

The classic Tesla line-up. L-R: Frank Hannon (guitar), Tommy Skeoch (guitar), Jeff Keith (vocals), Unidentified Dog, Brian Wheat (bass), Troy Luccetta (drums)



# SMOKIN'

**SACRAMENTO BAND TESLA LIT UP THE LATE 1980S SCENE WITH THEIR ROOTSY YET RADIO-FRIENDLY BRAND OF HARD ROCK. DAVE REYNOLDS TALKS TO GUITARIST FRANK HANNON AND BASSIST BRIAN WHEAT TO FIND OUT HOW IT ALL HAPPENED**

**BY THEIR OWN ADMISSION**, Sacramento hard rockers Tesla felt like the odd ones out back in the '80s. Having first ridden to prominence with their spectacular debut album, 'Mechanical Resonance', released in late 1986, heavy touring with the likes of David Lee Roth, Alice Cooper and Def Leppard saw the quintet's stock rise sharply over the next 18 months. Tesla's second album, 'The Great Radio Controversy', released in 1989, not only peaked in the *Billboard* album charts at number 18, but also delivered a Top 10 US hit single with 'Love Song'.

The band was named after Nikola Tesla, a Serbian-American inventor and engineer born in 1856 who designed the alternating current electricity supply, but was also hugely interested in the development of lighting, telephony, X-rays and wireless technology. Tesla's interests were so wide-ranging that he obtained around 300 worldwide patents for his inventions prior to his death at the age of 86 in 1943. Tesla never really got the credit that his creative genius and inventiveness deserved. Given that fact, there are many people who

feel the metal band chose their name particularly well.

Mind you, Tesla wasn't the name the original quintet – vocalist Jeff Keith, guitarists Frank Hannon and Tommy Skeoch, bassist Brian Wheat, and drummer Troy Luccetta – had been operating under when they signed a recording contract with Geffen Records back in 1985. At the time they were known as City Kidd, but both record company and management felt the name wasn't in keeping with the blues-infused, gutsy hard rock sounds the group was dealing in.

Once the newly named Tesla hit the road, it wasn't just their native America that embraced their honest hard rock that guaranteed 'no machines', in an era that was often drowning in synthesized sounds. They went down a storm at their first UK appearance, at the famous Marquee Club in London in May 1987, before they opened for management stablemates Def Leppard in September of the same year.

The 'Five Man Acoustical Jam' album from 1990 saw the band score another Top 10 US smash with a ▶

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