



RAW POWER

AN INSIDER'S
VIEW OF SLASH'S
TOURING RIG...

PHOTOGRAPHY
BY JAMES WILSON

■ A week on we catch up with Velvet Revolver again at Cardiff's International Arena. For the inside story on Slash's touring stash, we go direct to Adam Day, who has been looking after the man's guitars and amplifiers since 1988.

"Back then the job was much easier," he reflects, "Slash only had three amp heads: one for dirty, one for clean and one for spare. And he had a lot fewer instruments than the 14 that travel with him today. The rig today – five JCM Slash models and a JCM800 – is a lot louder than it was back in the Appetite For Destruction days."

Day maintains his job nevertheless remains pretty straightforward. "The only real problems I've ever had have been with power tubes in the Marshalls. We replace them all with Groove Tubes. On the main dirty head we use a GT E34L, and on the JCM800 we've got GT 6550. Both are a five rating. All the heads are labelled – if I've got amps on the shelf they all look the same so I've got to keep track of which is which! The clean heads have been modified to take GT KT88 tubes, cleaner and punchier in theory, and also have a 12AT7 preamp tube in the beginning of the gain stage, which is a little cleaner than a 12AX7. Using the rated Groove Tubes means I can throw in new tubes without really having to adjust the

bias because the rating is the same. It's useful if you're in a pinch!"

Despite taking care of 14 guitars, Day doesn't even use stringwinders: "I just wrap the string around the post twice and crank it on. I yank the strings hard and play them hard to stretch them!"

He uses a little Tri-Flow liquid Teflon on the nuts and saddles every time he changes strings, arguing that 95 per cent any tuning problems on a guitar will be caused by the nut. To that end, he uses specially gauged files to keep all the guitars' nut slots cut properly.

During the show, Day uses in-ear monitoring. "I have Slash's clean, dirty, talkbox and acoustic sounds in my own mix – I get a little bit of drums and lead vocals too, which I use for cues when I'm changing Slash's sounds. It's hugely useful for festivals because I'll have to do changes on the downbeat and sometimes I won't be able to see Slash, so I need to hear where that downbeat is. And sometimes Slash will hold a solo a little longer or slide into the next bar. With the monitoring I can anticipate the changes. I'm isolated well with these in-ear monitors because they cut-out a lot of the damaging frequencies..."

But enough of that – let's look in detail at Slash's touring guitars!



1 Gibson Slash Signature Series prototypes, 2004

■ "These are Custom Shop Gibsons, basically a Les Paul 1959 Reissue with a Standard size neck in tobacco sunburst finish. What makes it unique is its Fishman Powerchip piezo bridge pickup. Slash activates it via a three-way toggle switch situated by the main controls. The bottom position is magnetic pickups, the middle is magnetic and piezo and the top is just piezo. They're basically an aged finish, but they're not distressed in the shop. The distress on this guitar is Slash's own personal work."

"This one is fairly light, which is what we usually look for from the Custom Shop because they tend to sound a little warmer. This guitar is actually a fairly bright sounding guitar, which is what Slash is rather liking these days. We have three of these guitars – the first one is flamed maple and the other two are plain maple, which is what you'll see available in stores. No.1 is the main guitar, No.2 is a backup to that and No.3 we hold back exclusively for acoustic. He plays this on Used To Love Her and the piezo sound is as good as it can

be given that it is a solid body guitar.

"For the No.3 Les Paul that gets used for acoustic stuff I'll change the strings every four or five songs, just to keep the strings bright. The other guitars I'll change every six songs because Slash sweats a lot! If, one show, Slash only plays a guitar for three songs, then it'll be three shows before I change the strings. But he'll play seven songs in a night on his main Les Paul so the strings have to be changed before every show..."



Les Pauls No.2 and No.3, which is used for the acoustic parts of Used To Love Her

2 BC Rich Mockingbird

"This was played on the last Guns N' Roses tour. On Suckertrain Blues (from the VR album Contraband) Slash played his '65 Strat and used the whammy bar on the solo, but he uses this 1980 BC Rich to play it live. The backup to this is a later model Custom Shop Mockingbird, also fitted with a Floyd Rose vibrato..."

3 Custom Shop BC Rich Mockingbird

"The electronics are bypassed in both the BC Rich guitars for a direct link from pickup to output..."

4 BC Rich Bich 10-string

"This is set-up for six-string use with bypassed electronics..."

5 Guild double-neck Slash Custom

"Slash designed this guitar by drawing on a cocktail napkin – he wanted a half-acoustic and half-electric guitar, and it's basically half solid body and half hollow body. It's got a piezo-style pickup under the saddle on the acoustic side and it's used for songs where he'll play acoustic and electric in the same song. The piezo signal goes directly into the PA. Slash switches the necks and I switch the sounds from here."

6 Guild double-neck backup

"This is identical to the other Guild double-neck: both use 0.12 to 0.52 Ernie Ball Phosphor Bronze strings."

7 Gibson Les Paul Standard

"This is Slash's old No.1 Gibson with a cigarette burn on the body..."

8 Gibson Les Paul Standard

"And this is its old sister..."

9 Gibson Les Paul Standard

"This 1976 tobacco Les Paul has 'zebra' Seymour Duncans and is tuned to Drop D for Headspace, Superhuman and Slither."

10 Gibson Les Paul 1957 Reissue Goldtop

"This has Seymour Duncan Alnico II humbuckers, is tuned a full step lower and is also used on Fall To Pieces."

11 Gibson 'Skull' Les Paul Standard

"This is tuned a full-step flat for Dirty Little Thing, D to D."

12 Gibson EDS-1275 Double-neck

"The 12-string neck is tuned with both sets of E strings dropped to D. The guitar is strung with a custom gauge string set and is used for No More, No More – the Aerosmith song."



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SLASH'S SIGNAL CHAIN

FROM THE GUITAR we go into a Nady Wireless 950GS Wireless Receiver then into...

■ BOSS OC-2 Octave 2 Octave Divider; "used only on Illegal Eye".

■ Dunlop Crybaby DCR-2SR (plus a DCR-1SR for backup): "Slash has three control pedals for this positioned across the stage."

■ Custom Audio Electronics Splitter:

"the A-side goes to a JCM Slash set to dirty, a JCM800 with only two GT 6550 output tubes for half power operation and a JCM Slash (spare). The B-side is sub-split into another Custom Audio Electronics splitter and sent to two JCM Slash heads set to a clean tone. The other side of the sub-split goes to another switcher so I can activate the Talkbox, the two clean heads or the acoustic DI etc. The TalkBox goes to a JCM Slash head as well."

"We have two pedals in the FX loop of the JCM Slash Dirty. A BOSS DD-3 Delay and an MXR 10-band EQ. We use that for a lead boost and feedback enhancer. The Delay is for slap and solos. Any feedback stuff I'll programme manually. At soundcheck I'll dial in the best EQ to get feedback..."

Each of these heads powers a 4 x 12-inch cabinet loaded with Celestion Vintage 30 speakers, though all the piezo-equipped guitars go through the PA. Slash's strings are Ernie Balls .11 to .48 (though on drop D tunings the low string is a .50) and his picks are 1.14mm Dunlops.

Which leaves only one secret weapon: a Monster Power Conditioner Pro 2500! "It's a power conditioner that gives readout of the voltage at each venue," explains Day, "and it makes sure the amps are getting the right amount of juice. I also use a Furman voltage regulator to keep a constant voltage for the amps. Amps can sound a little softer with less voltage and sound like they're struggling. A lot of guys are aware of the way voltage changes the sound. Van Halen uses a Variac to put the voltage right where he wants it - he uses that as a kind of master volume control like some people use attenuators."

