

BLUES BOOK

ZZ Top guitarist solos on six-string memoir

By CHRIS ERIKSON

BILLY F. Gibbons has a résumé that demands respect, if not a likeness on Mount Rushmore. Red-hot guitarist, cultivator of heroic facial hair, hot-rod enthusiast, blues aficionado, raconteur and leader of ZZ Top, the Texas trio that's still going strong after 35 years.

To the list we can now add author, with the arrival of Gibbons' newly published "Rock + Roll Gearhead." It's a coffee-table book that pays homage to Gibbons' twin obsessions — cars and guitars — presenting photos from his collections of both along with tales of his decades on the road.

We caught up with the self-appointed Rev. Gibbons shortly after he and ZZ Top wrapped up a national tour at the Beacon Theatre. An amiable conversationalist with

So what did you do when you were in town recently?

Well, you want the BFG tour guide of NYC?

Sure.

First, get your all-day subway pass. Head downtown. We'll start off with a restaurant called Mexican Radio. They serve Mexican fare that brags of bordertown. It's pretty impressive. No. 2 stop would be St. Marks Place. We went to visit the Sock Man. It's the size of two telephone booths set end to end, and it's jam-packed with unusual and exotic footwear.

Then we hit Gem Spa and ordered up our egg cream, with Fox's U-Bet chocolate syrup. That's the only egg cream. Then there's Matt Umanov [a guitar shop], down in the Village. If we're making our list, that's a must-add. You know, it's never-ending, this quest for the next best.

You mean the next best to your fabled '59 Les Paul, Pearly Gates?

Yeah. It has actually incited the search, which has led to this mass of lumber. And so far, Pearly is still the reigning queen.

What's so special about that guitar?

The tone, the abject power, the output and the feel. When I picked it up the resonance was eminent, following the first strike. No chord, no amp, no nothing; you *heard* it.

How many guitars do you usually bring on tour?

We were dragging about a dozen guitars on this tour. We stopped in to see the Stones down in Miami, and

Well, yes. Only because it was tethered to a tweed Fender Champ amplifier. Pestering your parents for 12 months is one thing; to succeed in this excursion is paramount only by the presence of the amplifier. Acoustic guitars serve me no purpose. They're bad luck for me.

Did someone suggest the book, or was it your idea?

I was approached by two team members with Motor Books. They do automotive books, and somehow from cars they added guitars into the mix, and once that was going I said, Well let's see what might be of interest.

The excursion into the vault brought back ... you know, open a guitar case and you get 10 stories. So what might have been rather challenging became, for want of a better word, a true labor of love.

How about the cars?

Since we're constantly on the road, we seldom get our hands on the wheel. It's those girls in the famous videos that got to drive all these crazy machines. But they've been in the warehouse, and they're as pretty today as the day they were hauled out of the shop.

You got into guitars as a kid. Cars, too?

Yep. Right about the same time. For me it was a perfect match. I don't know how best to put it. You know, you get a guitar, you learn to play a song, and then you've got to take it to the nightclub, so you've got to get a car. That's the easiest way out of this rather curious dilemma of, "Why do

