

Tres Hombres ZZ Top's Beard & Boogie



Frank Beard is the one without sunglasses.

Frank Beard's a gambling man. "Ah, don't mention the America's Cup," he drawls. The night before, New Zealand had won its first semi-final race, and it looked as if they were still in the hunt.

"You mean you've won one, and we've won two? Well now, let's place a little bet ..."

Phone interviews are always a gamble, but this one more than most. ZZ Top

are holed up in a Holiday Inn hotel in Houston, Texas, taking calls from Japan,

Australia and *Rip It Up* in preparation for their tour next month. Who would answer the phone? Would it be guitarist Billy Gibbons, musical mastermind and reputedly the intellectual of

the group? Or Dusty Hill, the bassist who made headlines a year or so back when he shot himself with his own gun? (His derringer fell out and hit the floor when his girlfriend was pulling off his cowboy boots.)

Beer Drinkin' & Hell Raisin'

On the other end of the line is Frank Beard, drummer of ZZ Top and recognisable for the fact that he's the one *without* a 20 inch long chin wig. He's relieved that his conversation with Japan is over. "You speak better English," he says in a slow Texan drawl. "Australians and New Zealanders are probably closer to Texans at heart than anybody. You do like to have a beer and a good time."

Having a beer and a good time almost sums up the ZZ Top experience. They're everyone's guilty pleasure — that "li'l' old boogie band" that went high tech and high video rotate in the 80s with their songs on the two major rock 'n' roll themes, cars and girls. Looking like cartoon cowboys — or "the Blues Brothers in a rabbi skit" — their video hits from 1983's *Eliminator* turbocharged their long career into another stratosphere, a momentum kicked in two years later by *Afterburner*.

Now, critics are analysing ZZ Top's contribution to popular culture whereas in years gone by the group was dismissed as just another Texas bar band. Lester Bangs once wrote that the band's reason for existence was "the eternal reiteration of simple riffs for the sake of 'partyin'." As a final insult, he said, "They wear cowboy hats."

Later, Bangs became a convert. "We were kinda used to it," says Beard. "For so long we were a 'Southern boogie band.' It didn't really bother us that much. We were having a good time doing what we'd always wanted to do. And now that we have become, ah, hip — an 'in' thing — it's gratifying. But it's not something we sit around and laugh about."

The witty ZZ Top videos, which seem to be full of legs, cars, beards, and sheepskin guitars, have been crucial to the band's recent success. Beard seems well rehearsed on this subject: "We've been lucky enough with our videos to come across some people who, at this

THE BEAT GOES ON

THE HONDA TOP FIFTY

1. Beat it.	1. Turn on.
2. Just drove through town.	2. Catch us if you can.
3. Fairing better.	3. Ain't no stopping us.
4. Fast forward to freedom boulevard.	4. Thumping Black Flash.
5. Groovy baby.	5. Streamlined liberator.

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HONDA

Nº1 under the sun

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