

# What happened to the guitar you loved so much in the music shop?

## Guitar expert, Felson, gives an insight into the most common guitar problems

**It's only a few months old but now it buzzes, doesn't stay in tune and even when you tune it, it still sounds dead and lifeless. Does this sound familiar? I may be able to offer you some pointers as to why and how to rectify them.**

First of all, let's understand why it sounded so good in the shop in the first place. So you, the customer, have decided what guitar you want and off you go to buy it. At the music shop you're faced with a huge array of shiny toys designed to tempt you. Having dealt with music shops as a user and a warranty repairer for most of my life, I am sure of two things:

1. The shop owner/worker wants you to buy something. If he hasn't got what you had in mind then he will try to ensure you buy something he has in stock (as it's better to sell off old stock before you order some more).

2. Despite this seemingly self-serving attitude, they will however, want you to be satisfied with your purchase. After all, a satisfied customer will return to buy more.

This means that most guitars in music shops up and down the country are playable, and while in the shops, are kept that way. So why, after a short while, do you find: annoying buzzing and choking notes; that it doesn't stay in tune; or that it goes out of tune between different strings; and generally does not sound as good as you remember it?

Most of the time problems of this type are down to guitar strings. Dead strings will make the guitar sound like it's rattling and vibrating. It will not sustain and will sound out of tune. Most people don't realise how quickly a string-sound starts to deteriorate, even if you don't use the guitar a new set of strings will sound dull after three or four months. These times are only a rough guide because string wear will vary due to playing style and the acid produced on everyone's hands is different. Nonetheless, if you're playing two to three hours a

day, guitar strings will be worn out in two weeks. If you're playing under stage lighting in a hot and sweat-filled venue, then two gigs would be the maximum.

So a change of strings will solve all these problems you would think? Yes, but you must attach them properly. If you have a traditional machine head (i.e. the one with the string hole in the side of the post) the loose end of the string must be locked against the post, you need at least three or four turns of the string on each post to fully secure it. There is a good diagram of how to do this on the following link: <http://www.felsonguitars.co.uk> (go to 'frequently asked questions' and click on 'figure 1'). This will help stop string slippage. There is no loose end with Fender style machine heads because the hole is on the top of the post, but you still need three or four wraps round the post.

Another thing that causes strings to buzz and choke is changing string gauges. When a guitar leaves the factory it was made in, it is set up to play for a particular gauge of strings. If you change them for a heavier or lighter set then the neck is going to need adjusting. If you're unsure of how to do this, it is probably best to get professional help. It should cost around £30-40 for a full set-up (which would include a neck adjustment) from a guitar repairer. Or it may be worth asking the shop if it would be prepared to put on your preferred gauge of string, and make the necessary neck adjustments, to secure the sale.

A further thing to bear in mind is where you keep your guitar. Most guitars are made of wood, so are sensitive to the environment they are kept in. If the room you keep them in is cooler or hotter, damper or dryer than the shop they had become accustomed to, the neck may need to be adjusted to compensate. Keeping the guitar in a case, or gig bag will certainly help by reducing this problem, because the climatic changes happen more gradually, giving the instrument more time to adjust.

So regularly changing your strings (correctly), keeping to the same gauges, and a good setup at least once a year should keep your guitar playing the way you remembered it did when you originally bought it in the shop.

**Got a guitar problem you'd like Felson to hear about? Write to Noisy ([info@noisyzone.co.uk](mailto:info@noisyzone.co.uk)) and we'll pass your problems on, you never know, it could appear in the next issue!**

