

Agora Ballroom where it helped to get noticed. If you played a Thinline II through a 135 watt Twin, you got noticed. A good sonic reference would be Kink's guitarist Dave Davies' 1980 solo album AFL1-3603. The Thinline was eventually stolen in Toronto, but not before we had laid more than a few tracks with the nuanced subtlety of a chainsaw, and we thoroughly relished every moment spent throttling up the Thinline II live and on tape. Color it as 'unforgettable' as a case of herpes.

When the new Lollar Regal pickups dropped in our midst (thanks, Stephanie), we were more than a little surprised, as our thoughts turned with fond memories to our old Thinline. Lollar bit off an accurate reproduction of the Fender humbucker? That's a tall order, to say the least. Intrigued, we asked Jason to explain, and he did:

TQR: Developing a new pickup is not a minor undertaking. What inspired you to resurrect the original Seth Lover Fender humbucker? Did you have an old Tele Deluxe back in the day?



I didn't. When I was about 13 I wanted a Les Paul Custom and my guitar teacher told me not to buy a Les Paul, and that I should buy a Tele Deluxe with two humbuckers and two volume and tone controls with a 3-way switch. The only band I had ever seen play them was Slade, and I just thought they were the ugliest mofos I had ever seen – big old platform shoes and plaid pants playing a Tele Deluxe. That guitar was just too butt-ugly. But about 7-8 years ago people started asking for that pickup. I was getting a lot of them in for repair because people would

take them apart and they don't understand that the polepieces are magnets. They would screw the polepieces back in the wrong direction and some strings would be dead. That is very common when people try to take those old pickups apart.

TQR: All you need to do is look at the back and know not to take them apart...



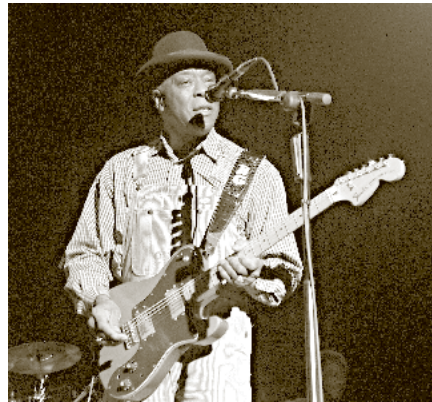
that can go wrong with them and they are a bitch to re-build.

And the internal parts are just horrible. They have these really thin nylon bobbins that are extremely heat sensitive. They heat-pressed in a little metal stud that they attached the coil wire to, and it melts very easily and will break the coil. There are just so many things

TQR: They originally used cunife magnets because it could be machined and threaded, correct?

Yeah, it was a new magnetic material in the '70s that could be machined, but it never caught on. The only way you can get that stuff today is as surplus. It's rare. There is a guy who found enough cunife to make something like 30 pickups that he was trying to sell for \$450, and you have to provide a donor re-issue pickup for the cover, but you won't hear much about that.

TQR: So you must have bought a few old pickups...



I bought several sets on eBay, and they were expensive – something like \$500 each. A friend of mine also has an original Thinline Deluxe. At first I thought I wouldn't be able to make

them without that cunife material until I figured out that Alnico V of a certain length sounded really close, but I could only get rods, and not anything that was threaded. So I put the idea on the shelf for awhile. Fender makes their 'reissue' version, and the baseplate and cover are the correct dimension, but inside they are just a standard dual coil humbucker set in wax because the covers are so much bigger. The original pickup covers want to howl sometimes, and Buddy Guy sent me some old Tele Deluxe pickups that he wanted potted because of that. More recently I found this magnet material called ferco that is very similar to the Alnico V that was so close to the cunife, and I started doing more testing. I bought more old pickups and I bought a Tele Deluxe reissue for testing. Fender has said that they have revoiced their humbuckers, but I haven't seen or heard any difference.

TQR: So you assembled a collection of old Fender humbuckers, and once the ferco magnets were available you were off and running...



Yeah, once I got that it was just a matter of building the right set of bobbins and doing some winding tests to figure out what the right specs were. Those original pickups measure at over 10K. I also had to draw up all the spec for the baseplates and covers and have those made.

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TQR: And how do you do that?



You get out an original pickup and use a set of calipers to get the dimensions that you enter into a CAD program. You have to make sure that you get the tapered curve on the side of the covers right so the stamped part will come out of the die. Fender got the overall dimensions for the baseplate and cover right in the reissues, but there are lots of way you can screw it up. You can draw

it wrong, or your machine shop can misinterpret your measurements, or guitar companies can change the dimensions of their pickup routs. You have to check all of that.

TQR: How long did it take you to get the Regal into production? Sounds like four years.

Yeah, about that – deciding to do it, coming up with the money, doing the drawings, and even after the drawings are submitted they have to make the tooling, then they do an initial press that we have to verify, changes may be made, we get another sample to verify, and then once you get the parts stamped they have to be sent out to plating, and that takes months.

TQR: Did you view this as a moderate risk? It's not like the Tele Thinline and Deluxe are iconic designs...

Right, but I could tell that they were getting popular and a lot of younger bands were using them. I wanted to be the first one to come out with a complete pickup and not just be re-building the reissues. If you sell the guitar keep the Lollars and put the originals back in.

TQR: Well, you already make an incredible range of chocolate, so to speak. Once you got all the specs together for the Regal, it wasn't like you were going to go down the same road as Teles and Strats with brighter and darker versions, right?

No, although I do have a neck version of the Regal with lower output. There are always people that want a less powerful neck pickup with not as much woof in it, and the typical bitch I hear about the Thinline Customs is that the neck pickup always overpowers the single coil in the bridge.

TQR: Alright, so the Classic Player Tele Thinline Deluxe we bought comes with 250K pots, and we ordered a pair of 500K from Angela Instruments and one of

them burned up last night. Works full on, but craps in and out when you turn it down, so... I ordered a pair of 1 meg audio taper today. We're going balls to the wall now. Guess it was meant to be.

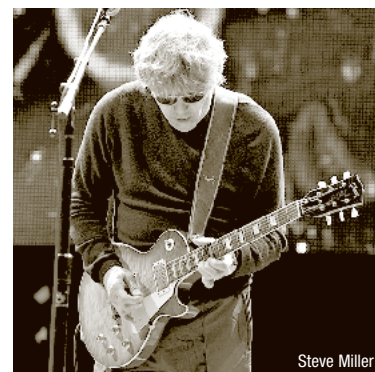


You really need to use 500K pots with these pickups minimum, but if you were to compare my pickups with an original '70s Telecaster it isn't going to sound the same without 1 meg pots. Plus, the '70s Teles were so f'ing heavy. Everybody thought heavier was better back then. We've sold about three hundred of these now, and once in a while someone will say that the bridge pickup buzzes. So I tell

them to send the pickup back and I don't hear anything, but I've had five or six people say that the bridge pickup buzzes. Finally I took the guitar outside the shop where it's really quiet and just cranked the amp, and what they're talking about is when you're not playing it and you switch to the bridge pickup with a cranked amp you can hear a tiny little buzz. I never heard it until I had to find it, and it's really minor, but it's because there is this metal plate inside that is an original detail that gives the bridge pickup a fatter, thicker sound. After I heard the noise I grabbed an original wide range to compare my pickup to and the original had the same buzz. I guess if you have your amp cranked and you're not playing you can barely hear it, but I don't know why you would be sitting there not playing with your amp on ten (laughing).

TQR: The first time we ever talked was easily ten years ago, and there are so many 'custom' pickup winders now. It's become a little bizarre, which is a nice way of saying there is a lot of bullshit clouding the pickup bizz... You must laugh sometimes.

I do, but it isn't too funny when someone calls me up with a set of very specific requests for a pickup that they read about



online, and I know that if I do what they want they aren't going to like it. There is a lot of dogma out there.

TQR: What's new and hot?

We did the Thunderbird bass pickup

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recently, and there's the El Rayo... It's a humbucker made with Alnico VIII and 40 gauge wire, so it only reads at about 4.4K. It has a really punchy attack almost like a single coil. It's kind of a lapsteel idea with a real strong magnet

and a bigger coil with less turns. It's funny, I was talking to Steve Miller – Les Paul was his godfather, and he was telling me that he had all these pickups that Les made. He sent them to me, and about half of them are almost exactly what we designed for the El Rayo, except that he used ceramic magnets and 38 gauge wire. But it was funny that a week after we announced the El Rayo we got all these pickups that Les had made that were so similar. And then we are just about to launch the Lollar'tron, which is a Filtertron that fits in a standard humbucking rout. These sound closer to what is in my early '60s Gretsch than most of the modern Filtertrons I've heard. We're about to do a video on them and we want to have at least fifty sets available before we officially introduce them. I'll make you a set next week so you can check them out. What do you want, nickel?

TQR: Nickel is good! 

www.lollarguitars.com, 206-463-9838

The Thinline That Never Was



With Lollar's big Seth Lover/Fender humbuckers in hand, we needed a guitar to put 'em in, and the choices seemed obvious. Vintage Thinline? No, we weren't gonna tote that note... Reissue Tele Deluxe? We had to agree with Jason – just too butt ugly, thank you. Japanese reissue Thinline II? Tempting, but the electronics would have to be gutted and

the frets would be tiny, unlike the big ones on our old Thinline... Fender also makes Thinlines in Corona and Ensenada, but they too would be plagued with those tiny vintage frets. Further research revealed a model we had missed – the Classic Player Thinline Deluxe... Now we're talkin.' Semi-hollow Thinline ash body, maple neck with medium jumbo frets, 4-bolt neck plate with bullet truss rod, small traditional headstock, dual Fender humbuckers, (and here's where the 'Deluxe' applies), and two volume and tone controls with a

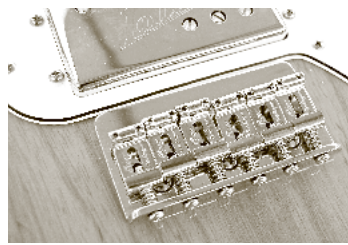
3-way switch in the style of the fuggedly Tele Deluxe. \$799 new online, with no used models to be found. The Fender web description of the Classic Player Thinline Deluxe refers to this model as 'new' but it appears to have been introduced in 2009. Regardless, someone had a good day when they dreamed this one up. We bought ours direct with free shipping from the Music Zoo and for the most part, we have been extremely pleased if not pleasantly surprised...



First of all, the online stock pictures on the Fender website used by most dealers don't do justice to this guitar. The photos make the maple neck look bright white (cheap), when in fact the poly lacquer is nicely tinted and does not at all resemble a cheaper Asian Fender model. The 3-tone burst over the matched two-piece, highly figured ash body is a beautifully executed testament to Fender quality and attention to detail in the Ensenada factory. Simply put, the quality of the ash,

the care with which the two pieces were carefully matched and the vibrant 3-D finish are as good as it gets in an \$800 guitar or a \$2000 guitar, for that matter. The maple neck features a 9.5" radius, excellent fret work, and a sensible and solid 4-bolt neck plate. Now, the slab cut grain running through the neck visible in the fingerboard is a little unusual, but after sitting in a warehouse for who knows how long, we were able to easily adjust the neck straight with several cranks on the bullet truss rod. The neck shape is a moderate full C, comfortably rounded and not unlike the feel of our original old Thinline II.

We like moderately high action, and the standard hardtail Stratocaster bridge plate and saddles used on the Thinline are



a great idea. However, the saddles seemed a little less substantial than the Custom Shop metal we're used to, especially with the saddle height adjusted higher than the factory setup.

By the time we had the saddles high enough, the threaded set screw feet seemed wobbly and loose near the end of their travel, so we replaced them with a True Vintage nickel plated steel set from RawVintage.com. Big improvement there, and we mounted the saddles on a heavier hardtail Strat bridge plate that we found in one of our parts cases.

Nothing is perfect, and we'll have to rate the sealed 'F' stamped Ping tuners as marked. They truly suck, slack and

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loosey-goosey, forcing you to drop below pitch on each string and hope for the best as you creep up to pitch. The slot and hole in the top of the low E tuner post wasn't quite big enough for a .048 E string, either. Yank these as soon as you can. We found some very cool Schaller sealed 6-inline tuners that also mount diagonally like the old Fender tuners and the stock Pings, but Harry, our friendly rep at AllParts informed us that they don't and won't

fit the Classic Player Thinline Deluxe. Used to, but don't any more. Plan B had us rummaging through our parts cases again, where we found a set of Kluson (TonePros) vintage 6-inlines. To our surprise, they drop right in the existing holes for the posts using the existing bushings and completely cover the existing holes from the Pings, but you do have to drill new holes for each Kluson tuner. Be sure to use the smaller screws that come with the Klusons. This isn't difficult as long as you work carefully and align each tuner in a straight line. The Klusons are absolutely flawless and really complete what is otherwise an exceptional 'cheap' guitar weighing just 7.4 pounds.

REVIEW

Lollar Regals



We knew the stock 250K volume pots in the Thinline would need to be replaced, and this was a job we were

not looking forward to. Looking over the existing wiring harness, we saw heavy blobs of solder where the shielded pickup ground wires had been grounded to the volume pots with hard, environmentally compliant solder, and lots of flimsy plastic-coated wire everywhere. 'Affordable' guitars are often wired in ways that make pickup replacements challenging, and the Thinline was no exception. Once we had the new 500K volume pots installed and connected, we discovered that the bridge volume pot worked on '10,' but cut in and out as we turned it down. Cleaning didn't help, so we chalked it up to a defective pot, or one we had made so by applying too much heat to the pot. Both were packaged as Fender CTS replacements made in Taiwan. We also noticed that the pot shafts



were taller than the originals, which would leave the black skirted

volume knobs sitting higher off the top of the guitar than the tone knobs. That ain't right. Should you replace pots yourself, plan on adding four more circular steel washers to each of the volume pots to insure that the knobs sit flush on the top. You may also be interested to know that the two 500K pots we bought actually measured 444K and 526K. While we weren't prevented from evaluating the Lollar Regals with the bridge pickup turned up all the way, we decided to order a pair of 'Fender' CTS 1 meg audio taper pots this time and go for all the power and presence that was originally delivered in the vintage Thinline equipped with 1 meg pots. There are no mistakes...

The stock reissue Fender humbuckers had sounded OK – not awful, brighter than most humbuckers, but very vanilla with none of the character, zing and vivid intensity we fondly remembered in the original pickups. The 7.76K neck pickup was as woofy and indistinct as the 8.07K bridge was thin and bright, but had you never heard the real thing, you might just leave them in and never know the difference.

The Lollars measure a stout 10.66K/neck and 11.05K bridge and they sound like it – powerful, very forward and aggressive, but in a uniquely over-poured fashion that is unmistakably all Telecaster. Played clean they present a huge voice that mirrors their physical size. The bridge pickup is bright, anchored with a robust upper midrange voice, stridently urgent, yet fidelity and musicality are equally abundant. Let's just say that neither pickup is shy, no matter how loud your amp is or isn't set. The neck pickup is surprisingly lush, warm and oozing upper mids, again, very different from anything you have heard from a Telecaster before, just as Fender originally intended at a time when humbucking guitars were eating their lunch in the early '70s. Played through an over-driven amp, you had better get your dental work checked in



advance. These are the carpenter bees of the pickup world – you know, those big, fat bumble bees that drill holes in the woodwork of your house? We think the advertising tag for Lollar's Regal pickups should read, "get noticed."

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Or perhaps you should post warning signs outside your next gig... WARNING – THINLINE TELECASTER INSIDE, ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK. This is not a criticism by any means. For the same reason our old Thinline II had us doing double takes in 1980, these pickups simply sound like nothing you have ever heard before. Sure, a semi-hollow slab of ash contributes to the sound as well, but the huge, face-planting character of the Regals is entirely unique to the original Seth Lover humbucking design. If you play slide, you need some of this, as there seems to be some serious lapsteel DNA in these coils – just more of it. Clean rhythms are fat and chunky with a ton of spank, single notes sustain until you let go of ‘em, and hard rockin’ chords and solos... well, they will stop idle conversation, especially among other guitar players.

Our Mexican Classic Player Thinline Deluxe has indeed been transformed into a full-grown man loaded with the Lollars. Looking at it, you wouldn’t necessarily expect to hear such sounds, but they are all there in wide glide technicolor. And now what? Quest forth and get noticed. **TQ**

FENDER CUSTOM

Vibrolux Reverb

Delta Moon guitarist Tom Grey’s mention of the Custom Vibrolux Reverb in the March issue of TQR did not go unnoticed. In fact, given his deep collection and experience with vintage gear, there was no way we were not going to develop a review of the Custom Vibrolux on your behalf.



We watched a few eBay sales, but fate pointed us to the web site at Dave’s Guitar Shop, where we found a very new-looking but described as ‘used’ Custom Vibrolux Reverb that we acquired for \$700 shipped. That’s a

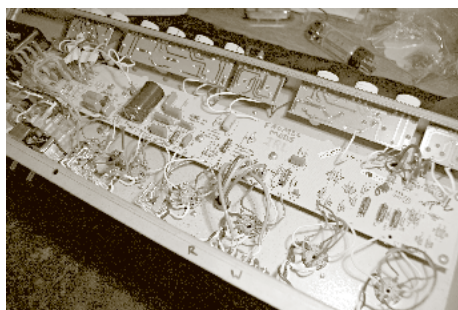
great deal, and our research turned up recent completed sales on eBay that ranged from \$650.00 - \$700.00. Our amp arrived in absolutely new condition – a 2010 model based on the EIA codes on the Jensen P10R speakers. What we didn’t expect to find was a cryptic note written on the cap can that read “Fromel Mod, 10/25/10 – RW.” Inside the original Fender warranty and manual envelope that had been stapled to the inside of the cabinet were copies of the printed Fromel Mod installation instructions complete with color photographs of each section the circuit board and the location of the caps

and resistors to be replaced. We had found references to both Fromel mods and Moyer mods online when researching the Custom Vibrolux Reverb, so we immediately read over the instructions slowly and dialed the number for John Fromel’s amp shop in Seattle, WA. In addition to operating a thriving amp repair shop in a city that can easily support one, John Fromel builds custom guitar effects and mod kits for pedals and amplifiers. We spoke to John about the Custom Vibrolux Reverb, among other things. Listen...

TQR: We noted that you build guitar effects in addition to putting together mod kits and working on amps. What is your best selling pedal?

By far the EQ pedal. It’s a semi-parametric EQ – essentially a unity gain EQ that has bass, sweepable mids and treble controls, true or buffered bypass, and the parametric portion of it can act as either a sweep or a shelf. When it’s in shelf mode it takes a selected frequency and everything below that you can cut or boost. Guitar players really like it because you can get super-boosted or super-scooped mids depending on what you’re going for. A lot of guys use it so they can easily switch guitars. Like if you’re going from a White Falcon to a Tele you would normally have to tweak your amp. With the EQ you can set your amp for one guitar and the EQ pedal for a second guitar. It’s also really useful right after your favorite distortion or boost pedal so you can dial it in instead of using multiple boost pedals with different EQ characteristics. And another useful application is using it with a vintage amp that may have only one tone control.

TQR: What inspired you to begin putting these mod kits together, and for the Custom Vibrolux Reverb specifically?



Well, one came into the shop and I recall thinking that it didn’t sound very good and I could make it sound

better. I did some research, and there is a guy named Mark Moyer who is known for his ‘Moyer mods’ and I just took out the junky components, especially in the tone stack and filter caps, and that was it. Here’s the deal about the Custom Vibrolux Reverb... It is not a reissue of any amp that Fender ever built. It’s basically a modified version of the reissue brown Vibroverb 2x10 they built in the ‘90s, and when Fender designed the Custom Vibrolux Reverb they did some things that weren’t really very good. Putting the reverb on both chan-

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