

**"I HATED THAT SONG.
I HATED WHEN IT CAME UP IN THE
SET. SOMETIMES I'D GET TOO
DRUNK AND WOULDN'T
BE ABLE TO PLAY IT."
SLASH ON SWEET CHILD O'MINE**



SLASH

HE WROTE THE GREATEST RIFF OF ALL TIME (AS VOTED FOR BY YOU) AND CONTINUES TO KICK ASS WITH VELVET REVOLVER. SO WHY IS SLASH SO DAMN MODEST?

WORDS: STEPHEN LAWSON PICTURES: JOHN MCMURTRIE

Hendrix, Clapton, Beck... When a guitar player attains a certain level of acclaim, it's customary for the famous fret-botherer to drop his Jimi, Eric, whatever and be referred to by one name only. This month's cover star had a head start on the rest in that department: with his monosyllabic handle, you could say Slash was predestined for greatness.

However, unlike some of his similarly abbreviated rock peers, Slash a) still rocks; b) still wears filthy old Motörhead t-shirts and biker jackets when most blokes his age would have opted for a nice sports jacket and Pringle sweater; c) is still alive and d) is so modest you wouldn't think he'd played a gig at his local pub, never mind written and performed some of rock guitar's greatest licks and solos. All of which made him the ideal person to kick off our tenth birthday celebrations.

When *Total Guitar* caught up with Slash he was in high spirits, having just arrived in the UK for a tour of Scotland and England with his latest musical venture, Velvet Revolver. ("I'm having the best fucking time. It's so rare to get a band that works. Just getting the initial thing together is such a rarity...")

To mark our tenth birthday, we asked Slash to provide a list of his ten favourite riffs, hoping to tab some of them for you in the mag. This being rock 'n' roll and Slash being jetlagged after his flight from Los Angeles to London, we weren't holding out much hope of receiving his top ten. But then he turned up with three scraps of paper (see p.48) containing his ten favourite riffs, solos and guitar players. He even apologised for the state of his handwriting, for chrissakes! It's hard not to love this guy...

Since we last spoke to you, the TG readers voted your intro to Sweet Child O' Mine

as the greatest riff of all time. How'd you like them apples?

"I don't know. It's sort of a funny thing because that riff was... I was just noodling around and just stumbled over this little bit of an idea – it was sort of a fluke. To me it was just some silly thing that I wouldn't have taken much further if Izzy [Stradlin] hadn't been there playing some chords.

"It was always a joke to me until Axl came up with some words and made a song out of it. And because this was in the early days of Guns N' Roses – we were this fuckin' hard rock band – it was just a sappy ballad to us. I hated that song. I hated when it came up in the set. Sometimes I'd get too drunk and wouldn't be able to play it. I just never took it seriously until way later when the song became a hit, and all I'd have to do is go into the first notes of that song and everyone in the whole place would lose their fuckin' minds.

"Now to see it being recognised as an influential rock lick... [Laughs, in disbelief.] I'm a little bit overly flattered and humbled by it. I really don't know what else to say. I would never have predicted that in a million years. You don't sit down writing riffs so that they turn up later as being... I dunno... the shit, so to speak."

So you came up with the intro by noodling around. Is this often the way you come up with riffs, or do you tend to have stuff written before you hit the studio/rehearsal room?

"Well, there's all different kinds of things. I hate practising for practising's sake, so sometimes an idea will come to me and I'll go pick →



Slash with the first ever issue of TG and – by some miracle of desktop publishing – the latest



Slash: rawks on water

HOW TO SOLO... THE SLASH WAY

RULE 1

Be spontaneous: "I don't write solos like Judas Priest or some of those other two-guitar bands where they'd write the whole solo and harmonise it. For me solos are usually very spontaneous and I usually end up keeping the original idea that came to mind the first time."

RULE 2

Don't worry about making mistakes: "When I'm writing a solo I'm wary of going back. I'd rather play it again then listen to it, in case I get too analytical. If it gets me during the performance then I know it's okay. The thing is it needs to have a great flow. So sometimes if you're rolling and there's a mistake, just leave it. In the studio you can go back and fix it."

RULE 3

Invest in a good, big hat. Wear it.

RULE 4

Stand out from the rest of the band: If you're ever fortunate enough to make a music video, choose a sparse location in which to play your guitar solo. A desert, cliff top or the middle of the ocean (see above) are all ideal places to throw some classic rock shapes - completely isolated from your bandmates.

up the guitar and that's when I really start practising. I get ideas from all over the place. I could be anywhere and something could pop into my head. I try to keep a guitar nearby so that I can access it quickly. They [riffs] can come from soundcheck; Matt and Duff might be playing something on bass and drums. There's a song on the Velvet Revolver record called *Superhuman*, where they were just playing something on bass and drums. It's a very strange riff and where that came from I have no idea, but it was definitely influenced by the rhythm those guys were playing.

"There's no set way to do it, and the harder you try to just come up with something, the more often than not it doesn't happen. But once you catch onto something and someone puts some drums to it and it takes off, then you know you've got something cool. You can tell from my top ten guitar riffs that I'm riff-oriented. I think that's what turned me on to rock 'n' roll guitar in the first place, the single-note groove."

That's interesting, because most people tend to associate you with guitar solos.
"Well I mean, the riffs, in a way, are really just lower register guitar solos."

Many of your heroes - Clapton and Hendrix, for example - would play a lot of leads, often throwing licks between vocal lines. Despite your status as a lead guitar hero, you could never be accused of over-playing or throwing in licks for the sake of it.

"The thing about that is, as much as I love guitar playing and being a soloist, I've never wanted to be that overbearing, constantly in your face kind of lead guitar player. I've always wanted to be part of the band. When I do my solos, I don't wanna be the feature guy in the band, which a lot of guitar players are into. I think that's one of the reasons why I settled into playing with another guitar player, because then you become more of a group. It's sort of an oxymoron because I play my ass off during my little bit, but it's really about what the band's doing and how the song goes. I think the guitar in rock 'n' roll is something that's sorely missed and it's an integral part to me, but it still comes down to the singer and the song. A solo should be something that moves the song along, not just this big feature blast. I find that in three or four-piece guitar bands, guitarists tend to cover the whole gamut because they're as much a frontman as the lead singer."

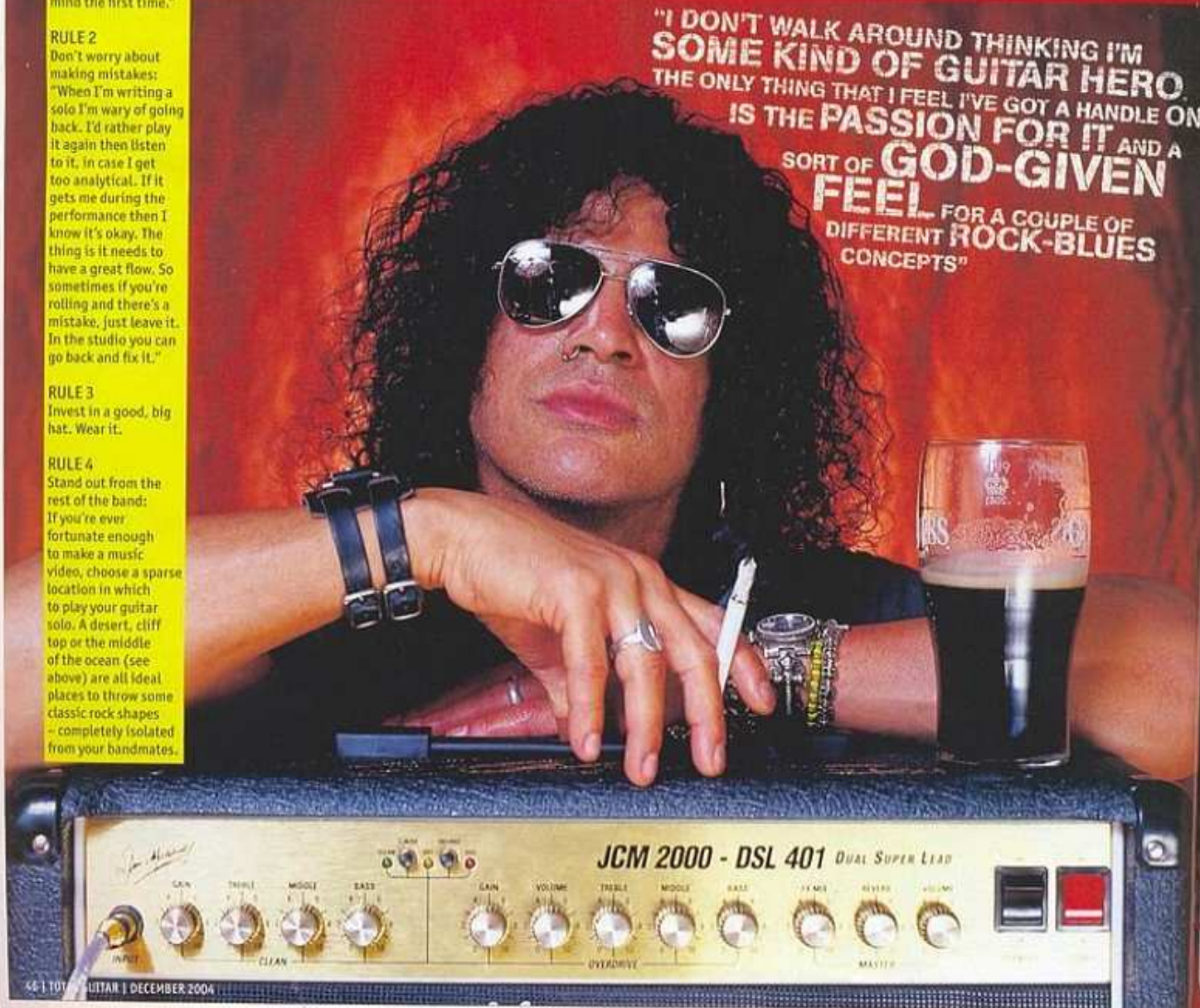
How do you decide who'll play what in a two-guitar band like Velvet Revolver or Guns N' Roses?

"It's not really a matter of thinking about it. Usually how it goes is I'll come up with an idea, I'll play my thing and then David [Kushner, Slash's VR sidekick] comes up with his own thing. That's how it was in GN'R too. Very rarely would we sit down and work anything out. Sometimes it could be a particular kind of riff that I might hear in my head where I've got two parts and I get Dave to try and play it. But if he doesn't feel comfortable playing it, then I don't push it. *Night Train* [from the GN'R album, *Appetite For Destruction*] was very much a two-guitar thing, and when I worked on that with Izzy that was one of the only times that we actually sat down. He had his single-note thing and I beefed it up with something heavier. So I would listen to what he was playing and see what I could come up with. But usually with any of these guitar players that I work with it's really free; everyone just does their own part."

As a player you're renowned for your sustain, string bends and vibrato...

"I'm amazed that you're telling me this!" →

"I DON'T WALK AROUND THINKING I'M SOME KIND OF GUITAR HERO. THE ONLY THING THAT I FEEL I'VE GOT A HANDLE ON IS THE PASSION FOR IT AND A SORT OF GOD-GIVEN FEEL FOR A COUPLE OF DIFFERENT ROCK-BLUES CONCEPTS"



Slash's scribbled
top ten riffs, solos
and guitar players



Slash: wears
sunglasses indoors
and doesn't look
like a twat. Legend!

→ Why, because you hear it all the time?

"No, I don't do guitar interviews as often as we talk about other stuff, so when you start talking about signature stuff that I do, I'm like, 'Really!' I mean, I just didn't know it was that recognisable."

Well, yeah! The last time we spoke you said you sometimes felt just like a regular Joe guitar player. Is that false modesty? Come on, man - you're a certified guitar hero!

"The thing with me is I have a constant struggle every single night - even after good nights - where I'm just trying to express what's going on in my head, with my left-hand technique, with my right-hand technique and just to make it all happen. You know, just trying to grow this thing. I don't think you'll ever get to that place... Well, I bet Chet Atkins has. But for me I'm still working on being, in my mind, what a good guitar player is or what it is, I guess, that I'd like to hear as far as my tastes are concerned."

"I don't really feel all that accomplished, so the notoriety I've picked up over the years as a guitar player is really fucking overwhelmingly flattering and it's hard for me to accept it. There's amazing guitar players all over the place that are capable of so much shit: voicings, melodies inside the chords, scales that fit inside certain chord changes. Shit that I don't know

LEARN TO PLAY SLASH'S FAVOURITE RIFFS

FOR THOSE ABOUT TO ROCK

WORDS AND MUSIC BY SCOTT,
YOUNG, YOUNG
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AC/DC: For Those About To Rock

TRACK 2

♩ = 126
N.C.

TAB

m m m m m m m etc
p p p p p p p

Aim to pick the first string slightly louder with your second finger, as this is the main melody. You should get a natural staccato effect by putting your fingers back on the strings in between plucking. Aim for a slightly overdriven valve sound, with bridge

BACKING - TRACK 3

ROCK BOTTOM

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UFO: Rock Bottom

TRACK 4

♩ = 155
N.C.

TAB

Try to avoid note bleed between the fourth and sixth strings; a slightly overdriven sound will help clean things up. Watch the ties in between bars, as they can throw the riff rhythmically. Practise at a slow tempo initially, as the end of bars 2 and 4 can be confusing.

BACKING - TRACK 5

anything about. So it's very belittling to me, as much as I do know. I don't walk around thinking I'm some kind of guitar hero. The only thing that I feel I've got a handle on is the passion for it, and a sort of god-given feel for a couple of different rock-blues concepts. Intonation and bends that are done properly and hit you in the heart, I have a feel for those too. Whether I've managed to pull it all off, technically and physically, is another matter altogether."

Where does the technical side of your playing come from, in terms of influences?

"I really don't know how the deal goes. I think I've come to terms with my limitations as a guitar player. So I'm trying to break those boundaries, but I'm too lazy to study – to get into it technically. From the viewpoint of trying to break it down and analyse it, that's never gonna happen. But I'm always trying to add to my repertoire.

"The actual blazing part, when it happens, it's not something that I sit down and practice per se, but when the part calls for it and you feel that energy in that particular section of the song, it just more or less happens. There's a song on the [Velvet Revolver] record called *Headspace* that has a really quick solo. When I did that I had to go back and listen to make sure I'd hit all the notes.

That was a spur of the moment solo and every time I play that live it's still hard to do. And it's not really that hard a lick: most blazing guitar players would be able to pull that off with one hand behind their back. But I do love having those little fits and flurries."

What was it like growing up as a guitar player in L.A. during that intensely technical period of the 1980s?

"When the Eighties came there was nothing very interesting around, because the amount of passion and pioneering that had gone on pre-Eighties laid down the groundwork for me. Although, when Eddie Van Halen came out it was all fuckin' flash and technical prowess, just WHAM! He was the only guy who did anything for me because he's the only one of those players who has a really good rock 'n' roll, tasty point of view as far as guitar playing goes. Even though it's so unorthodox. He was the only one who, when he didn't have both hands on the fretboard or his hand on the whammy bar, could actually do a really amazing, regular rock lick. I think everybody who got into Eddie Van Halen missed out on that, and all they picked up on was the pyrotechnics of it.

"So I never went to the Eddie Van Halen school of guitar playing because I considered that to be very original,



Surrounded by Les Pauls in Gibson's London HQ. Sweet!

unique and his own thing. That trend [that followed] was pretty ugly. By the time you got to Motley Crüe and by the time I was just getting started in the scene in L.A., there were no guitar players of any quality whatsoever. I just did my thing when Guns N' Roses first started and I don't think I got recognised as a half decent guitar player until way late in the band's career."

And then when you did get a reputation, it was as this badass hard rock player. But does

DEVELOP YOUR OWN SIGNATURE SOUND, LIKE SLASH...

"It's hard to explain, but with all the different guitar players I've listened to over the years, I recognise them all as being good guitar players, but they have little bits and pieces here and there which really hit my taste factor. It could be just one bar out of one whole solo that's really cool and I subconsciously ingest that. I'm very particular about what I like and what I don't like. If I really like something then I pick it up. I don't necessarily sit down and learn it note for note, but I stick it in that catalogue of guitar licks in my brain. Somehow that gets applied to my own style later. It's like a cut and paste computer thing."

SPACE TRUCKIN'

WORDS AND MUSIC BY JON LORD, RITCHIE BLACKMORE, SAN GILLAN, ROGER GLOVER AND JAN PAULI

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DEEP PURPLE: *Space Truckin'*

TRACK 6

♩ = 128 N.C.

The bulk of this riff is taken by a dirtier than dirty Hammond organ, but you can double up with the melody. Watch the syncopated rhythms as much as the rests in between, so as always, counting and foot tapping are essential.

BACKING – TRACK 7

HOW MANY MORE TIMES

WORDS AND MUSIC BY PAGE AND PLANT

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LED ZEPPELIN: *How Many More Times*

TRACK 8

♩ = 144 N.C.

Go for a more saturated fuzz tone as opposed to straight ahead valve distortion. The riff itself has been emulated a thousand times, so shouldn't be tricky, but make sure you put in the Page vibrato on the D's. Also note the shuffle groove.

BACKING – TRACK 9

BACK IN THE SADDLE

WORDS AND MUSIC BY JOE PERRY AND STEVEN TYLER

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AEROSMITH: *Back In The Saddle*

TRACK 10

♩ = 122 N.C.

A small amount of palm-muting may help the notes punch out slightly, but keep the sound fairly clean with the middle or neck pickup selected. The picking can be slightly awkward in bar 2 so work on the pick staying clean at slower tempos.

BACKING – TRACK 11

→ Mr. Slash have any saucy secrets or skeletons in the closet, playing-wise?

"Well, I do all kinds of stuff. There's a track out, a Spanish guitar thing I did, that's on the radio constantly in the States. It was the soundtrack for a movie I did that got released and I had no idea. My mom called to tell me! It's instrumental – all Spanish guitar. So I guess that's pretty different. [The name of the track is *Obsession Confession* from the soundtrack to a Quentin Tarantino-funded movie called *Curdle*.]

"I spend a lot of time playing acoustic guitar in my house. I either play electric without an amp or I play quietly on acoustic because I can't stand people hearing me practise, no matter how well I know them. Everything I write on acoustic is actually pretty sweet and very rarely does it get switched over to the electric and become something else. I wrote *Fall To Pieces* on an acoustic.

"But I also do all these sessions with these weird cats, like Ray Charles. I played with Carole King a little while ago, and with Bob Dylan – but that was a whole different trip. So it's not just the wham-bam rock stuff. But that's still my passion. It's what I love to do, just because of the whole energy of it – the brute force. I also love going to this blues bar round the corner from my

house and jamming with different cats. That's how I keep my chops up, by not being a one-dimensional guy."

TG is ten-years-old this month. To celebrate, we were thinking about nipping down the local student union and getting wasted on cheap snakebite... What was your most rock 'n' roll birthday?

"You know I've had a lot of really great rock 'n' roll birthdays, but I think the best I can remember was my twenty-first... I think. It was a surprise party that they totally fooled me on. I remember getting picked up by my manager who told me he had something really serious that he wanted to talk to me about, so I was just waiting for the worst. We went to a bar and we had a drink. I was sitting next to my manager and on the other side of him was Dean Martin. It was in the afternoon and I was having my Jack Daniels and Coke when my manager started going over all this potentially negative band stuff that had been happening. He really got me down in the dumps. Then we got in the car and went over to my publicist's house and it was a full-on surprise party. The whole band [Guns N' Roses] was there and all our friends and tons of booze. It was a huge fuckin' party. Anyway, I've had many since then, but that was my first

real rock 'n' roll surprise party. That was a very decadent party.

At this point, TG attempts to wrestle details of this decadent bash from Slash – Sex? Drugs? More sex? – but he's keeping scbtum on the nitty gritty.

OK, if you were to give TG a birthday present, what would it be?

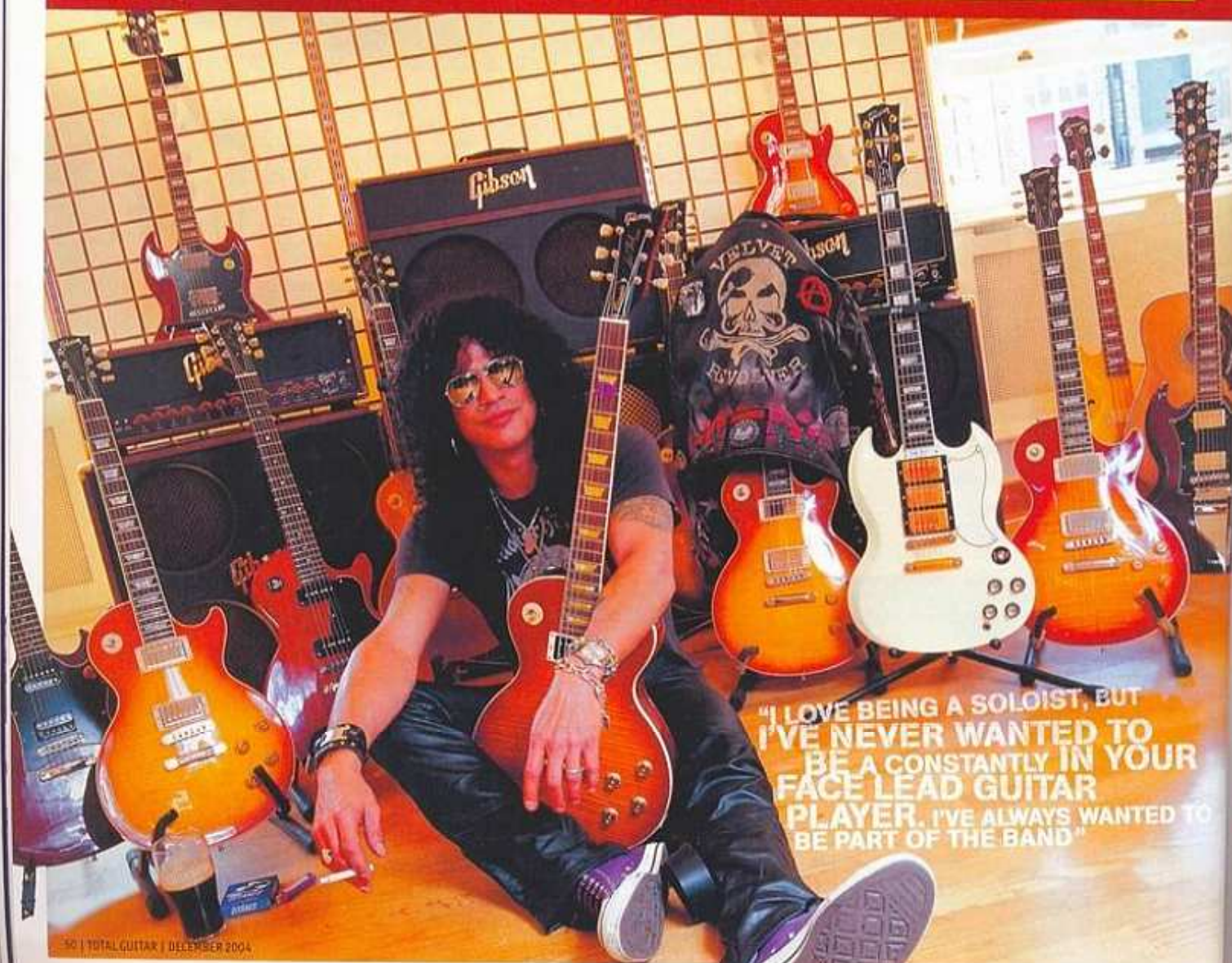
"I think the coolest thing would be a guitar that was really rare and special. I had a Les Paul that was Joe Perry's and I recently gave it back to him. It was also Duane Allman's before Joe had it – his ex-wife sold it. I had it for years, but I gave it back to Joe for his birthday."



Slash: proof that Guinness really is good for you

SLASH'S NO 1 TIP FOR IMPROVING YOUR PLAYING – INTONATION

There are some young guitar players from the punk rock thing and the problem with them is they don't have any intonation whatsoever. The attitude's there, but they make it sound unmusical. Another one is Kirk Hammett, who is a pretty renowned guitar player. He's one of those people who drives me nuts because of intonation. I didn't even know what intonation was until somebody told me a long time ago. 'You're getting pretty good, Slash – you've just gotta get your intonation together.' I didn't really know what that meant, but what it came down to was: if you're gonna bend a note, make sure it's going somewhere. Don't let it go half in or half out, or whatever."



"I LOVE BEING A SOLOIST, BUT I'VE NEVER WANTED TO BE A CONSTANTLY IN YOUR FACE LEAD GUITAR PLAYER. I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO BE PART OF THE BAND"