

Guitar Player

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TALOS BASIC COMBO

TESTED BY TERRY BUDDINGH

Designed and built by engineers formerly with the prestigious hi-fi manufacturer Conrad Johnson, the Talos Basic represents a different approach to guitar amp design and construction. While the company borrows its name from Greek mythology (Talos was the bronze warder of ancient Crete), the Basic also borrows many of its design concepts from the exotic and mythical worlds of pro audio and high-end hi-fi.

THE TALE OF TALOS

Built in Springfield, Virginia, by Doug Weisbrod and Bill Thalman, the Basic reveals its pro-audio influence with a tough, birch-ply cabinet, a sturdy spring-loaded handle, and a durable sprayed-on textured finish (the same coating used on many pro P.A. cabs) that provides a formidable defense against ravages



INSTANT GRATIFICATION TALOS BASIC

WHO'S IT FOR?

Players seeking uncommonly pure tone, unique flexibility, and a fresh look.

KUDOS

Outside-the-box design. Audiophile-approved components. Minimal signal path. Regulated power supplies.

CONCERNS

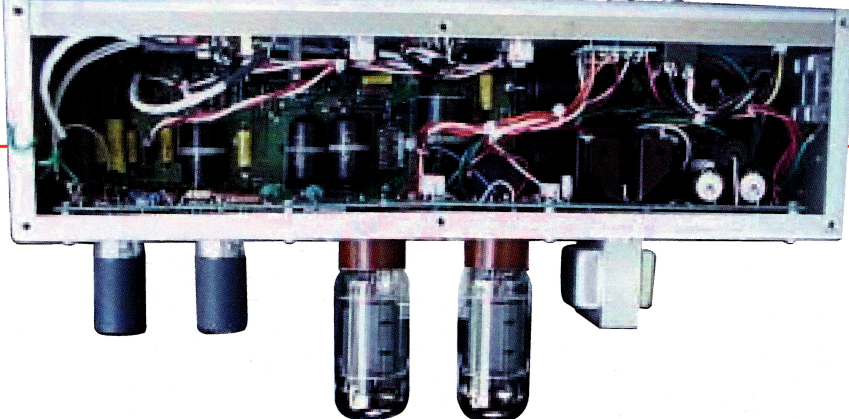
Transformers get quite hot (despite cooling fans). Crowded chassis not service-friendly. Expensive.

PRICE

\$2,950 retail
street N/A

CONTACT

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ZOOM

In contrast with its simple control panel, the Basic's interior is surprisingly busy. The pots have push/pull functions that alter the gain and low-frequency response.

of the road. To enhance aesthetic continuity, an oval theme is repeated for the speaker grille, illuminated "porthole" logo, dual top vents, and dual rear-panel vents.

The Basic fully embraces the audiophile's minimal signal path philosophy by eliminating traditional, tone-robbing passive tone controls. For many players, this would be a startling and disconcerting omission, but it's less cause for concern than you might think, as you can adjust the preamp's tonal character significantly with just the amp's Brite/Fat switch. Additionally, varying the relative settings of the Gain and Drive knobs shifts tonal emphasis, and pulling these knobs adds low-end depth and fullness, as well as some gain.

The Basic has two input jacks and two preamp gain stages. Plugging into the Hi input accesses both gain stages, and the Lo input accesses only the second stage for the shortest signal path. The Gain knob controls the level feeding the second stage, and the Drive knob controls the preamp's output level.

The sonic purity provided by the preamp's minimal circuitry is fully realized with the help of low-noise regulated power supplies for the preamp tubes'

plate supply and filaments. What's so cool about regulated power supplies? Because hum and noise can phase-cancel the signal at certain frequencies, a low-noise, low-hum power supply promises purer and richer tone.

For even more sonic flexibility, the Basic's output stage can be switched to three different operation modes: Triode (18 watts), Partial-Triode (30 watts), or Pentode (50 watts). Besides changing the amp's output power, reconfiguring the output stage also affects the amp's tonal balance, texture, and dynamic response. Triode mode typically produces a fuller and fatter tone, with a richer texture and a more compressed dynamic response. Rarely seen in guitar amps, Partial-Triode (often referred to as ultra-linear mode) produces more power than Triode mode, and typically sounds clearer and more detailed. (Partial-Triode operation also requires a special output transformer with extra primary winding taps.) Pentode mode typically produces the most power, and, hence, the biggest and boldest tones with the most bite and dynamic punch.

GIG TESTING

I played the Basic in several bands—rang-

ZOOM

Despite its lack of traditional tone controls, there are still plenty of ways to adjust the Basic's sound. The unlabeled mini-toggle activates the cooling fans.



SPECS

- Gain and Drive controls
- Brite/Fat switch
- TRS FX loop/insert jack
- Aeon and Kimber Kap capacitors
- Riken Ohm and Dale/Vishay resistors
- One Ruby 12AX7 preamp tube
- One Philips JAN 12AT7 phase-splitter tube
- Two Svetlana 6L6GC output tubes
- 12" Jensen Neo speaker
- Tri-Mode switch for 18-, 30-, or 50-watt operation

ing from a quiet jazz quartet to a loud six-piece R&B outfit—using a variety of guitars, including humbucker-equipped archtops and several Strats and Teles. For the jazz gigs, plugging into the Lo input and selecting Partial-Triode mode yielded warm, viscous, and well-detailed tones. The Triode setting was also sometimes tempting for its richer and darker texture—especially at lower volume levels or when playing thick, juicy, Wes Montgomery-style octaves. As I became more familiar with the Basic, I began to appreciate the value of the 3-way Output switch, as it allowed me to very effectively adapt the amp for different playing styles and venues.

Using the Basic outdoors with the R&B band, the amp spoke

with authority in Pentode mode. This is where I really appreciated the Jensen Neo speaker's quick, precise response, which not only lent uncommon crispness and clarity to funky rhythms, but allowed low-note runs to growl with authority.

BASICALLY COOL

The Basic Combo brings new meaning to the term “less is more,” as it's simply amazing how much control over texture and dynamic response you get from just two knobs and a couple of switches. Despite all its exotic hi-fi design influence, the Basic retains a familiar blackface Fender-like tonal vibe, yet its sheer flexibility puts it in a class all its own. 