

SOUNDS DECLARES A JOURNALIST-FREE ZONE!

Yes, readers, the next five pages are guaranteed absent of Bushell, McCullough or any other scribbler you love to hate. Instead, we asked five people from widely varying areas of music to write what THEY wanted, about subjects... close to the heart. And the end results are so good we'd better look out for our jobs!

THE ROAD



IT CAN be a very long walk between Euston Square tube station and Euston mainline station if you're carrying an amplifier, two guitars and a bag of clothes. If I've done it once this year, I've done it 20 times and I swear it's getting longer.
Oh, the joys of being a pop star. I think my amp-carrying arm is getting longer too. I should swap arms sometimes but once you get a decent grip, it's better to keep moving, especially if you have a prevailing wind. White knuckles are the least of my problems, but rain really pisses me off.
If you think life on the road

is all private aircraft and limos or you cherish some romantic vision of seeing the world from a Transit van on the M62, let me show you another view in which no-one comes to pick you up in a limo or a Transit but you have to get a bus to the tube and then on to the station and then on to the gig. And so on. Then you come home and wash your socks and boil your hankies and start again.
If you've never got past the bus stop at the end of the road then let me, dear reader, acquaint you with the bare necessities for rockin' all over the world:

1. A small amp. If you're going to lug the bastard thing all over the country on big bumpy trains, then I'm afraid the old Marshall Stack is right out of the window.
Instead, you must go for something which is small but powerful. I have a Roland Cube 60 which is only 16 inches high but puts out BIG SOUND. If it's miked up it will easily fill the average club and will crank-up for big halls. I haven't tried it in any stadiums yet. It does tend to become a bit heavy after the first 800 yards but it's worth the hernia for the range of sounds. It retails at about £190 and will fit on the

luggage rack of your average 125 Intercity Express.
2. Two guitars. I say two guitars because if you're playing solo and break a string you can become a lonely man with very big fingers as you try to re-string like a professional (NB: professionals have Roadies). I recently finished a gig in Leeds with only four strings intact. I told the audience that I was breaking all this metal because I wanted to be like Einsturzende Neubauten. I don't think they believed me. I use two Arbiter Les Paul TV copies. Sometimes I only take one, depends how lucky I feel.

3. Accoutrements: These are the little things that mean so much, like a toothbrush and an electric shaver so that you can do your ablutions in the lavvie as you whizz through Glossop at 125 mph. Firstly, you should have a big bag that goes over your shoulder to leave your hands free. In this should be your guitar leads, tuner, strings etc, stage clothes (if any) and a change of underpants. Underwear is very important. The ratio of days on the road to underpants should be 1:1. 3:1 is the minimum accepted by the Musicians Union and at anything above 7:1 you must be a member of King Kurt.

Other necessities are decent boots that don't leak, a couple of pairs of jeans (£6.50 each from High Street North, East Ham), a thick jumper (Oxfam should have some), a jacket that keeps out the rain, and a warm hat (both army surplus). Put all this gear on and you may look like the talking Action Man but at least you won't freeze to death in a bus shelter in Dundee waiting for Christmas or a bus. If you want to be really flash, you can buy yourself a flask for tea or Campari or whatever.

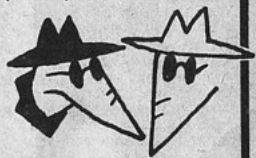
You will require a modicum of agility and balance to carry all this gear. I suggest that you practice by loading yourself up and running up and down the stairs at Shepherds Bush tube station. Also needed is great patience, as anyone who regularly uses British Rail will realise.

As far as sleeping arrangements go, it's a good idea to have strategically placed relatives and good friends in places like Edinburgh (Hi, Rosi), Manchester (Hello Bob) and Liverpool (love to Dot and Jane), otherwise anyone's sofa will do. Sleep is important and you should try and get some at least once a week.

Be sure to take advantage of all BR's super-savers and stuff because it is very hard to run away from a ticket inspector whilst carrying an amp and two guitars.

Before I got this job the furthest north I'd ever been was Catterick Garrison in Yorkshire but that's all changed now. My current ambition is to do a gig in Kirkwall on the Orkney Isles. I'm really looking forward to that. There's also a possibility of going to America but if that doesn't work out, well sod it, it's only a hobby.

Chances are in the next twelve months I'll be coming to your town, playing your burgh, but in the meantime if you're sitting on a 125 opposite a bloke with a big nose and a funny hat and the train lurches and a guitar falls on your head, don't be too harsh on him. It's probably me.



BILLY BRAGG on THE ROAD