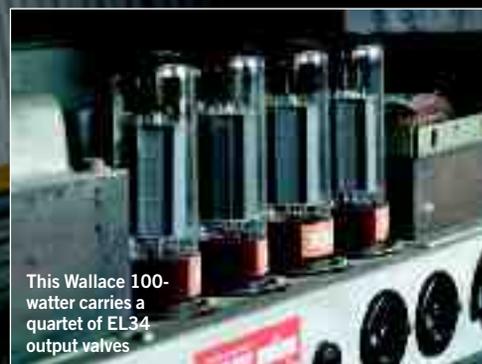




# FATHER TED

Amplifiers built by Ted Wallace aren't easy to find, and despite a 40-year history, the name is virtually unknown. This is the story of Wallace, a brand that did it first – and British amplification's best-kept secret

Words Paul Day  
Photography Amanda Thomas



This Wallace 100-watt carries a quartet of EL34 output valves

Ask a guitarist to name any British amp brands and chances are they'll usually plump for Marshall and Vox. With a little more severe memory jogging, real experts on the subject should recall long-forgotten brand names like White, Roost, Burman, Impact and Vamp. However, it's highly unlikely that any will mention Wallace, one of the real pioneers in the not-so-gentle art of making guitars louder.

Quite why Wallace is so overlooked in the annals of amplification is something of a mystery. Maybe it's because the company didn't indulge in big advertising campaigns or produce very much in the way of publicity material. The latter is often a great source of information for research purposes, as well as inducing severe bouts of nostalgia, but in this case, the very obvious lack of literature is frustrating to say the least.

Another reason for the company's obscurity could be that Wallace tended to cater more for the needs of session men and other musicians employed in similarly anonymous situations, rather than target the public, pro or semi-pro player. Big-name endorsements weren't considered to be too much of a priority either, although the roster of Wallace users actually boasted more than a few famous faces.

Many makes have been lost in the mists of time because they were short-

lived, disappearing before managing to make any impact on the UK amplification scene, but this certainly can't be said of Wallace, which enjoyed a production span of over 40 years. This fact alone makes it all the more amazing that hardly anyone has ever heard of the amplifiers adorned with this logo.

The history of the brand and the man behind it actually dates back to the late 1920s. Ted Wallace was a sax player, but his true talent lay with all things electronic and he decided to put this attribute to profitable use and set up his own company in 1928, selling musical instrument amplifiers. In 1938, he commenced commercial production of amplification designed specifically for guitar and bass. This puts our Ted more than a wee bit ahead of the competition in this field, both here and over in America, pre-dating the efforts of the legendary Leo Fender, as well as long revered icons in the UK amp industry.

The early Wallace amps kept things simple, employing basic all-valve circuitry and features. Construction looked crude, but Wallace concentrated on internal construction quality rather than worrying about appearances. Consequently, his amps looked home-made, but they were designed to perform in professional environments. Ted Wallace also didn't believe in change for change's sake and even by the start of the 1960s his amps had undergone few alterations. It meant they looked increasingly anachronistic, but Wallace still preferred to emphasise →

→ what went on inside. He even made this lack of looks a selling point in one of the few product brochures ever issued by the company. This stated, “cabinets are of neat appearance, with a complete absence of useless decoration so often found in commercial equipment.” Another claim was, “overall efficiency, with true undistorted output and absence of hum and other background noises”, a boast that can be backed up by any Wallace user.

The range displayed includes two combos, the 20W Sessionist Super with 12-inch speaker and the twin-12 Soloist 30-watter. These partnered the 30W

## Wallace enjoyed a production span of over 40 years. This makes it all the more amazing that hardly anyone has ever heard of these amplifiers

Solent Super and 50W Presence Master heads, available to best suit guitar, bass or organ. All amps featured the same controls: volume, treble and a three-position bass range switch, while tremolo speed and depth were also included where relevant.

Fitted with Vitavox speakers, their accompanying cabs came in 2 x 12 and 4 x 12 configurations, the latter being a very early example of a format subsequently made famous by a certain Jim Marshall. Solidly constructed and far from small, these speaker enclosures were as heavy-duty as the amps. This meant finding suitably sturdy carrying handles was a problem, but the Wallace solution was to use cast metal, coffin-style handles presumably purloined from a friendly funeral director! Black vinyl, small case corners and silver aluminium speaker grille was the order of the day for other fixtures and fittings, although some examples crop up clad in a more colourful combination of maroon vinyl and gold grille.

Apart from these standard models, Ted Wallace would build amps to order, ensuring a bewildering array of one-offs over the ensuing years – almost to the point that it seems no two Wallace amps were ever exactly the same!

The biggest and most important change for the company came in 1967, with the development of the new XT amp, which incorporated a unique piece of Ted Wallace design described somewhat simplistically as a tone mixing system. Essentially, this involved a dual preamp, one side employing wide-ranging bass and mid-treble filters, while the other governed harmonic content only. The levels from both were blended as required via a control layout spanning bass/mid gain, four-way range selector, mid-treble, XT gain and master volume. The end results combined well with Wallace’s classic clean sound,

Right: this AC 3500 XT Mk II looks better with the later ‘black face’ control panel  
Middle: the fuzz controls on this 100W XT head were a reluctant Wallace option!



Below: an early twin-channel 50W head sporting simple circuitry and grey vinyl control panel



Above: behind crude appearances lies wiring that’s a work of art

yielding impressively musical and versatile performance for guitar or bass.

The concept was initially employed on just two heads, the AC 50 XT and AC 100 XT, but by 1969 the range had expanded to encompass 20W and 200W

versions, the latter guaranteeing instant deafness as Wallace watts meant more than most. Built-in fuzz became an additional option, somewhat incongruous in view of the company’s consistent quest for clean and quiet. The irony wasn’t lost on Ted, who offered this extra in almost miserly manner, via two front-mounted controls linked to what was simply a cheaply built, transistorised fuzz box bolted on to the amp chassis.

Over the next five years the XT line underwent constant refinement and Mk II, Mk III and finally Mk IV versions accordingly appeared, while available wattages also varied. Most of the changes involved were comparatively minor and, certainly outwardly, the only →

→ discernible difference often merely concerned the model number.

Styling also altered little, sticking with that established during the later 1960s: a black vinyl-covered wooden sleeve, hard-edged and sporting small metal corner protectors, plus leather handle(s). The front panel was originally grey vinyl-covered and controls usually lacked any descriptive legends, although if the customer insisted, Ted Wallace would reluctantly write on the relevant titles using a Biro. Control descriptions later came on engraved black Trafalite strips and eventually this material covered the complete fascia, carrying all necessary lettering. This final combination looked much better and far less amateurish than any earlier Wallies.

On many models, the brand logo was a separate plate mounted above the control panel. It started out small, but as Wallace realised the value of visual advertising, the size was increased accordingly. On earlier amps this nameplate was simply stuck to the front and fell off when the glue dried out. If the amp was a plain panel example there was then no way to determine the manufacturer, which means there are a few 'mystery' Wallaces out there!

The company was situated at 4 Soho Street, London W1, before moving, in 1971, to 12 Praed Mews, Norfolk Place, London W2. It was essentially a one-man operation, although Ted did employ the services of somebody to help him out with the woodworking side, building



**Above: boasting BIG transformers and KT88 bottles, this hefty head is a two-man lift!**

**Right: five controls were the standard minimum on all Wallace XT amps**



## Ted Wallace would build any amp to order, ensuring a bewildering array of one-offs over the ensuing years

the cabinets etc. This was probably necessary because, while Wallace was a very good electrical engineer, the cases for his beautifully constructed amplifiers could border on rough-and-ready. One Wallace assistant was known as 'Geronimo', and he had some different ideas on styling, seeking a more professional look via radiused edges, smoother corners and a recessed front panel. Some cabs were built this way, but he was told to keep things simple and appearances stayed Wallace's way until production ceased.

This officially occurred in 1975, when Ted Wallace decided he'd had enough of business bureaucracy, tax tussles etc, or as he put it, "the men in suits". He subsequently moved to the Isle Of Wight to enjoy his retirement, although he did build one or two amps. He may have quit the industry, but Ted Wallace left behind a legacy of amps that provided sterling service for guitarists and bass players all over the country.

This had started back in the 1930s,

but demand became significantly greater two decades on. As with instruments, there was little choice of amplification in the late fifties for the fast-growing breed of electric guitarists and bass players. Wallace was literally one of the few games in town and enjoyed the custom of the session men employed in the capital's numerous radio and recording studios, ensuring that the sound of these amps appeared on many hit records.

Manfred Mann were early users and John Paul Jones was a well-known Wallace-wielding sessioneer. Future Led Zeppelin colleague Jimmy Page was similarly supplied for his short-lived sojourn in The Yardbirds. In the September 1966 Beat Instrumental, he stated he'd be using "a Wallace unit, which Chris Farlowe gave me. It's quite old and was first used by Bobby Taylor, the first guitarist with the very early Thunderbirds. I was always impressed by the sound he got from it."

The XT series appealed to a wide variety of players, including folkie Bert Jansch, Mick Grabham and Rick Wills of Cochise, session man Eric Ford and hit band The Foundations. Wallace also produced equally powerful PA systems and these hefty beasts found favour

with more than a few big names, including Elton John, Long John Baldry, Jethro Tull and Procul Harum.

After Ted threw in the towel, Wallace amps soon dropped out of sight and by the eighties they were commanding comparatively little money. That situation has changed over the ensuing years, with very few now cropping up at any price. Musicians who still own old Wallies tend to guard them jealously, likewise hire companies and studios that use them to help warm up digital recordings. Wallace amps tend to appeal more to bass players than guitarists, as the latter don't always appreciate such stay-clean quality, which is the very thing that four-stringers favour.

Ted Wallace is unfortunately no longer with us, but his amps live on and, being built to last, will no doubt continue to do so for a few more lifetimes yet. The fact that so very few players are even aware of their existence represents an almost criminal lack of recognition, especially when others have offered far less and achieved worldwide fame. Here's hoping one day the name Wallace can command the respect due to someone who, undoubtedly, did it first. **📌**