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Mr. GEARHEAD™ presents 5 Steps to a...

Great Electric Guitar Setup

If you want to get the most from your guitar, but you're not exactly sure where to start. Here are five easy steps that you can follow to get your guitar playing great. Here are some basic tools that you will need to get started:

- Set of automotive feeler gauges (.002 - .025)
- 6" ruler (with 1/32" and 1/64" increments)
- Phillips screwdriver
- Electronic tuner
- Wire cutters
- Peg winder
- Light machine oil (3-in-1, toy locomotive, or gun oil)
- Polish and cloth
- Capo

Step 1. Changing Your Strings

Strings are the life's blood of your guitar. When your strings aren't in top form, neither is your guitar. In order for strings to provide the maximum performance, they should be changed on a regular basis. Strings that have lost their integrity (worn where the string is pressed against the fret) or have oxidized, rusted or are dirty respond poorly. To see if you need to change your strings, run a finger underneath the string and feel for dirt, rust or flat spots. If you find any of these, you should change your strings.

Always make sure to stretch your strings properly. After you have installed a new set and have them tuned to pitch, hold the strings at the first fret and hook your fingers under each string (one at a time) and tug lightly, moving your hand from the bridge to the neck. Re-tune and repeat several times.

Step 2. Making Bridge Adjustments and Setting Intonation

There are numerous types of bridges, but one basic point that should be remembered; ensure that there is sufficient break angle of the strings over the saddles (at least 30º). Much of the remainder of bridge adjustments, as in the case of setting a floating tremolo, is determined by personal taste.

At this point you can pre-set the basic intonation of your guitar, by taking your tape measure and measuring from the inside of the nut to the center of the 12th fret (the wire, not the fingerboard). Double that measurement to find the scale length of your guitar. Adjust the 1st string bridge saddle to this scale length, measuring from the inside of the nut to the center of the bridge saddle. Now, adjust the distance of the 2nd string saddle back from the 1st saddle, using the gauge of the

2nd string as a measurement *(Example: If the 2nd string is .011" you would move the 2nd string back .011" from the 1st saddle)*. Move the 3rd back from the 2nd saddle, using the gauge of the 3rd string as a measurement. The 4th string saddle should be set parallel with the 2nd string saddle. Proceed with the 5th and 6th in the same method used for strings 2, and 3.

Step 3. Adjusting Your Truss Rod

The purpose of the truss rod is to counteract the tension placed on the neck by the strings. This tension can be affected by movement of the wood from environmental influences like temperature and humidity. To adjust your truss rod: check your tuning, then install a capo at the 1st fret, depress the 6th string at the last fret. With your feeler gauge, check the gap between the bottom of the string and the top of the 8th fret - the measurement should be approximately .010".

Adjustment at headstock (Allen wrench): If neck is too concave, (the guitar in playing position, looking up the neck towards the keys) turn the truss-rod nut counter clock-wise. Too convex—clockwise.

Adjustment at neck joint (Phillips screwdriver): If neck is too concave, turn the truss-rod nut clock-wise. Too convex—Counter clockwise. Check your tuning, then check the gap again with the feeler gauge. *In either case, if you meet excessive resistance or need for adjustment, or you're not comfortable with this adjustment, take your guitar to your authorized Service Center.*

Step 4. Setting Your String Height

Players with a light touch can get away with lower action, others need higher action to avoid rattles. Check tuning. Using 6" ruler, measure distance between bottom of strings and top of the 17th fret. Adjust bridge saddles or if your saddles are preset, the bridge height adjustment screws, to approximately 4/64". Experiment with the height until the desired sound and feel is achieved.

Step 5. Adjusting Your Pickup Height

Set too high, pickups can cause a myriad of inexplicable phenomena. Depress all of the strings at the last fret. Using 6" ruler, measure the distance from the bottom of the 1st and 6th strings to top of the pole piece. Adjust the distance with the two outside pickup mounting screws. The distance should be greatest at the 6th string - neck pickup position, and closest at the 1st string - bridge pickup position. The distance will vary according to the amount of magnetic pull of the pickup.

When you've completed the above steps you should be ready to rock. Remember guitars are tempered instruments, retune, play and make further adjustments as needed. Most of all, have fun!