For the last 30 years the Fender® Stratocaster® has been my main guitar. When working with the bridge setup I always strive for the most musical and in-tune mechanical operation I can find. I’ve asked hundreds of players about their setup and over the years I’ve come up with my own method that always returns to pitch and has many musical benefits as well. The method described works best when the tuners are working properly, the nut has been properly cut so strings don’t bind, the neck truss rod properly adjusted and the six (or two) mounting screws that fasten the bridge plate provide proper freedom of movement.

At the heart of the setup is balancing spring tension with string tension by adjusting the two long spring tension adjusting screws at the “claw” to which the tremolo springs are attached to the steel tremolo block. Use three springs from the tremolo block to the claw: furthest position left, furthest position right and center; do NOT set the outside springs at an angle.

1. Begin by adjusting the two screws of the claw so that when you pull UP on the tremolo arm and the bridge is in contact with the body the G string pulls up a minor 3rd. This will make the B string rise a whole step and the E string a half step. The mechanics of the system should first make musical sense. When done correctly, you will end up with an “Angled Claw”—which is exactly what you’re looking for. (Balancing the Tension.)

2. You may have to go back and forth a few times between the two adjusting screws until the bridge is stable and the intervals described are true. And you’ll need to correct the intonation by adjusting the bridge saddles. This takes a bit of time. But when done properly, you will enjoy it.

3. When all is right and balanced between springs and strings, the Am7 barre chord on the 5th fret should sound like it is descending musically to an Abm7 when the bar is slightly depressed. It won’t be perfect but it’s a very musical sound you’re after and should achieve. This effect is ideal for “shaking” chords and applying a manual tremolo to your voicings.

4. An important point is to lubricate string contact points. I use a Teflon® lubricant by Dean Markley (Dean’s Tuba Luba) under the strings at the nut slots and where the strings contact the string tree(s). You only need to use a little lube; wipe away any excess.

5. I try to use the minimum windings on the string posts, preferring just one if possible. My bass strings leave the post at the top; my trebles wind down and leave the post at the bottom.

6. There is a short video of me explaining the whole process at:
   http://www.DeanMarkley.com/QR/WB.html

All the best,
Carl Verheyen

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