

SOUNDROOM



Audere JZ3

Direct \$149–230,
depending on options

Pros Excellent tone
with class-leading
versatility

Cons None

Contact

(503) 645-0250
www.audereaudio.com

TECH SPECS

Models tested

JZ3-VV-2B, 2-band EQ
with volume, volume,
treble/bass stack, and
Z-Mode switch;

JZ3-VB-3B, 3-band
EQ with volume,
mid/balance stack,
treble/bass stack,
and Z Mode switch

Tone controls

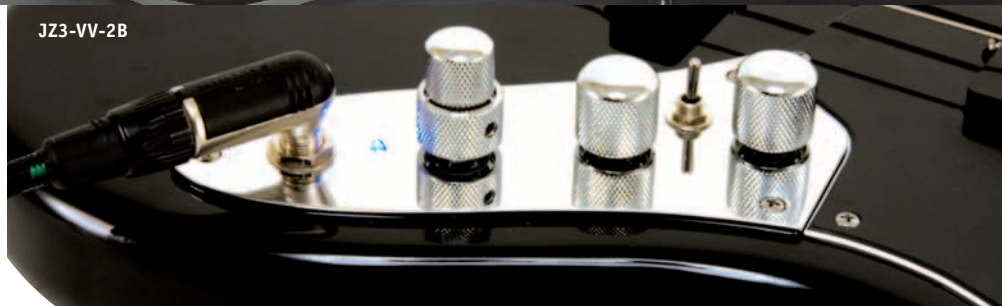
JZ3-VV-2B: bass,
±12dB @ 100Hz
(shelving); treble,
±14.5dB @ 2.5kHz;

JZ3-VB-3B: bass,
±12dB @ 80Hz
(shelving); mid,
±10dB 500Hz (wide
bandwidth); treble,
±10dB @ 3.7kHz

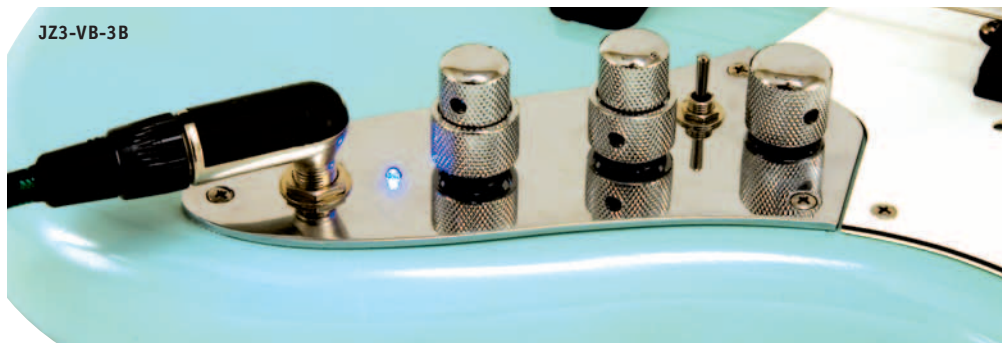
Made in U.S.A.

Warranty

One year limited



JZ3-VV-2B



JZ3-VB-3B

The Audere's battery LED is handy-dandy, just be aware of the two-second no-output test period when the bass is first plugged in.

AUDERE JZ3

BY JONATHAN HERRERA

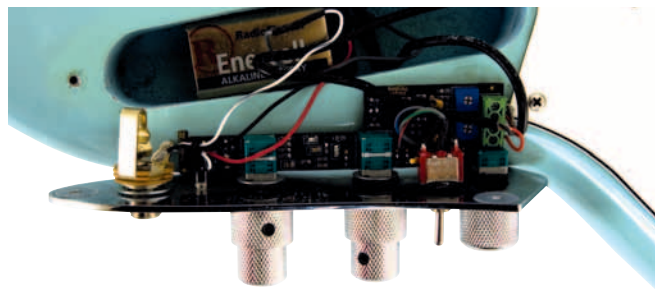
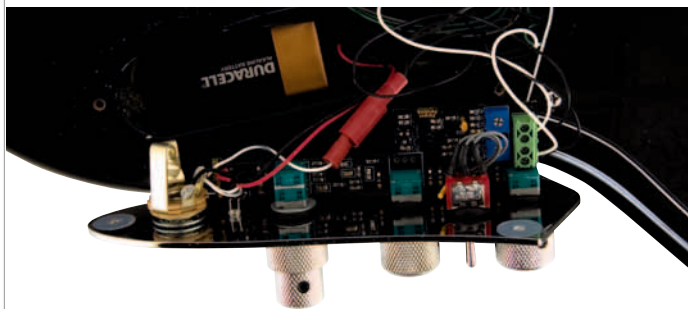
PASSIVE OR ACTIVE? ON OPPOSITE EXTREMES of this debate lie the “Who Needs a Golldurn Battery” committee and “My Bass Makes Coffee” caucus. The rest of us—the non-ideologues—are simply looking for good tone, and no matter what our proclivity, our bass's output depends on the same thing: strings' alchemic ability to induce current in pickups by vibrating in their magnetic field. If a bass is passive, this signal goes through some simple potentiometers to control volume and tone before it heads out to an amp. If it's active, a battery-powered preamp buffers, boosts, and further tweaks the sound before it hits the rig.

No matter what, though, the sound is

born at the pickups, and David Meadows, founder of Audere Audio, recognizes the pickups' sonic primacy. He put his engineering emphasis on the interface between a preamp and the pickups. This approach makes his design one of the coolest, most original around.

Meadows's background is in designing semi-conductor processing equipment used by big corporations, but the stress and long hours found him searching for a musical outlet. He found it in the bass. But after buying a high-end instrument with a popular onboard preamp, he immediately saw opportunities for improvement and eventually ended up hanging a shingle. Seeking to differentiate

The Audere was a mighty tight squeeze in this '75 Fender Jazz Bass (right), but I got it stuffed in there eventually.



himself from the competition, he focused on the impedance load presented to pickups and its effect on tone. All of the components in a bass's signal chain—the tone controls, cables, pots, and amp input—combine to present this load. The load changes pickups' frequency response, so Meadows figured load adjustability would be an intriguing new way to alter tone. Thus, his 3-position Z-Mode switch, which gives players real-time control over load. For the more intrepid, circuit-board capacitor sockets allow for further customization of the High Z switch position's sound with Audere's optional pack of caps. To further preserve fidelity, Audere units feature DC coupling (the pickups are connected directly to the preamp transistors) and only one DC-to-AC translation point at the preamp output, translating to cleaner tone through the preamp's front end.

Further cool design tricks abound. The Audere preserves a stereo signal through the preamp, essentially handling each pickup's output independently. This allows for active mixing, as opposed to the much more common passive blend control. Passive blends tend to result in three primary sounds, the soloed bridge, soloed neck, and

both. Active blending offers a linear and uniform scan across the pickup spectrum. All the in-between settings sound like just that, a ratio of the two pickups that's directly proportional to the knob's position. When installed in a J-style bass, active mixing is revelatory, coaxing out previously unheard tones. The Auderes also have a quite groovy battery-strength indicator LED, the brightness of which is proportional to the strength of the battery. It flashes bright blue when a bass is first plugged in, or dimly if the battery is on its way out. One slightly weird by-product is that the bass is silent for a couple of seconds while the battery test runs; odd, but no big deal.

The preamp is made from high-end components. It's available in a variety of configurations, including the J-Bass replacements (complete with pots and jack plate) I checked out, as well as pot- and plate-less units for installment in other basses. I swapped out the original electronics on my '75 Fender Jazz for the Audere (don't worry, I kept the old stuff), and found the installation a little frustrating, as the cavity was just big enough to fit the preamp. After much cursing and consternation, I got it in there, but it was not fun.

The Audere's high-tech wizardry became an afterthought once I started fooling around with it on a bass. There's nothing confusing about the system, other than learning (which takes about five seconds) that the Z Mode switch is the inverse sonic equivalent of the (groan) Tall/Grande/Venti coffee cup scheme. High Z is trebly and a little small sounding; Medium Z is balanced and familiar; and Low Z is big and bassy—all this without touching the EQ, which, by the way, was exceptionally clean and useful. The Audere's inherent tone was clean, neutral, and, in our J-Bass testers, bouncy and pliant with a shimmery top end. Most important, it is versatile in the extreme, with numerous avenues to tone tweaking. It's also nearly devoid of noise and remarkably focused and clear, especially in the Low Z mode. String-to-string distinction was exceptional.

The Audere preamp was seriously groovy. It was fascinating hearing on old Fender in a completely new light, without swapping pickups, and I'd expect it'd do the same for any instrument. Considering the intelligence that went into its design, and its highly evolved sound, it's one of the best creations in bass. **BP**