

Do you work alone, or do you have guys that help you?

Basically I work alone. I work out of my shop in Texas. I do all the prep work, sanding, painting and artwork myself. When it comes to building custom racks that require welding, I will mock up the rack and do the tack welding, but the finished product I will have welded by a professional. I get some pieces fabricated at a local machine shop. When I am in Los Angeles working with Van Halen I don't have access to my shop, so sometimes I use Bill Detamore at Pork Pie Percussion. He is the drum-building master and has done some clear-coat and finish work for drums that I painted. For fabrication I use Rick Grossman [the guy that invented the Ahead aluminium drum stick] ... He's a madman at machine work and fabrication.

What's involved in being a tech for Alex Van Halen? Does this help you in your work?

Teching for Alex is fairly demanding. He is an impossibly good drummer and musician. He hears everything. I have to be dead on with my tuning because he hears it if it's a little off. A lot of it comes down to trust. I listen to the band at soundcheck and I may tweak the snare tuning just a little so it sounds like Alex in that room. I don't claim to be a supertech or anything, but I grew up listening to Van Halen, practically learnt to play drums while playing to Van Halen records. So I care that the drums look and sound like Van Halen. That's my goal.



What was it like to suddenly have to fill in on the ZZ Top tour. Can you tell us about that?

Oh, you heard about that, huh? I was teching for Frank Beard while on tour in Europe in 2002. I got a call from one of the crew guys at about 2am saying, "They just took Frank away in an ambulance and the last thing he said was, 'Get John to play the show.'" I said, "Yeah, right," and hung up. Then a few minutes later Billy Gibbons called me and said, "Time to step up to the plate." After you get a call like that you don't go back to sleep ... or at least I couldn't. So the next day I set up the kit like any other gig, made a few minor adjustments for me, and then Billy and Dusty came in and we did about an hour-long soundcheck/rehearsal. The lights went down and we played the entire show. I was pretty familiar with the songs but I hadn't played a full show in a long time, and never with ZZ Top. It was a very surreal feeling that night, pure concentration and adrenaline. That kind of thing does not happen all that often – it's happened to me twice! In summer 2010 I was teching for Brent Fitz, drummer for Slash, on his first solo tour. We were in Moscow for the last two shows of the tour, and I get a phone call at noon on show day from Brent and he says, "Can you play the show tonight?" Turns out he was fine, but Todd Kerns, the bass player, had to fly home for



emergency eye surgery that morning, and Brent went to Slash and said if he played bass with me on drums, we can do these shows. Brent is one of those guys that can play everything ... and play it well. Slash is a total pro and was really cool about it. "Just have fun with it," was about all he said. It was great fun, now that I look back on it. At the time it was pure survival – playing through cramps in every part of my body, watching for cues, listening, concentrating, breathing and playing Guns N' Roses, Velvet Revolver and Slash's solo songs for the first time ... in front of a sold-out audience and with the man in the top hat himself. Pretty surreal!

Finally – your own set-up. What is it and what finish have you put on your own kit?

I was fairly excessive with my drum kits in the past – trying to emulate my heroes. Now I favour a leaner set-up. I have a few kits, the main one being a Pearl Reference Series 24" kick drum, 12" rack tom and a 16" and 18" floor tom. It's purple pearl with lime-green flames that wrap around the shell instead of from bottom to top. Inside the flames are ghosted images of spark plugs, eyeballs and other random hot-rod imagery. I have about 25 different snare drums to choose from; most of them are 14x6.5. The funny thing is, one of my other kits, a Tama Starclassic Maple, is white. I order my drums white ... so it's like a blank canvas for my paint job. But this one I never got around to painting. I'm like a mechanic whose car doesn't run! My cymbals are all Paiste. I have a few different electronic brains – Roland V-Drums and ddrum. I prefer racks to stands as it usually takes up a little less floor space. But sometimes the look of a bunch of straight cymbal stands just looks killer.

You can see more pics of John's work on his website: www.johndouglas.com