

The Right Speaker for your Blues Junior

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Aftermarket speakers, like tubes, are not really a mod. But they do change the way your Blues Junior moves air and the tones that get emphasized. They may partially mask an amp's flaws, but the right approach is to make the amp sound great first, then use the speaker to give it that final push in the tone direction you want to go. It should be your *last* mod, not your first. People who say that a new speaker has cured the Blues Junior's inherent boxy tone simply haven't heard a Blues Junior with proper tone stack and power supply mods.

See the bottom of the page for easy instructions on how to change the speaker.

My customers and I have collectively tried many different speakers, but I'll limit my comments to speakers that I've spent some time with and have a feel for the tone.

Fender Special Design (stock speaker)

This is the stock speaker in all black and blonde Tolex Blues Juniors and old green board tweeds. The speaker is made by Eminence and it's roughly equivalent to the Legend 125/1258. This speaker has been used in hundreds of thousands of Fender amps, including the Deluxe Reverb, Hot Rod Deluxe, Twin Reverb, Blues Deluxe, and many others. It's a decent, all-around speaker. It doesn't have the deepest bass, and the highs can sound kind of fizzy, but it's well balanced. Many people decide to leave it alone after they do the mods. The "farty" tone in the bass of a stock Blues Junior is mostly due to poor design decisions in the amp, not flaws in the speaker. One surprising new observation about the stock speaker: The more power you give it, the better it sounds. My 5881-powered 25-watt Blues Junior has the stock speaker in it, and it sounds awesome. The Billm basic mods will go a long way to helping this speaker deliver. Many owners who have upgraded to 6L6s and are running a full 30 watts find the stock speaker comes to life and they don't need to change it.

Jensen C12N (stock in tweed limited edition and "NOS" models)

This reissue Jensen is built in Italy by SICA Altoparlanti. They've made an effort to capture some of the old "American sound" magic of the Jensens that were so popular in the 1960s, but they fall short in some significant areas. The [C12N](#) starts out well in the bass and transitions well to a smooth midrange, but this speaker can be downright shrill on the high end, especially with a Tele or Strat bridge pickup. On the plus side, **the C12N cuts well in a band situation and is less likely to be buried**. It sounds better after a lengthy break-in period, but it's definitely not my favorite speaker.

Eminence Texas Heat

The [Texas Heat](#) is one of the most popular of Eminence's line of Patriot speakers, and for good reason. It has great tonal breadth, strong bass, prominent, slightly smoky mids, and a smooth top end. When The ToneQuest Report tested a bunch of the Patriots a couple of years ago, they reported that the **Texas Heat improved every amp they tried it in**—and they tried a lot. It's more efficient than most other aftermarket speakers, so you get your 15 watts' worth. The only criticism I have of the Texas Heat is that when playing clean, the highs can sound a bit disconnected from the rest of the tone, almost as if my high E string was connected to another, smaller speaker. It sounds better if you roll off the bass and boost the mids a bit to fill it in. And when you crank it, distortion tones are sweet, not spiky and harsh.

Eminence Cannabis Rex

The [Cannabis Rex](#) gets its name from its hemp cone. Hemp fibers strengthen the cone and impart a different flavor than typical paper cones. The cones are made for Eminence by Tone Tubby, the leader in hemp-cone speakers. **This is *the* warm/clean jazz speaker!** It's a great clean speaker, but its cleans have that hemp cone personality—soft-edged, but not mushy. It handles overdrive and distortion very well when you push it. It's very efficient, one of the loudest speakers you can put in an amp, and it pushes out pretty, round bass notes really well. The top end is very sweet, even forgiving. This speaker couldn't make a harsh note if it tried and is beautifully balanced from bottom to top. Super for creamy lead work.

Eminence Red White and Blues

If your idea of electric guitar is crisp, bright, staccato bursts, clear, sizzling chords, with lots of top-end sparkle and tight, tight bass, [this is your speaker](#). One player's "tight bass" is another's "no bass," however. So if you like booming lows that flap your pants legs, that you can feel in the soles of your feet, look elsewhere. This is a great lead guitar speaker for many kinds of rock, searing bright country, or to clean the mud off your humbucker tone.

Eminence Swamp Thang

There's nothing swampy about the [Swamp Thang](#)—this is **the loudest, cleanest speaker in Eminence's lineup**, but its response is tilted towards the bass side. Eminence calls the treble response moderate, but I find its highs more prominent than the Texas Heat's. It produces big, round lows, even in the BJR's small cabinet. The magnet is huge and it will add noticeable weight to your BJR. It might hit an aftermarket, larger output transformer like the Heyboer I use. You can probably spin the baffle 180 degrees to place it at the lower right instead of upper left (from the back) for clearance. I use the Swamp Thang on my test bench because it's so clean (I want to hear the amp, not the speaker) and the moderate highs keep the ice pick tones out of my ears. The Swamp Thang is not a truly neutral speaker; it adds a warm, woodwind-like undertone.

Eminence GB12/GB128

The [GB128](#) from the Legend line is Eminence's take on the famous Celestion Greenback. It's **an improved, affordable Greenback**, with great, deep, lows, that classic British smoky tone, bass that manages to be fat and round-toned without being overpowering, strong mids, and nicely restrained highs. It may be one of the best speakers you can buy for blues tone.

Eminence Wizard

I don't see many British-voiced Eminence speakers in Blues Juniors, but [this one](#) is pretty interesting. The bass is firm, with an aggressive edge to it, not round like the Cannabis Rex, GB128, or even the Jensen C12K. The highs are bright and crisp, also with an aggressive edge to them, like the Red White and Blues, but with more bass. And in true British fashion, the midrange is colored, too. Not smoky, like a Greenback, but an interesting, textured tone, rich with harmonics. This is a **very efficient, loud speaker** and if your Blues Junior is getting buried, this might just be the thing to unearth it. If you like mellow, stay away. If you like to peel their eyelids back with your bridge pickup or put a serious edge on your neck or 'bucker tone, this one's for you.

Eminence Lil' Texas

Want to put your Blues Junior on a diet but not sacrifice tone? The neodymium-magnet [Lil' Texas](#) is over 4 pounds lighter than the stock speaker and sounds better than the Special Design or the C12N. It has a **nice, clear American voice that covers rock, blues, and jazz**. It benefits greatly from the basic mods to open up the bottom octave; it sounds a little gutless in a stock Blues Junior. It has a smooth top end, sweet midrange, and firm, non-boomy bass. Eminence says it's good for country, but I'd choose the Red White and Blues for searing leads. It's nearly as loud as the Swamp Thang; when I plug both in together, it hangs right in there. For a lightweight extension cab, the Lil' Texas can't be beat.

Celestion Greenback

The [Greenback \(G12M\)](#) has always been a good choice for the Blues Junior. It's a bit quieter than some of the newer designs, but the classic, warm British tone is there in spades. **This is the speaker that defined "smoky,"** that coloration of midrange tones sought after by blues and blues-rock soloists. A classic.

Celestion Vintage 30

[The V30](#) was one of the tone pillars of the classic rock era: **huge, powerful mids and early breakup**. Four of these in a half stack and you were on your way to rock god status. But they were often tempered in half stacks by a pair of Greenbacks to fill out the bottom end. The V30 has less bass and less treble than the stock Special Design speaker. Fender chose the V30 for the Texas Red special edition of the Blues Junior, and you can hear the difference right away. It's a standout for lead guitar and for rhythm guitar that stays out of the way of the bass player. If you like thumpy bass or need clean headroom, look elsewhere. Some players say they get more clean headroom with the V30, but I think that's because the mids are prominent and that's the most sensitive area of our hearing, so it sounds louder.

Celestion G12H Heritage

The [G12H Heritage](#) looks superficially like the G12M Greenback, but it's a much different speaker. And the G12H Heritage is not the same speaker as the G12H. The Heritage is made in England, and the non-Heritage is made in China. Anyone who has heard both will tell you that the Chinese-built G12H is a very nice speaker, but the Heritage is noticeably better. The G12H Heritage bass response goes down to 55Hz, and it can keep up with the Eminence Swamp Thang for rich, deep lows. The highs are clear and bell-like and can be surprisingly bright if you crank the treble. The overall frequency response is flatter than the G12M Greenback, which has that famous midrange hump. With the G12H, the midrange response is up to you. **With the mids dialed back, you get a clear, Fendery scooped tone that supports clean playing beautifully. The speaker is very responsive to mids, though, and if you crank them, you'll get plenty, maybe more than you bargained for.** On Blues Juniors and other Hot Rod series amps, the TwinStack mod is essential. This is an expensive speaker, but it covers the range of American and British tones perfectly.

Jensen C12K

The [C12K](#) is Fender's current choice for the Deluxe Reverb reissue. It sounds somewhat like the Texas Heat, but much more restrained in the highs, maybe even a little dull-sounding, a little more color in the mids, maybe a little dirtier in the bass. But there's an impressive amount of bass on tap; with a bit of roundness, like the Cannabis Rex. It's like a rude version of the Swamp Thang, but the ST is a much better speaker overall. **This is a loud, efficient speaker.** Like the Swamp Thang or Wizard, you'll feel the increase in weight because of the huge magnet. Compared to many other speakers, the C12K sounds kind of lifeless. It properly tames the highs of the Deluxe Reverb but doesn't bring much to the party.

Weber California

[The California](#) is Weber's **clean-and-loud speaker, patterned after the great JBL D120**. Like the Swamp Thang, it does what the amp tells it to do, but it's more balanced in tone and brighter. It's available with an aluminum dust cap, like the original JBLs, but don't go there! It'll be way too bright and beamy.

Weber 12F150

The [12F150](#) is **Weber's idea of what a vintage, US-made C12N would sound like if it were offered today**. It gets that brash voice-of-rock 'n' roll American tone right, and it's a popular choice among rock and blues players. Bass is solid, mids are somewhat scooped, highs are bright and clear. One potential point of confusion: the many choices of cone and doping options can greatly change the tone. So two players comparing their 12F150s may almost be discussing apples and oranges. A call or email to Weber's tech staff will get you the right ingredients for your tone, though.

Weber 12A125

I was prepared to dislike the [12A125](#) based on my experience with other light-coned alnico speakers: no bass, early, unharmonic breakup, etc. I tried it in an unmodded Blues Junior and was unimpressed. But after the mods, the 12A125 really surprised me. **If you're looking for a fast, responsive, bright speaker that just oozes Fender "spank," this is your speaker.** It's bright, like the Eminence Red White and Blues, but it has a nice, crisp bass, like a tenor who can hit clean, clear low notes, not a deep-voiced baritone. This is an inspiring speaker for bright, clean playing—I heard things from my Tele bridge pickup that I don't think I've heard with any other speaker. The highs get great support from the mids, but the voice is pure American, not a hint of British smoke or thickness. Yes, you can go too far with the bright stuff and make it painful, but that's what tone controls are for. I had a harder time finding a good overdrive tone with this speaker because it doesn't like complexity. I had my best results starting with the tone controls off and either the bass or the mids up full. then dial in just enough of the others so it doesn't sound thin or muffled. Get one of these, plus the basic mods, and kick some Deluxe Reverb ass! This speaker is everything the Jensen P12R wished it was.

Jensen P12R

Fender chose [this speaker](#) for the Relic Blues Junior version. The Relic looks like it was made in the 1950s and lived a very hard life, complete with rust, stains, cat-clawed grille cloth, and tattered tweed. The P12R sounds like it's from the 1950s too... kind of like an old table radio. **This speaker makes the Blues Junior sound like a kazoo on steroids:** squawky, nasal, thin, and weak. If you like that old-timey sound, you've found it. For the rest of us, yuk.