

# VINTAGE

## V58JDAB Jerry Donahue

By Barry Cleveland

The master Danny Gatton once referred to Jerry Donahue as “the string-bending king of the planet.” It’s an apt description. In addition to being a member of the British folk-rock group Fairport Convention (and Fairport offshoot Fotheringay) in the early- to mid-’70s, his playing helped propel the Hellecasters and the Electric Revelators, and albums by Robert Plant and Elton John.

Several Jerry Donahue signature models have been issued over the years—the most recent being the \$1,299 Fret-King JD Duncan Black Label, designed by Trev Wilkinson. The Vintage version reviewed here is a considerably less-expensive alternative

to the JD Duncan, designed to put a little Donahue magic into the hands of players with more limited budgets. Despite its modest price, the V58JDAB claims to deliver much of the sonic versatility of its costlier sibling—largely by way of a proprietary 5-way pickup selector designed by Donahue and configured just like the one on the JD Duncan.

### Built Like a Plank

The V58JDAB is built around an unbound American alder body (the JD Duncan’s alder body has a bound ash top) with an Ash Blonde finish. The finish on the solid, hefty plank is evenly

applied, though there were a few very tiny particles trapped in the finish on the top. A single-ply white pickguard adds a classic ’50s touch.

The guitar features a bolt-on, one-piece hard maple neck/fretboard with perfectly inlaid black dot position markers and a vintage-style 7 1/4” radius. The neck itself feels quite comfortable, although it doesn’t sit entirely flush with the body, and the nut is seated slightly askew. The 22 medium frets were nicely dressed, cleanly installed, and felt good to the touch except for a few sharpish edges.

The guitar’s setup and intonation were reasonably good, but both could have benefitted from a little finessing. That said, the relatively low action easily accommodated aggressive string bending without fretting out, and fret buzz was minimal overall. On these counts the Vintage delivers when it matters.

The Wilkinson Deluxe WJ555 tuners and WTB bridge are very solidly built, stable, and perform well. The volume control is quiet in operation, but goes from silence to “on” rather abruptly, and the lack of a gradual linear taper may let down players that like pinky swells and volume dynamics. The tone control is more effective, but touches the mounting plate when turned. In general, the

Vintage delivers in terms of playability, but there is room for improvements in quality at the detail level.

### Select Grades

The 5-position pickup selector is at the heart of the V58JDAB’s impressive tonal versatility. Position 1 engages a Wilkinson WJTDn Alnico 2 single-coil, which, interestingly, is intended to provide the sound of a ’60s/’70s Stratocaster neck pickup. It’s certainly in the ballpark, and by any standard sounds quite good—with the requisite spank and a pleasing balance of warm roundness and sparkly highs. It fared best with clean and moderately overdriven amp settings.

Position 2 gets you the same pickup, but adds extra capacitance to the circuit with the aim of emulating both fatback jazz guitars and Eric Clapton’s late-’60s Cream tones. A Gibson L-5 or ES-335 it is not, but the lack-of-woodiness factor notwithstanding, the tone is surprisingly humbucker-like and sounded good on all amp settings from clean to high-gain.

Position 3 combines the neck pickup with a Wilkinson WJTDb Alnico 2 single-coil bridge pickup in parallel to achieve—surprise—the sound of a Telecaster with its 3-position switch in the middle position. It delivers the same full-range chunkiness

you’d hear from a good Telecaster with both pickups engaged.

Position 4 also combines both pickups, but inserts a capacitor and a resistor in reversed phase in the circuit. It is designed to emulate the tone of a Stratocaster with its 3-position selector in the in-between, out-of-phase position, and it yields a thinned-out but edgy sound that’s great for cutting through dense mixes.

Position 5 gives you the bridge pickup alone. This pickup sounds really good on pretty much any amp setting, yet it lacks some of that characteristic edge and bite you might hear from a standard Telecaster. It’s also slightly quieter than the neck pickup.

### The Verdict

The Vintage V58JDAB is a lot of guitar for the money. Sure, it may need some tweaking and not all aspects of the workmanship are immaculate, but when it comes to the truly important stuff—like playability, versatility, and, especially, tasty tones—it delivers. And all these broadened sonic options make the Vintage considerably more than just another inexpensive T-style axe. 🎸

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## RATINGS

Vintage V58JDAB

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Tones

Playability

Build/Design

Value

**PROS** Versatile, with very good (if somewhat non-traditional) sounds. Plays well and stays in tune.

**CONS** Requires some adjustments to perform optimally. Workmanship would benefit from greater attention to detail.