pickups:** Piezoelectric with Ovation OP24 electronics  
**Controls:** Volume, bass, midrange, treble, battery check  
**Scale length:** 25 $\frac{1}{4}$ "  
**Truss rod:** Adjustable through rear body access  
**Neck width at nut:** 1 $\frac{11}{16}$ "  
**Body width:** 16"  
**Body length:** 20"  
**Body depth:** 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ "  
**Overall length:** 40"  
**Weight:** 5 lbs

**T**HE THUNDERBOLT IS THE newest addition to the Ovation line and represents a bold new aesthetic for acoustic-electric guitars. It's similar to the Ovation Elite 1868 Super Shallow Cutaway model, with some obvious cosmetic changes. The result is an instrument that makes a very strong visual statement. For the first time, an acoustic-electric instrument ventures into a visual domain previously dominated by solidbody electrics. The Thunderbolt is available from Ovation, Box 507, Bloomfield, CT 06002.

The Thunderbolt combines the traditional Ovation body shape with the cutaway super-shallow bowl used on several previous models. The soundholes, which moved to the upper bouts with the Adamas and Elite models, have been changed to look like thunderbolts, hence the name. The bridge has also been redesigned to look like a thunderbolt. The pearl-finished spruce tops are available in red, white, and black.

The black pearl-finished headstock has all six tuning machines in a single row, as opposed to Ovation's traditional 3+3 format. The ebony fingerboard extends over the body and has 24 frets on the treble side. It's devoid of fretboard position dots, although it has small black side dots on its white binding. The ebony on the review model was of the highest quality, and the solid jet-black look unpunctuated by position dots is very attractive. The fingerboard is fretted with jumbo frets, and the quality of the fretwork and trueness of the fingerboard was as good as any production guitar I've seen in a long time. The neck is extremely stiff, due to the Kaman truss rod system. However, access to the rod is a little difficult on the shallow-bowl models. The truss rod and



**The Thunderbolt has angular soundholes, a shallow body, and a built-in pickup.**

everything else inside the instrument are accessible through a removable panel on the bowl's back. Even then, you need a special extra-long Allen wrench to reach the truss rod.

The electronic system is Ovation's top-of-the-line OP-24. This preamp gives three bands with 12dB of cut and boost, plus a volume control and a battery check. Ovation's piezoelectric pickup system is integrated into the bridge's saddle assembly. The sound quality of the Thunderbolt is definitely different from the deeper-bowled Ovation models; it has a very tight, clear sound that "cuts" through extremely well. It's more contemporary high-tech than rich, warm, and natural. I feel that the Thunderbolt could hold its own against a synthesizer or in a full-band situation where the guitar tends to get lost among the other instruments. For rock or techno-pop, the Thunderbolt might well be an excellent choice, although it would not be my first choice for a

## OVATION THUNDERBOLT

solo guitarist.

The Thunderbolt is a well-made instrument with a unique visual presence. My only reservation isn't specifically with this guitar, but rather with the possibility that a trend is starting in which new models cease reflecting improvements in design and workmanship, and simply become fashion statements.

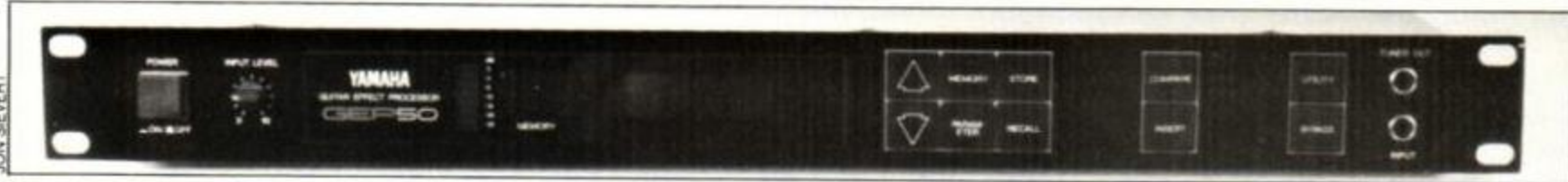
Overall, the Thunderbolt is quite comfortable to play. The neck is thin and nicely shaped, and the set-up on the review guitar was perfect right out of the box. In addition, I

find the extra-shallow bowl a lot more comfortable to hold and play than the deeper-bowl Ovations, which always seem to slide off of my stomach. However, just as with all wood acoustics, the size of the resonant chamber always affects the tone, and as I mentioned earlier, the effect of a small body is clarity and "cut" at the expense of fullness and warmth.

**Manufacturer's response.** Kaman's director of advertising/manager of fretted instruments, David Bergstrom, replies, "Roger Sadowsky seems to have covered all of the important points, features, and benefits of the Thunderbolt in a clear and

fair manner. Please let me calm his fears that Ovation has stopped making improvements in design and workmanship. We haven't. The concept of the Thunderbolt was motivated by aesthetics. Ovation wanted to make an improved Adams-style top design and bracing pattern available in an instrument that would have stage appeal to pop and rock musicians. The Thunderbolt soundholes are purely for looks, but the quintad soundboard bracing pattern with all braces placed longitudinally to the grain is very functional and allows the top to flex more freely. An example of a functional design improvement is the 16-fret-to-body neck."

## Yamaha GEP50 Digital Multi-Effects



Yamaha's GEP50 combines an impressive distortion sound with other high-quality digital effects.

By Joe Gore

**R**EMEMBER YAMAHA'S REX50 Multi-Effects Unit? The one that allowed you to mix distortion with all of those nifty Yamaha digital effects? The one that came in that silly trapezoidal housing? Well, someone at Yamaha has apparently realized that we guitarists don't like effects that can be neither rack-mounted nor stomped on. The GEP50 is basically a spiffed-up and rack-mountable version of the REX50, and it's a very cool machine.

The GEP50 has 50 pre-programmed effects and 50 user-programmable memory locations, so you can choose between the factory presets, or use the extensive editing functions to sculpt them to your taste. Output levels can be set independently for each program—very handy for live performance.

But how does it sound? Simply fantastic. The 12 reverb settings are warm and natural-sounding and the delay, chorus, flanging, and phasing effects are equally musical. It has compression and parametric EQ programs, as well as three pitch-change settings that allow you to create two pitch-shifted notes up to an octave above or below actual pitch, and combine the harmonizations with the direct sound. (As on any low-priced harmonizer, the shifted pitches sound a bit grungy and artificial, but there are, after all, many musical applications for grungy, artificial sounds.)

But the real treat is the quality of the distortion. Admittedly, this is an awfully subjective matter, but to my ear, these are perhaps the best non-tube distortion sounds around. Their rude and random-sounding overtone content makes them sound quite gnarly and low-tech (and I intend that as a heavy compliment). You can control the balance of direct and distorted signals and tweak the timbres with a 3-band equalizer (with parametric midrange). There's also a "trigger level" control that functions effectively as a noise gate. The nine distortion programs are sort of redundant, since they seem to be dif-

ferently EQed edits of the same basic sound, but they demonstrate just how flexible the GEP50's distortion is.

So what's the catch? Well, unlike some higher-priced multi-effects units (such as Roland's GP8), you *cannot* stack the effects in any arrangement you choose. The GEP50 lets you mix distortion with only one reverb or time-delay effect at a time; you can, for example, have distortion and reverb, or distortion and chorus, but not distortion and reverb *and* chorus, or even just reverb and chorus. Also, the compression, parametric EQ, and pitch-change effects can't be combined with distortion at all. Furthermore, the distortion EQ functions aren't accessible when the distortion is combined with reverb. But the GEP50 is MIDIified, so you can augment it with other MIDI-compatible effects. Plus, the device has a rear-panel effects loop, so you can patch in additional signal processors. Since you can control the loop-in/loop-out status with the front-panel "insert" button, or store the status in the user-programmable memory locations, even non-MIDI devices can be integrated into your setup—don't throw out your analog stomp boxes just yet!

Other handy features include a tuner output jack, an edit compare switch, and an input level attenuator. The utility functions let you name your edits, make MIDI assignments, and set the range of memory locations to be recalled by the optional footswitch. There are stereo outputs—the GEP50 sounds *outrageous* through two amps—but only a single input. (Too bad—this would greatly increase the GEP50's usefulness as an all-purpose studio signal processor.)

Yamaha is marketing an almost-identical machine under the name SPX50D—go figure. Its presets are different, with fewer distortion sounds (although you *can* replicate all the GEP50 presets with the editing functions). It has two features that the GEP50 doesn't: three front-panel direct recall buttons that allow you to advance directly to

the device's three major effects groups, and a rear-panel trigger input that lets you initiate certain effects with the optional footswitch. If these features sound useful, opt for the SPX50D. If you don't like editing, but want some screamin' presets all ready to go the first time you plug in, choose the GEP50. Both units list for \$695.00, and they are very highly recommended.

Continued

### Product Reviewers



Harvey Citron was a co-founder of the Veillette-Citron Company and currently designs, modifies, and repairs guitars.



David Hicks of Hicks Electronics in Tulsa, Oklahoma, is an amplifier repair specialist who also modifies current and vintage models.



Roger Sadowsky of New York's Sadowsky Guitars, Ltd., is a luthier and repairman who has customized instruments for Marcus Miller, Bruce Springsteen, Sting, Prince, and others.



Warren Sirota is a guitarist, composer and music/computer programmer living in Oakland, California. His cassette *Tales From My Other Life* was released in 1987 on Digital Arts & Sciences.