

# Exotica

## Komet Amplification Komet

By Terry Buddingh

Since his days at Ampeg more than 30 years ago, New Jersey native Ken Fischer has been refining the art of amplification, and he is now one of the world's most respected amp gurus. Hardcore connoisseurs consider Fischer's Trainwreck amps to be among the mostly highly prized boutique models available. However, due to health problems, Fischer's Trainwreck production is down to about two amps a year. And even if you're lucky enough to find a used Trainwreck Express, Liverpool 30, or Rocket for sale, the current price can easily exceed \$10,000! Fortunately, there's another way to experience the magic of Fischer's designs.

The Komet (\$3,599) is the result of a collaboration between Fischer and a pair of quality-obsessed amp builders in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, named Holger Notzel and Michael Kennedy. Fischer's minimalist design philosophy is fully embodied in the Komet, which has no reverb, no effects loop, no master volume, and no footswitch. Fischer feels the extra circuitry required by such functions degrades tonal purity.

The Komet's build quality is transcendent. It's often said that art is in the details, and the Komet crew didn't miss a lick. The chassis is made of 1/8"-thick, aircraft-grade structural aluminum, and it's powder coated with a gray hammer-tone finish. The tube sockets have gold-plated contacts

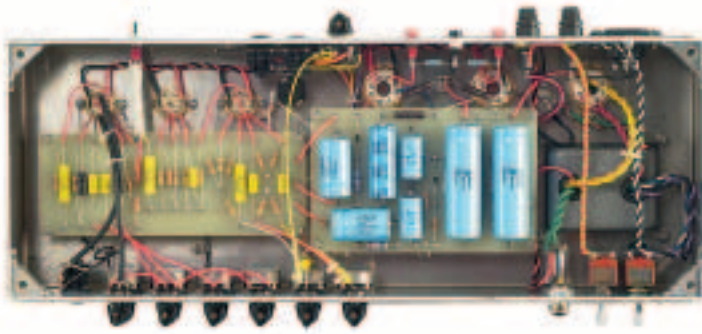


- Single channel
- Hi-Cut control
- Presence control

for reliability. The high-quality pots are hermetically sealed in stainless-steel housings and feature custom tapers. All of the chassis hardware is stainless steel, and the cabinet is fitted with threaded inserts. Wood screws? As they say in Jersey: "Forget about it!" In this age of disposable electronics, it's refreshing to see a product that's built to perform reliably for decades.

Proper output-tube biasing is essential for killer tone, and the Komet's three Bias Test Point jacks

make biasing easy. (All you need is a digital multi-meter that can read in the millivolt range.) And here's another example of Komet obsessiveness: Instead of the usual screwdriver-adjustable bias pot, the Komet features a precision 10-turn pot with a numbered scale—a handy feature if you're into experimenting with different output tube types. For example, once you've used your meter to set the bias, simply jot down the bias pot's scale reading for each set of tubes, and you'll be able to dial-



**Pretty on the inside—Dig the meticulous construction and quality components.**

- Durable 1/8" thick powder-coated aluminum chassis
- Low-noise conductive-plastic-sealed pots
- Silver-plated copper wire
- Ceramic tube sockets with gold-plated contacts
- Stainless-steel hardware



Swapping tubes is easy, thanks to the test-point jacks and the precise, 10-turn bias pot.

in the same bias setting again in a matter of seconds.

The Komet's rear panel features a unique Touch Response switch with Fast and Gradual settings. The Gradual mode produces a significant drop in preamp gain, while slowing the leading-edge attack for a more laid-back, vintage-style tone. The Fast setting produces a more immediate and modern-sounding response.

I especially dug the interactive nature of the Komet's Hi-Cut and Presence controls (the former is

similar to the Cut control on a Vox AC30, and the latter works like a typical Marshall or Fender presence circuit). With most amps, high presence settings loosen-up the feel and enhance the "burn" in the high frequencies, but the tone can also become painfully bright. The Komet's Hi-Cut control allows you to subdue the piercing treble while retaining the enhanced sustain provided by higher presence settings.

The Komet's magic lies in its *feel*, as well as its sound. The amp has great touch sensitivity, and it

seems to magnify subtle expressive nuances instead of compressing them. In fact, it feels almost alive in the way it responds to each note with a tactile bounce.

Changing tubes can elicit significantly different tonal characters. While the Komet rocked authoritatively with its stock Svetlana EL34s, a vintage pair of Genelex KT66s brought out a more refined sonic character. The tone was incredibly sweet, with delicate and lacy top-end chime riding above layers of complex midrange detail.

Installing a pair of "black plate" RCA 6L6s transported the Komet into Fender territory, and, with the Touch Response switch set to Gradual, the tones assumed the looser, funkier vibe of early-'60s, brown- and white-Tolex models.

By any measure, the Komet is truly an exceptional amp. It's a standard bearer for construction quality, and its innovative circuits and killer tone set it apart from the boutique pack. This is an amp you'll definitely want to audition if you get the chance.

**Komet Amplification**, (225) 926-1976; [kometamps.com](http://kometamps.com).