



Gig Proofing Your Rig

By Tom Spaulding

If you could hire a guitar tech to look over your rig, what recommendations would he make? Here are a few tips that I've picked up during my touring years that can help you get through a few of the common "disasters".

Spare Me

Spare parts can save your gig if you have them handy. I keep an open set of strings on my workbench that match whatever gauge/guitar the guitar player is using. This will save valuable minutes digging through your gig bag in the dark, trying to find the electric set amongst the acoustic sets. A Planet Waves Pro Winder that has a built-in string cutter and bridge pin puller is essential. One tool, three jobs.

- Cables. Keep a spare cable sitting on or near the amp. That's where you will be when you need it, so keep it ready. I use the Planet Waves Cable Kit for all of my audio cabling. You can make a custom length cable in two minutes without soldering.
- Tools. I've found cheap all-in-one tool kits at Walgreens for less than \$15.00 that, once you add a truss rod wrench, cover most of the needs you might have on a gig. The kit has needle-nose pliers, wire cutters, jeweler's screwdrivers and a multi-head nut driver and screwdriver. It even comes with tweezers, and fits in your gig bag.
- Batteries. For non-powered pedal boards or a wireless unit, keep a 9 volt battery on top of your amp. If you don't use it, at some point you'll save somebody else, maybe even the lead singer's wireless mic. You *know* he doesn't have a spare.
- Fuses. You can't play an amp with a blown fuse, and it's much easier to bring a spare fuse than a spare amp. I use a zip-tie to fasten the fuse to the back panel of my amp.
- Tubes. Save your old-yet-working tubes and use them in a pinch. One power tube and one preamp tube are enough insurance to keep you up and running. I keep them in a zippered mic bag and toss them in the back of my combo amp.



Home Run

A fancy pedalboard is great, and keeping the wiring nice and neat looks like a million bucks...until something goes out and you have to troubleshoot it. I keep a female-to-female ¼" adaptor fastened to the top of the pedalboard. If the board goes out in mid-song, I just take the input and output cables, connect them using the adaptor and bypass the entire board.

That keeps the player in the game, and allows me to work on the problem as the music continues. I can even take the whole board back to my workstation and the show goes on. For club bands, you can finish the set and find the problem during a break.

Toys On The Side

This is a good reason to keep a spare overdrive box handy, too. Most guitar players, if they really had to, could gig with only an overdrive pedal. If you use a channel-switching amp to get your distorted tones, then pick one other pedal you must have (delay, chorus, etc.) and keep it near your rig, **not** on your pedalboard. When disaster strikes, take your spare cable, plug it into your emergency pedal (with a fresh battery in it) and go.

Multi-Tasking

When I was gigging around Wisconsin in various bar bands, we always seemed to carry a Peavey XR-600. This 6-channel P.A. head is a Swiss army knife of audio. You can plug in mics or line level instruments, have separate EQ and reverb per channel. You can use it as just a graphic EQ, pre-amp or only as a power amp.

There were times when it was called into use to be the bass amp, the monitor mixer, the keyboard amp and an extra power amp for the mains system. Many companies make similar products, but throwing one of these in the trunk can be excellent and affordable insurance for the whole band.

Nowadays I'm using the Crate Powerblock. It is a lightweight, 150-watt stereo power amp, guitar/bass head with RCA audio inputs, stereo out, line out, with an effects loop.

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Whatever Works For You

The bottom line is this: On a big tour, I can rely on the redundant backups we have. If an amp, direct box, speaker cabinet, wireless, etc. goes out, I use the spare. No compromises are made in the rig. For the club musician, it's best to think about what *could* go wrong, decide what attendant compromises you *can* live with, and build your emergency kit around what works for you.

See you on the road.

