

Adjusting The Bacon and Day Banjo Mute

by Bud Puckett and Ed Cuneo

Oliver "Bud" Pucket, Emory University Physicist, ret. was one of Perrys' plectrum students. An excellent machinist, Bud made the mute on Perry's 'Bacon and Day Number 8 Ne Plus Ultra', and it was he on whom Perry depended for all his mute adjustments. Bud has made a list of suggestions for setting up the mute. All numbers refer to the original patent drawings.

1. Prior to making the following adjustments, make sure your banjo head is at the desired tension. Remove the resonator.
2. The mute should be located slightly behind, and parallel with the front edge of the bridge, i.e. 1/16" or less. There are 4 threaded screws holding the mute assembly onto the dowel stick. To change the position of the mute on the dowel stick, loosen those screws and replace the mute at its new location. Before tightening the 4 screws, make sure the armature is in the proper location, parallel with the bridge.
3. When engaged, the cork must be flush with the head. Push the pedal in until the cork contacts the banjo head. The armature or 'cross bar' as it is called in the original patent, must be equidistant from the head along the entire length of the bridge. If it isn't, remove the mute assembly, loosen up the small set screws which hold the armature in place, and make the necessary adjustments to make the armature equidistant from the banjo head along its entire length.
4. Nothing should bind the mute. Obtain a free action. This might require you to slightly bend the push rod. If you look at the original patent drawing figure two, you'll see that there are two nuts on the end of the push rod (i.e number 29). Remove the nut on the very end of the rod. It is not needed.
5. The push rod will have a nut remaining on the inside of the bell crank lever. This lever, (#25), inside the banjo, translates the motion of the knee lever and rod so that the mute assembly is pushed toward the banjo head. Tightening or loosening the remaining push rod nut, will help adjust the position of the stop finger (#37) at the end of the knee lever, so that the stop finger rests on the rim and simultaneously softly contacts the bell crank lever when the knee lever is in the resting position.
6. Engage the mute with a piece of paper between the armature and the banjo head. The piece of paper should be tightly held at each cork bearing along the armature when the mute is engaged. If the paper is not uniformly tight, place a piece of paper, about 1" by 5" on the head, under the armature. Get a piece of fine sandpaper (250-400) and place it on top of the paper facing the armature cork bearings. Push the pedal in until the cork bearings softly contact the sandpaper. Move the sandpaper back and forth, sanding off a small amount of the armature cork bearings. Check the contact points again with paper. Repeat as necessary until the armature cork bearings, engage the head firmly and uniformly when the mute is engaged. This will compensate for head tension variations which effect the degree of head sag at the bridge.