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NEW & HIP BOUTIQUE GUITAR

D ALLEN

JOHNNYBLADES AND JOHNNYBUCKERS

The San Francisco-based manufacturer teams up with guitar great **Johnny Hiland** on a pair of smokin' hot pickups



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Dave Allen likes to design his pickups in conjunction with the killer guitarists who actually use them.

pickup dubbed JohnnyBlades, comes in matched sets of three.

These electronics include four-conductor lead wires and are available with white, black, crème or parchment covers. Most important, they sound surpassingly good. “The JohnnyBlades are incredible,” says Hiland. “The neck pickup is round and bubbly, while the bridge gives me that Tele-like spank. The pickups are great with a clean tone, and with distortion they really let me reach out, grab you by the neck and throw you around the room a little.”

Allen also designed some double-coil pickups, the JohnnyBuckers, with Hiland’s assistance. These pickups use Seth Lover’s original PAF as a point of departure, but they incorporate higher-quality components than the original designs; for instance, rather than using plastic, the innards boast shins of Canadian maple, a tonewood that provides a little extra resonance. The pickups have the cold-rolled steel blades, which provide greater clarity in this context than standard iron pole pieces, and are characterized by a tight, bright sound that refuses to muddy up at higher volumes. Hiland says, “The JohnnyBuckers are absolutely killer. On the one hand I can tear loose with them when I feel like rockin’ out, and on the other hand they’re the only humbuckers that I can chicken-pick with. They definitely love to be spanked.”

Johnnys Be Good



D ALLEN JOHNNYBLADES AND JOHNNYBUCKERS
LIST PRICE From \$299.95
dallenpickups.com

DAVE ALLEN had put in many years as an engineer working with mobile satellite and radio networks when a job relocation threatened to uproot him and his family from their home in the San Francisco Bay Area. But rather than move with the company, Allen, an avocational musician, decided to start his own boutique pickup operation.

D Allen now offers a full selection of guitar and bass pickups, all hand-made from premium components. While some modern pickup makers aim to recreate in exacting detail the designs housed in golden-era electric guitars—mid-1950s P-90s, late Fifties PAF humbuckers and Fifties and Sixties single-coils—Allen uses them as a foundation for subtle innovation. “My goal is not to create a replica set of 1959 Strat pickups,” he says. “I make a slightly hotter bridge

pickup with a different scatter pattern for a more balanced sound, and I hand build each bobbin, using a special process that reduces microphonics and keeps the pickups a bit quieter than vintage models.”

Allen likes to design his pickups in conjunction with the players who actually use them, many of whom are killer guitarists. He recently collaborated with the country-rock-jazz virtuoso Johnny Hiland to create signature models with his Joe Barden-inspired blades. It required a protracted tonal study to craft a prototype that stood up to Hiland’s staggeringly high standards. “Johnny’s got an incredibly gifted ear, and while he’s such a nice guy, he’s very hard to satisfy,” Allen says. “Standard metal blades were too shrill, so we had to get some new blades custom-made from cold-rolled steel. In the end, we must have gone through 20 different designs to arrive at the final product.”

One of the results, a single-coil