



GJD: John, what are the most common values for volume and tone potentiometers in your guitars?

JS: Volume pots are usually 250K or 500K. Tone pots are usually 250K or 500K, and sometimes we use other miscellaneous volumes for custom work.

GJD: In terms of volume pots, why do you use different values?

JS: You want to make certain that you are loading the pickup with what it really wants to see. A typical value for a Strat single coil is 250K. So, if you used a 500K pot, it would have more brilliance and zing but not in a good way. On the other side of the token, there have been people that use a 250K pot on a humbucker, and it is not pleasing to the ear. I mean, that the response tends to become flat. Hence, a 500K pot is usually the best choice for a humbucker.

GJD: So, what I would imagine that wiring a guitar that has single coils and a humbucker could create some issues? How do you get around that?

JS: Yes, that can be a problem. However, thanks to the new mega switches that are 4 pole/5-way, you can alleviate that issue. Utilizing one of these mega switches, you can play some tricks on your pickups. In single coil mode the pickup(s) will see a 250K load. In humbucking mode the pickup(s) will see a 500K load. You can also change the capacitor to go along with that. For example, the Humbucker might see a .022 value and the single coil might see a .047 or a .1, value depending on preference.

GJD: A lot of guitar companies utilize a wiring scheme with just about every possible combination. Does that extra wiring compromise your tone?

JS: I don't really see much harm in having a humbucker with 4 conductor cable. Actually it can be useful with a humbucker. Running a humbucker with both coils in parallel will make it sound

kind of single coil-ish. There are many other useful options that one can choose from.

GJD: John, that brings up another question. What are the challenges of making a humbucker sound like a single coil with one of these alternate wiring options?

JS: In parallel mode that I just spoke of, you still have both coils active but there is a wider sensing area for the strings and this creates a different sound; as compared to less area with a single coil. In split mode, you don't have magnets, you have slugs and they respond in a different way. Also, the impedance load is different. In terms of tone, many people think that a split humbucker doesn't have the fullness of a normal single coil. I think the best application with a split is to combine it with the middle pickup. I prefer the front coil of the humbucker for combining. But, really in split or parallel mode is not that far off. They are interesting and useful sounds, especially for a player wanting a funk type sound. One other thing, in parallel mode you have much less noise as compared to split. Actually, in parallel mode, you actually have less noise than in series mode as well. But for the ultimate classic Strat tone, single coils by themselves or 2 single coils together is tough to beat.

GJD: So, can you please reiterate the different modes of a humbucker?

JS: A humbucker in series is the normal full output mode. It has a bit more noise but still no hum. This is the usual mode for full on lead playing. A humbucker in parallel mode is going to have a little less output, give you a better tone for clean chimey stuff and as I mentioned is quieter. A humbucker in split mode, will be very Strat like but have the most noise.

GJD: Why does parallel mode have less output?

JS: Let's say each coil is 6K. In series you would have 12K and in Parallel you would have 3K. So you have less output but you actually gain some top-end and low-end clarity.

GJD: What humbucking modes do some of your artists like in their guitars?

JS: For Scott Henderson, he usually uses single coils mostly and when he does use humbuckers, he doesn't split them. Another guy is Mike Landau, he is doesn't use a split either. Both guys do have unique tone control to pickup assignments that seem to really work for what they are doing. We can get into that a bit more later on.

GJD: John, let's talk a little bit about stack coil pickups.

JS: In most cases, stacked coil pickups have identical coils. The first thing that is interesting is that the pickup actually sounds louder when you turn off the bottom coil. This is because there are no cancellation issues. However, DiMarzio does something a bit different. They use coils that are imbalanced to achieve their noise-free sound. Actually what happens if you split one of the coils on a DiMarzio the pickup still sounds the exact same.

GJD: So, why don't you make a stacked single coil pickup?

JS: Because we use the silent coil system which we feel is a better option.

GJD: Okay, we will discuss your silent coil system down the line.