



# Meet *your* maker

## Much to gain

**Take one** guitar-playing Texas trial lawyer, a fascination with electronics and a friendship with Bob Bradshaw... it was only ever going one way for Jeff Diamant *Words by Mick Taylor*

**D**iamond Amplification is a name that's showing up more and more on the rock 'n' roll radar. The company blasted into the world of high-end rock amplifiers at the Summer NAMM show in 2006 with unique circuits on its boards and big names in its sights. Artists including Tim Mahoney (311), Rusty Cooley (Outworld) and Keri Kelli (Alice Cooper) confirm the rock slant, and it's with the latter that we bumped into Jeff Diamant backstage in Cardiff, late in 2007. With two new amplifiers added to the line for 2008, we thought it high time to dig a little deeper into Diamond.

### How did you get into making guitar amps?

"It came from a fascination with electronics and just trying to make things better. Like most guitar players, I started trying to figure out how to get the sounds I wanted. Early in my playing career I became friends with Bob Bradshaw from Custom Audio Electronics, and also Martin Golub [now engineer at Diamond]. Martin had been the amp guy over at Custom Audio for years and we'd got into working on circuits and ideas together."

### What were the main things you were trying to improve?

"Sometimes there was too much functionality in amps: too many options. Also what I consider to be incorrectly designed effects loops, reliability issues... And in terms of tone, too much saturation, too much compression and not enough high-mids, because in trying to go after new sounds, the low end can get too full and too muddy."

### So ultimate gain isn't the be all and end all of everything?

"I tend to separate gain from distortion, and that's a distinction that a lot of people don't make. It's important because you can have an amplifier with a lot of gain for the power and

punch and sustain that you want, but it doesn't over-saturate. A lot of the pro-level players want a cleaner tone that gives them a fuller, more articulate sound than you get with extra distortion. That's sort of been my theory – we wanted all the gain in the world, but we didn't want it over-saturated. Just a fuller, rounder sound which makes things thick and chunky for rock players."

### Before guitar amps you were in law, right?

"Yeah, it's a bit different! I've been a practising trial lawyer for pushing on for 15 years now. I do commercial litigation, which is basically companies fighting over money!

"In part, Diamond Amplification was built out of frustration with the practice, not because of the job itself, but because I hate

lawyers! The guys I hang out with at weekends – all of my real friends – are musicians. But the practice has been good to me and I've had a lot of success; it's what created the avenue for me to do Diamond."

### Your amps are built entirely in the USA – were you tempted to manufacture in the Far East to keep costs down?

"We have no intention to outsource or go to the Far East for production. It's not just another amp from China – we want everything top shelf all the way through. Even the transformers are wound in the States. I could save a third on every [circuit] board by sending them to China but I don't want the reliability issues. Barring wherever they're rolling our resistors and capacitors,



everything is done in the United States.”

**Where do you stand on the PCB vs point-to-point debate?**

“The answer should always be: there is no difference. But PCBs, in my opinion, just improve the reliability of the whole thing. Anybody who’s studied old Marshalls will know that every one sounds different – that’s got everything to do with point-to-point wiring. The reason hand-wired amps continue to get notoriety, I believe, is that the people who are making them have high attention to detail – they want high quality amps and they use high quality components. All those things can be achieved through a PCB design. We use the best of everything we can find. Tonally there’s no difference, but for reliability you have to give it up for the PCB.”

**Presumably the classic modded EL34 amps – Marshall ‘Plexis’ and Master Volumes – are the blueprint for Diamond amps?**

“I’d go further than that and say that’s the blueprint from which almost everybody starts. Everybody who’s out there doing it owes a debt to Leo Fender for the clean circuits, or Jim Marshall for the crunch circuits. As far as what we do, channel one has an origin somewhere in Leo Fender and channel two in Jim Marshall. What you do with the circuits after that makes all the difference. I can take somebody’s old Marshall and give ‘em a new sound with a resistor and a cap[acitor]. That’s the art.”

**Tell us about your new amplifiers for 2008...**

“The year has brought a widening of the spectrum at both ends. We have stuff that’s heavier than the existing Spec Op and Phantom amps, and stuff that’s on the cleaner, more vintage side.

“The first is the Nitrox. That circuit is so over the top. It’s really heavy – a big, beefy metal sound and it’s aimed exclusively at the heavy rock and metal market: it’s a beast.

“Then there’s the Spitfire, in two variations: a one-channel, largely clean amp with our Dual Volume Gain design [a feature of every Diamond amp]. It’ll go from super clean, to bluesy ZZ Top and classic rock break-up. The Spitfire II adds another channel which is a crunch channel, sort of akin to an older Marshall clean to crunch for a more vintage feel, but with a modern vibe. A guy said to me in the booth at NAMM, Oh it feels like an updated JTM45... I’m happy with that!”

**There’s a lot of ‘retro’ around at the moment, so how do you perceive the general trend in the amp market?**

“I guess in the vintage days, less technology meant things were simple. As we moved into the eighties, things became more complicated: programmable preamps, rack gear, interfacing systems... Y’know, in the eighties everything was bigger than life. Rock stars had clothes you couldn’t get, girls you



For a really big beefy metal sound the Nitrox is a must have with a really over the top circuit

“We use the best of everything we can find. Tonally there is no difference, but for reliability you have to give it up for the PCB” **Jeff Diamant**

couldn’t get... cars... hair! And they were phenomenal players. The nineties sort of started celebrating mediocrity, in my opinion, and that changed guitar rigs too. I think we started to see a systematic simplifying of things, not so much because there were advantages to being simple, but because of the whole ‘mediocrity is great’ influence. I think there’s been something of a continuum from there, but now for the right reasons. Guitar players are realising they don’t need everything they thought they wanted. What Bob Bradshaw would say about all those interfacing systems he builds are that they’re

not about making the guitar player’s rig more complicated, they’re about giving the guitar player lots of options. And even though they look complicated, they’re keeping the signal clear. Guitar players are figuring this out: what I need is a great guitar and a great amp. If I want to augment that from there, fine, but fundamentally I want an amp that I can walk up to, plug in and be happy. The biggest mistake is to take some effects and try to mask a tone that you’re not happy with. So I think now people are looking for higher quality and less features: walk up, plug in, play. And that’s where we’re headed.”

**Cooper’s Man**

Keri Kelli

Rocker par excellence Keri Kelli is currently a mainstay in Alice Cooper’s band. He’s also played with Slash’s Snakepit, Ratt and Warrant – a serious rock pedigree for Diamond amps.

“I met Jeff when I was recording a record out in Houston, Texas,” explains Keri, “and they had a bunch of amps there – all kinds stuff. I tried ‘em all and the Diamond just blew me away straight out of the gate. And we’ve been lovers ever since – ha!”

What is it about the Diamond tone that Keri likes so much? “It’s the fullness of the sound, and the power. The amp is so open sounding, and the gain is very smooth: just very big and round and smooth sounding.”

What’s going on with the Alice Cooper Band right now? “Well, we started recording the new record in February 2008, and then it’s back out on the road again – Alice does not stop!” [www.kerikelli.com](http://www.kerikelli.com)



Those Diamond amps look right at home...