

# Alvin Lee's Goin' Home Again

## Ten Years Later, He Jets Back on 'Rocket Fuel'

by Daisann McLane and Stan Soocher

**A**fter nearly a decade of false starts and stops, Alvin Lee's come round to rock and roll again. Eight years ago, he became a legend at Woodstock. His guitar rode the fast lane, and his solos on the classic "I'm Goin' Home" screeched like burnt rubber on the track of the Indy 500. Ten Years After, Lee's British-bred rock and blues band became one of the most in-demand acts on the American tour circuit. But his next eight years were all downhill. Now, with a new band, Ten Years Later, and a new album, *Rocket Fuel* on RSO, Alvin Lee is out to recapture the rock and roll audience.

"After Woodstock, our audiences changed," Lee recalls. "We got the rowdy fourteen and fifteen year olds, and all they wanted to hear was 'Goin' Home'. I got very disillusioned with rock, and I experimented with lots of other kinds of music to see if anything would get me off again. Ten Years Later does just that. My drummer's got me buying running shoes, and we have a go round the block every now and then. It helps keep the energy level up," the 32-year-old guitarist laughs.

Sitting in his hotel room in Phoenix, Arizona (one stop on a four week American swing), the scruffy, rumpled Lee sounds like he's more inclined toward napping than running laps. His thick working-class accent (Lee grew up in Nottingham, the "Detroit of England") often slurs his words. But he makes his reasons for "coming full circle" in his musical career quite clear.

"I realized that what you do best is what comes easiest to you. One night George Harrison was telling me how he wished he could write simple stuff like Little Richard does. I told him, 'It's easy—you just vamp in A, then go up to the D when you feel like it.' Well, we both had a good laugh, cause what is easy for me isn't always easy for the next bloke. One more thing brought me around; I realized that if I went to hear Jerry Lee Lewis, I'd feel cheated if I didn't hear 'Whole Lotta Shakin'."

Jerry Lee Lewis is one of three musicians (the others are Chuck Berry and Little Richard) that Alvin Lee idolized

as a youth in Nottingham. "That's why I never like the Beatles much," he explains. "I thought they did weaker versions of those great Berry tunes that I liked." Lee's dad, who collected old 78's, was responsible for his son's lifelong romance with the blues.

After leaving school at 16, Lee formed the Jaybirds who became Ten Years After with a name change in 1967. The blues were enjoying renewed popularity in England at the time, and TYA's blues/rock fusion made them one of the most popular of the revival bands. Their early albums, especially *Undead*, recorded live in a small British club ("You could hear the sweat dripping off the walls that night," Lee recalls), earned them a spot in the rock and roll history books.

But that moment on the stage at Woodstock was their peak. Subsequent albums sounded tired, and Lee com-

plained to the press that TYA had become a "travelling jukebox". His solo experiments with country-rock, jazz and funk failed to generate the popular excitement of Ten Years After. Two years ago, Lee retreated to his 15th-century home in Oxford, England, and spent his days puttering around his barn-turned-studio. "When I first met Alvin in 1976, he was trying to put together the old Ten Years After", relates his manager Jon Brewer, a veteran of several large English talent agencies, who got an invitation from Lee to come up and hear the band.

Brewer reassured Lee that there was an audience for hard, energetic, rock and roll. Lee decided to recruit some younger musicians to get that excitement, and found bassist Mick Hawksworth and drummer Tom Compson. "When I auditioned Tom," Lee remembers, "he drummed like a freight train pushing you down the rails. Impressed me straight away." Lee and his new band, christened Ten Years Later, worked 10 hours a day, five days a week on new material. "It was like jamming two and a half years into one."

As for Alvin Lee's exhaustive tour schedule, Brewer chuckles. "I don't think that Alvin's laced up his racing shoes today, but he's got tremendous reserves. He goes out on the road, but he'll never get out of his head." ●

*With a new band on board, Alvin Lee is heading back to his rock&roll roots. 'You do best what comes easiest,' he says. The result: 'Rocket Fuel.'*

