Dialing in a Guitar Sound

Monarch method: Set all EQ knobs to 50%. Balance Gain + Volume. Only change EQ knobs if necessary.

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Steve Trovato method: Hit your high E string and sweep the treble knob, see what it does. I'm gonna turn it to zero and bleed it in slowly till you tell me when to stop. Use the low E string to do this for the bass knob. B, G, and D strings, sweep the mid knobs. When I get to the 3 places you decide to stop, that's your point of departure. That should be a pretty good sound based on what you hear. Then dial in your tone from there.

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Ideas from the Fractal forum:

Idea #1

From time to time I hear customers complaining they can't get the sound they want and they look at their preset and all the tone knobs are at noon or only slightly deviated from noon. I ask why and they say something like "well, I don't want to stray too far from the defaults".

Amps have controls for a reason. Don't be afraid to get radical with them, especially older amps. Those old amps were crude and not intended to deliver the more modern type tones players today want. For example, if I were to use a Fender model for a lead tone I would turn the bass way down and midrange way up as they get too flubby otherwise.

As an excellent illustration consider Joe Bonamassa's settings:
Bass is all the way down, midrange is almost all the way up. Pretty much how I would dial in that amp (59 Twin or 58 Bassman which are very similar topologies).

As you turn the volume up on these old amps the distortion is coming from the power amp and you need to boost the mids and cut the bass to flatten the response since the power amp's response follows the

speaker impedance which is scooped in the mids. Otherwise the bass clips before the mids which causes flubbiness.

That's also similar to how I dial in a Plexi. I crank the mids and lower the bass.

Idea #2
I've had people tell me "but I'm not allowed to turn the bass all the way down" or similar comments. Allowed? Try it! Or preconceived notions of "well I don't want a thin tone, so I can't turn the bass down." TRY IT. And listen to the result. Our mind is the #1 thing preventing us from getting the tone we actually want!

Idea #3
Yeah, I totally dial in amps with my ears & not eyes.....I don't care where the knobs end up at!

I remember the first amp I had - an old Randall orange panel 1x12. I had to crank it all the way just to be heard, and the bass would totally fart out. When I would turn the bass down, I felt like "but I shouldn't do this!" - except that it sounded way better. Lesson learned early.

Idea #4
It may be in the ears for a lot of players, but knowledge is helpful too (at least for me). For those of us not coming from an extensive tube amp experience, great insights provided here by those who know is equally powerful assistance. Thanks for the tips. Keep 'em coming.

Idea #5
Bass is all the way down, midrange is almost all the way up.
That would also describe almost all of my settings, likely since I use Non-Master Volume 95% of the time and older amps. Bass way down, cranked mids and treble is usually up there.

I've always been glad I don't have any OCD about how to set the controls or how they may/may not match up to a real amp, nor have

thoughts about that the controls don't look right. Yup, always use the ears, never tweak with the eyes.

Idea #6
On the other hand, I have seen many times that if you're tweaking too many amp parameters (advanced or otherwise), that you should find a different model--one that does what you really want.

Idea #7
I am absolutely devoted to having a 31 band graphic EQ (also called a 1/3 octave EQ) in my rig. (I use an Alesis DEQ230). I use my ears, not my eyes, to set my tone with it and I've tested myself by blanking out two presets and then setting both of them, band by band, until they sounded right to me, then checked the resulting curves when I was done with both of them. The curve is the same, to within 1dB in every band.

I note that a prominent characteristic of just about every Bob Bradshaw rack used by any big name 80s guitarist is that they all have two or three 1/3 octave EQs in them. Ever wondered why? They're final tone shaping and play a big part in the really great tones many of those players were getting out of those rigs.

I view the 1/3 octave EQ as the most overlooked and yet most powerful tone shaping tool you COULD have in your rack. It's the FIRST thing I'll put in my effects loop if I had to start over.

Idea #8
To me, a 1/3-octave graphic EQ is a fantastic learning tool to teach your ears what different frequency bands can do to sound. And it's darned handy to move a slider up and down and ask yourself, "Is this closer to or farther from the tone in my head?" But for my purposes, I can get what I want quicker and more precisely with three (sometimes four) bands of parametric EQ.