





PEAVEY

AT-200

If the term 'autotune' sends Spice Girl-sized shivers down your spine, then wait until you see Peavey's offering. Review by **Martin Wheeler**

You're probably all familiar with the terms 'autotune' or 'pitch correction' - commonly used in a derisory fashion when discussing the below-virtuoso vocal abilities of a pop songstress or boy band. Tuning a guitar, though, is a different matter. Doing it quickly and correctly can take many years to learn, and using an electronic tuner of any kind is only half the battle to get thing in tune with itself. So imagine being able to tune your guitar strings to exact pitch at the touch of a button... and also have each note tracked and in tune all the way up the neck.

This month we're examining Peavey's autotuning guitar contender. The company behind the circuit is Antaras Audio Technologies, the same people responsible for first bringing pitch correction technology to vocalists in the late '80s. The software has been developed specifically for guitar, and Antaras has also developed a system for high end-Parker Guitars.

The concept of a self-tuning guitar is not a new one. Gibson's Robot Guitar uses motorised machineheads driven and controlled by a mini onboard computer, while Jimmy Page has been using the mechanical Transperformance system on a Les Paul for many years. The Trevor Wilkinson-designed



The complicated bit: powering comes via four AA batteries



Speedy profile neck with flat fingerboard radius

With the autotune turned off there's a chunky output with enough meat and clarity for a range of sonic duties

Fret-King Super-Matic also employs a mechanically-driven system, but this is the first time that a digitally-voiced, non-motorised system has been developed specifically for guitar... and it's available pre-installed on an instrument costing under £500.

Starting with the guitar, a first glance reveals little of its true nature - in

essence it's a reasonably generic twin humbucker 'rock' instrument with a a maple neck topped with a 24-fret rosewood fingerboard attached via five screws and cup washers to a twin-cutaway basswood body. The neck feel is modern with a satin-finished back and a very flat fingerboard radius with neatly installed medium-

FACTFILE

PEAVEY AT-200

DESCRIPTION Solidbody electric guitar with autotune circuitry.
Made in China
PRICE £499

BUILD Basswood body with bolt-on maple neck and 9.5" radius rosewood fingerboard, 24 medium jumbo frets, vintage style vibrato and tuners

ELECTRICS Two Peavey passive humbuckers, three-way toggle selector, master volume and tone. Tone pull-switch offers active or passive modes; push-switch on volume engages Auto-Tune. Standard jack output and 8-pin DIN for MIDI input
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Candy apple red (as reviewed), black

SCALE LENGTH 648mm/25.5"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 43mm
12th fret 52mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 20.7mm
12th fret 22.6mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 35mm
bridge 54mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 1.5mm
12th fret bass 2.0mm
WEIGHT 3.5kg/7.75lbs

CONTACT Peavey Europe
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**Like this?
Try this...**

Fret-King Super-Matic
Wilkinson-designed auto tuning system on Fret-King guitar, using motorised bridge saddle tuners driven by onboard circuitry
RRP from £1499

Gibson Robot Guitar
Developed by German company Tronical, this system uses motorised tuners and an onboard mini computer to drive them. Now exclusive to Gibson and available on selected models only
RRP from £2400

AxCent Transperformance System
Most famously used by Jimmy Page, this system – invented in 1987 – can be retrofitted to most guitars but involves hefty modification and at a gulp-inducing cost
RRP from \$4000

gauge frets; access to the higher frets is helped marginally by a deep treble side cutaway and a sculpted heel. The hardware is all black, and the controls number a simple volume and tone control with a three-way toggle switch.

Round the back there is evidence of the through-body stringing, a battery compartment that takes four AA-size cells, and a larger plate-covered rout that houses all the technology – in this case a flat circuit board and the pots and jack access. On the side there's a jack input and MIDI port for the optional AT-200B Breakout Box which allows you to ditch the batteries and access software updates via MIDI from your PC.

Sounds

The stock appearance hides a few special features. The tone control is a push-pull unit used to engage the autotune, and the volume control is also a push-pot which activates tuning software. In passive mode with the autotune turned off there's a pleasantly chunky output from the humbuckers with enough meat and clarity to cover a wide range of sonic duties.

Engaging the autotune via the tone pot does two things – a small green LED embedded into the neck pickup surround glows to life to subtly



The volume engages autotune, the tone knob switches between active mode and passive pickups

In two or three seconds, bam, you're in tune... and I mean really in tune.

Here's where it gets better still: when tuned, the software also offers what Peavey call Solid Tune, meaning that every note is spot-on in tune all the way up the neck, unlike a conventional guitar that even when intonated correctly still suffers from sharp and flat fretted notes... the sound that we've come to know, love (and fight against) for years. Plugging into the workshop Peterson Virtual Strobe tuner, every

quick tune and it's done; the set-up, string tension and feel remain the same, but the output is a semi-tone lower. It works equally well for open tunings. The only time it's defeated is if you need to tune sharp, but a capo will do that, as will the MIDI-controlled pedalboard expected to be out this year.

Verdict

This is an exceptional piece of kit for the money, and a very affordable first foray into the world of autotune. Minor niggles are the digitally-created guitar tone while using the system, which I'm confident will be improved on, and the whole thing will soon be upgradable via the Breakout Box and Antares website. The guitar is a competently-built midrange instrument and nothing to get overly excited about, but the autotune function works incredibly well – and it will soon be available as a kit for any guitar. But before you rush out and chisel lumps out of your favourite instrument remember that engaging the system (as it is now) dramatically alters the tone of your guitar, so that needs to be addressed. The system is also available in a footpedal that only requires a Hex pickup like the Roland GK-4, and there are a slew of alternate tuning software packages coming online, including 12-string guitar and a virtual capo. One to watch for sure.

Press down on the volume control and in two or three seconds, bam, you're in tune – and all the way up the neck

inform you and not the audience that the system is online, and the output changes dramatically while the tone develops a thinner, slightly synthetic edge. Strum the open strings gently and press down on the volume control and there's a gentle whirring sound as the pitch-correction software does its thing.

note is dead on all the way up the neck. To be really picky the 24th fret may have been a couple of cents flat, but otherwise it works beautifully.

The system runs the output from the pickup signals via the switch, so you can still click between pickup settings and use the volume and tone as normal. It works well regardless of how the strings are manually tuned – so well that playing at low volume produces a slight chorus effect if you can still hear the acoustic output of the strings at a similar level to the amp, as the strings are slightly out of tune on each fret as normal but what comes through the amp is in tune. Fiddling with the tuners to mimic a typical 'out of the soft case' tuning of various sharp and flat strings doesn't phase it for a second; a quick strum and press, and the output is whack back in tune. Marvellous.

The applications in a live situation are wide-ranging. Need to drop a semi-tone for a couple of tunes only? No problem. Fret all the strings at the first fret, a



The eight-pin DIN connector is for linking to the optional Breakout Box

| FINAL SCORE | |
|------------------------|------------|
| PEAVEY AT-200 | |
| Build Quality | 18/20 |
| Playability | 19/20 |
| Sound | 17/20 |
| Value for money | 19/20 |
| Looks | 18/20 |
| TOTAL | 91% |