

Product Reviews

Product Review
Pickup Tone Multiplier
AweSome Musical Instruments
www.AweSome-Guitars.com

It started with an e-mail asking if my guitar's pickups gave me 35 pure virgin analog pickup tones. Nope, of course not. But that's what *AweSome Musical Instruments' Pickup Tone Multiplier™* was claiming to be able to deliver to my guitar. With great skepticism I read on, trying to understand exactly what this "Hyper-Mod™" patented *Pickup Tone Multiplier™* thing was supposed to do.

I've been playing guitar for decades and over the years I've owned, tested, destroyed and been frustrated by dozens and dozens of gadgets, all promising something wonderful. Most failed to deliver. Some were cheap, most were not.

I dropped a line to the proprietor of *AweSome Musical Instruments*, a good-natured guy named Thomas Wnorowski, and designer of the *Pickup Tone Multiplier™*. To say that Mr. Wnorowski is enthusiastic about his product would be an understatement. He unabashedly refers to it as "The greatest invention since Les Paul created the solid body electric guitar". With that kind of in-your-face bravado I had to try one out.

A few days later the device arrived in the mail. It was for a standard three-pickup Stratocaster (although other configurations are available - both for right-hand and left-hand players). Essentially it was a white pickguard with a single volume knob and single tone knob. In place of the standard third knob and the five-way selector switch were six silver switches. The first three switches are on-off-on switches each controlling a pickup. Flipping a switch one way puts the pickup coil in one phase and thrown the other the coil is in the opposite phase. Using just these three switches will give you 13 different pickup tones from your three pickups - with all the pickup coils being in parallel.

The next three switches are on-off switches and connect select pickups in series. When down, all the pickups are in a parallel circuit. Flip the fourth switch up and you combines the bridge and middle pickup in series creating a compound/humbucking pickup tone, the fifth switch puts the bridge and neck and the sixth neck and middle. If you flip on the fourth and sixth switches together you get all three pickups in series. See how you can get to 35 sounds? There are videos



on the web site demonstrating all of the sounds available.

Now, I'm clueless when it comes to electrical stuff and I leave luthier stuff to my luthier so to be honest, installing this scared the crap out of me. However, I read the instructions and I felt like I could manage it. Even if you cannot solder you can install one of these pickguards. *AweSome Musical Instruments* gives you everything you need to do the job without solder if you want. In addition to the pickguard (you supply your own pickups or they have some of their own for sale) with the switches, volume and tone pots with knobs already installed, you get 12" each of red and black wire, 4 solderless crimp connectors in case you need to extend a wire, and two wire nuts to connect to your output jack wires. One small niggle is that the extra wire I was supplied is of a smaller gauge than on most pickups and output jacks. In the future Thomas says he is increasing the gauge of the wire because others have mentioned it too. All the connectors on the mod for installing your pickups are push to open spring like connectors so all you have to do is stick in the wire and let the button go and the pickup is secured. Installing the *Hyper-Mod™* and restringing the guitar took me a little more than 20 minutes. I took my time and focused on getting it right. After I installed the last pick guard screw, I took a deep breath, plugged in a cable, and turned the volume knob. Nothing, no sound at all. Crap.

I flipped switches, still nothing. Reminder to myself, always plug in a pickguard and tap the pickups to make sure you are good to go before putting in all those screws and restringing. Eventually I removed the pick guard and discovered I had done a lousy job connecting two wires. I corrected my error and I put the guitar back together. Once again I plugged in and turned up the guitar. Behold, there was sound.

I sat there for the next 30 minutes flipping through the six unfamiliar switches on my now "Hyper-Modded" 1994 Stratocaster. Wow, I now call it my "Supercaster" since the modification, because what it has done to this guitar is nothing short of amazing. Once getting the feel for how the switching operated it became more natural. Most importantly was that I was hearing dozens of new naturally produced tones and resonance from the guitar that I had not heard prior to the mod. The tones ranged from tight and muted to ragged and jagged, depending on the volume of my amp. This modification is dynamite. Plugged in with a

processor and the potential of this product is stellar.

To be candid, this isn't just a casual "effect" to use on occasion. If you drop a Hyper-Mod™ into one of your guitars, do realize that there is a genuine learning curve that requires a bit of attention so that players understand how to get the most from the device. There is a method to how the switching works to maximize the tones one

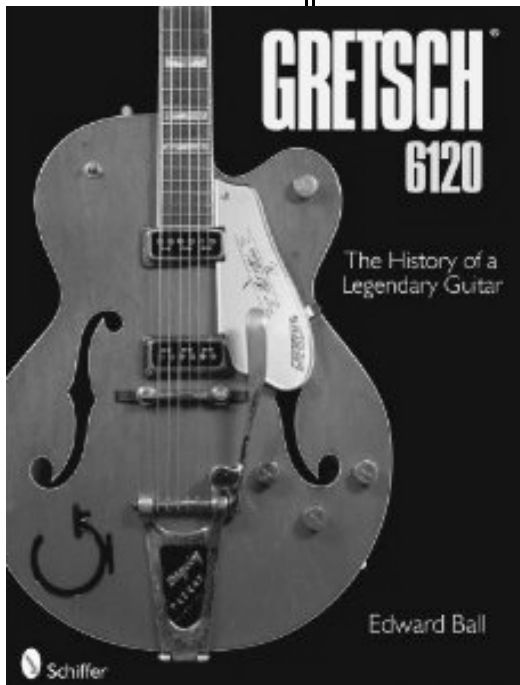
can extract from a modded axe. Since you have to navigate six switches to get a tone it does take some getting used to. I've fiddled with mine for a couple weeks and while I'm far from an expert, I've found several tones that I really like that I'm quite pleased with.

My guess is most players won't use all 35 tones, but will find a core of tones in addition to the traditional Stratocaster five pickup tones that they will use regularly and a few they use when the song calls for it or as their unique "signature sound".

If I could only purchase one peripheral device or make one modification to my guitar or amp, this, hands down, would be where I would put my money. The AweSome Musical Instruments Pickup Tone Multiplier™ switching system is nothing short of amazing. You can get them for a variety of guitars and basses, in addition to three pickup Strat like guitars, for around \$130.00. They even have low-cost assembled and kit boards versions for the DIY people to install in any instrument. I can't imagine how anyone wouldn't be thrilled with the capability it puts into one guitar. For the gigging player, drop a Hyper-Mod™ in to one of your gigging axes and drag one or two less guitars to a gig.

The website features pages of information about the devices as well as videos. For more information on this really impressive product visit www.AweSome-Guitars.com

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Book Review

Gretsch 6120: The History of a Legendary Guitar

Edward Ball

Schiffer Publishing

For anyone who grew up through the 60's, there was no guitar more iconic than the hollow body Gretsch. Depending upon the part of the United States you were in, you either got hooked on the image of Chet Atkins or, perhaps more likely, George Harrison, with a big bodied Gretsch onstage. Although Harrison's celebrity probably sold more guitars for Gretsch, Atkins skill and influence in the music business forever ensured icon status for the Gretsch 6120. In his book, Gretsch 6120: The History of a Legendary Guitar, author Edward Ball does a masterful job detailing the history of the Gretsch Guitar Company with an eventual spotlight on the 6120 itself.

The first two sections of the book cover the cultural backdrop that culminated in the 1955 release of the first 6120. There is particular emphasis on the Gretsch Streamliner, a one pickup hollow body that in many ways, evolved into the 6120. Ball also takes great care to point out the significance of the association that developed between Gibson and Les Paul and how their collaborative commercial successes led to Gretsch seeking out a similar working arrangement with Chet Atkins.

Section III is the core of the book and is basically a year-by-year discussion of the 6120, with plenty of lovely color photos and details down to the differences between specific production batches!

The remaining two sections of the book discuss the ups and downs of both the guitar business in general and the Gretsch Guitar Company as it tried to cope with a rapidly changing marketplace (and culture) through the 1970's and 1980's.

With this book, Edward Ball has done a masterful job taking the reader through the life of the Gretsch 6120 and the guitar business overall. With "Father's Day" on the horizon, this would seem to be a prime choice for anyone interested, not just in the Gretsch 6120, but in anything related to guitars and popular culture!

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