

--- In walbassesnaturally@yahoogroups.com, "junofly_22" wrote:

Can someone help me decipher the following. I just got a Wal and kinda get the volume control thing but after that I get lost. Maybe it's been a long day and my brain is fried. Any feedback in layman's terms would be greatly appreciated.. I bought it used so wouldn't know if they come with a owners manual that might clear up what to many may be a very stupid line of questions!

Hi there! Yes, the description of the tone controls are written in ancient Mesopotamian on the Wal leaflet!¹ So confusion is perfectly normal! We all went through it so the questions are anything but stupid!

The Wal tone network is quite unlike almost all other basses! However when you get into it using it becomes very intuitive. Volume you've got sussed - however, if you pull that up you engage "pick attack" which adds a bit extra punch into the sound (i.e. if you're playing finger style it sounds a bit more like you're playing with a pick!). Can be useful for a bit of extra cut through in a mushy mix!

The centre detented control is the pickup pan (between B and T - neck (Bass - B) and bridge (Treble - T) – it's a 70s thing!.

Then you have a separate tone control for each pickup - neck and bridge in the appropriate positions. These are kinda like the normal tone controls on a passive bass (10 is full range and the closer to 0 the bassier/less trebly it gets) but it's not quite that simple. There is a definite profile to the sweep of the pickups tones with a sort of "shelf" where the tone gradient changes around about 4-5 ish. However, the tones aren't like passive ones where it's put it on 10 and leave it there. They are usable pretty much all the way through their range - even at 0 for dubby tones which retain some clarity and note definition.

The tones are also push/pull. Pull them up and a little boost is added around the frequency where the tone controls start to cut. Basically, if you solo a pick up and sweep the tone from 10 to 0 and back you'll hear a sort of "wah wah effect". If you look in the Files section there's an MP3 which goes through a lot of these settings and changes. Basically, when the tones are pulled up the bass sounds a bit more "active".

So what does all that mean in real life? It sounds very complicated but once you've messed around a bit while knowing what you're doing it becomes very natural. I've added some "sample" tone settings to try out below which are the ones that seem to work for me. See what you think and let us know how you get on. But trust me, once you've found your own fave Wal tones no other bass is ever going to sound quite so good or quite so versatile.

As to my fave tone settings, here's a few of my standards to have a go at...

¹ Well, I mean! "As the controls are backed off, the spectrums of the appropriate pick-ups are foreshortened (roll-off 12db/octave). Therefore, the dominant tone character varies throughout the entire range of the control" That's almost as bad as Vagon poetry!

Well, both tones on 10 is an OK place to start but there's much more available than that....

Pan: Neck 30/Bridge 70, Neck tone 6 (pulled up), Bridge tone 8 - pretty good rocky, finger style sound

Pan: Neck 30/Bridge 70, Neck tone 6 (pulled up), Bridge tone 8 (pulled up) - similar but a bit more "active"/poppy sounding

Pan: Neck 70/Bridge 30, Neck tone 6 (pulled up), Bridge tone 8 - rounded but punchy soul, finger style sound

Pan: Neck 70/Bridge 30, Neck tone 6 (pulled up), Bridge tone 8 (pulled up) - similar but a bit more "active" / forward sounding

(on the above push the neck tone back down for a more traditional, passive sounding version)

Pan: Neck 100/Bridge 0, Neck tone 6 (pulled up), Bridge tone X - rounded soul/ballad finger style sound

Pan: Neck 100/Bridge 0, Neck tone 6 (pulled up), Bridge tone X - pluck strings over 20th fret for a pseudo upright/string bass sound

Pan: Neck 70/Bridge 30, Neck tone 2 (pulled up), Bridge tone 8 - sort of dubby sound but retaining definition

Pan: Neck 100/Bridge 0, Neck tone (pulled up) - sweeping through range from 0-10, Bridge tone X - hammer on rhythmically while sweeping tone control for a pulsing pseudo sequenced wah/synth bass sound

Some of these might work for you, others may not. However, the key thing is keep experimenting there are SO many great sounds in there it's a shame not to have fun finding the nice quirky ones! You'll soon get the hang of how the tones interact.

Cheers

Trevor

Well first of all congratulations on getting the Wal. Naturally we all think they're pretty wonderful but no doubt you will too once you've had chance to get used to it.

Trevor has done the legwork on getting you moving with a whole array of sample control positions to try. I thought I just add a few things to try from a slightly different perspective.

You say you've got the volume control sussed, so that's a good start.

Of the other three controls, the pan or balance control is the next simplest. It is the other upper control, next to the volume control, and with labels B at the fully anticlockwise position (on a right-handed bass), BT at the centre-detented position and T at the fully clockwise position

To start with, push all the pull-up switches in. This removes all the boosts and will give you a simpler starting point.

The two lower controls are the tone controls. Just turn them both fully clockwise to 10 to start with.

Now, going back to the pan/balance control, play a few open string notes and reach round with your fretting hand. Rotate the pan/balance while the open notes are sounding. When at the T position, you are hearing only the Treble (or bridge) pickup. When at the B position you are hearing only the Bass (or neck) pickup. When at the central BT position you are hearing an equal mix of the Bass and Treble (Neck and Bridge) pickups. Of course, you can also position the control anywhere in between these three positions to get a mix that favours one or the other pickup in varying amounts. With the tone controls set at 10 the differences in sound will be fairly gentle at this stage, but you will be able to hear the different tonal character of the pickups, due to their different positions (basically the further from the bridge the pickup is positioned, the bassier the sound, the closer to the bridge the pickup is positioned the more treble or high frequency sound is picked up).

Having figured out the balance control, check out the pick attack. This is engaged by pulling up the pull switch on the volume control. This adds a small boost of high-ish mids (I think around 3k???) to the overall sound. You'll need a speaker setup capable of reproducing higher frequencies to notice this much but it adds a definite edge or sparkle to the sound. Slaps and pops sound particularly more dynamic with this switched on but I love it for enhancing the clarity of finger style stuff too (sorry Klamster!). Push the pick attack switch back in for now and we'll look at the filters for each pickup.

The two lower controls are the low-pass filters. The most powerful aspect of this type of preamp revolves around the idea of mixing together two different sounds from each pickup using the pan/balance control. The low-pass filters are what allow you to set up the two individual sounds. There's no need to go into the technical whys and wherefores of the system, save to say that each pickup has its own dedicated filter control.

The lower control nearer the bridge is the filter control for the bridge pickup. The lower control nearer the neck is the filter control for the neck pickup.

The easiest way to grasp how these work is to work on one pickup at a time.

So, start by turning the pan/balance control to the "T" position, and make sure the volume control is cranked up. This means that you are hearing only the treble (or bridge) pickup.

With the filter control at 10, the control acts a little like a standard passive roll off, like Trevor said. So, again, play some open strings, reach round with your fretting hand and slowly back off the bridge pickup filter control. Notice how the higher frequencies of the sound disappear as the control moves closer to zero. This is because the filter progressively attenuates or "rolls off" the sound above a given (roll off) frequency.

When you have the hang of that, repeat the process but this time, turn the filter to 10, then pull out the filter pull switch. Again, as Trevor said, this boosts the frequency near the roll off frequency. Therefore, as you wind the control backwards from 10, you are once again progressively reducing the high frequency content but, as you do so, you are actually boosting the frequency near that roll off - in simple terms you get a pronounced hump or "honk" in the sound. Moving the control moves the frequency at which the honk sounds - kinda like a wah-wah. By itself this might sound quite harsh and unmusical. This is where having two different filters on two different pickups and a way of mixing them becomes really useful.

Before we go there though, now move the pan/balance all the way to the "B" position. Now all you are hearing is the bass (or neck pickup). - You can prove this by turning the treble filter we were just looking at up and down - it won't make any difference to what you hear.

So now, with pan in the "B" position, repeat the above process, but with the lower filter control nearest the neck. Once again, backing off from 10 will reduce the higher frequencies and brightness in the sound. Notice how this pickup sounds more bassy than the other - due to its physical position. When you pull out the filter knob on this control you will hear that this filter's boost frequencies are different to those of the treble pickup - they are specifically tuned to bring out the bassier tones of the neck pickup. If you roll right back to 0 or 1 with the pull switch operated you can get some huge fat buttery lows.

The final trick is to hear elements in each of the sounds you have set up for both pickups, and then to mix them together using the pan/balance control.

If it all gets too confusing, just pick one section of the above to work on 'til you feel comfortable with it, then move on to the next, and so on. You can always leave one pickup unboosted with its tone control at 10 (to have it running unboosted but without any tone roll off) and experiment then with changing the settings to the other pickup only and see how it sounds blended in differing amounts with the unboosted one. Sometimes what sounds like an outrageously nasal honk on the treble pickup will actually sound great when just a tiny amount of it is mixed with, say, a smooth bass boosted sound from the neck pickup. You could then maybe add the pick attack to give the whole sound some top end clarity. Endless possibilities.

It's quite a different way of sculpting sound than the more common two and three-band cut/boost style EQs. It's not without its problems and shortcomings too - you can carve quite big holes in the mids of your sound - but on the other hand, it's very

powerful and can create sounds that you cannot get with the simpler cut-boost methods.

I hope this hasn't been too much blather - feel free to ask questions and let us know how you get on!

Mik