



John with Rickenbacker 8-string bass — only two in Britain (Chris Squire has the other one)

John Entwistle

talks to Tony Jasper

John Entwistle is one quarter of the legendary group The Who. Although he plays bass, and occasionally brass instruments, his studio (upstairs in his London home) is crammed with guitars of every description, not to mention a grand piano, an organ, a synthesizer and a drum kit! Surrounded by the fruits of the band's phenomenal success, I asked John if he could recall his first interest in the guitar.

I was playing trumpet in a dance band, playing at interesting venues like Joe Lyons and social clubs. I was quite interested in the guitar in the band, but the guitarist kept breaking strings. I think he must have tuned it wrong. Anyway, I had a guitar-playing friend who had made his own amp, and he wanted me to join him in a group, playing trumpet. When we got together he was louder than me, so I thought I'd better enquire into this guitar thing! I looked at 6-strings, but I found bass was much easier — mainly because the strings are further apart. There were only two or three you could buy here in those days, Tuxedo, Star and Lucky 7, and they were all too expensive. I wanted a Fender, but they just weren't available. I think Jet Harris was the only person who had one then.

So what did you do about that?

I had one made up, same sort of shape, but not really very good. It had a great, square-backed neck, just glued on to the body. One day when I was playing it, the glue gave out and I



The Gretsch that once belonged to Duane Eddy

had an instant four-string harp!

You mentioned Jet: was he your hero?

No, it was Duane Eddy I spent most time listening to. I didn't have a record player, so I had to go along to a friend's house, but I had all his singles with those bass string solos. I tried copying bass runs from *Rebel Rouser*.

Did you have a bass that stayed together by this time?

The Detours had a new singer and he was also a bass guitarist, but he had some HP troubles. He kept the guitar hidden under his girl friend's bed. He said I could have it if I paid off his £50 HP debt. It was a Fender Precision. I was around 16 at the time.

And The Who had started?

Yes, only we were called The High Numbers at first. We had an agent and we were quite busy – about five gigs a week around west London. I made a mistake about the Precision. I was ignorant about amps and speakers, and because everything sounded rather weird I got rid of it and got a Rivoli. Later I regretted parting with the Fender, but then the group began to get very popular and I found I could afford better guitars.

You had a Rickenbacker, didn't you?

Yes, Townshend used Rickenbacker guitars and I had a Rickenbacker bass. That was around 1963-64. But the neck went on that one. Then I bought a Gretsch bass with a neck like a tree trunk and I found I got rather tired playing it. So I bought a small Danelectro. Then I rediscovered Precisions and used them exclusively up until three years ago.

And what since then?

From about the time of the *Who's next* album I used a cross between a Gibson Thunderbird and a Precision. I had it made for me with a Fender neck and the Thunderbird body, with Gibson bridge and fittings. Now I'm back to Precisions, but I'm happy with anything really, as long as it's long-scale. I need to have the right feel when I'm on stage, and short-scale basses just don't feel right for me.

How many guitars have you?

I think it's fifty-six.

Do you collect them because you like to look at them, or is there a functional side to it?

It's 30 per cent for appearance and 70 per cent functional. I've played most of them at some time, but some were bought for other people.

How do you mean?

Well, people have turned up for recording sessions with me with the wrong guitar for what I have in mind. So I've brought along one of my guitars for them, to get the sound I want. I even provided drums for one session, an old kit of Keith's.

Have you a favourite bass player?

Feller called Jack McCartney!

Who?

What I mean is, if you could take the technical ability of Jack Bruce and the wonderful feel for a song of Paul McCartney, and mix them together... you'd have my favourite bass player.

I wonder if he'd be right-handed or left-handed?

Probably play straight up the middle. Having a left-hander in the group is cheaper for microphones. In the early days, I used to have to share a mike with Townshend, but I could never get near enough for his conk! He once had a Fender amp and if the polarity was wrong on that and we touched each other, sparks flew. It must have looked amazing – two blokes crowding round a mike-stand with blue sparks shooting between their noses! I've been playing with Pete since I was 13, one way and another, and we have this understanding gained through time. It's rather weird, our relationship. I can't explain it: we just know what each other is up to.

You've been playing with other people too, particularly recently.

Yes, Eric Clapton plays on *Rigor Mortis*, and I like Kenny Jones around on drums. In some ways of course The Who is very restrictive. We have our sound and certain things are expected of us. So I enjoy playing with other people and exploring new sounds. But I wouldn't dream of leaving The Who. It means too much to us all. It's a way of life. ●



Gibson violin bass



A Gretsch and a Fender from the collection