

Killer Lead Guitar, Made Simple

by Claude Johnson
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About this e-book: This is a guide-book that goes with Claude Johnson's instructional video, "Killer Lead Guitar Made Simple". If you obtained this e-book any other way except buying the video, please inform as at admin@guitarcontrol.com. Thank you.

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"I mean, the sound of an amplified guitar in a room full of people was so hypnotic and addictive to me, that I could cross any kind of border to get there"

- Eric Clapton

INTRODUCTION

Hi. My name is Claude Johnson, and guitar playing is my passion. It's been my passion for the last 15 years. But even more than just guitar playing, I really enjoy *lead guitar* playing. Yeah, chords are cool, rhythms and songwriting is cool, but to me, the real magic is wailing away with a distorted tone, playing a wicked solo...

Since very early on in my guitar career, my goal was to play smokin' lead guitar. Well, after many years of practice, and trial and error, I was able to do this. I started getting better and I started playing in bands too. Eventually, this led me to pursue a teaching career and production of my first instructional video, Killer Guitar Control Secrets. That video cuts to the essence of improvisational control.

Now, I've sort of worked my way backwards from the advanced concepts in Guitar Control to this course, Killer Lead Guitar Made Simple. My teaching philosophy is based on simplicity. I teach you what you need to know in order to start playing lead guitar, and I leave all out all the distractions.

You can find an endless supply of exercises, techniques, concepts, etc in the guitar magazines and books... And that's all fine and good. But thumbing through magazines and playing the monthly lessons is not the fastest way for a beginner to learn. Yes, you will learn some cool licks and tricks... But what the beginning lead guitar player needs is a simple method that cuts to the essence of things, leaves out distractions, eliminates trial and error, and shortcuts your learning.

You know, most things in life are very simple. But, we tend to make them complicated. The sheer abundance of information that is available can be overwhelming. Where do you start? What is really important to know?

So that is what I'm trying to do in this course – teach you how to develop solid lead guitar skills – quickly, and without confusion.

How to Use this Course

There is no right way to use this course. Some people learn better from a video, some from an audio, some from an ebook. Pick one and start with it and don't jump around. You might as well read the book first. Heck, you're already reading it. Go through it once without your guitar, then once with your guitar. Then the audios, then the videos. By the time you get to the video, you'll already be progressing.

Keep going back and forth until everything is clear to you and you know exactly what to do. Keep integrating the material from the DVD, the ebook, and the audios together with your learning experience. Your lead guitar skills will naturally develop and grow stronger and stronger the longer you play.

The most important ingredient is the intention and dedication of the student.

No Fluff!

This e-book is short and exactly to the point. Remember, the whole point of this course is SIMPLICITY. I could easily write 50 pages of guitar exercises to “pump up” the book and make it look like you're “getting more” material. But, more material is not what you need. Recall, there is an endless supply of material out there in the form of books, magazines, other videos, etc.

So the whole point is to remove the confusion and focus on the exact things you need to acquire lead guitar skills NOW.

Overview

There are 3 things you need to learn and practice. First, the scales. You will learn certain patterns on the fretboard (Pentatonic Scale and Minor Scale). Secondly, you will learn certain techniques (Alternate Picking, String Bending, Vibrato, etc). Thirdly, You will learn example licks from the DVD. A guitar “lick” is a short series of notes that makes a musical statement.

The example licks are the “Cliff Notes” of Guitar Soloing

Back when I was in high school, we sometimes were assigned huge books to read in Literature class. If we didn't have time to read the book, (or just didn't feel like it), we could “cheat” by just reading the Cliff Notes. The Cliff Notes were sold separately as small booklets that summarize the essence of the real book.

That's what learning these example licks will do for you. Instead of learning 20- 30 complete guitar solos (which would take forever for the beginning student), I've extracted 52 of the most fundamental and commonly used licks and phrases. By playing these licks, your fingers and ears will get used to playing lead guitar fairly quickly.

In addition, all of these licks are from the same basic pentatonic pattern. And this pattern is going to be our focus of study for this course. So, you are already going to be learning quickly by keeping things simple and working toward mastering this ONE pattern.

On top of that, you're going to use these “cliff note” licks to maximize your progress in this pattern in record time.

Melody vs. Harmony

It is important to understand the difference between melody and harmony and how they relate to lead guitar playing.

When you think of a popular song, the first thing that usually comes to mind is the melody. This is the basic tune of a song, often in the form of a vocal melody. For example, think of the song “Happy Birthday” or “The Star Spangled Banner”. These songs have such obvious and strong melodies, that you can easily sing them a capella (without background instruments).

A melody is a series of notes, one after another, and has a specific rhythm to it, along with a specific sequence of pitches. With “Happy Birthday”, the melody starts out, HAP – PY BIRTH-DAY TO YOUUUUU.... Even the first six notes are instantly recognizable. Interestingly, “The Star Spangled Banner” also starts with an instantly recognizable six-note phrase.... OH -OH SAY CAN YOU SEEEEEEE...

The recognition comes as a consequence of the rhythm and the pitches.

Harmony is the underlying chord progression of a song. Now, not every song has a melody that is as recognizable as the examples both. For instance, “In My Life” by the Beatles, you may or may not recognize the melody if someone were to hum the first eight notes. BUT, if you heard the background chords along with it, you'd probably recognize the song instantly.

To the non-musician, or to the untrained ear, most people just associate with the melody.

But the harmony is often equally important. The notes you play on the guitar will sound completely different based on what harmony is going on underneath.

In other words, the same lick will sound completely different depending on what chords you play it over. In practice, the harmony helps define the melody, and this especially true in guitar soloing.

Guitar soloing is melodic – that is to say, it consists of a sequence of notes. You might say that melodies and guitar solos are 'horizontal' (laid out in a straight line) and that chords and harmonies are 'vertical' (stacked up).

Depending on what chords are being played, you can play in a different key to produce good-sounding musical phrases. In this way, melodic overlays and interacts with the harmony.

All this is background knowledge. We will soon discover what it means in practical terms...

Getting Started – What You Need

You will need a decent electric guitar, a decent amplifier, a guitar pick, a patch chord, and an electronic tuner. All of these items can be obtained cheaply from your local music store, or from an online retailer, such as Ebay.com.

Notice I did not say a great guitar, or even a “nice” guitar. An inexpensive guitar can sound surprisingly good. For example, the guitar I used on the DVD for this course cost me \$139 plus shipping from Ebay. And it doesn't sound too bad at all! But you do need a decent guitar. If you have an old, crappy guitar, it will simply sound bad and your progress will be stunted, along with your motivation and enjoyment.

You also need a decent amplifier that can produce a distorted tone. Again, you don't need to spend much money.

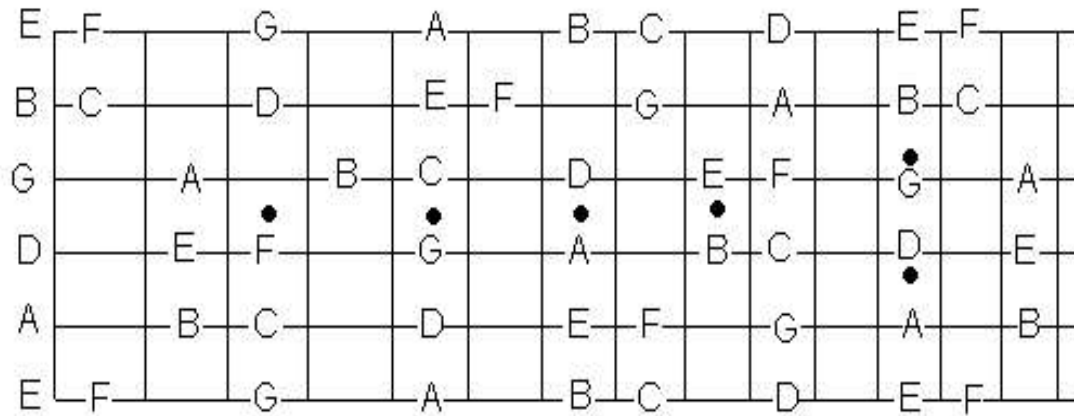
Make sure your guitar has fairly new strings at all times. The effort is worth it because otherwise, old strings will turn your decent guitar into a crappy guitar!

And you must be in tune. Use an electronic tuner when you are first getting started to avoid frustration. As you get better, you can tune by ear, which will improve your ear.

You need a guitar pick. Although some guitarists get away with just playing with their fingers, this is not my recommendation. I suggest using a medium to heavy pick.

Knowing Your Fretboard

From the bottom (low) string to the top (highest) string, The notes are E, A, D, G, B, and E. The notes on the fretboard are laid out like this:



Eventually, you should try to memorize the fretboard as thoroughly as possible. For now, simply be aware of the general layout. Notice that between the notes B and C, there is no note. Also, between E and F there is no note. Between F and G, there is a note which can either be called F# or Gb. (F sharp or G flat). Same thing with G and A, there is a note between them called G# or Ab. (Also a note exists between A and B, and between C and D, and also between D and E).

Notice there are a total of 12 separate notes that repeat all over the neck. These 12 notes are: (A B C D E F G A# C# D# F# G#)

The Pentatonic Scale

What is a scale? A scale is a collection of notes. We have 12 notes in total, BUT we are not going to be using all 12 at once. (What a relief!). In fact, we are going to only use 5 notes at once, in various combinations.

“Penta” means five. “Tonic” means tone. So, Pentatonic means playing 5 tones (or notes) in various combinations.

A pentatonic scale is not just any 5 notes though! (Although technically speaking, any combination of 5 notes **could** theoretically be called “pentatonic”, it is common usage to mean a *specific* pattern of 5 notes, and it has a *specific intervallic structure*.)

By “intervallic”, I am referring to the intervals, or distance between the notes. You can measure the distance between notes in terms of the number of frets. Two notes that are next to each other on the fretboard on the same string are “one fret apart” (E and F... or D# and E, etc). This is also called a half-step. A whole step interval is a distance of two frets – for example, G to A. Take a look at the fretboard diagram above until you understand what I mean about the intervals.

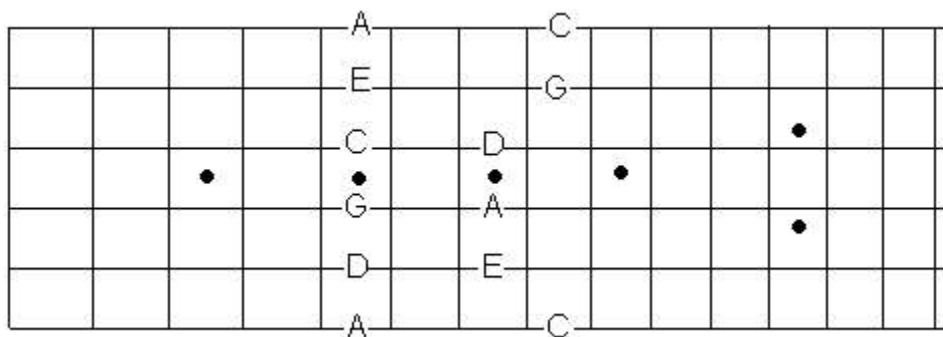
If all this sounds complex, don't worry, we're going to bring this back down to earth here in a moment. All will be made clear, I promise.

The “A” Pentatonic Scale

Now, lets look at a specific pentatonic scale – the “A” Pentatonic Scale. This scale consists of the notes A, C, D, E, and G. The notes are everywhere on the fretboard, but, we are NOT going to try to memorize the entire fretboard! Save that for the advanced course.

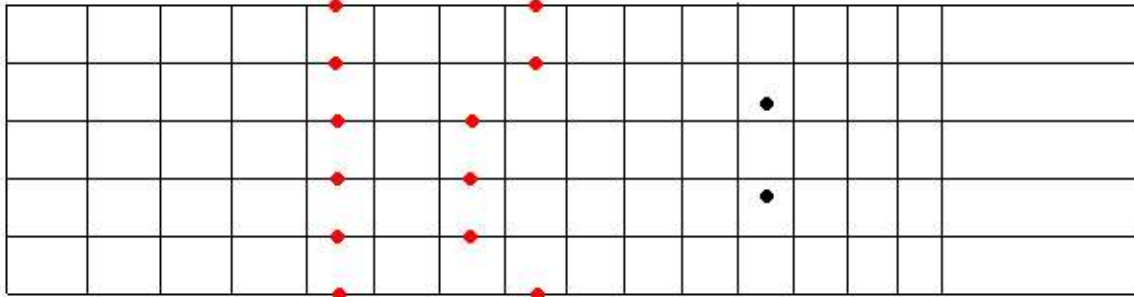
We are going to memorize just ONE single pattern, in a specific position of the fretboard.

Here's the pattern:



A lot simpler than trying to memorize it all over the neck! At later stages of your musical development, you can do that, but for now, just this one pattern.

And in fact, you don't even really have to memorize the notes at all when you're starting out! Just memorize this shape:



(Memorize the dots in red)

To play this scale pattern, you would start out on the bottom string, fretting the low A with the first finger on the 5th fret, then playing the C with the pinky on the 8th fret, then moving up to the next string, playing the 5th fret with the first finger and the 7th fret with the ring finger.

Because the pinky is the fourth finger and the ring finger is the third, I tend to think of this pattern in terms of “ONE – FOUR, ONE- THREE, ONE-THREE, ONE-THREE, ONE-FOUR, ONE-FOUR”.

But you can think of the pattern however you want, as long as you get familiar with the basic shape.

Practicing the Scale

In a musical context, when you play a guitar solo, or even the example licks in this course, you are going to be combining the notes from the pattern into various musical ideas and phrases. The order of the notes will not be sequential necessarily. In other words, you are not going to start from the bottom of the scale and go to the top. The order of the notes will be “mixed up”.

HOWEVER, when you are first learning the pattern, you WILL play the notes in order, from top to bottom. This is done as an exercise to build your technique.

It's very similar to when you learn the alphabet as a child. First, you first learn it in order, A B C D E F G, H I J K L M N O P, etc... Only when you are familiar with that, can you start combining the letters in various ways to make words that make sense.

Same thing with the guitar. You first learn to play the scale pattern in order. Once you have that down, you can start mixing up the notes to play riffs and licks that make sense. Got it? :)

So, later we will “mix up” the scale. For now, play it in order, starting on the low E string, 5th fret (the starting note is A), and ending at the 8th fret on the high E string (The ending note is C).

You simply fret the note with your left hand by pushing down the string with your finger right behind the metal fret. (The fret is the piece of metal that goes across the fretboard). Most electric guitars have 22 or 24 frets. Make sure you are using enough pressure so that the string is not muffled.

Then, with your right hand, use the guitar pick to play the string.

The Alternate Picking Technique

The right hand (picking hand) grips the pick in a firm manner but with no tension in the muscles. It should feel natural but controlled. When we start above the string and pick down, we call that a downstroke. When we start below the string and pick up, we call that an upstroke.

The basic idea is to alternate between downstrokes and upstrokes. Since there are two notes per string in this pattern, the picking becomes consistent. Keep the left hand close to the fretboard and avoid unnecessary motion.

Keep your pick parallel to the strings.

Play the scale with a metronome if possible. If you don't have one, simply count and keep the rhythm. Strive for a consistent tone and rhythm. Consistency and proper form is WAY more important than speed. Forget about speed, speed will come naturally as a consequence of correct technique.

Watch the DVD and listen to the audios for further clarification.

Vibrato

Vibrato is the rhythmic vibration of a note. This is a musical technique common to most kinds of musical instruments, although it is absent in percussion and piano or keyboard. It works great in vocals, too.

Vibrato adds an awesome dimension to guitar playing that can be extremely expressive and musical.

The technique consists of shaking the wrist back and forth almost as if you were shaking a small bottle of water. The shaking is natural and from the wrist. As you shake your hand, press the fretted note and move it around slightly in accord with the wrist motion.

Watch the DVD to see it...

Bends

The piano has no bends or vibratos... Bends are exactly what they sound like, bending the strings to raise the pitch of the note. Since this pulls the string away from the straight line, the pitch rises, no matter which direction you bend the string (up or down). Bending up is more common and sounds better in most situations. By this, we mean pushing the string toward the ceiling.

Hammer Ons & Pull Offs

Normally, you use both hands to play. However, much of the time, your picking hand can take a break, and many notes can be played with the left hand only.

The DVD explains these techniques way better than I ever could in writing, so let's just leave it at that. They are simple.

Also, the DVD shows other techniques like slides and artificial harmonics.

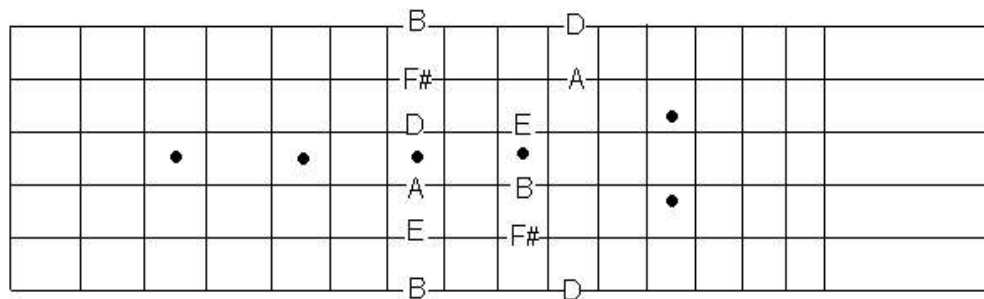
Shifting Into Another Key

After you are familiar with how to practice the A pentatonic scale, you can instantly play in any key! Simply play the same pentatonic pattern starting at a different fret. In other words, just slide your hand up or down the fretboard.

Recall the pentatonic scale (and every other scale) has a *specific intervallic structure*. For all its complex possibilities, the guitar makes it simple to switch keys because its intervallic structures are highly shape-based.

So now we will transpose the pentatonic scale shape from A to B. This means we are moving it up the neck 2 frets, or one whole-step. It looks like this:

B Pentatonic



And by the way, the example licks on the video are all almost all in B Pentatonic.

Notice the F#. Don't let that throw you...Again, you don't really need to memorize the notes yet. Just focus on learning the shape of the scale. The fact that you are starting on the 7th fret means you're in the key of B.

How do we know that? Well, here's how to...

“Memorize the neck” in 60 seconds

Look, when you are just getting started, all you really need to remember is that the pentatonic scale...

- Starts on the 3rd fret in the key of G
- Starts on the 5th fret in the key of A
- Starts on the 7th fret in the key of B
- Starts on the 8th fret in the key of C
- Starts on the 10th fret in the key of D
- Starts on the 12th fret in the key of E

Downloading Essential Licks Into Your Nervous System

So far, you should be familiar with the basic techniques (vibrato, bending, etc), as well as how to play the pentatonic scale. At this point, you go over the 52 licks in the DVD.

The 52 Licks on the DVD were hand picked by me as being the most essential and useful, and the licks that will most quickly help your fingers and ears to “understand” the pentatonic position.

It should be pretty easy to follow the tablature on the screen. The numbers simply refer to the fret numbers. And watch out for the bends! Notated like (7) (arrow up to 9) is the 7th fret bent up to the pitch of the ninth fret. In the audio lessons I give more instruction on reading the tabs. And in the DVD, I explain how to play the licks.

Also if you remember that the licks are all based on this pentatonic shape, you will pick them up quicker. Listen to me play the licks first. Occasionally I may play variations in the video just to show the possibilities. But each one is played clearly, and you should mentally picture the lick, then try to follow it and play it from the screen.

They start out easy, the first lick is just a bent note repeated three times. Then, they get progressively more advanced. Still, none are that tough really. Some are intermediate level licks, but no reason you can't learn them real soon.

Master one lick at a time before moving onto the next, and if you get stuck, just PLAY IT SLOW... you will get it. Strive for correct rhythm, tone, phrasing, and form before trying to develop speed. Always.

If your basic technique is not up to snuff (bends especially), then you need to devote time every day (at least 10 minutes) to improving the bends.

By the way, it is better to play 10 **focused** minutes of guitar practice than an hour of messing around aimlessly. In practice, quality counts, not quantity.

When you have mastered these 52 licks,
you are just on the verge of just starting to play Killer lead guitar.

That's right. At this point, you should be just starting to get a little comfortable with the pentatonic position and you're able to play some basic licks, maybe even improvise a little and mix up the licks you learned and play some ones, or at least variations on the ones you've learned.

Try that... Try making a small change in each of the licks I showed you, to make a new lick. You can do it!

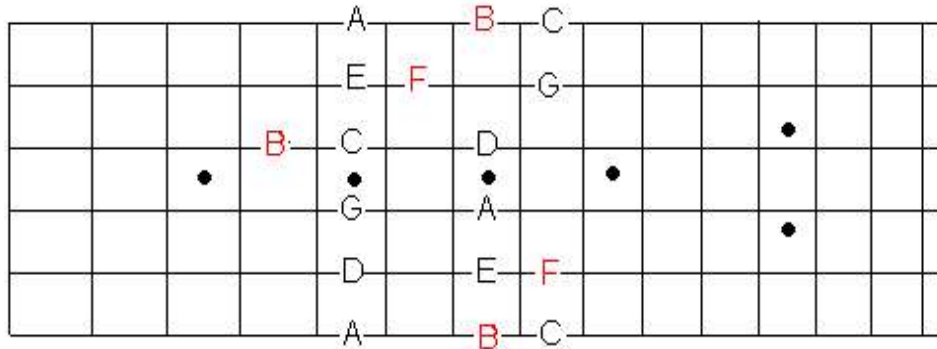
For example, you can play the first note twice quickly instead of just once. Or, you can change the last note of the lick... Or maybe you repeat part of the lick or whatever... The possibilities are endless. And the more combinations you create, the more combinations you see are possible.

And now that you are becoming skilled, you are almost ready to Play Killer Lead Guitar. But first a word on the minor scale.

Learning the Minor Scale

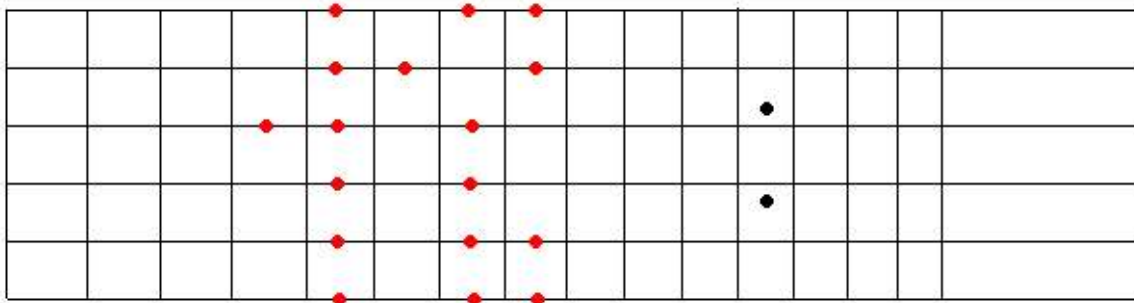
I like to think of the minor scale as “The Pentatonic Scale with two extra notes”. So we have gone now from using just 5 notes at once to using 7.

For example, A pentatonic scale adds the notes B and F to become A minor like this:

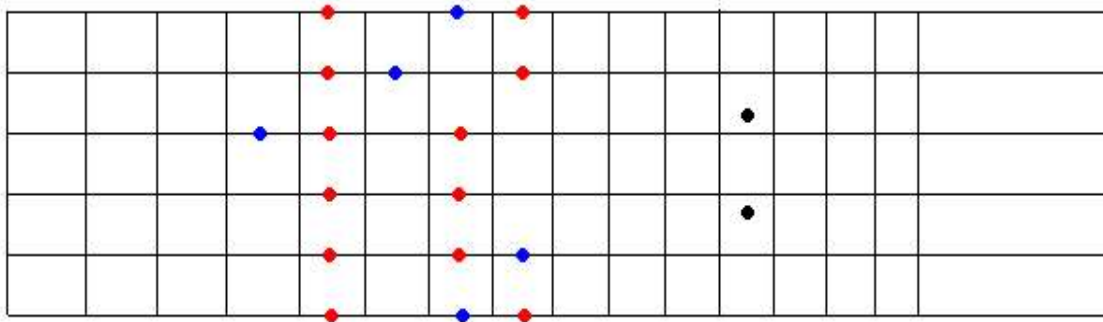


Playing these extra notes lets you add more melodic variation to your leads, and is a way out of the pentatonic sound when the pentatonic scale seems to “get old” or “sound stale”. Fortunately, the pattern is similar so you can learn to go from the pentatonic scale to the minor scale by playing the licks you already know and adding some of the extra notes.

The basic pattern for the scale is like this (in red):



You should also get used to visualizing the pentatonic scale , and then the extra notes that can be added. For example, the pentatonic is shown in red, with the extra notes from the minor scale in blue:



Learning Famous Guitar Solos

You are starting to play lead guitar now... But it is not “killer” lead guitar just yet. We are going to the next level of playing soon... But first, let's talk about learning famous guitar solos.

Learning one of your favorite guitar solos is not only possible, but it is fun, and very helpful to your playing.

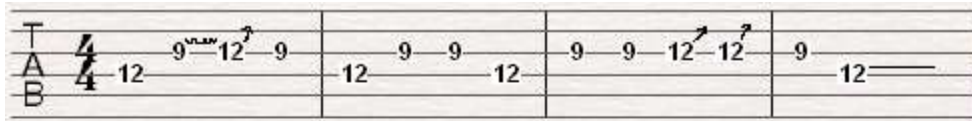
The best way to learn is to try to transcribe the solos yourself by ear. It is also helpful to pick up transcriptions, either professional, or free on the Internet.

Here's two short examples to get you started. I did not notate the rhythm, i think its best at this stage to use your ear and not get caught up in reading music.

Example Solos

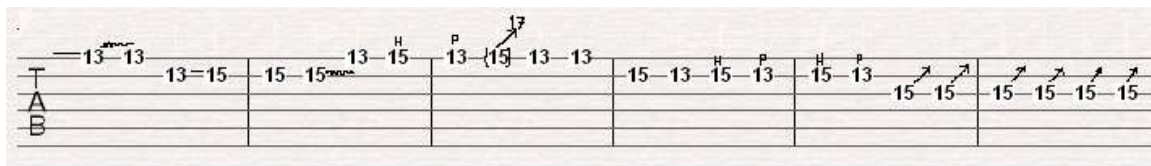
Cocaine: - JJ Cale/ Clapton

This is the beginning of Clapton's solo. This is not in the pentatonic pattern we've been studying, but another one, which is actually down the neck one pattern. Here we are in E pentatonic, but instead of playing from the 12th fret position, we are playing a different pattern, but its the same notes. Notice the slight bends, the vibrato on the second note, and the slide on the last note.



Here's another example -

Baba O'Reilly by the Who



This is also slightly outside the patterns we've been studying. The point is to get used to the sound and practice the phrasing to get close to the actual solo.

Improvising over Chord Progressions – The Essence of Fun with Killer Lead Guitar

Once you can play the 52 example licks on your own, then you can try them over various chord progressions. Not every lick will work over every chord. So you have to experiment and use your ears. Play the ones that sound best to you! Then, go beyond the known by experimenting with new variations. And you can go off the beaten path entirely, playing brand new licks completely, from within the right scale. You can even disregard the scales and play completely from the heart. If you find a note you like, play it!

The following are some easy progressions to get you started improvising.

Progression #1

C – C - Eb – F

Solo in C pentatonic or C minor

Progression #2

E – E – D – A

Solo in E pentatonic or E minor

Progression #3

G - D – C – C

Solo in E pentatonic, E minor, or G pentatonic

Progression #4

E7 – A – E7 – A

Solo in E pentatonic

Progression #5

12 bar blues

A7 – D7 – A7 – A7 – D7 – D7 – A7 -A7 -E7 -D7 – A7 -E7

Solo in A pentatonic

Progression #6

Bm7 – E – D – E

Solo in B pentatonic, F# minor, or F# pentatonic

Progression #7

Dm7 – G – Dm7 – G

Solo in A minor or A pentatonic

Progression #8

D - D- G - A

Solo in B Pentatonic or B Minor

Constructing a Solo

Keep in mind you can build solos by planning out ahead of time what you're gonna to play, rather than improvising it.

A no-brainer solo formula

Start by using the example licks you've learned. Start with the simpler ones at the beginning of the solo (such as Lick #1 in the DVD), and work your way toward the more complicated licks. Remember, solos naturally build up and use more notes toward the end.

How to Proceed and How to Practice

Keep in mind that any progression can be transposed into any key and still retain its harmonic structure. For example, progression #4: E7 -A – E7 – A could be transposed from the key of E to the key of G by moving everything up. This now becomes G7 – C – G7 – C, and you solo in G instead of E7.

At this point, you have all the information you need to develop lead guitar skills quickly. How quickly depends on your level of focus, your intention, and the amount of time you spend.

You should focus on the following areas:

Playing the Pentatonic Scale Using Alternate Picking : 5 to 15 minutes

Playing the Minor Scale Using Alternate Picking: 5 to 15 minutes

Bends and Vibrato: 5 to 15 minutes

Improvising: 5 to 15 minutes.

You can spend anywhere from 20 minutes a day to an hour a day or more.

Try to play at least 20 minutes a day using the above practice regimen.

Conclusion

Playing lead guitar is a skill like anything else. Now you have the knowledge of exactly how to develop this skill by working on a few key areas. With practice, you can't help but improve. And with consistency, and focusing on the right things, your progress will be swift and enjoyable. Good luck! - Claude Johnson