

# ***The Blue Guitar***

## **Brawley A-122 Threat LTD: Revisited**

In my original article on this guitar I explained how I had rewired the pickups with a custom switching harness that provided some tones more suitable for blues. I had wanted to replace the pickups but the non-standard frame of the two single coil pickups limited my options so I was planning on getting them rewound "one of these days".

It turns out that the narrow base strat-style pickups are more common than I had thought and that companies like Kramer have used them on their SSH guitars. Pete at [Vintage Vibe Guitars](#) had a pair of them in stock that he had made himself and they worked great in the guitar. For the humbucker I put in an old SD '59 bridge pickup that I've had for 20 years; I replaced the Alnico 5 bar magnet with an Alnico 2 magnet ordered from [A.M.P.G.E.](#), which gave it a much smoother sound.

After replacing the pickups and rewiring the harness I have to say that this is one of the best guitars I have ever played! The neck is like a dream, very straight for the shredders out there, with the width, radius and fret size all well matched. I did raise the action slightly so that the strings would not bottom out on the frets when I'd bend them across the fretboard but even after doing that the action is still much lower than any of my other guitars. I blocked the tremelo bridge with a piece of wood glued in to the trem cavity; if you just tighten down the trem springs the bridge would not sit parallel to the top of the guitar.

With the new pickups the guitar now gets some of my all-time favorite rock and blues sounds. Having a traditional PAF-style humbucker at the bridge is like the best of both worlds: it sounds like a Les Paul but it plays like a very smooth strat, PRS or Parker. With the seven different linkages available this guitar covers a lot of sonic territory. Since replacing the custom Brawley single coil pickups I now get real strat-like sounds-with the neck and middle pickups by themselves and with the quack of the notched position using the middle pickup and the inner coil of the humbucker.

With the push-pull switch down all 5 positions of the selector switch are humcancelling. Starting at the top (the traditional neck only position) there is the series linkage with the neck pickup and the outer coil of the humbucker. This position has a sound that is both clear and full; I would compare it to the middle position on a Les Paul more than anything else. The second position is a series linkage with the middle pickup and the inner coil of the humbucker; this has some of the quack of the traditional notched positions but with the series linkage it is much fuller and thicker. The middle position has the neck pickup and the humbucker outer coil linked in parallel, which is similar to the middle position on a telecaster. The 4<sup>th</sup> position has the middle pickup and the



humbucker inner coil linked in parallel and has all the quack you'd ever want. The 5<sup>th</sup> position is the modified SD '59 bridge pickup which I was raving about earlier.

I thought that the 4<sup>th</sup> position might be a little too “quacky” for this guitar so I tried linking the middle pickup with the outer coil of the humbucker. However with the two humbucker coils swapped all of the mixed linkages were more bland, with not as much of a difference between them. So I switched it back to my original configuration which puts the middle pickup linked to the inner coil of the humbucker and the neck pickup linked to the outer coil. I may eventually decide to put in a push-pull pot for the tone control and use that to split the humbucker for the 5<sup>th</sup> position, for a total of 8 possible sounds from this guitar.

I made one change from the original wiring harness as presented in the original article. I was able to remove the RC networks I had added to the push-pull pot to modify the sound of the stock pickups since the series linkages of the single coils with the split humbucker was too dark for my tastes. The edited drawing is at the end of this article and it could be used with practically any SSH guitar although you would need to observe the winding direction and polarities. It is important that the magnetic polarities alternate as you go from the neck to the bridge; I configured it as S--N--S-N but you could also do it as N--S—N-S. The two single coil pickups you use should be RWRP with respect to each other. Hopefully the humbucker that you use will have 4+ wiring so that you can configure the winding directions to match that of the single coil pickups.

As for my original article, if you really can't afford to replace the pickups my custom wiring harness makes the guitar more usable for traditional rock and blues, but it still leaves much to be desired. The stock pickups are definitely unique but I prefer vintage-style pickups, like those from Lindy Fralin. Although the guitar was a joy to play unamplified, I stopped using it about a year ago because the amplified sounds did not excite me at all.

The single coil pickups I used measured about 7.4k DC resistance, which is higher than vintage strat pickups but they blend well with the humbucker. As for the humbucker, the SD '59 bridge pickup was too bright with the Alnico 5 magnet that came with it but absolutely perfect with the Alnico 2 magnet that I put in.

One other option here would be to replace the pickups but leave the wiring in the control compartment stock. That would be a big improvement over the stock setup but you would miss out on the 3 humcancelling linkages that are added with my custom

wiring harness. So I strongly recommend that the control compartment be rewired as well, which would make it the ultimate gigging guitar. Number one: it's cheap so you won't have to beg on the streets if it gets stolen at a gig. Number two: it's got the slickest neck I've ever seen, with its width, radius and fret size working together perfectly. Number three: with the push-pull pot in the down position all 5 linkages are humcancelling and offer a decent variety of tones (one killer sound that you are missing is the neck pickup of a Les Paul, but what do you expect from a single humbucker at the bridge?)

Although I have moved up to 010's on most of my guitars, it is a lot of fun using 009's on the Brawley because with the lower tension you can really finesse the strings. I had tried 010's on the guitar to help stabilize the tuning before I blocked the bridge, but it just wasn't as much fun to play and you would still lose your pitch on the lower strings when you were bending the higher strings.

Enjoy!

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<http://www.blueguitar.org/>

### **Links:**

**Original article on modding the Brawley A-122**

[http://www.blueguitar.org/new/articles/blue\\_gtr/gtr/brawley.pdf](http://www.blueguitar.org/new/articles/blue_gtr/gtr/brawley.pdf)

**Custom wiring harness (revised)**

[http://www.blueguitar.org/new/schem/blue\\_gtr/gtr/brawley\\_harness.gif](http://www.blueguitar.org/new/schem/blue_gtr/gtr/brawley_harness.gif)

**Brawley Guitars website**

<http://www.brawleyguitars.com/>

**Harmony Central user reviews**

<http://www.harmony-central.com/Guitar/Data4/Brawley/A-122-01.html>

**Brawley A-122 sound samples**

<http://www.blueguitar.org/new/mp3/samples/brawley.mp3>

