

Brit Pack Belters

JJ GUITARS PEAK ONCE MORE WITH A TASTY PAIR OF HAND-CRAFTED STUNNERS WITH TONE TO SPARE. PAUL SALTER EXPLORES THE ELECTRA MYTHOLOGY

GBINFO

JJ ELECTRA

PRICE: £1349

BUILT IN: UK

SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25-inch)

NUT WIDTH: 43mm (1.68-inch)

BODY: Alder, maple top

NECK: Mahogany, glued-in

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood 305mm radius (12-inch)

FRETS: 22 Medium

PICKUPS: Two JJ Custom humbuckers

CONTROLS: Volume, tone, 3-way selector, coil split on tone knob

BRIDGE: Nickel-plated aluminium JJ custom wraparound

MACHINEHEADS: Gotoh, plastic-buttoned vintage

FINISHES: Trans-black (shown), many more including transparent and 'burst colours

CASE: Hard case supplied

LEFT-HANDERS: On request - no extra charge

CONTACT: JJ Guitars
PHONE: 01608 684887
WEB: www.jjguitars.com

Expecting guitars to conform to particular standards of quality determined by their country of origin, is almost as pointless as stepping off the ferry at Calais and wondering where all the blokes avec onions, bicyclettes et berets are hiding.

While national stereotypes are becoming ever more blurred, each country's culture nevertheless adds a slant to the product design at a given point in time. You can see it in fashion, cars and food, for example, and it's something that's recognisable with guitars, too. After all, could you imagine an original reverse-headstock, graphic-finish Jackson coming from anywhere but 1980s USA?

JJ Guitars is proving itself to be a fine example of the current British luthier's art, and with a couple of successful years now under its belt the company has added a new model to stand alongside the Jewel and Retro offerings. The all-new Electra tops the current line with a new single-cutaway body design, along with a few subtle tweaks to the JJ format. It comes in

both vibrato and hard-tail versions and certainly doesn't disappoint in the looks department, but does it manage to retain that British feel?

BODIES & NECK

Single-cutaway bodies are of course a subject of considerable debate at present [Gibson recently went legal against Paul Reed Smith for using the singlecut design as a trademark infringement of the Les Paul - Context Ed], but that hasn't stopped the JJ guys from using the theme for these new top-of-the-range models. Their variation on the outline has a touch of the asymmetricals about the blunt end though, which although nothing new per se, produces a more streamlined look that received all-round positive comments during the Electras' stay at GB.



GBINFO

JJ ELECTRA V

PRICE: £1349

BUILT IN: UK

SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25-inch)

NUT WIDTH: 43mm (1.68-inch)

BODY: Alder, maple top

NECK: Mahogany, glued-in

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood 305mm radius (12-inch)

FRETS: 22 Medium

PICKUPS: Two JJ Custom humbuckers

CONTROLS: Volume, tone, 3-way selector switch, coil split on tone knob

BRIDGE: Gotoh/Wilkinson VSV 300 vibrato

MACHINEHEADS: Gotoh locking, plastic button

FINISHES: Trans red (shown) plus many transparent and 'burst colours

CASE: Hard case supplied

LEFT-HANDERS: On request - no extra cost

CONTACT: JJ Guitars
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WELL SMOOTH

HAND-SHAPED HEEL

■ Most manufacturers have an approach to shaping the heel of their guitars to allow better access to the upper frets.

The JJ Electra slant on the concept appears to be using a standard kind of glued-in joint and then intensively smoothing and contouring the whole area.

It must be a more labour-intensive approach, but the result feels great and is as effective as most.



■ JJ's own humbuckers are routed through the company's intriguing Love Tone circuit



"YOU REALLY NEED TO GET VERY SILLY WITH IT INDEED TO PUT THE STRINGS NOTICEABLY OUT OF TUNE"

Both bodies are hand-crafted from alder – one would assume mahogany for this general style of guitar – with attractively grained maple tops. The tops aren't quite carved in the traditional manner, but are gently contoured towards the edges to provide a more sedate arched effect. These particular samples are enhanced with binding, which along with the body-matching veneer on the headstock, adds an extra £100 to the basic price; that's good value when you consider the extra luthier-hours involved.

The set mahogany necks have a comfortable rounded C profile that lies somewhere between a current Les Paul and a PRS wide-fat shape in feel. Not a skinny speed neck by any means, but well short of the kind of bulk that would hold you back during your flashiest moves, and extremely comfortable.

It's been mentioned in past reviews that in the early days of JJ Guitars, the guys managed to purchase a batch of rosewood fingerboard blanks that were originally destined for Burns guitars during the 1960s. The good news is that supplies of this well-seasoned timber are still

■ The JJ Electra has Gotoh plastic-buttoned vintage-style machineheads



NEW HEADS

GETTING IT STRAIGHT

■ There's been some rethinking with the headstock design at JJ.

It's now being made slightly smaller – partly for aesthetic reasons, and also to allow for a re-positioning of the machineheads to allow a straighter string-pull across the nut. Looks good, works great – well done, JJ.



plentiful and being put to good use on the whole range. It'd be nice to think that this vintage rosewood might add a little special mojo to the JJs, but in a more practical sense the decades of storage has meant that this is hard and dense stuff, which bodes well for stability and tone.

In both cases the 12-inch radius rosewood 'boards are fitted with 22 smoothly finished medium frets that make the necks of these Electras a slick and comfortable playing experience. There's no binding along the necks, meaning the JJ luthiers have worked hard on their fret-end finishing, producing admirable results. Part of their process in this area leaves a slight chamfer on the low E side of the neck and not on the other. Slightly puzzling, but it works!

HARDWARE & PARTS

The newly tweaked straight string-pull feature has perhaps more relevance for the Electra V, fitted as it is with its Gotoh/Wilkinson VSV 300 trem; an updated vintage-type whammy bridge with bent steel saddles that has a push-in arm.

This sample is set in a floating position to provide bends in both directions and as well as having an impressively easy feel, it ranks as one of the most efficient non-locking tremos we've ever tried. You really need to get very silly with it indeed to put the strings noticeably out of



GBOPINION

JJ ELECTRA

GOLD STARS

- ★ Excellent coil-tap tones
- ★ Solid humbucking tones
- ★ Sleek build quality

BLACK MARKS

- Truss rod cover is slightly off-centre

IDEAL FOR...

Plenty of pro-level sweet rock tones

TONE TALES

DIFFERENT KIND OF LOVE

■ **Tone controls are often the most under-used part of a guitar. With JJ Guitars however, the guys have put in a bit of work in this area to produce the JJ 'Love Tone'.**

Basically, their tone controls are quite subtle over most of their rotation, providing a usable warming effect, right up to the last couple of notches where things thicken up to a tasty thick 'Woman Tone'. It's a taper to savour for sure.

tune and it copes admirably with all the extremities of dive bombing we threw at it.

Of course it helps that – like the hardtail version – the Electra V is fitted with a self-lubricating GraphTech nut. The V is also outfitted with a set of Gotoh locking machineheads (the hardtail has standard tuners), which are the elegant kind that simply lock by tightening the slot at the top of the string post with a screwdriver or even a small coin.

The Standard Electra is fitted with a sturdy JJ Custom bridge. This is a reassuringly solid chunk of aluminium that's been nickel-plated and compensated to intonate standard 9s and 10s almost perfectly. The whole unit is adjustable via grub screws to match your favoured gauge of strings, to the 25-inch scale length and by the two heavy-duty brass posts to tweak the action. What's more it's a single, direct point at which the strings' vibrations are transferred to the body and feels great beneath your picking-hand, too.

Each guitar is fitted with a pair of JJ humbuckers, wired to a three-way selector switch and a single volume and tone. Good basic stuff, but more variety is available from the tone knob which includes a push/pull coil split that uses extra components for a different take on the standard concept. Exact electronic details are not specified, so the jury is out until the aural evidence is given...

SOUNDS

...well yer 'onner, after due deliberation and all that, it seems that JJ Guitars have more than acquitted themselves on this one. A coil-split is often only a passable impression of a genuine single-coil tone, and generally gets regarded as a useful option for occasional use at



■ A novel approach to serial numbers, don't you think?



■ The headstock on these samples comes with a smart body-matching veneer

slippery Hendrix and Frusciante-type licks and partial chords. There's plenty of scope for tight jazzy excursions on both neck pickups, too – surprisingly appealing stuff.

Pushing the tone knob back home doesn't disappoint. With the bridge pickups this is a real gear-change, a huge surge of oomph that tightens the whole sound with more cut to the top end and a more muscular midrange. There's a welcome push to the lower frequencies too that should find favour with the heavy-inclined, as it's tight and punchy and just right for powerful, damped chugging chords and riffs. As might be expected, the hardtail version has a more solid core tone and more

best. In this case, however, the results are extremely impressive. There are elements of a P-90 at work here in my opinion; the output is gutsy and rounded, with enough midrange punch to prove convincing with a generous dose of overdrive. With the Electra V, there's more of an open, less focused vibe, only missing a touch of the standard model's excellent definition. On both guitars in all switch positions, however, these are just about the best tapped tones I've heard yet in a guitar.

Clean sounds are just as rewarding if you lean toward the warmer kind of single-coil tones, especially

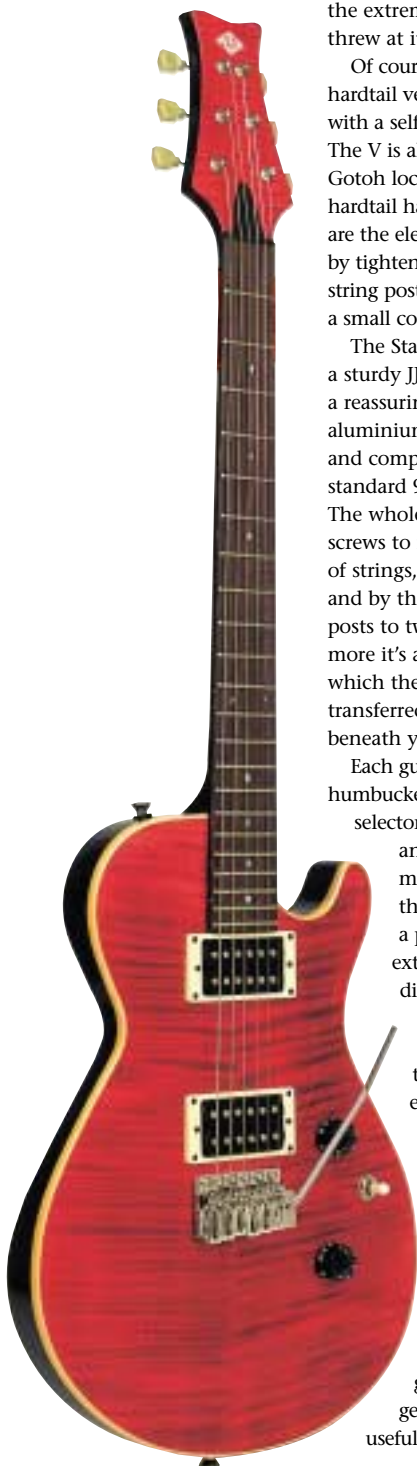
■ Two JJ Custom humbuckers and a coil split give the JJs lots of tonal options



GBRATINGS

JJ ELECTRA

| | |
|------------------|-------|
| BODY & NECK | ★★★★ |
| HARDWARE & PARTS | ★★★★ |
| PLAYABILITY | ★★★★ |
| SOUNDS | ★★★★ |
| VALUE FOR MONEY | ★★★☆☆ |
| GBVERDICT | ★★★★ |



DETAILS

A COUPLE OF CLASSY HUMBucker-LOADED GUITARS THAT OFFER GREAT BUILD, GOOD LOOKS AND PLENTY OF VERSATILITY



■ The Electra V features Gotoh locking tuners



■ The tone knob has a handy push/pull coil split



■ The Electra V has a superbly efficient vibrato



GBOPINION

JJ ELECTRA V

GOLD STARS

- ★ Excellent coil-tap tones
- ★ Comfortable neck
- ★ Very efficient trem

BLACK MARKS

- Side position dots could be larger

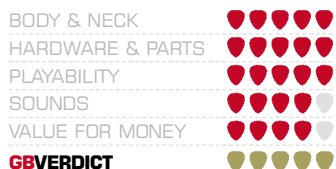
IDEAL FOR...

Covering a wide range of rock tones at a professional level

refinement about the top end, but the trade-off is missing out on the Electra V's airier vibe and higher midrange emphasis. Picking between the two would be a hard choice for sure, as both of these guitars are so impressive; no doubt your preference for Gibbos or Fenders as a general tonal ballpark will push you in one direction or the other.

GBRATINGS

JJ ELECTRA V



GBCONCLUSION

CLASSY BRIT AXES WITH VERSATILE TONES

■ **The question was; do JJ's have a British vibe? Up until now we've always thought so – along with the Gibson influence, of course – but with the Electras we reckon there's a touch more of modern USA flavouring added to the mix.**

It seems that apart from the headstock shape, this time around the inspiration has been drawn even more strongly from the other side of the Atlantic. But at the end of the day, are we that bothered? My opinion is a resounding no – these

guitars rank among the best we've seen lately in terms of looks, build quality and tone. Add to that the fact that the sound from the tapped pickups represents a genuine alternative to the full humbuckers and there's more than enough reason to rate these instruments as highly as anything else in this price range.

If you're considering a classy humbucker-loaded guitar with plenty of versatility, these are a vital addition to your list of instruments to try before you part with your money. **GB**