



GJD: John, last time we were talking about pots, wiring and a whole bunch of other stuff. I would imagine with so many variables that one should try to keep certain things constant so their ear doesn't get fooled.

JS: Absolutely, I totally agree. Even changing your strings in the middle of tone tweaking can obviously alter what you are hearing.

GJD: Let's talk about pickup magnets for a bit.

JS: I've tried a lot of different magnets over the years even when I was working at Fender we would do a lot of research to find out why old pickups sounded the way they did. My experience is that I can wind a newer pickup and get it to sound somewhat close to an old pickup. So even if the wire is different, that doesn't matter too much. It's really in how it's wound. What is difficult these days is how the magnets are produced. The process of how they cool the magnets and form the magnets has all changed. So, an Alnico 5 is not what it was in 1960. In addition, there is not just one Alnico 5 magnet; there are a lot of different parameters.

GJD: How can you get around that as a manufacturer?

JS: Well, we have made contacts with some original manufacturers of these magnets and purchased magnets from them. This costs us a lot more money but we feel that it well worth it.

GJD: To your ears how do they sound different from a newer magnet?

JS: What I noticed is the older ones have more of a give in their sound. They sound more organic. A lot of people think the older magnets really don't make a difference but to me it was the primary factor in building pickups that seemed to satisfy my customers.

GJD: Do you think the older magnet makes as big a difference in a Humbucker as compared to a single coiled pickup?

JS: I don't think that it makes as much as a difference in a Humbucker because the wire is not actually going the magnet. One thing that you need to remember is that part of the specifications of the pickup can vary based on the magnet.

GJD: Can you please be more specific?

JS: For example, the inductance is going to be determined by how much iron is in the magnet. On a single coil the wire is wrapped around the magnet, so the magnet is probably a little more critical. That has a greater effect on the inductance of the pickup.

GJD: Let's go back to the cost of manufacturing the magnets. Some manufacturers might buy cheaper magnets overseas and that is going to come out in the wash.

JS: Yes, we feel that a domestic magnet that costs a lot more makes a huge difference and we let our customers decide and pass the expense onto them. Another thing is that I hate changing a recipe once I've found that it really works. I know it works by the feedback that I get from my customers.

GJD: Let's talk a little more about going the extra mile for production of your products.

JS: Well let's be honest here, there are only so many hours in a day and you have to get stuff done. But if you go about it in a focused manner you are going to come up with good results that are part of that perfect recipe. Somewhere there is actually a scientific reason if something does make a difference and that is one thing that I am almost committed to finding. If I hear a difference I want to know why.

GJD: Is there a downside to using older magnets?

JS: Yes, they tend to chip easier. It is my understanding that Leo Fender would bevel the magnets because they had chipped corners. Later, he forced the magnet manufacturers to produce magnets that wouldn't chip. That's also about the time when the pickups started to sound different. I'm willing to deal with the facts that the older magnets are more brittle because I love the sound.