New pickups...my goodness!

by **sclitheroe** » 14 Apr 2012, 05:21

So excited/happy I had to share...

Just finished upgrading my two guitars (a Greg Bennett AV-6 and an RL-4) with Stew Mac's Parsons Street Humbuckers, replacing the stock Duncan Designed ones. I went with the Alnico-2 ones in both the neck and bridge. Not knowing a ton about pickups, but having a love for most things 50's, the Parsons Street ones appealed to me with their unpotted coils, wood spacers, and generally low-tech vibe. I also figured unpotted pickups would add resonance, or air, or _something_ to my tone.

Installing the pickups was easy enough, save for the fact that my soldering isn't as good as I remembered, probably because I haven't done it in a long time. Regardless, I was careful, took my time, and everything worked out fine, other than the super cheap switch in one of the guitars self-destructing when the plastic back melted as soon as I heated one of the lugs. A quick trip to Long & McQuade and I had that fixed up too. (oh, and I spotted a minty used SL-20 for $85 there - is that a good deal?)

Now I haven't played a ton of guitars, nor a ton of pickups, so I'm not an authority, but man, what a difference good (or at least, BETTER) pickups makes. More clarity, more detail, and just an overall richer, deeper sound. Even pick noises, when the pick leaves the string, are new and interesting sounds I didn't have before.

This carries over to pedal use too - everything sounds better, with more depth and complexity. The most notable improvement pedal wise is the GHF - it went from being OK (don't get me wrong, I always liked it) to an absolute beast, just brimming with fuzz I've heard in my head, but not been able to get with my rig. The only thing I can think of is that it either likes the impedance better, or it really likes the added complexity of the signal its being fed and has more to work with, but its really a whole new pedal now. It doesn't feel like it has more gain (and how could it, the Alnico-2 is supposed to be lower output), its just got so much more...fuzz

The wife test was interesting - usually, if something sounds significantly better, she'll comment it sounds "nice" when I emerge from the basement. Tonight as I was testing everything out, she actually came downstairs and asked "what is going on, it sounds like a club down here"

So probably none of this is news to anyone with good guitars with good pickups, but it's been a revelation to me, and was worth the 2 nights of stress, minor burns, and lingering fear that I was going to completely mess up my only two guitars, so I figured I'd share.

I'm so happy. Highlight of my week/month/year so far for sure.

sclitheroe

Re: New pickups...my goodness!

by **Mully** » 14 Apr 2012, 08:55

yeah changing pickups is AWESOME.....

I always try to have a looper pedal engaged to record before and after samples so I can quickly see if it really sounds better or is just wishful thinking.

Mully

Re: New pickups...my goodness!

by **Dirk** » 14 Apr 2012, 09:45

Congrats, changing pickups is awesome indeed.
I just upgraded my Fender Duff McKagan sig with a Dimarzio Willpower P-bass pickup, which makes it sound awesome.

Dirk

Re: New pickups...my goodness!

by **Steam Abacus** » 14 Apr 2012, 13:41

I absolutely agree that fitting decent pickups can totally transform a guitar. My budget is always tight and so none of my guitars are high-end instruments - but I've invested in replacement pickups (I tend to go for Seymour Duncan) for ALL of them.
Also, just having the RIGHT pickup can make a huge difference, too. I've got an old Ibanez Artist which, many years ago, I swapped the pickups on for the SD JB/Jazz humbuckers (an improvement over the stock pickups). More recently though, I was not feeling much love for the guitar (and this was my main gigging guitar for years) and it wasn't getting played much. So I decided to overhaul it. I fitted a set of SD Alnico II Pros and it ABSOLUTELY TRANSFORMED the guitar! Just better in every way - better tone, better sustain, better 'feel' to the response when playing.
So there's better quality pickups but there's also just the right pickups that match the guitar they're installed in.

Steam Abacus

Re: New pickups...my goodness!

by **Laurie** » 14 Apr 2012, 13:49

> *sclitheroe wrote:*
> *I spotted a minty used SL-20 for $85 there - is that a good deal?*

Yep. Grab it before I do
You probably won't use it for anything productive, but it's a good one for the collection.

Laurie

Re: New pickups...my goodness!

by **Laurie** » 14 Apr 2012, 13:52

> *sclitheroe wrote:*
> *just brimming with fuzz I've heard in my head, but not been able to get with my rig.*

Ohhh.... that's awesome!

What are the part numbers of the pickups you got?

Laurie

Re: New pickups...my goodness!

by **sclitheroe** » 14 Apr 2012, 16:00

These ones here:
http://www.stewmac.com/shopby/product/5408

So the 5408 neck and 5416 bridge

sclitheroe

Re: New pickups...my goodness!

by **visserman** » 28 Apr 2012, 14:16

Sclitheroe: What you mentioned about detail is very true, better quality pick-ups can improve details and overal tightness of your sound.

Would anyone change the pick-ups on a good sounding Strat? Some people do not like brightness (Strats are Brightsounding guitars!!) and therefore change pick-ups on them. If you do not like brightness, maybe you should try another guitar.

Steam Abacus: The Ibanez Artists from the 80s used to have Super 70s pick-ups in them. The Ibanez Performer Series (A Les Paul Copy Model) from the late 70s did have similar kind of pick-ups. The Performer does sound very different compared to the Artist. Logical, since both guitars are of a different design and neck-construction.
I have tried and tested the Performer many times against a Gibson Les Paul, and both guitars can come very close in sound.

Mully: What a Marvel idea of that looper and recording before you change pick-ups. Sometimes you are a real genius!! (hey do not get too proud of yourself now!!.....)

visserman

Re: New pickups...my goodness!

by **sclitheroe** » 01 May 2012, 05:24

Interesting observation of the night:

I can hear my wristwatch through my pickups

Had my hand resting near the neck pickup while I looked at some chord diagrams, and I could hear this tick-tick-tick coming from the amp, and couldn't figure out what the hell it was, until I moved my hand and it went away.

So I threw in some reverb and delay to amuse myself with self-oscillating quartz movements

-Scott

sclitheroe

Re: New pickups...my goodness!

by **Pepe** » 01 May 2012, 08:17

The boss of the music shop I'm working in had this "tick-tick-tick" as well years ago! After he found out what the heck was going on he was really amused. First he thought something in the amp was broken.

Pepe

Re: New pickups...my goodness!

by **visserman** » 01 May 2012, 11:58

Yes that is quite a common thing. I have a digital metronome, when I put it near the pick-ups it amplies the clicks of the metronome, and yes analogue watches as well, and you do even have to be near your pick-ups.

visserman