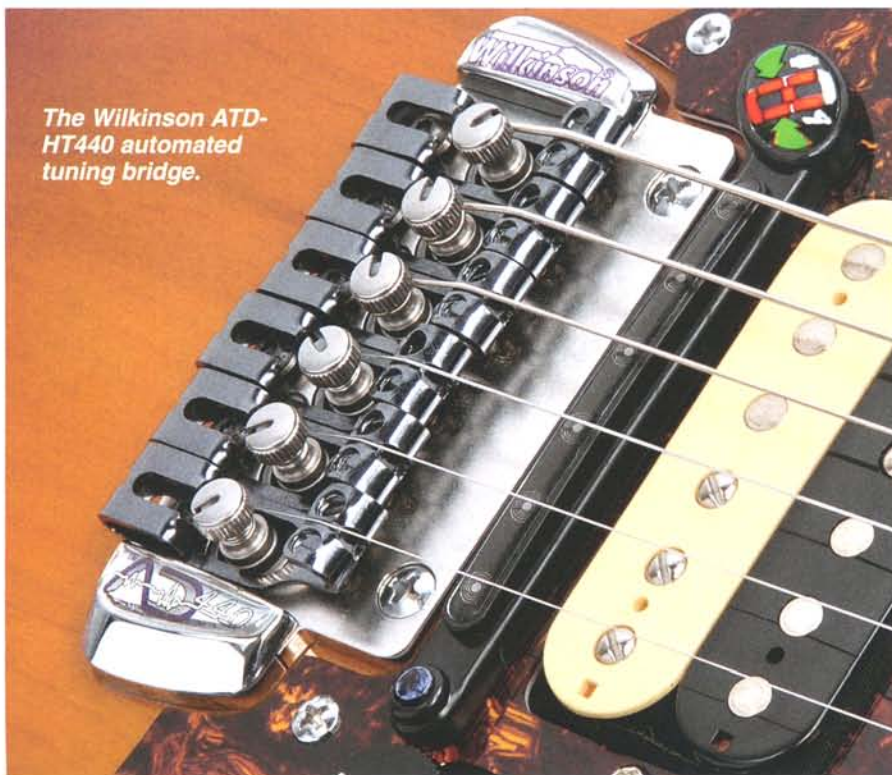


TREV WILKINSON ATD

Guitar Hardware Pioneer Creates Easy-To-Install, Guitarist-Friendly Automatic Tuning System



The Wilkinson ATD-HT440 automated tuning bridge.

IN 1996, U.K.-BASED Auto Tuning Developments was founded for the sole purpose of designing a viable electro-mechanical self-tuning device for fretted instruments. Although the company's core design team included the prominent guitar hardware specialist Trev Wilkinson, its work stayed largely under the radar, overshadowed by Wilkinson's many higher-profile projects. Only after 14 years of exhaustive R&D did Auto Tuning Developments introduce its first product—the ATD-HT440 self-tuning hard tail guitar bridge—but it did so in a big way. The ATD-HT440 was unveiled at Summer NAMM as a built-in component of new Super-matic guitar introduced by JHS's Fret-King line—the year's biggest introduction for Fret-King but just a starting point for Auto Tuning Developments. Within a few months the company expects to offer its self-tuning bridge as an OEM component for third-party guitar makers, and later as an after-market retrofit sold under the brand of Wilkinson ATD..

It's been observed that guitar players are basically traditionalists who resist innovations deemed too kooky or outside-the-box—or as Wilkinson says, "Guitarists will not buy technology for technology's sake." That, in part, is why it took 14 years of careful refinements before Auto Tuning Developments was confident it had a winning product. Company founder Richard Whittall, the businessman and property developer who had the initial idea for the ATD-HT440, first took his concept to Wilkinson, already a highly regarded guitar hardware maker with his own company. Later they brought in Andy Leadbetter, a young mechanical engineer, Dave Goodway, a digital engineer, and others handpicked for their various specialties. The team also got technical contributions from sources as diverse as German gear-maker Maxon Motors and American laser innovator Turchon Technologies.

This year Wilkinson, a founding partner in the Fret-King line, brought the

product to market by way of the Super-matic, a guitar he helped design. Ultimately, however, the ATD-HT440 is built to succeed as a retrofit. Wilkinson's design makes it possible to install the device in a standard Strat vibrato bridge rout with no destruction to the body of the guitar. Its super-low profile and miniscule controls make it a thoroughly unobtrusive addition, wiping out the problems of bulk and poor cosmetics that have doomed similar devices. "Unobtrusiveness and user-friendly design are essentials when fitting something to a guitar," says Wilkinson. "We take the stance that a guitar player should never have to think about our product until he needs it—and then it should operate flawlessly and efficiently. Our product should never have to be a compromise for the customer." Invisibly incorporating micro-processor control circuitry, the ATD-HT440 uses hi-tech micro gearboxes and a one-touch control button allowing the player to automatically tune to standard E-tuning. Further one-touch adjustments change the guitar's tuning from standard E to open G, DADGAD, and open D. Tuning can also be reprogrammed in seconds to any of five tuning presets—which the user can change at will.

The next goal for Auto Tuning Developments will be the adoption of its product as an OEM component on guitars by major manufacturers. "Selling this product OEM is essential in gaining acceptance of a technology as sophisticated as ours," says Wilkinson. "We believe our customers will have to satisfy themselves that our product works and is an asset before the buying decision can be made."

Purely an R&D company for the first decade-and-a-half of its existence, Auto Tuning Developments has now turned its attention to the marketing and distribution of the ATD-HT440. With strategic partnerships already set up in Europe, Asia, and North America, the company is poised to take its product further into the mainstream. "I have always said that marketing will sell anything once, but a product that works and is truly a benefit to the customer will sell again and again," says Wilkinson. "Get both things right and you should be unstoppable."