



This is the start of the 'Blog' by Peter Allen. There are limited pictures in this edition. However, the following years will show more picture and maybe less words!

Week ending 29th December 2006

This week was punctuated by Christmas and New Year and trying to organise my workload around the holiday period. This has enabled me to give promises for the next five days onwards as well as allowing me the chance of having a few days' holiday. Not that I've been sitting still - I have been able to do many jobs that I've been putting off pending a more convenient time - which never seems to happen in reality. So while many of you were trying out your Christmas presents, I was having a ball doing essential maintenance such as fitting new blades to my thickness planer, new abrasive to the drum of my thickness sander and a new belt on the regular sander. Not forgetting fitting a new band saw blade and setting the table and guides. I changed the air regulator on the compressor and sealed the bed on my new metalwork lathe so the fluid doesn't leak away. As my wife says "boys and their toys"! Real boring stuff to non-techy people but part of getting ready for the New Year for me!

Happy New Year to you all.

Week ending 22nd December 2006

This is the first Christmas I have been able to concentrate on planning my own workload without any obligation to the retail industry and consequently, I delivered on all my promises and everything went like clockwork! This week let me reminisce about the past a little. When a friend of mine brought in a new Hank Marvin Burns re-issue (made in Korea) for set-up my immediate reaction was how well finished the guitar was compared to what I remember from years ago. Earlier in the year another customer brought in an original Hank Marvin Burns guitar for me to set-up and that was a real dog. I finally achieved a good result but I had already had a memory jog of what things were like yesteryear. Quality is something that we take for granted nowadays - thanks to the Japanese car industry's quest for quality control which has spun off into all sorts of other sectors including the guitar making industry. One manufacturer who has raised their game over the years is Hofner and recently I was privileged to do set-ups on three of these fine instruments. So there was a little bit of déjà-vu this week when I was presented with a really old Hofner cello jazz guitar and asked what it would take to restore this instrument to its former glory. The irony of this request is that by the time I have finished working on this instrument it will be better than its original build and set-up well.

Anyway, back to the Hank Marvin guitar it did require a fair amount of work on levelling the frets in order to set the guitar up, so quality on level frets could still be improved. I finally reduced the string height by over half and thought I too might like one. Just kidding!

Merry Christmas to you all.

Week ending 15th December 2006

I have been very busy recently so this diary entry is a week out of date but lets you know what has been going on. An interesting project turned up recently - a 1960s Stratocaster that had the body completely stripped bare and sported a very good refret. The body obviously looked out of place and the owner entrusted me with refinishing the guitar in a typical distressed finish and setting it up. As I said before it's been very busy and, although I could have done the job myself, when I am too busy I sometimes sub-contract out to specialist people who are also craftsmen at what they do. In this case Martin Sims was given the job of restoring the finish to my customers preferred 60's colour and to distress the body sufficiently for it to look authentic according to its age. It's no easy feat to create faded and cracked lacquer - I once heard about someone who drove through a forest with a body strapped to his car bumper to get the distressed look but I can't see that this would have matched up to careful replication of worn away edges in the right places.

I visited Martin's premises 2 months ago and was very impressed with his way of working, the layout of his workshop and one or two nice gadgets such as his CNC router! Martin also does work for Fender Europe so he knows what is acceptable to achieve a Fender high standard. I have put Martin Sims on my 'Useful Links' page should any of you wish to have him do similar work for you. www.simscustom.com
The guitar arrived back four weeks later - exactly when he said it would be ready - and that meant I could build the guitar back up ready for the customer's Christmas treat to himself. It's always an anxious moment when the customer collects, opening the case to reveal his or her precious guitar and whether it lives up to their mind's eye of what they expected. The moment arrived and the customer was very pleased, so much so that he sent me an e-mail which normally would sit with all the other 'Thank you' letters but as some of the credit for the bodywork must go to Martin Sims. I will leave it here as a final statement.

Hi Peter

Just a quick note of thanks for all you have done.

The Strat looks fantastic and plays like a dream now that you have set it up. I would implore anyone who has just bought a guitar, new or used, to let you set it up before they waste time struggling with it as it is. They will be amazed at the difference and like me will be converted to being a lifelong customer of your company.

Thanks & Merry Christmas.

David W.



This is the guitar detailed in the Blog entry for week ending 15th December (above).

Week ending 8th December 2006.

Well, the reason for there not being any diary entries for the past few weeks is because I was on holiday. So, first week back at the bench I pick up where I left off with some repairs to guitar necks. The first is a Telecaster neck with a severe forward bow and a truss rod that had just run out of adjustment. The second is an SD Curlee Honda USA and on this the reverse happened, due to past owners who left the strings off the guitar for a considerable length of time! This is an important lesson to learn from someone else's mistake because this neck had bent severely backwards and undoing the truss rod made very little difference to the shape of a neck - even 13 to 56 gauge strings would not have given the neck any relief. Both necks were heated and put into splints to re-set them. This is something that often takes more than one go, in order to change the 'memory' of the wood. In the case of the Telecaster with forward bow, the neck eventually retained a new memory of nearly flat and this means that under tension the truss rod does not have to do so much work in order to maintain a slight amount of relief in the neck. The customer required 10 to 46 gauge strings causing even greater tension in pulling the neck forwards. It's worth pointing out that, even though this guitar has now been set up, I still re-check it daily to ensure the guitar is staying where it's put and that it won't alter once handed over to the customer. One other point worth mentioning is how the guitar is stored and at what temperature/humidity can have a big effect on it! I did have one customer that kept his guitar in the airing cupboard and at the end of a week found it was banana-shaped! This means that the best neck in the world cannot tolerate being abused through ignorance. The SD Curlee which was in for restoration had not seen a set of strings for probably a year or more. This neck had such a severe back-bow it would never have played and it took several attempts to straighten it so that the truss rod would work in conjunction with the strings. It is important to note that no fret work can be started until the neck is totally stable and my customers who have had this work done know I am obsessive about checking to ensure the correct relief is maintained. Often this means an invitation back for a Health Check after 2 or 4 weeks. It is always possible that, because we are dealing with a natural product, the neck will change in the future but that does not stop me trying to do the best for the customer's guitar so that it stays well set-up months after the original set-up.

Week ending 28th October 2006

I had several guitars this week with truss-rod problems. If people don't understand how a truss-rod operates - or how fragile they can be - it's best to leave them to the experts!

One customer brought back two guitars I had done Professional Set-ups on 6 months ago for their Health Checks. These Guitars were hand-made Stratocasters and were fitted with a conventional 'one way' truss-rod system. Because the guitars were fairly new at the time of setting them up, no unusual traits were noted on the set-up worksheet. The beauty of my Professional Set-up is that it allows me to know instantly how the guitar neck reacted since it was done.

If I go back to the days when I was involved with Patrick Eggle Guitars Ltd, we had times when 50% of the necks were scrapped because they had back-bow, whereas those with forward bow could be manipulated by the conventional truss-rod. Later the Eggle moved over to 'two way' truss-rods which allowed us to adjust the necks either way and so use all the necks produced.

In the case of the two Stratocaster necks, both the actions were too low at 1/64 at the 12th fret. These were originally set at 3/64 of an inch (neck radius 7.25'). Co-incidentally, they had moved the same way and the same amount! You can see how flat the relief was by the large amount of backwards movement in the neck (66%), thus lowering the strings. It would have only been a short time before the customer was unable to play the guitars. Readjusting the truss-rod (slackening it) allowed the original action to be maintained and the details were noted for future 'Health Checks'. In this case study, I asked the customer to come back in 2 months' time to re-check and ensure that the necks have stayed where they are put!

A Fender Stratocaster 'Custom shop' model came in for Pro-Set-up and this time the truss-rod worked under 'no load' but when the string tension was applied to pitch, it did not matter how many times the truss-rod was adjusted, the neck would not hold steady with the correct amount of relief set in it. When the truss-rod gets tight there is a danger of snapping it. One of the tricks in reducing this rod tension is to splint the neck, bending it slightly backwards so that the truss-rod does not have to do so much work. It is hoped that, once the neck is taken out of the splint, the amount of counter tension within the neck and rod will be sufficient to cater for the forward pull of the strings. It is very rare for me to be defeated by a neck but in this case the truss-rod would not hold a set of 10 to 46 gauge strings at concert pitch. It is my conclusion that the truss-rod anchor is in some way pulling through the truss-rod channel and whatever tension is applied to the neck, the anchor point just moves further along the channel to the same tension. It could also be that there is not enough bias in the rod to produce a straight neck. The findings/readings were the same on each occasion giving a deflection in the neck relief of 0.007' - just short of where I wanted it to be. Under normal conditions it should be possible to adjust a truss-rod so that it is perfectly flat under string tension at concert pitch, something I could not do with this neck. In this case the customer should have the option to have the neck replaced as faulty but, as the neck is 10 years old, whether this is accepted by Fender is another matter! (GT Services is not associated in any way with Fender Guitars)

Week ending 21st October 2006

Today we saw a Rickenbacker 4001 Bass reunited with its owner after a complete refret. Re-fretting an instrument is a major undertaking and a lot of Rickenbackers have a reduced fret life due to the amount of lacquer sprayed onto the fingerboard in manufacture. This prevents frets being re-profiled after they are worn past a certain height. To prolong the guitar's life the fingerboard was prepared with shellac (used as French polish) as this is much thinner than the original lacquer. The refret couldn't begin until we had control over neck via the truss rods. Both truss rods were found to be over-tensioned, causing the adjusters to bend towards the headstock and making them difficult to undo. The Rickenbacker guitar design allows both truss rods to be removed so, with the truss rods out, the rods were straightened and re-threaded and fitted back into the neck. The main reason the truss rods were over adjusted was the massive curvature in the neck - often called a 'forward bow'. Not only were the truss rods trying to straighten the neck against the tension of the strings but also, straining to straighten a bent neck was too much to ask of such thin rods. Trying to straighten the truss rod adjusters without dealing with the curve in the neck-stock wood is effectively dealing with the symptoms rather than the illness!

With the frets out of the instrument, the fingerboard was levelled so that the truss rod didn't have extra work in order to straighten the neck. Once the guitar was re-fretted, the last thing I needed to do was set-up the guitar and balance the pickups. The customer had said he found the bridge pick-up weak and, on checking the sound output, I found it to be hardly existent with the magnets less than 3mm away from the strings! The Ohms meter showed a reading of 254K which, as some people will know, is the resistance across the potentiometer. In short the pickup was open circuit, meaning it had a break in a wire on the coil. With a speedy service provided by Aaron Armstrong (Kent Armstrong's son) the original pick-up was re-wound and back into the guitar by the end of the week. This time the Ohms Meter read 9k and the final position of the pick-up was set considerably lower/ further away from a string.

Also this week I was finalising a late seventies USA Fender Strat which had a Seymour Duncan Hot Rails Pickup fitted to the bridge position. Again, a weedy, thin volume output with it set quite close to the strings. The Ohms meter showed a reading of 250K, the resistance across the potentiometer. Like corporation buses 2 similar pickup problems came along together - what a coincidence. The advice I gave this time was to buy a new rails pickup, one of Kent Armstrong's, as the cost of the new one was the same cost of the rewind repair and postage. WD - suppliers of Kent Armstrong Pickups - sent one 'Special Delivery'. It arrived next day and the customer collected it the day after. This time we rewired the Push/Pull Pot so that it was running series/parallel to give greater choice of sound. Originally the pick-up had been wired for 'phase reverse' which does not alter the sound unless it is in conjunction with another pickup. Again we had another satisfied customer who was very pleased with the up-graded choice of sound both from a fully working pick-up and a rewired configuration, together with a complete professional set-up.

I apologise to customers who I have had to delay accepting work from this week, due to my extremely heavy work load over the past two weeks, but mine is an exclusive, quality service and I do give all my customers my full attention and won't skimp on quality to force more volume through. So thank you for your patience and understanding in accepting some delays.

Week ending 13th October 2006

I had a CF Martin acoustic which the hot weather had affected by shrinking the rear binding between the top and bottom bouts on both sides. It had got to the point where the binding had become delaminated from the edge and wouldn't go back flush to the sides. One side was worse than the other. If it had been somehow forced back into place the pressure could have caused breakaway at a later date.

The first job was to create jigs to give the binding sideways and downwards pressure at the same time. On the bigger of the two areas I used a gap-fill glue/resin, the dipped infill caused by curing was later colour-filled with grain filler. The lip effect of the outer binding was sanded down flush to the side but the black laminated stripe started to show through the white outer edge - not enough to be a problem but a nuisance all the same. The nuisance area was whitened and later masked off and lacquer sealed.

The job had initially appeared to be an easy, quick one but by making sure that full attention to detail was given I produced a satisfactory result even though it took much longer than originally expected. Making the repair as invisible as possible was actually very fiddly and time consuming but the end result - one very happy customer and a long-term solution - made it all worthwhile!