

# Jerry Reed Style Pinches in Travis Picking

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It is winter time again (in the northern hemisphere) and banjo players may face the challenge of playing in lower temperature, when the frozen fingers have limited ability of high-speed picking. In these conditions it is helpful to involve more pinches (by index and middle fingers) into the game. In this article we will return to the three-finger Travis picking presented in the April 2010 article and we will mix it with some patterns presented in the chord-melody article from December 2010 issue of Banjo Sessions. The exercises are for fingerpicked tenor banjo in DGdg tuning, but they could be transferred to 5-string banjo too if you use different left-hand voicing – look at the final Example 10.

Basically, we will try to fit the melody played by the middle finger on the highest (first) string to the syncopation of the Scruggs style roll, while the thumb regularly alternates in Travis picking mood. For each presented rhythmic pattern, there will be shown the development from thumb-lead roll via middle-lead roll to the conventional Travis picking pattern (well, with specific convention on thumb notes as you can read later) and finally to the “frozen fingers” option with index + middle finger doublestops. I recommend practicing the examples with metronome – if you are in front of computer, here is one ready for you: <http://www.metronomeonline.com/> . Please note that the thick bar lines indicate that each measure in the first three Examples is separate exercise to be repeated “many times”. As the article is focused on the picking hand, there will be no actual melodies presented in the Examples – it is up to you to find some melody on the 1st and sometimes 2nd string of your banjo.

The three-finger roll fitted into the eight-note measure results in the specific syncopation, i.e. shifting some of the melody notes to upbeat position. First measure of Example 1 shows the forward roll which divides the measure to the segments of 3+3+2. The melody played by thumb is on the 1st, 3rd and 7th note of the eight-note measure (marked by red centre). While the 1st and 7th notes are on the beat (assuming that we have four beats per measure) the 3rd note falls between the beats and it is the one which makes the syncopation (see the Example 6 of the June 2010 article about bluegrass rolls). The second measure moves the melody to the first string while keeping the same syncopation; now it is played by the middle finger and the result is the backward roll. The third measure shows one of possible renditions of this syncopation of the melody on the first string in the Travis picking style. Note that the thumb plays root-root-fifth-fifth, the middle finger plays the requested syncopation and the index finger fills some spaces between the melody notes – I have placed the index finger between the beats where was the empty space. Finally, the fourth measure shows the “frozen fingers” option, where both the index and middle finger form the unit (late guitar legend Jerry Reed would have said “the claw”) which up-picks the melody string and the neighbor lower one at once. Practice this measure with different chords until it becomes automatic, and take care for the correct thumb alternation. Ideal chord voicings have root and fifth on two thickest strings, e.g. in case of DGdg banjo it is G chord 0000, D chord 0202, C chord 5520 and F chord 3532. Five-string banjo players may use G chord 0000 or 0005 and D chord 0234.

## Example 1 3+3+2 syncopation

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The musical notation for Example 1 consists of a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is written in eighth notes. The first three measures are separated by thick bar lines, indicating they are separate exercises. The fourth measure is a double bar line. Below the staff, there are four measures of picking patterns: T I M T I M T I, M I T M I T M T, M I T M T I M, and M T M T M. The first three measures have a red dot under the 3rd note of each measure. The fourth measure has a red dot under the 3rd note of the first pair of notes.

The Example 2 shows the same process for the 2+3+3 syncopation which is used in the Foggy Mountain Breakdown tune of Earl Scruggs. Note that in the second measure the second note is picked by thumb instead of index finger, to avoid the middle-index-middle picking sequence. After you have practiced the fourth measure of the Example 2, try to combine it with the fourth measure of Example 1; listen to different syncopation while keeping the correct thumb alternation. You may also experiment with muting the pinched pair of strings with your left hand – the open strings would be muted by the touch of left pinky, the closed string by releasing the pressure of the respective fingers, similarly to the back-up technique called vamping.

**Example 2**  
**2+3+3 (FMB) syncopation**

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The Example 3 shows the 3+2+3 syncopation. Again, in the second measure the fifth note is played by thumb and not index finger. In the third measure, you may prefer to omit the last eighth note, especially when the new chord is played in the next measure. But note that in such case (before the change of the chord) the thumb would play the root-root-fifth-ROOT pattern (the open third strings instead of fourth in this case) to confirm the root of the just abandoned chord and to avoid the duplication of the next chord (e.g. when moving from G chord to D chord). This is explained in my own comment to my April 2010 article at Banjo Sessions. The fourth measure with the index + middle finger pinches is very similar to the fourth measure from previous Example 2; combine them without interruption, listen to the difference and keep the correct thumb alternation.

**Example 3**  
**3+2+3 syncopation**

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The Example 4 shows the development of two-measure Travis picking pattern with Jerry Reed style pinches. The first two measures show the starting point – continuous thumb-lead forward roll which crosses the bar line; the second two measures show the continuous backward roll with the same syncopation of the melody, played by middle finger on the first string. The second line starts with Travis picking approach to the given syncopation, and ends with the same syncopation played by index + middle pinches.

**Example 4**  
**Two-measure sequence with 3+3+3+3+4 syncopation**

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Let's look again at the first two measures of Example 4, but now with the perspective that the melody is played on the first string by middle finger (so it is on the 3rd and 6th note of the first measure and on the 1st, 4th, and 7th note of the second measure). You may recognize that such syncopation is used in the B part of Ground Speed tune by Earl Scruggs, shown in the Example 5 with the tab for 5-string banjo and for DGdg tenor banjo. In this case the main voice is probably the one played by index finger, but the syncopation is the same.

**Example 5**  
**B part of Ground Speed**

Composed by Earl Scruggs  
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The same syncopation is used in Jerry Reed's composition *The Claw*, shown in Example 6. The transcription to DGdg tenor banjo (with capo on 2nd fret) does not match the rhythm on guitar perfectly, because Jerry Reed used also ring finger of his picking hand. As the contemporary banjo players generally use the thumb, index and middle finger (and not ring finger), the exact emulation of this pattern would require either successive thumb strokes or the rolls with crossed thumb and index finger – this is definitely not the “frozen fingers” option so let's not enter this territory now.

**Example 6**  
Signature lick of *The Claw*

Composed by Jerry Reed  
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The image displays two musical staves for the signature lick of "The Claw" in G major, 4/4 time. The top staff is for guitar, and the bottom staff is for tenor banjo (DGdg) with a capo on the 2nd fret. Both parts consist of four measures. The guitar part uses a standard tuning (EADBE) and the tenor banjo part uses a standard tuning (GDBG). The notation includes notes, rests, and fret numbers. Below the guitar staff, the picking pattern is indicated as T I R T I R T I R M T. Below the tenor banjo staff, the picking pattern is indicated as T M T M T M T.

The Example 7 shows the etude of Jerry Reed style pinches on dominant seventh chords, with the melody on the first string. Watch the root-root-fifth-fifth thumb alternation before the measure with the same chord and root-root-fifth-root before the chord change. If you want to practice the etude also in the key of D (with D7, G7 and A7 chords), stretch your fretting hand to the barre voicing 2256 for A7 and mind the correct thumb notes.



repetition of last measures with the pinch permanently shifted to the middle pair of strings, and then with the pinch shifting between the middle and treble pair at your will.

### Example 8 Pinched melody on the second string

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1.

2.

Of course, you may use other two-measure syncopated patterns for the chord progression in the Example 7. One option is the pattern from the last two measures of Example 4; some other options are in the Example 9. The first line combines the patterns from Example 3 and Example 2. It is useful to think about the non-syncopated source for each pattern; in this case it was probably half note, two quarter notes; two quarter notes, half note. In the second line you can hear that the pinch from the beginning of the second measure was anticipated (syncopated ahead) so it is played at the very end of the first measure. The same logic is used in the third line, where the pattern starts with the pick-up pinch in the previous measure – it means that the last pinch of the pattern belongs already to the next pattern and next chord in case there is chord change.

Example 9  
Other two-measure grooves with pinches

Final Example 10 shows the famous C7 lick from Earl Scruggs' version of Bugle Call Rag. Also in this case you can hear that the pair of Bb notes, which was originally on the first two beats of the second measure, has been shifted ahead so one of them appears now as the last note of the first measure. The first tab is the original 5-string banjo version, followed by the transcription to DGdg banjo. The third tab shows the Jerry Reed style pinches on the 5-string banjo with the syncopation matching the Bb notes of the original tab – the C7 chord barre voicing is 5558. The fourth tab then shows the same pinches on DGdg tenor banjo with 5523 chord voicing. Look at the thumb alternation: root-root-fifth-fifth of C7 in the first measure, but root-root-fifth-root in the second measure to avoid repetition of G note, the root of the following chord.

Enjoy!

# Example 10

## C7 lick in Bugle Call Rag

Composed by Earl Scruggs  
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The musical score is presented in three systems. Each system includes a saxophone staff, a guitar staff, and a bass staff. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 4/4. The first system is marked with a C7 chord, and the second system is marked with a G chord. The guitar and bass staves show fret numbers and rhythmic patterns, with 'M' and 'T' indicating missed notes or thumb strikes. A slide ('Sl') is indicated in the second measure of the second system on the guitar staff.