

THE THD HOTPLATE



Reviewed by "Cos"

I bought my THD Hotplate after having a very bad experience with another companies attenuator. I was in the middle of a recording session for Permanent Reverse and this "other brand" started burning!

I jumped online and ran to AMS (American Music Supply)* and ordered a Hotplate pronto! Two days later there it was. This thing is solidly built like a tank! It really reminds me of a piece of military gear.

I will try and make this short and sweet. "Why this attenuator and not one of the others out there?"

The THD uses a capacitive and well as resistive loading network. Quite a few of the other brands out there use cheaper pure resistive networks. Like that piece of smoldering junk I had to start with.

The THD unit really responds more to the players touch. Because of this it is not as harsh as a pure resistive unit. The pure resistive units end up making your amp sound cold and feel and respond like a solid state amp. The Hotplate allows more of your amps color, tone, and feel to shine though.

I want to point out here that you will read reviews that say this unit sounds bad at really low volumes out there on the web. Guess what? Most attenuators do! At whisper bedroom levels it is a matter of physics. Your putting out so little power that your taking the speaker movement and cabinet interaction out of the equation. The speaker cabinet "breathing" and moving air, the speaker coils warming up, speaker distortion and sound waves interacting with the guitar are part of the tube amp playing experience.

After I repaired my smoked "other brand" I had a chance to A/B these two units. I set the other loadbox to its 1% setting and it sounded well..not so good!! The THD on its lowest setting blew it away! And with the deep and bright switch it sounded even better. Plus at the lowest setting THD gives me a volume control! There was NO question, with the THD Hotplate my search was done! Just remember that as bedroom levels there is a trade-off for tone, but in my opinion THD has done the best job to correct this with their unit's design.

Also the THD has a fan that is powered by sound! How cool (pun) is that. The harder you play the more it cools! The other unit said with a 100W amp it did not need a fan yet it got so hot that it was almost a freaking fire hazard even with 50 Watts! The THD unit stays cool and even with 100W it only gets warm.

About line outs and speaker sims. My other unit had a speaker sim circuit with “on” and “off” axis mic settings. It was pretty much useless without massive amounts of post EQ. THD just gives you a basic line out. You can route this line out to other amps, or into the board and use virtual cabs via plug-ins in your DAW! This is much cheaper than some of the “pro” speaker sim units that are electronic. I find this method works great even with a PODxt Pro with the amp set to off and just using the PODxt's cabs.

I did round after round of trying to use the other units “cab” sim and it just fell way short. You can't get a handful of resistors and a few caps to sound like a real mic and a real speaker. THD knew this, that is why they did not go there I bet. Instead THD gives you a line out that reflects what the raw uncolored output of the amp sounds like. Plus a level control to route, set and do with what you please. I prefer this method. Give me the true color of my amp on the line out and I will decide how I process it from there!

About the Hotplate “Load” setting. This shuts the speaker off and you can use the line out for your recording setup. The “Bright” and “Deep” switches seem to work in reverse in this setting so experiment with them for your recording tone. Remember when your using the line out your getting the raw amp tone so it will sound bright and brittle with no speaker sim in your recording chain. Use a plug-in in your DAW if you can.

I want to talk a second about using a Hotplate. Some people think “I can get this thing and crank my amp to 10 and it will sound killer!” Hold on a second there, lets think this through. The goal is to light up the output tubes right? Your output tubes have a range that they perform best in. Just like a car has a “power band” that the most horsepower and torque are developed in. Is just mashing the gas to the floor until the engine red-lines best? No! The amp is the same way. You want to get the amp into the tilting point where it is just breaking up but not too much. This give you the best tone and the greatest dynamics from the amp. That gives that “elastic” quality that tube amps are known for. I have found that most amps around 5-7 is where the sweet spot is. Past that and the sound gets “muddy” it starts to “blur” in a way that is not very “musical”. Lower than that is the sound it a bit dull or cold. With a Hotplate your master volume starts to become a sort of tone control, so think of it that way rather than just mashing the gas.

The Bottom Line. In case you did not know THD has been making these for YEARS! They are pretty much the industry standard. They are built rock solid buy people who know tube amps (they make them too!). If you wanting to rock you tube amp into the sweet spot without going deaf don't think twice about any other brand, get a Hotplate.

One last thing. Think hard about what “Ohms” unit you want before you buy. They come in a few. The main point here is will you be using one or two cabs, think about your speaker options.

Cos

*Cos unofficially endorses AMS cause their service has always been awesome and quick! Cos did not get paid for this review and THD does not even know or probably care who the heck he is anyway LOL!!