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Floyd Rose - Getting a Lock On the Guitar Market

When talking about inventors in the guitar world, few names that have changed the landscape of guitar playing as much as Floyd Rose. After conceiving the revolutionary double locking tremolo, Rose could've kicked back on a beach and watched the dollars roll in, but being the innovator that he is, Floyd refuses to stop and is constantly tweaking, reworking, and reinventing tremolos for the needs of modern guitarists. After a successful NAMM show, MMR decided to give a call to the guys at Floyd Rose to talk about the past, present and future of the company.

### The Original Floyd Rose

Like most companies, Floyd Rose started as a one-man show. "Back in the early '80s, Floyd was a musician," says Andy Papiccio, director of marketing. "And, being a musician and an inventor, he came up with the Floyd Rose tremolo, which he used to make by himself. He sold them to a bunch of high-end artists out in the Seattle area and, all of a sudden, he came into a relationship with Kramer. Kramer picked up the product and worked closely with Floyd in getting the tremolos developed and worked into a manufacturing process and started the worldwide distribution of Floyd Rose. From there – in the 80's there were a lot of big hair bands, a lot of guitar heroes – the Floyd Rose tremolo just took off. During that time there weren't too many big hair bands or guitar heroes who didn't play the piece. Here we are in 2010 and it's pretty safe to say that Floyd Rose is a household name in the guitar world. It's a real icon. It's in the NAMM museum and has been influential in the guitar market and the music business over the tenure of the product. Floyd is probably one of the few successful guys who had a patent and rode the patent the whole length of the patent which is still highly in use."



"The first thing I patented was the original version without fine tuners," explains Rose. "The second patent was for the fine tuning version and then the pro version. Usually, when I find a problem related to guitars, I look at it as troubleshooting. If there's something that doesn't work the way I want it to, I ask myself, 'What exactly is the problem?' I always knew from playing guitar and using a tremolo before that the problem was the friction of the strings rubbing the nut and bridge saddles. When you go down on the tremolo the strings move over the nut and over the bridge a little bit and then when you release the arm there's some drag there and it doesn't always come back in tune."

At first, Floyd tried to lubricate the nut to decrease the friction. "When that still did not work to my satisfaction, that's when I realized that you had to stop the movement if you want 100 percent elimination of the friction." How do you get no friction? "Well if there's no movement, there's no friction," says Rose. "So, I glued a string in place with crazy glue and that actually worked for a moment until it broke free, but it actually came right back to tune so right then I figured out within ten minutes what had to happen. I had to clamp it and then from there it's a matter of engineering. I wasn't an engineer, so I had to start learning how to make things out of metal and went into it just one thing at a time," says Rose.

### Growing Pains: The Speedloader

Floyd's next big invention came in 2004 when he announced the release of the Floyd Rose Speedloader. "The Speedloader tremolo was another take on the double locking tremolo," says Papiccio. "This time it used a patented string that Floyd developed. The string was pre-cut, pre-tuned, pre-sized, so you would just snap the string in and the guitar would be in tune with very little fine-tuning. This eliminated the whole extra time in trying to set up a double locking tremolo and it did away with your machine heads so this was a big step," explains Papiccio. "It's a sensational bridge and anyone that has a Floyd Rose or is an avid Floyd Rose player – once you put one of the Speedloader's in their hands – they get it immediately. The downside for us is that the timing may have not been right in 2004 to today. But it's still a bridge that's in Floyd's portfolio of

inventions and I believe that sometime in the near future you'll see that thing pop up again when the time is better for the product."

"I actually started really seriously thinking about it when I was a judge at a guitar competition here in Seattle," says Rose. "Steve Vai was performing and he broke a string on stage and since he had just flown up there for himself and didn't have a guitar tech or anything he looked down at me and said, 'Where's Floyd Rose when you need him?' He had to talk while he took a wrench out of his pocket to change the string. He's very good at it so it took him about five to ten minutes while he's talking to change the string get it tuned, get it clamped and all of that," says Rose. For Floyd, Steve's bad luck set off a light bulb. "I'd always wanted to be able to quickly change strings and I had already worked on double bullet end strings for another guitar project I was working on and that's how it was born," he says. "When we started selling them however, the problem turned out that if I didn't show them how to change a string they didn't quite get it. On the Speedloader bridge, there's a little setscrew on the nose of each saddle and that does the job of what the tuning keys used to do. People didn't know about the set screw because it's hard to see if you don't know what to look for. When people would run out of range with the fine tuners they wouldn't know what to do. That happened on the original Floyd Rose as well but the common knowledge is out there and anybody working in the store could tell you that you have to unclamp it, retune it and then clamp it. With the Speedloader, the knowledge didn't get out there. The other downside was that you had to use the Floyd Rose Speedloader strings. Dean Markley made those strings for me and we were going to have other manufactures make those in the future but by that time, they weren't selling because people were afraid of them because they didn't know how to use them."

### **Moving on: The Future of Floyd Rose**

Although the Speedloader wasn't as successful as they had hoped, Floyd and Andy are excited about the future. "Floyd currently is reinventing a retrofit Floyd Rose for the Les Paul," explains Papiccio. "Actually it's for any guitar that uses a Tune-O-Matic stop tailpiece," says Rose. "I don't know if you ever saw the one that we put out in the Kramer days that Schaller actually designed, but it didn't work unless you used really light gauge strings and nobody's ever been able to design one that would work as a top mount with no routing, until now. I finally figured out a way to do it so we're going to be tooling up for that soon. Most Gibsons are made with a Tune-O-Matic tailpiece, so hopefully Gibson will offer them from the factory at some point. It will look almost like the Original Floyd Rose but very low profile, which is very hard to do," says Rose.

"We also launched – at the 2010 NAMM show – a line of new Floyd Rose guitars. We have a line called the International series and a line called the Discovery series. All the guitars are designs and feels from Floyd and all composed of the Floyd Rose double locking Original Floyd Rose tremolo on it," says Papiccio. In addition to the launch of the new line of guitars, Floyd Rose debuted an all-new titanium bridge. "Every part of the bridge, down to the claw, the string retainer, the plate the saddles – everything is titanium," says Papiccio. "The response at the show was overwhelming – everyone was pretty interested in seeing it. They're pretty enthused as titanium seems to be somewhat of a buzz in our industry and for us to come out with this whole bridge is the ultimate for a lot of people. A few other companies have tried to make titanium parts to hotrod your bridge. They've tried to change out the block underneath or change the saddles, but no one has been able to do the whole bridge. It's already out to a few well-known artists that will be giving it the test ride and we'll get some real response from them and we think it's looking very promising. It's another new and innovative bridge by Floyd."

Floyd informs MMR that we can expect to see a series of new inventions from Floyd Rose coming out over the next 18 to 24 months. "We have another bridge that will be debuting by the June trade show but I can't talk to much about that one yet cause the patents are being applied for," says Rose.

"We have separate venues here," say Papiccio. "Obviously, we have the Floyd Rose tremolo which is a component in itself. At the current moment, we're very successful selling the Floyd Rose tremolo. It's still a very popular tremolo on many OEM guitars so that item itself sells through as guitar companies have double locking tremolos on their guitars. That side has been fairly healthy and as long as the guitar market stays where it's at and as long as the guitar business is doing good we have a place in the guitar market," says Papiccio. The company's other venue is their new line of guitars. "We just launched them and we will be picking up a series of reps throughout the United States as well as some international and foreign distribution," says Papiccio. "Our marketing strategy there is the fact that we have a lot of well known artists that are playing our tremolos and that we offer a very good guitar for the money with a very good name. Currently today, playing our bridges are Richie Sambora of Bon Jovi, Van Halen, Motley Crue, Aerosmith... I literally could get out an artist roster list and read down the names and you would probably find not too many of them not using it." As long as there are guitar heroes, Floyd Rose will have a venue for moving product.