

The TG-100 "Solo" and the Birth of Till Guitars

After Eighteen Years, I still remember the moment the flash hit me...

...It was the Spring of 1996. I had the good fortune to come across an imported no-name Flying V at the Simi Swapmeet - with a real Gibson hardshell case all for \$25. It had a broken mahogany bolt-on neck, but it was loaded with upgraded hardware and electronics including Seymour Duncan humbuckers and Grover tuners. I was planning to put the pickups in something else, sell the case, then get on with my life. But when I got back to my woodshop (Joe Till Custom Woodworking - serving the community since 1988) I started whittlin' away on a knotty piece of alder to see what it would take to make a new neck. Five minutes later it was round and comfy - and useless because of the knots. But a new neck was definitely doable.

So I thought, if I'm gonna go through all the trouble to make a neck, I might as well go all the way and build my own guitar. Three days later I was rippin up and down the street on my new TG-100 "Solo" no.001.

My course was set. Good bye Top 40...

...Hello Top Ramen!

I knew to keep the first one simple. All I wanted to do was figure out the major concepts at first. Lengths, widths, heights, angles... At that time I had been playing guitar and working with wood for about 20 years, but I had never done much more than change the strings on a guitar. The learning curve looked like a search light pointed straight up into the sky.

I played around with a French Curve to come up with the headstock shape. Then, after taking some general measurements from of a Dano/Silvertone, I freehanded the body shape, which is unchanged after all these years. I still use the original tracing template. The 24 3/4 inch scale length was determined by the fretboard I was reusing from the Flying V, as was the neck angle and bridge choice - Tune-0-matic with a Stop tailpiece. So was the 2 volume, 1 tone and 3-way toggle control array... or was it 1 volume and 2 tones?

No. 001 has a one-piece Yellow-Poplar body with contouring similar to a Strat, with a rounded arm rest and a generous belly cut. By number five I was laminating beautiful woods on top of Alder bodies and sculpting the tops for comfort and style. To this day I love to see the light bounce off the curved ridges - I call it "throwing the light".

Chambering and hollowing soon followed. At first I did it to lighten up the heavy exotic woods I would occasionally use (ha!), but also to play around with the essential tone of the guitar. The hollower I went, the more human the tone seemed to get. Almost breathy. My amazement with this aspect continues to this day. Though fully electric, my guitars express a lot of acoustic qualities. They sound great around the house at night unplugged. Especially in the hallways and kitchen.

Figuring out how to glue in the neck was my next mountain to climb. It took me a few years to get there, but once I did I built nothing else for about 5 years. My setneck pockets go all the way to the rear of the neck pickup for a solid, permanent connection between neck and body. This allows for comfortable slumping of the heel so you don't run into a brick wall on your way to the upper frets. Sometimes I can feel the energy of the strings vibrate up to my elbows!

That first TG-100 had those used the Seymour Duncan humbuckers from the ill-fated Vee. I couldn't believe how good they sounded. But I used other odd-ball brands for the next few models... whatever I could find. But nothing sounded as good as those Custom-Custom Duncans. Not even close. So I drove the hour north to Santa Barbara to see if I could get some sort of deal going with the man, himself. Unfortunately (for me), they were all in Germany at the Musikmesse Festival. But when they got back, they gave me the \$2.00 tour and an OEM account. They treat me like a king to this day. They have pickups for every occasion, all of which you can hear demos of at SeymourDuncan.com. Consider everything they make an option.

I've been tweaking and refining the TG-100 for 18 years. There are few pickup configurations and switching schemes that I haven't used. I've installed all kinds of bridges and used dozens of different woods. And I've played every kind of music I know on this model. It's very fast and expressive. Even people who know nothing about guitars come up and ask "what is that beautiful guitar you're playing?"

And it's handmade right here in the USA.