

Guitar Olympics

A dramatic black and white photograph serves as the background. A hand on the right holds a torch with a bright flame. Another hand on the left is open, palm up, reaching towards the light of the flame. The torch has an ornate, metallic handle.

**SHARPER, FASTER,
SMOOTHER AND BETTER!**

If you're serious about guitar playing, grab your fave six string, amp, metronome, sweatband and Lucozade as JASON SIDWELL takes you for the workout of your life...



As you read this, the Olympics will be all over the TV with people from all areas of sport pushing themselves to the brink of endurance for their moment of glory. So, in line with world events, we've decided to bring you the inaugural TG Guitar Olympics to get your hands in shape and ready for some serious playing at home and on stage.

IN THE CHANGING ROOM

Ask anyone with a lot of ability on the guitar and they'll tell you that getting good demands quality practice time. Just like an athlete, regular training including large amounts of repetition is the only way to make great improvements. A sprinter is concerned about their minutes-per-meter ratio, a weight lifter with his bench-presses, so why shouldn't a guitarist be concerned with their finger dexterity or indeed (ahem) speed barriers?

Begin by setting a clear picture of what your goals are, be it short term (*eg* learning a

new chord) or long term (*eg* mastering Van Halen's complete repertoire) and then create a regime to make it happen. At best, the ideal practice session will contain all three of the following areas:

- 1) What you want to sustain
- 2) What you want to improve upon
- 3) What you want to learn that's new

How much time you spend on these aspects depends upon your goals in relation to the time you have available. Be realistic with this and you won't be disappointed. Opinions vary but depending on your present abilities, a minimum of thirty minutes a day should sustain your capabilities whereas one hour or more a day will show substantial improvements (even after just two weeks).

IN THE GYM

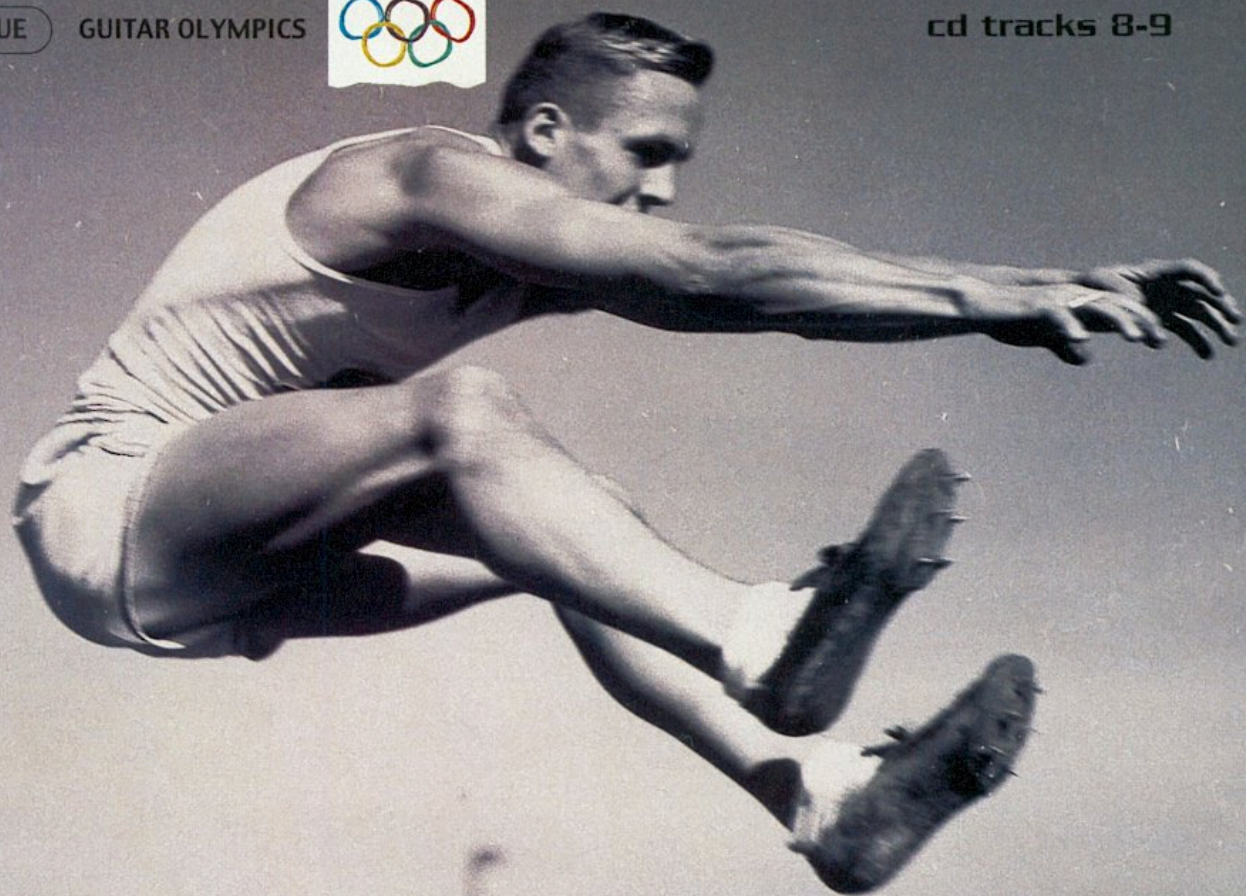
The following exercises are all geared to developing your physical ability on the instrument. There's no music theory, no fretboard mapping (*ie* learning notes on the

fretboard) and no song references – those come later – just an expansive regime for improving technique. Much of it is rock orientated and geared towards isolating and eradicating many of the problems common to the physical aspects of playing the guitar.

For best results, play through the examples slowly so your hand muscles 'memorise' everything. Once done, use your metronome (you do have one, don't you?) to find your peak 'ceiling' for playing an example perfectly before making mistakes (*eg* fig 1: 4 notes per click @ 90bpm). Drop the tempo down a few bpm, so it feels comfortable. Play for three minutes. Return to ceiling level. Play for three more minutes. Increase by two/three bpm. Play several times. Now, return to your original ceiling. You have now bookended your ability.

Consistent practice will make you more accurate and enable your ceiling to be raised. Once you've mastered one or more of the events, use the backing track to spice them up.





SUPERSTOCK

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G

On the CD

TRACK 8

Events 1-19

TRACK 9

Events 1-19 backing track

Guitar, bass & drums:

Jason 'sweatband' Sidwell

Burst playing and Snap values

Burst playing refers to executing a small phrase once (eg a six note phrase @ 110 bpm/six notes per beat, using alternate picking) with a rest (eg one beat) before repeating. This is a great way of achieving a higher bpm before requiring the stamina for constant repetitions.

Snap value is the accuracy of synchronisation between your picking and fretting hands. If one hand gets to do its job before the other (eg fretting hand lagging behind the picking hand), the notes will be sloppy (poor snap value). Urghh!

Speed

Guitar playing shouldn't be a sport for achieving the fastest single note solo but there are base tempos which constitute world class rock guitar playing à la Vai, Satriani, Malmsteen, Moore *et al.* Basing performances on three-note-per-string scale note sequences, six notes per click @ 120bpm+ and four notes per click @ 160bpm+ are good ballparks to measure yourself against. Just don't injure yourself trying to achieve these!

POINTS FOR PRACTISING

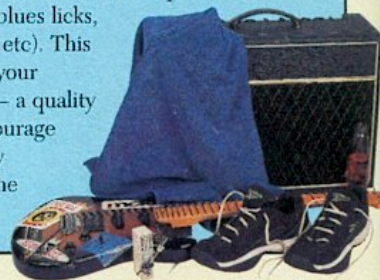
As with any disciplined practising, bear these points in mind:

- 1) Adopt a relaxed body and hand posture when playing, as relentless practice can encourage a hunched back and tense arm muscles. This is a sure way of incurring RSI (Repetitive Strain Injury) so whenever you experience arm/finger muscle 'tingling', drop your hands down by your sides and shake them to loosen the muscles.
- 2) Be brutally honest about what you fluff and then work to eradicate these weaknesses. You will improve quickly this way.
- 3) Reduce the distortion – it adds excitement to your sound but also blurs the mistakes. Even better, practice both unplugged and plugged into

an amp to encourage solid technique building.
4) Record your playing as often as possible – listening back to yourself is a great eye (ear?) opener to see how well your doing.

5) Be patient – You may only manage 'The Crab' (Event 11) at 75bpm after three weeks, but there will be a day when you're easily clocking 90bpm!

6) After the exercises, end the practice session with fun (eg blues licks, funk grooves etc). This will develop your individuality – a quality that will encourage others to play with you in the first place!





THE TG TEAM ON PRACTISING

Richard Barrett says

"The point of practising is to stretch yourself by playing things you find difficult or can't do. Be realistic about your first steps to avoid discouragement – if you can play something slowly and perfectly you can build up the speed later. This is better than playing it half right at twice the speed!"

Steve Allsworth says

"Have a plan of action, be it exploring the Dorian mode or new chords otherwise you'll end up noodling – the death of all serious practice sessions. Years ago, I found my improvised solos consisted of mainly two pentatonic shapes and was very restrictive.

So, I mapped out all my licks (plus new ones) on different strings while keeping the same pitch. Not only did this improve my fretboard knowledge but also my appreciation of the tonal differences between the strings and positions."

Pete Callard says

"Write down everything you're to practice and then organize it into priorities – eg if developing a good picking technique is the most important thing to you, put it at the top of the list. If you have two hours to practice, divide it into six 20 minute segments concentrating on six topics (eg warm ups, picking, scales, arpeggios,

chords, jamming to backing tracks). With longer sessions, tackle more of the areas on your plan, or dedicate more time to each. Practising this way means that you achieve the most you can in the time available and will end up feeling bad if you miss a session – and trust me, guilt (or a bad gig!) is one of the best ways of making sure you practise!"

Jimi Savage says

"When practising, select a technique such as tapping or sweep picking and dedicate your session to exploring its possibilities. By limiting your technique vocabulary, you'll be forced to make discoveries and decisions you may not have done otherwise."

The Main Events

FIG 1a & b: Picking Hurdles

CD TRACK 8

These two short examples will develop your inside picking (eg down pick third string, up pick fourth string) and outside picking (eg down pick fourth string, up pick third string). For fig 1a, watch the fourth finger roll needed for the notes at the 10th fret and fig 1b's first finger roll at the 7th fret.

FIG 2a & b: Double- and Triple-Jump

CD TRACK 8

Picking across the strings will greatly open up your playing to sound less scale. Learn and develop these two phrases to explore a new approach to pentatonics.

FIG 3: Leapfrog

CD TRACK 8

Jumping up a third interval and coming down a second interval – this 'leapfrog' example is a good way of practising a scale that's more melodic than playing straight up and down a shape.



EVENT 4: Triathlon

CD TRACK 8

V V V V V etc.
 V V V V V etc.

3-5-7-5-7 3 7 3-5-3-5-7 5-7 4 7 4-5-4-5-7-5-7 4 7 4-5-4-5-7-5-7 5-7 5-7 5-7-8-7-8 5 8 5-7-5-7-8 7

Triplets can be tricky to play regarding both timing and picking so this is a good pattern to work on. As with all triplets played with alternate picking, each group of three notes will start with an alternating pick stroke – for example, if you start with a downstroke, the next group of three will begin with an upstroke. This may feel strange at first but stick with it, as there may come a time when you'll need to use both down- and up-picks on the main beats of a bar.

EVENT 5: 4x4 Race

CD TRACK 8

First staff of music for 'The Merry-Go-Round'. It begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is written in eighth notes, with a final half note. Above the staff, there are two sets of fingering instructions: 'V V V etc.' and 'V V V etc.'. Below the staff, there are two lines of fingering numbers: '3-5-7 3 5-7 3-5 7 3-5-7 3-5-7 4' and '5-7 4-5 7 4-5-7 4-5 7 4-5 7 4-5-7 4-5-7 5-7 7-5-7-8 8'.

This is the last of the patterns commonly favoured by guitarists to vary their scale practice, using the three-note-per-string approach to scalar playing. Notice after completing the pattern on two sets of strings (this occurs every three groups of four semiquavers), the picking pattern repeats itself. Ultimately, this means that once you've mastered the sequence on two sets of strings you're sorted picking wise for the rest of the example's ascent.

EVENT 6: Steeplechase

CD TRACK 8

As shown here, dividing a scale into arpeggios is a great way to expand your options within a scale shape. Despite being tricky to pick cleanly, using this in your solos will instantly make you sound more sophisticated/jazzy/fusiony (delete as appropriate). For maximum versatility, practice both picking suggestions (ie starting with a down-pick and then with an up-pick).

EVENT 7: Jogging

CD TRACK 8

The musical score for "The Wind" by The Beatles, featuring guitar and bass parts. The guitar part is in G major, 4/4 time, and includes a key signature change to D major for the final measure. The bass part is in G major, 4/4 time, and includes a key signature change to D major for the final measure. The score is for a guitar and bass duo.

16th note funk grooves are the musical equivalent to jogging in that they should be relaxed so you can maintain it for a while without tiring yourself out. This example is one of many that will keep you 'in the pocket' and employed in a band. The triplet 16ths in bar 2 are best started on a down stroke and practised slowly before increasing your speed. This more advanced funk rhythm is great for adding interest to your playing but don't overdo it otherwise it will lose its effect.



EVENT 8: The Beam

CD TRACK 8

Chord progressions for Event 8: The Beam. The chords are Gmaj7, G6, Cmaj9, C6, and Gmaj7. The notation shows the chords in standard staff notation and the corresponding fretting and picking patterns on the guitar strings.

This set of four chords are relatively tricky despite the minimal note shifts – just like a gymnast on the beam, if get yourself muddled up you'll come a cropper! Follow the fingering suggestions and practice slowly. Picking wise, use either extended hybrid picking (pick and fingers m a and e) or conventional finger picking (pima). Alternatively, arpeggiate them if the 'block' playing shown here proves tricky.

EVENT 9: Cartwheeling

CD TRACK 8

Chord progressions for Event 9: Cartwheeling. The chords are Em, C7, B7, and E5. The notation shows the chords in standard staff notation and the corresponding fretting and picking patterns on the guitar strings.

Becoming versatile with pick and fingers (usually just m and a) is a useful technique to acquire a 'cartwheeling' approach to picking strings. This work-out should have you ripping out classical or country-tinged arpeggios in no time! If using a rock tone, use palm muting to stop string ringing on after being played.

EVENT 10: The Relay

CD TRACK 8

Chord progressions for Event 10: The Relay. The notation shows the chords in standard staff notation and the corresponding fretting and picking patterns on the guitar strings.

So named as it's a scale pattern played along one string that requires fingers one and four to 'relay' into the next fretboard position. A great example for improving hand synchronisation (snap value) so keep position shift noise to a minimum.

EVENT 11: The Crab

CD TRACK 8

Chord progressions for Event 11: The Crab. The notation shows the chords in standard staff notation and the corresponding fretting and picking patterns on the guitar strings.

With one note per string and cascading groups of fifths, this sounds less like a guitar and more like a violin (a violin is tuned in fifths). It's a great chops builder.



EVENT 12: Somersaults

CD TRACK 8

Exercise 10

2-3 7-8 11-12 7-8 11-12 16-17 11-12 16-17 21-22 16-17 11-12 7-8 11-12 7-8 2-3-3

This is a bit like doing somersaults as you're doing the same move over a large area - in this case, two notes (F# and G) being played at the same pitch all over the fretboard. Put in the time as this sounds demented at faster tempos (four notes per beat @ 120bpm+), especially with the string slides being sounded!

EVENT 13: Pommel Horse

CD TRACK 8

Limiting yourself to only two fingers on the fretting hand (fingers 1&2/2&3/3&4) is a bit like the arm-tiring Pommel Horse - you're going to need endurance! Use third and fourth fingers if you want to really test yourself as these are the weakest fingers for the majority of guitarists.

EVENT 14: Little Finger Endurance

CD TRACK 8

The second system of the musical score for 'The Little Boat' consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. It features a melodic line with eighth notes, each marked with a finger number (1-4). A slur covers the first four measures, and another slur covers the last four measures. The lower staff is a single-line bass staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains a sequence of notes with fingerings: (H) 8, P 7, H 8, P 7, H 8, P 7, H 8, P 7, H 8, P 7, H 8, P 7, H 8, P 7, H 5, P 7, and H 8. The notes are connected by a continuous line, and the sequence is divided into groups by vertical bar lines.

This short legato work-out will invoke pain after several repeats due to the emphasis on the third and fourth fingers, so be careful. Only pick the first note as each repeat uses a hammer-on instead. Ultimately, you're aiming for even timing and volume dynamics throughout.

EVENT 15: Trampoline

CD TRACK 8

This is a favourite arpeggio-based sweep picking phrase, except every note is articulated from the fretting hand and not picked. Watch for first finger hammer-ons as these are weaker in volume than those made by the other fingers.

EVENT 16: Legato Marathon

CD TRACK 8

Смелый солдат, смелый солдат,
 Он в поход пошел, пошел,
 Он в поход пошел, пошел,
 Он в поход пошел, пошел.

Legato playing with loads of hammer-ons and pull-offs can often entail odd note groupings per beat (5,7,9,11 etc). If you get each picked note on the beat and all the notes evenly timed (ie no 'hiccuping'), this shouldn't present too much of a problem. The speed will come later!



EVENT 17: Finger Splits

CD TRACK 8

8va

P P P H P P P H P P P H P P P H P P P

15 14 12 10 14 12 10 8 12 10 8 7 10 8 7 5 8 7 5 3 7 5 3 2

(8va)

H H H P H H H P H H H P H H H P H H H

3 5 7 8 5 7 8 10 7 8 10 12 8 10 12 14 10 12 14 15 15

Adopting a four finger/four note per position shift approach, this 'guitar version of the splits' exercise will sort the men from the boys! This was originally shown to me by TG's Pete Callard who, in turn, was shown it by TG's Ewan Smith. Nightmare!

EVENT 18: Bench Presses

CD TRACK 8

BU BD BU BU BD BU BU BD BU BU BD BU BU BD BU BU

4 (5) (4) (5) 4 (5) (4) (5) (4) (5) (4) (5) 4 (5) (4) (5) (4) (5) (4) (5) (4) (5)

This example will encourage a more exact practice approach to rock vibrato with specific note and timing goals. If you want a more aggressive metal style, start here and then go onto two fret bends and faster dilations. (Triplet 16ths will make you sweat!)

EVENT 19: The Bends

CD TRACK 8

8va

BU BU BU BU BU BU BU BU

20 19(20) 19 17(19) 17 15(17) 15 13(15) 13 12(13) 12 10(12) 10 8(10) 8 7(8)

There are few things worse than out of tune string bending so work at your accuracy with this exacting exercise. Bend to each pitch as quickly and as accurately as possible. Practice slowly at first (eg one note per beat @ 70 bpm) until you've mastered the amount of strength needed to bend each note to its relevant pitch.