



*Jody Carver's*  
**Fender Steel Guitar Club**

***Dedicated to the Fender Stringmaster and the people who play them.***

## Are the Fender Steel Guitars back?

Could it be? No, don't tell me the ghost of Leo is back. Well, maybe. Fender announced to the world during the NAMM show the new six string lap steel. To stay true to Fender the guitar looks just like the old Champ. Now called the FS52 it touts some pretty impressive features. According to Fender's web site

<http://www.fender.com/products/search.php?partno=0950072821>

This guitar has an Ash body with a white gloss polyurethane finish.

One standard Strat pick-up with flat coil pieces, volume and tone controls. With a 22 1/2" scale it should sell pretty well. The site does not talk about the string spacing or width at the heel. At least this is a good start. I have made two calls to Fender to ask a few specific questions but have had no return calls as of this

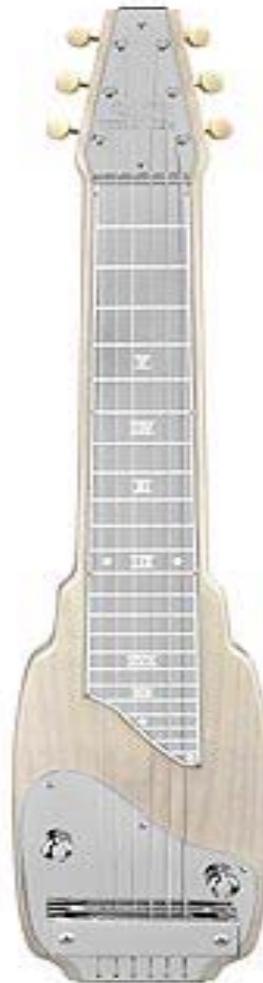
newsletter. So much for customer service. I did give them my 800 number in an effort to save them a few bucks but it didn't help. The receptionist was nice though!

The list price is around \$575.00 and after checking with a few Fender dealers it seems that the sell price will be around \$350-\$400.00 US. This is above most of the other new (mass produced) lap steels on the market but "It's a Fender."

There has been quite a bit of bantering on the Steel guitar Forum about the future of Fender. Will we see an eight string next? How about a new single/ double/ triple Stringmaster?

**Beats me-- they won't call me back!**

Gary



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**Don Burrows:**

**Don Burrows is recovering from heart surgery. As you already know Don makes steel guitar legs and cases for many of us in the steel guitar circles . As of this newsletter Don is recovering well and should be back on his feet very soon. Don asked me to thank everyone for the tremendous support he has received from the steel community.**

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*This newsletter makes no money for advertising.*

## Who is responsible for Leo Fender's success? By Chuck Brattain

***Was it a Kid in Hawaii? Stanley Oahu? Paul Barth? Mr. Hall? Ray Massie?***

***(I WAS THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME)***

One day in about 1944 (at my age I will use "about" a lot), I came home from school and my mother said, "After dinner I want you to wash and put on clean clothes, because you are going to have a Musical Aptitude Test tonight. A man came to the door today looking for kids to train and play in his band". My dad said, "Great, maybe this will be something to keep him busy and out of trouble". Anyway, this man came and showed me a few strums on the acoustic lap steel guitar and said I was the best he ever saw (he told everybody the same thing) and I would be famous some day.



## Who is responsible? continued

My dad signed me up for \$15.00 down and \$1.50 a week for lessons, and the acoustic lap steel was furnished free for class and home practice. When I went to my first lesson there were 10 of us all in the same class for a one-hour lesson. They sure made it fun, and we even learned to play a couple songs by reading number music. This type of teaching steel guitar was started around the late 1920's or 1930's by a man we called Stanley Oahu who owned the Oahu Publishing Co. I think his real name was Stanley Bronson, and he also had a brother in the studio business.

Once upon a time a kid in Hawaii slid a pocket knife across the strings of a regular standard guitar and made a pleasing sound that fit great with Hawaiian music - and the Hawaiian Steel Guitar was born. It became very popular across the USA and evolved into the modern day steel guitar. Stanley Oahu discovered that by tuning an acoustic Hawaiian steel guitar to a chord and just strumming across, anyone could make a very pleasing sound and it would be very easy to sell lessons and teach in classes. How this worked was he would send out door to door salesman to enroll students and loan them a free acoustic steel guitar. They would teach them very well for about six weeks, then call the parents in to watch a test to see how much they have learned. Of course the test showed that the kid did very well and might be a PRO some day. Now the kid would have to have a nice ELECTRIC STEEL GUITAR to continue on with the professional steel guitar course. There was a lot of money to be made in selling a nice electric guitar set. LET ME SAY THIS RIGHT NOW - THIS WAS NOT A RACKET. Most of these studios were very honest and used topnotch teachers. The kids could learn to play really well if they would practice. After about a year taking lessons and seeing how this operation worked, I decided that this was for me - I could make \$15.00 an hour teaching and another \$100.00 or more selling a nice electric steel guitar set. You have to realize that this was the 1940's and the top wage was \$100.00 a week.

### WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH LEO FENDER ?

In about 1946 I was a student teacher for Karl Schultz, the best salesman I ever saw, at the Santa Ana House of Music. We had one or two door to door salesman working all the time and would teach anywhere from 100 to 200 students a week and selling a lot of nice steel guitar sets mostly Magnatone, Dickerson, and some Ricks. Mr. Hall of Rickenbacker was right there in Santa Ana, California.

Well, one day in about 1946, a radio repairman from Fullerton named Leo Fender brought in a guitar carved out of wood to show us what he was working on. It was not very good at all - and I thought, "this thing won't sell". But we were nice to him and gave him pointers on how to make it better. At the same time Karl Shultz told him it might be easier to make steel guitars. Karl was always looking for ways to make a bigger markup. I think Leo was impressed with the amount of guitars we sold and the price we sold them for. So Leo kept working on his standard guitars and started to learn about steel guitars. I think he had help from Doc Kaufman, whom I did not know, and Paul Barth who we called "Mr, Rickenbacker". Paul had worked a long time for Rickenbacker and some for Magnatone and I don't know who else, and he knew a lot about electric steel guitars. Leo would come around now and then to visit. Our main teacher, Paul Randall (no kin to Don Randall) was most often in class and when Leo would leave Paul Randell would say, "How is old Fuddy coming along with his plank?" The first time Paul saw the Broadcaster he said, "You can't play a plank."

Leo learned to make very good steel guitars at a reasonable price, so the studios could make a nice profit. Just a few of the studios that sold a lot of Fender Steel Guitars and made Fender a lot of money were the Santa Ana House of Music, Scotty in St Louis, Trick Brothers in Dallas, Ernie Ball Studios North of LA, Ted Pickles in Riverside, Fred McCord in Dallas - and there were about 100 more. I believe that the Studio Business of selling steel guitars was what put Leo Fender over the top so he could work on his standard guitars. Fender even started the I.G.L. International Guitar League for student competition between Studios.

If it were not for Stanley Oahu with his door-to-door salesmen all over the United States and the popularity of the Hawaiian lap steel guitar during that period of time I do not think that the steel guitar would be what it is today, and Leo Fender would not have been as successful as he was. Of course we all know that Don Randall, the head of Fender Sales, was one heck of a salesman - which helped a lot.

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## Who is responsible? continued

Leo had a model steel guitar set called the WHITE, named after Forest White, the Fender plant manager at that time. He would only sell it to studios so people could not compare prices of that steel guitar set. The step up models, eight strings, doubles, triples, and quads sold very well due to the great teaching of the studios.

When I was a student I played in a studio band called "The String Masters". One day Leo came by and said he was going to make the greatest steel guitar ever. He told us about all the features, one of which was a 26" scale to make a nice fat mellow tone. He couldn't think of a model name, and Karl said, "Why don't you just call it the String Master?"

Another reason for Fender's success is Ray Massie, who designed the push pull circuits for the Fender amps. They were the only amps back then that really did the job on the bandstand. Due to the great sales of Fender instruments in the early 1950's, Karl Schultz broke away from using the Oahu teaching method, and we wrote the Natural Method for Steel Guitar which was very successful.

I opened the Costa Mesa Guitar Center in about 1958 - the First Guitar Center, and sold Fender, Gibson, Martin, and Guild instruments, etc. One day a kid came in and traded his Standell Amp in on a new Fender Showman amp. The next day he came back in and said that he had blown it up. So off we went to the Fender factory and Leo gave him another one. The next day he came back in and said that he had blown that amp after about 15 minutes. So off we went back to the factory. Leo got really mad at first, but he became good friends with the kid and worked with him to make the amp better - and the Dual Showman was born. The kid was Dick Dale (of Dick Dale and the Del Tones). You still hear Dick Dale a lot these days on commercials playing his arrangement of MISERLOU.

So, thanks to a kid in Hawaii, Stanley Ohau, Leo Fender, Ray Massie, Karl Schultz, and Paul Barth, I have been in the music business my whole life working with the Steel Guitar - except for 4 years in the USAF.

"You just can't get any better than that"

Chuck Brattain

## Rick's Corner

### FSK - Fender Steel King Amp by Rick Alexander JCSGC Staff



I ordered a Fender Steel King Amp from GC Pro a few weeks ago, and I just received it the other day. I've had the opportunity to play with it in my studio, to use it at a live performance, and to record with it. So I thought I'd make the FSK the subject of Rick's Corner for this issue, and share my experience with and observations of Fender's latter-day contribution to the world of Steel Guitar.

First let me say that I am essentially a tube amp guy. When I play regular guitar, it has to be tubes. When I play Steel Gui-

tar, I usually like to use a tube amp and a solid state amp. The reason for this is that tube amps have the warmth, the saturation, the character etc., but they tend to crap out when I play Steel and "dig in" - and Solid state amps have clarity and more headroom before crapout (HBC), but tend to sound sterile and lacking in warmth. So my theory is that they compensate for each other's deficits and provide a full complete sound. For the most part, the theory works. I had been using my Stringmaster plugged into a Music

Man HD130 and a Peavey Session 500, and it sounded pretty darn good.

In my never ending quest for tone, I thought I'd try using a Fender Custom 65 Twin with the 15" speaker and an FSK and see how that would sound. So I ordered one of each. I received the Twin about a month before the FSK and rapidly determined that it wasn't for me. I know some really great players swear by it - Cindy Cashdollar and Big John Bechtel to name a few - but I guess my heavy handed playing style didn't suit it, or

## FSK Continued

maybe the one I got wasn't 100%. I couldn't seem to dial in a tone that sounded good to me, even when I tried the settings that Big John had recommended. When I played chords and slid up the neck (the crap-out test) it crapped out - even at low volume. My Music Man amps sounded better to me. So I returned it to my friendly neighborhood Guitar Center, which is conveniently located 2 blocks from my studio.

When I finally got the FSK, it was a completely different story. This is a 200 watt amp with a 15" speaker that was designed and developed specifically for Steel Guitar. It sounded good right out of the box with all the controls set at 12 o'clock. It did not sound sterile at all - it has a sweet bright sound that cuts through the mix without sounding shrill or tinny. I was happy with it right away, and I soon performed the sacred ritual of acceptance - I threw the shipping carton into the dumpster.

The FSK has some very handy and Steeler-friendly features. Right beside the input jack, there is an input pad which reduces the input sensitivity by 10dB. This is one of two anti-crapout controls on the front panel. There is a preamp clip light right next to the gain control that tells you if you need to reduce the gain or activate the input pad..

The EQ section consists of five rotary controls that sound fine when they're all set straight up, but allow for excellent pinpoint tonal adjustments. The first one is the EQ TILT, which can be used like a simple tone control or to compensate for room acoustics. There is a TREBLE control for adjusting high frequency tone. Then there are two controls for mid-range, the MID



LEVEL and the MID FREQUENCY. The MID LEVEL adjusts the tone at the frequency set by the MID FREQUENCY. This allows a great deal of latitude in mid-range tone coloration. And there is a BASS control for low frequency tone adjustment.

I generally turn off the Spring Reverb in my amps and use a Boss RV5 Stereo Reverb, but I did try out the reverb in the amp and it sounds pretty good - better than most. In fact, this amp sounds excellent with the guitar plugged directly into it using just the Spring Reverb.

There is a MUTE button that disables all the outputs except for the TUNER OUT, a handy feature for discrete tuning. There is a red LED that flashes when the MUTE is active. It has MASTER VOLUME of course, and then it has a LIMITER switch that prevents signal spikes from clipping the power amp. This is the second of the two anti-crapout controls. And there is a POWER AMP clip light to indicate when the power amp is being overdriven. I find these two controls invaluable, and I keep them both activated. Players with a lighter touch might not find this necessary, but it sure is nice to have these options right there at your fingertips.



The rear panel boasts some great features as well. A 1/4" TUNER out, a balanced XLR out, a GROUND LIFT switch that disconnects the LINE OUT ground

connection to reduce hum, and a PRE/POST EQ switch to supply the LINE OUT jack with pre or post EQ signal. There is a rotary LINE OUT LEVEL control which adjusts the signal level of the LINE OUT jack. And there are 1/4" FX SEND / FX RETURN jacks to use either as an effects loop or to daisy chain multiple amps. These all work well and efficiently.

The FOOTSWITCH controls on-off switching of REVERB, TUNER MUTE, and EFFECTS LOOP. Also included is a vinyl dust cover and heavy-duty pop in casters.

I have played several vintage Fender Steel Guitars through this amp - A 57 Fender Stringmaster T8, a 63 Stringmaster D8, a 49 Fender Custom, a 51 Fender Custom, a 48 Fender Dual Pro, a Fender Champion, and a Fender Champ. These guitars can all be seen at <http://rickalexander.com/BigSteel>

Without going too much into particulars, I will just say that every one of them sounded great through the FSK. I used it at a live performance last Sunday evening, along with a Peavey Session 500, and the sound was sonic bliss. As I mentioned before, the FSK has a bright sound that cuts through everything without ever being harsh or shrill. I even had my old Stratocaster going through it, and to my surprise it sounded pretty good!

The bottom line here is that Fender has come out with a great Steel Guitar amp. I have already ordered a second one, and I can't wait to hear what two of these bad boys will sound like in stereo!

Rick Alexander

<http://rickalexander.com>



# The Knight of Fender Tweed

## “Jody Sez”



Many years ago, I became consumed by the sound of a steel guitar. What a beautiful sound and it looked so easy to play. I mean after all...its easy as a piece of pie..well I found out a little different when it came right down to it so I would like to tell you my story of a way back when.

My first experience with Hawaiian guitars were those Hawaiian steel guitar players who played soooo smooth. Oh boy that's really what I want, the heck with going to school and listening to some teacher telling the class about history..who cared about what people did in other country's

certainly not I..unless it was Hawaii.:) then I would be all ears.

My very first steel guitar was a Supro that my dad bought for me..I was so excited, the only thing was I couldn't really hear it well..I had no amplifier. My parents were not rich in fact we were on this side of really being poor. My dad was a vaudevillian and he struggled to put food on the table for my mother and myself,,so how could he have gone out and bought me an amplifier? no way we had just enough money to put food on the table, no less spending all that money on an amplifier?.

I would sit in my little bedroom night after night and marvel at the sound of the bar making contact with the strings,,and wow what a beautiful sound,,however it sounded that way to me anyway and who really cared but me, but that's not true,,my dad knew how much I loved the little Supro and he was really hurting to think he couldn't afford to buy me an amplifier. I felt bad and said dad.don't worry it sounds good to me.

After months and months of me trying to make sense of what this instrument

was all about I began to realize,,hey this aint no piece of cake here,there must be more to this than sliding that hunk of steel up and down the neck.

My dad knew a Philippine fellow who had played a few music jobs with my dad's group. My dad called this man and asked if he would take me on as a student. This man was very kind because he really didn't have the time to teach anyone, he worked 7 nights a week at a hotel in Manhattan called the Lexington Hotel and the hotel had a beautiful room that was a restaurant where this man played 7 nights a week,,so how could he take me on?

I guess out of respect for my dad,he agreed to help me once in awhile. The only problem was I was young and I had no automobile and this man lived away uptown which was a good 1/1/2 hour train ride and to get there I had to take three trains. But I was determined to do what I had to do.

This gentleman's name was George Mennen a great steel player who played a 7 string Epiphone and boy was he ever good. He would sit and play me a few tunes to wet my appetite and then say ,well Jody would you like to try what I just did..

I swallowed hard and said,,well that's ok you can play I'll just listen.He said well you can learn from listening yes,,but you have to get your hands on the guitar to learn.

Mr.Mennen stood behind me as I held my Stevens bar in my left hand as I have done all those hours in the little bedroom. He said well it sounds to me like you have been practicing is that right, I replied well sort of.

He went on and told me how important the left hand was and how to use a vibrato.."what's a vibrato"? well that's what makes the difference from one steel guitar player from another. He said to me this will not be easy so don't get discouraged,let me

show you.

Hour after hour he stood with me as I watched the clock on the wall in his apartment,maybe school wasn't that bad after all I thought.

I struggled to satisfy him..again Jody do it again..then the big moment came after weeks of practice at home. I was to get my first ever lesson and learn to play a real song.

That song was "A Song Of Old Hawaii. He explained the it would be best if I played in the key of F on my C# minor tuning because the first fret was the widest and there was room for error if I used to much vibrato. That worked out, I was a one fret wonder and I played on the first fret for weeks on end.

Then weeks later we would work the same song in different keys and it became more difficult to stay in tune as the frets became narrower. I was able to handle this UNTIL....he said no we have to twist the bar and "slant" the bar to get a different chord. I said to myself ,hey this guys a nice man but what's this slanting thing all about ?

He then told me to do nothing but scales up and down the neck and to be careful as the frets became narrow the further down the neck. I began to get the knack and I could see by the expression on his face that he was satisfied. That really made me happy. I couldn't wait to get home and play my guitar for my mom and dad.

I played on the first fret then the second fret and my mom said,,why don't you play a song for us?

I said I don't know any songs.she said your taking three trains once a week and spending 8 hours a day in your bedroom

## Jody Sez, continued

and you don't know how to play a song? She said maybe you should learn how to play an accordion..I said to myself OH NO NOT that big box lying on my chest, besides I was a skinny kid and that accordion weighed more than I did.

Well as the weeks and months went by, I was starting to get the feel of it and wouldn't you know that I was able to play a whole song. To learn one song it took me about 100 hours riding the New York subways with all those weird people staring at me as I held my supro close to me for fear of someone taking it from me.

This was beginning to make sense,maybe I should get a job working for the subway and then I could ride the subways free and save some money for a real amplifier like my teacher had..Oh boy

just think of that,having my own amp.

That Christmas as I sat in my room,my dad came in to listen and he said,,I think you are doing fine and in the background my mother hollered out "buy him an accordion" I'm tired of hearing that sliding pond day after day and night after night.

That next morning was Christmas and my mom handed me a box,it was a pair of socks.then she said here you need these..pray tell what could that be??? It was a pair of pajamas..who wears pajamas? only those kids that walk funny :):)

Then all at once my dad said,,Jody,,that's me Jody here open this box,,I looked at the box covered with Christmas wrapping and my heart was beating like a bass drum and twice as fast.

I opened the box and there was a brand

new amplifier. My dad was so happy when he saw the look on my face and I could see tears of happiness rolling down his cheeks. I cried as well,,my mom said I still think he should play an accordion...

Well folks this is bringing back memories to me and I get emotional thinking of how hard my dad worked to make me happy.

So Until next time I will leave you now and return again real soon.

Merry Christmas everyone what am I saying its March now but to me that Christmas will live in my heart forever and ever...see you next time every body.

My best to you.

Jody



## Tips & Tricks

This month Rick steps up to the plate:

### 3 Steps to Better Improvising

by Dick O' Steel aka Rick Alexander

Want to really expand your steel playing horizons? Start by playing scales and modes - and singing in unison with the notes! You'd be surprised how high and how low you can go when you're singing with steel. You may have to go into falsetto for the high notes, but that's okay.

Then, after you've done that for a while - play a lick and sing a lick. Just play a series of notes, whether it's a scale or a riff - and then echo it vocally. Do that a lot and get used to it.

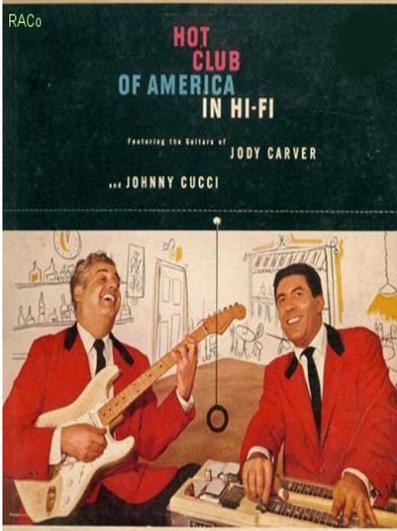
Then proceed to step three - sing a lick and play a lick. Make up a cool riff, sing it out loud and try to duplicate it on steel. Do that a lot and become accustomed to it - and before too long, you'll be able to play anything you hear.

The more you follow these three steps, the better you'll be able to improvise.

1. Sing & Play together.
2. Play a lick and sing a lick
3. Sing a lick and play a lick

It's also advisable to do a few stretching exercises before and after your practice sessions. This will help prevent cramping and sore muscles, and maybe even cut back on the jelly belly factor. And drink water! Our bodies are supposed to be 90% water - that's what makes muscles function properly. Being properly hydrated is of key importance.

**Editors note: If anyone wants to write a short column on tips & tricks please send me an email and I will ad it to the next newsletter. [gwb@mtnsales.com](mailto:gwb@mtnsales.com)**



***The Hot Club Is Back!***

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Here is how you can contact him: **DON BURROWS**  
**440.992.6129** or email him at

[wingingit@adelphia.net](mailto:wingingit@adelphia.net)

**Dick Meis School of Steel Guitar**

[www.pedalsteelguitar.net](http://www.pedalsteelguitar.net)

This site is full of great information for the non-pedal guitar. There are books and a special section for lap steel with some great tips by Chuck Lettes.

Dick has many items in stock and at reasonable prices. Don't let anyone fool you, Dick is one heck of a non-pedal player too. You can also contact him at: **303.428.4397** or toll-free at **877.380.1010**

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