

# Product Reviews

**Barden Pickups**  
**Joe Barden Engineering**  
**9161 Key Commons Ct.**  
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Original *Joe Barden* pickups have become legendary in the guitar world. The *Telly* pickups he developed with Danny Gatton go for big bucks on the used market. Joe Barden disappeared from the radar for awhile, but his pickups are now back. They are made by a new company, *Joe Barden Engineering*, with Frank Troccoli as President. Joe is still with the company as founder and "Chief of Technology". The current pickups are made to Joe's specifications in the U.S.A. in Manassas, Virginia, right across the road from the *Crosby, Stills and Nash* cover. The overriding philosophy is to remain true to the original vision of Danny Gatton and Joe Barden when they first developed the pickups. We got a set of the *Danny Gatton Telly* pickups and a set for *Strats*.

First of all *Joe Barden* pickups have a blade pole piece instead of the round slugs you see on most pickups. Personally I really like blade pickups. Old *Bill Lawrence* pickups are still some of my favorite pickups. On normal slug pickups when you bend a note there is a dip in volume as you bend the string, as it leaves the magnetic field of one slug before it is picked up by the adjacent one. With a blade pickup there is no drop in volume as you bend the string, since it is always over a magnet. Now some players are so used to that drop as part of their sound that they might find the strong continuous signal disconcerting. As I said I really like it.

The second thing you will notice is that these pickups are whisper quiet. They are hum canceling pickups. *Joe Barden* uses the word hum canceling instead of humbucking because humbucking congers up an image in many players' minds as a certain size pickup with a characteristic sound. That is not what these pickups are. They are the same size as the corresponding single coil pickups and they sound way more like single coils than humbuckers, which is what they were designed to do.

As humbucking pickups go, the *Joe Bardens* read low, with DC resistance around 4K. Most humbuckers read 5k and above. Don't be fooled by

the reading. Though they read low, there is no lack of output. They definitely have more output than the corresponding single coil pickup. They are as loud as most humbuckers in output, but without the midrange peak and rolling off of the highs and lows you get with most humbuckers, so it may seem at first that they are less loud than traditional humbuckers. Because of the low reading I guessed that the design involved two coils run in parallel instead of the traditional humbucking series. Like on the old *Dimarzio* dual sounds in their "clean" mode. Frank told me this was not the case, that they were wound like traditional humbuckers, showing that DC resistance is not always a sign of output. The output comes from the way Joe winds his pickups. For those interested, these are ceramic magnet pickups.

The pickups went into an early 70s *Telly* and *Strat*. I played them through several amps, including a *Dr Z Maz 18*, a newer *Vox AC 15*, a brown *Fender Super* and a *Mesa Maverick*. The sound of the *Telly* and *Strat* pickups were very similar. The *Telly* bridge had a little more twang than the *Strat* bridge. Though it does twang, it isn't as twangy as a stock *Telly*. The *Strat* bridge pickup does have more output than the neck and middle. One of our neck/middle pickups had a little higher DC reading than the other, so it went into the middle position. There is plenty of output from the bridge pickup in the *Strat* set, so you don't get that traditional drop you get in going from other positions to the bridge. On *Tellys* it's the neck pickup that is usually wimpy when compared to the bridge. This was not the case with the *Bardens*. The neck *Telly* pickup has more muscle than a stock *Telly*, more like a neck *Strat* in my opinion. The balance between the two was good, giving a sweet dual pickup sound. The "inbetween" sounds on the *Strat* were very *Strat* like. All the pickups are quite capable of overdriving an amp, more so than single coils. They are not distortion pickups though.

The sound of the *Bardens* is very clear with a lot of punch. They have a nice round tight low end and clear highs. The sound in-between the lows and highs is very smooth and even, with no major resonant peaks to my ear. Though you are playing humbuckers the sound is definitely in the single coil stadium. Though I was in single coil land sound wise, the pickups do have a humbucking feel to them. This may be the only drawback to a hardcore single coil player. They do

feel a little different in response to traditional single coils in these guitars. But if you are into changing pickups, you really don't want your guitar to sound exactly the same before and after the change. The pickups were very responsive to differences in pick attack and to changes in the volume and tone control.

The frequency response of the pickups is wider than some others. One of the raps some reviewers give the *Bardens*, on such places as *Harmony Central*, is that the high-end is shrill. We found none of that when they were played through any of our amps. The sound was always warm and musical. My guess is because the amps I used could handle the frequency response of the pickups. Looking at the reviews, those others often seem to be trying the pickups through small transistor amps which have notoriously shrill highs to start with and making them work higher in the spectrum just complicates the problem. It takes a good amp to show off a good pickup.

All in all I can recommend the new *Joe Barden* pickups to those who want to make sure their single coil guitars don't make noise and want more output, while not sacrificing the single coil sound pallet that they bought the guitar for, and, are not afraid to change the sound of their instrument a bit. It just would have been nice if I had started playing like Danny Gatton instead of me.

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