

# BLUESTONE

## Pro Load Box



**A handy power soak that lets your valve amp hit the sweet spot at ear-friendly volumes**

Words: Joe DeSanto

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#### Pro Load Box

SRP £98.70

All prices incl VAT

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#### WHAT IS IT?

A simple to operate, load box with added goodies, that sits between your amp and speaker, allowing you to quietly record cooking valve tones at low levels, and get a great on stage sound at acceptable volumes...yes, there is such a level.

#### WHY SHOULD I WANT ONE?

If you still live at home and still want to live at home whilst recording a steaming great valve amp, or get the best of those bottles live,

If you are one of the thousands of musicians who have a home studio and a valve guitar amp, you'll know how tricky it can be to capture those sonic delights at anything less than house eviction levels. Valve amps sound so good when cranked up because the power amp section reacts differently to the front-end (pre-amp) when the amp is overdriven, hence they deliver a more hefty, beefy, fuller sound in every department. The problem is that even valve amps fitted with a master volume do not redeem their best tonal assets at low volume settings.

Digital modelling amps can provide a workable solution for recording but they still often lack the soaring dynamics of singing valves, as their digital amp's line-out signal is modulated and compressed. But wouldn't it be cool to capture that pure, valve bursting utterance on disc, at acceptable domestic levels?

Well, now you can, thanks to the new Blue Stone Pro Load Box from Emerson and Williams. This clever little device is a power attenuator designed to let you run a valve amp flat out whilst keeping the volume under control and according to Emerson and Williams, the Load Box allows you to quietly capture the sweet spot from a cooking valve amp, with some up to date, on-board goodies thrown in.

The presentation is good, with neat blue livery over a sturdy, black, brushed aluminium box, which seems

robust enough to withstand the day to day trials of the most cumbersome musician, although I have to say, at this stage, it looks worryingly small. So will it handle the mighty throb and devil's hot breath of a bag of EL34's? We'll soon find out.

This is a passive unit (no external power required) that simply connects in-line between the amp head and speakers via two ¼ inch standard jack sockets clearly marked 'From Amp' and 'To Speaker' (a speaker lead is even included in the package).

Without going too deep into tube amp theory, running a valve amp, without a proper load will just spell disaster, as in...meltdown!

But when set to 'DI' the Bluestone bypasses the speaker, absorbs the output from the amp and simulates a speaker load, so the amp believes the speaker is still connected, which is a handy failsafe.

The amp's output (now filtered to a low powered signal), can be diverted to an external recording device, such as a mixing desk or computer interface via the Load Box's XLR output and the Load Box even has its own volume control to vary the output signal, hence you can pump up the amp to what would normally be wallpaper-stripping-volume, but still record at conversation level, or if that's still too loud, monitor via headphones in total silence, via an XLR headphone adaptor. Cool, no?

Another usable feature is the

3.5mm mini jack 'Audio' input, which allows MP3, Computer or CD players to connect directly into the Load Box, for practicing or performing to pre-recorded backing tracks.

We tested various amps, including an Orange Rocker 30 combo, into a Boss BR 900 CD home studio, with a Roland DM 2100 powered monitor system for fold back. I have to say, the Bluestone impressively preserves the amps full tone, characteristics and dynamics without any colourisation, which was easy to compare by carefully flicking back and forth from 'DI' to 'Speaker' via the toggle switch.

I ran the set up for several hours with the combo at around seven on the volume control, with no problems at all, but should the device sense a problem, there is a red led overload indicator. Guitars with single coil and humbucking pickups retained their full integrity and background noise was minimal, but there's a handy ground-loop toggle switch to eradicate any unwanted hum, should it arise.

Bluestone Pro is also great for live work, and is a sound engineer's dream. Just send the Bluestone's signal to a PA or powered monitors for a great sound, at happy pub landlord volumes.

At this price and with the extra on-board facilities, this is a must-have that will fit in the same bag as your guitar tuner and guarantee true valve tones at any level. **PU**