

Young's rig in 2009: (clockwise from front) Old Black, '59 Fender Deluxe (with Whizzer, on top), Fender Tremolux, Magnatone 280 with stereo vibrato (below Tremolux), Magnatone speaker cabinet, Fender Twin (with Whizzer). A Mesa/Boogie Bass 400 and Fender reverb unit are behind the amps.



RAGGED GLORY

FROM HIS BEAT-UP LES PAUL TO HIS BATTERED AMPS AND VINTAGE EFFECT PEDALS, NEIL YOUNG'S STAGE RIG IS A ROAD-WORN TRIBUTE TO HIS TIMELESS SOUNDS. *By Richard Bienstock*

“WHEN IT COMES TO equipment, the idea with Neil is that you don't change anything,” says guitar tech Larry Cragg. “You don't even think about it.” Cragg is himself among the many constants in Young's gear universe, having worked for the musician since 1973. A respected guitar repairman—he's been Carlos Santana's go-to guy for 40 years—who also owns his own vintage instrument rental company, Cragg first met Young while at Prune Music, a guitar shop in Mill Valley, California.

“At first I was just fixing his guitars,” says Cragg. “But a few years in, he was on the road in Japan when I got a call from his people saying, ‘Get on an airplane!’ And I've done every tour since.”

Young brought his standard rig out on the road for his 2009 tour, a mostly electric guitar-dominated jaunt. True to Cragg's word, his setup has remained largely the same over the years. But if Young is consistent in the equipment he uses to create his sound, the various pieces of gear also tend to be as idiosyncratic

and susceptible to change as the man himself.

At the center of it all is the volatile 1953 Gibson Les Paul goldtop Young calls Old Black. A brutal and battered beast, the guitar is responsible for the legendary gritty tones heard on countless Young classics, including “Cinnamon Girl,” “Down By the River” and “Hey Hey, My My (Into the Black).”

The Les Paul, which features a Bigsby tremolo and a P90 pickup in the neck position, received the black paint job that inspired its nickname prior to being acquired by Young.

LARRY CRAGG