

Guitar World Mag., Nov. 2000: Fight the Power, How to take control of your stage volume, by Matt Bruck.

I gig with my band regularly, mostly in clubs. I love the sound of my amp when I turn the volume up to about 5 or 6, but I'm just too loud for the size of the places we play. The soundman always wants me to turn down, but then I'm not happy with my tone. Help!

--Greg Clark
Olney, PA

Man, I feel your pain! There's just nothing, like the sound of an amp being pushed into output distortion. Output distortion occurs when an amp reaches its volume threshold, at which point the output (power) tubes really have to work. In my experience, output distortion is so wonderfully warm, toneful, organic, responsive and musical that most guitar players can't resist it. The only problem is that it requires that an amp be turned up loud, which produces exactly the problem you're experiencing. Some people might recommend putting an overdrive pedal or fuzz box in front of the amp to make up for the distortion you lose when you play at a lower volume. But stompboxes are not output tubes and do not produce distortion the same way; consequently, the sound they produce will be different from what you want to achieve with your tube amp. The bottom line here is that there's just no substitute for the real thing.

But fear not, because the good folks at THD Electronics have the answer to your problem, and it's called a Hot Plate. Technically speaking, a Hot Plate is a "power attenuator." Once connected between an amplifier's speaker output and the speaker cabinet, the Hot Plate acts like a master volume control that lets you play your amp at any volume, absorbing most of the power generated by the amplifier and passing a small part of the power to the speaker. Your amp and its output tubes will still be cranked up, only now you'll be able to get the tone you want and control the overall volume after it leaves the amplifier but before it reaches the speaker.

The Hot Plate also serves as a great dummy load and has an adjustable line out for recording. So if you live in an apartment and want to record your 100-watt Marshall, you can disconnect your speaker, use the load setting on the Hot Plate and go direct into your mixing board.

There are five different Hot Plate models (2,2.7,4,8 and 16 ohms), and although they all perform the same function, you'll need to pick the one that matches your amp's impedance. Make no mistake, a Hot Plate is not just for a head-and-cabinet-type setup but for combo amps as well. For more information, check out the THD website at HYPERLINK <http://www.thdelectronics.com> www.thdelectronics.com, or call (206) 781-5500.