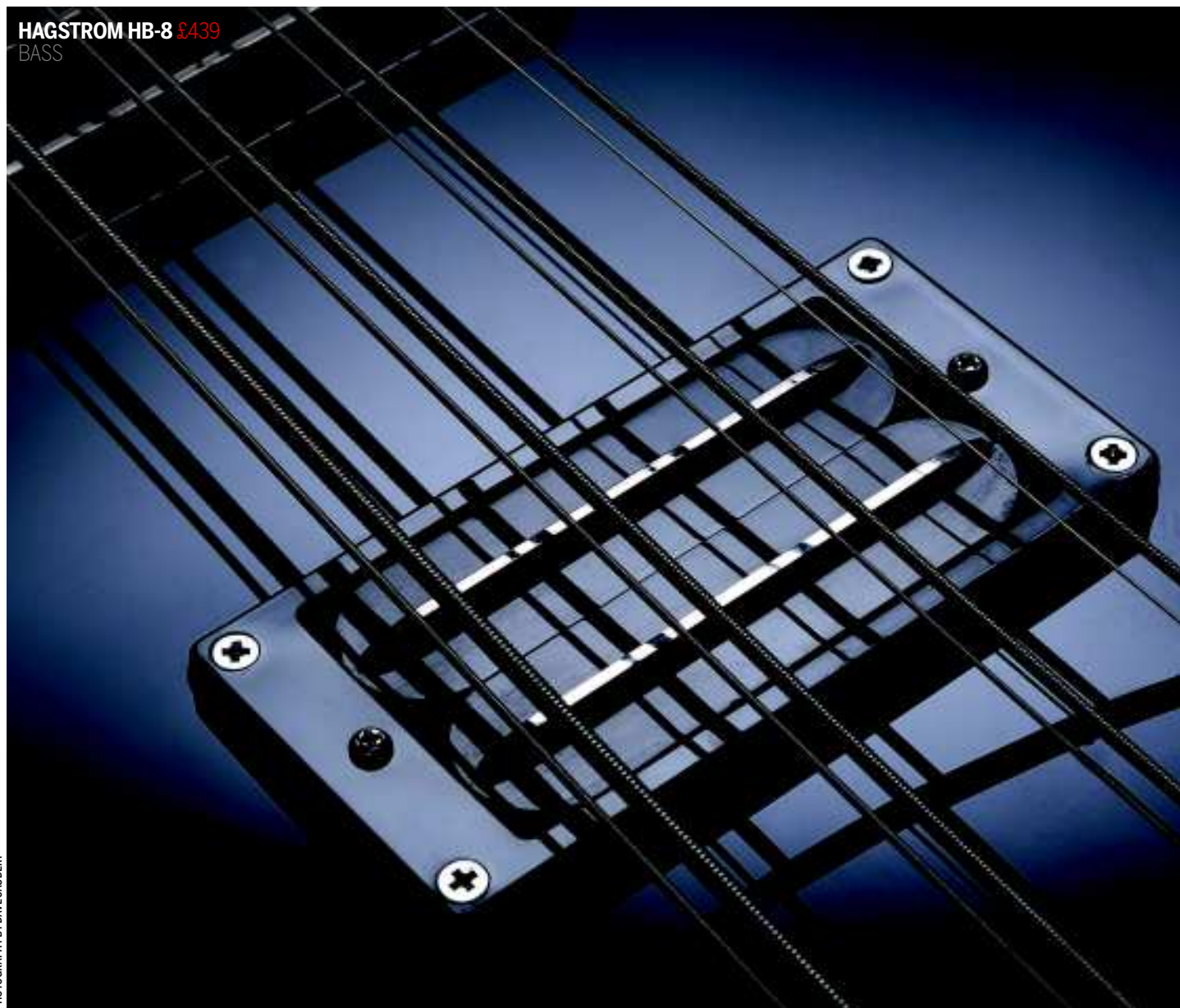


HAGSTROM HB-8 £439
BASS

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Hagstrom HB-8 £439

The bass guitar isn't just four strings. After all, why should guitarists have all the multi-string fun? *by Roger Newell*

An eight-string bass isn't a new concept. Many top-class bass players have dabbled with an eight-string over the years, including Chris Squire, Mike Rutherford, John Paul Jones, John Entwistle, Paulo Pinto and Jeff Ament. Even the Jimi Hendrix Experience used one on the Electric Ladyland sessions – as pictures of Noel Redding clearly show. This certainly helps in playing down any 'lead instrument' concerns that some might have, as effectively each bass string is doubled with a string an octave above (think heavier versions of the bottom four strings on a regular six-string). You don't have to tune in octaves – experimentation is

certainly encouraged – and Chris Squire, for example, uses the tuning eE-aA-aD-dG on his Rainey eight-string, introducing fifths to the sound from the basic D and G strings.

It was back in 1967 when Swedish manufacturer Hagstrom first introduced its eight-string bass. Now, 42 years on, it's been given a Far Eastern facelift. It's a tidily-produced bolt-on model with a 30.75-inch short scale, a nato body, and a maple neck with 'Resinator' synthetic fingerboard. It has a more streamlined look now, thanks mainly to new humbucking pickups. Meanwhile the original bank of switches has been replaced with a more user-friendly

rotary pickup selector that sits between the master volume and tone controls.

Like a 12-string guitar, the higher octave string is situated so that it's struck first with a downward pick. For maximum effect using a plectrum seems most sensible, but you can still get a very dynamic sound with fingers or perhaps a little Victor Wooten-style slap and pop.

Curiously, earlier versions of the HB-8 – even those in the recent Hagstrom catalogue – had the octave strings adjusted by smaller guitar-sized tuners, but our review model has a full set of Art Deco-styled, larger bass tuners. They work extremely well, of course, but do look a bit OTT to our eyes.

The Rivals

Surprisingly for such a niche market **Dean** offers both **Edge** and **Rhapsody** models as eight-stringers (£479 & £599). Both offer a 34-inch scale and active electronics, plus a basswood body and twin soapbars for the Edge, and mahogany body/bubinga top with EMG-HZ pickups on the Rhapsody. The **ESP B-208FM** eight-string (£470) is a full-scale, pro level model with a chamfered flame maple top, ESP pickups, three-band active EQ and 24 frets. Money no object? The **Washburn XB928** (approx \$1,500) is a real peach with its Bartolini pickups. They aren't available in the UK at time of writing, so you'll pay sterling equivalent. Finding a short-scale version is even harder, but **Hamer** used to make a very nice model if you can find one.



Sounds

Although the sonic abilities of the HB-8 may seem extremely specialist, it's easy to be seduced by its luscious tonal quality and huge sound. With a single volume and just one tone control, most of the sound blending relies on that all-important rotary switch. Six distinctive sounds are provided and they can be tailored to your preference with the tone control. The expected twin-pickup blends are particularly satisfying as they boost warmth and clarity at the same time.

Riffing on this beast is certainly fun and you just won't want to stop. But is this really a bass guitar, or a just thinly disguised lead instrument? It's your choice, but with a sound structure similar to the Burns Double 12, most players that

have used one have somehow managed to produce their own individual approach, and that's the key. For example, you can achieve a contrasting sound by using up-strokes, as this lessens the effect of the octaves, enabling a more conventional and fuller bass sound, which is even more pronounced when using fingers.

Essentially Hagstrom has provided the means for experimentation – it's up to you to make the most of this incredibly powerful sound. In the right hands it also has the potential to fill in for a rhythm guitarist, so your gig money could go further if your quartet becomes a trio.

Verdict

While not likely to be the first choice instrument for your

local blues jam night, if you have more adventurous leanings the eight-string bass could easily become a versatile and unusual part of your arsenal. Being presented with such an amazing sound and delivery is very exciting, although it's unlikely that you'll want this sound all night long. Yet as a second instrument it has masses of appeal, and at this price – for what is a very tidily made instrument – can you really afford not to try one? **G**

The Bottom Line

We like: Huge voice; uncluttered; well-made

We dislike: Single-sized tuners are a bit OTT

Guitarist says: A very special sounding instrument that really needs someone to champion it and make its sound their own. Could that person be you?

Hagstrom HB-8

PRICE: £439

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Twin cutaway, eight-string solidbody

BODY: Nato

NECK: Canadian maple, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 782mm

(30.75-inch)

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech, Black

Tusq/40.25mm

FINGERBOARD: 'Resinator' wood, pearl dot inlays

FRETS: 21, jumbo

HARDWARE: Fully adjustable chrome-plated BB-208 string-through-body bridge, sealed-gear tuners

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 20mm average (centres) for drones and main strings

ELECTRICS: Pair of Dyna Rail 1025 humbucking pickups, master volume and tone, rotary six-way pickup blend control

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4.5/10

OPTIONS: The HB-4 (£399) is the standard four-string version. A gigbag (£49.99) and hard case (£89.99) are also available

LEFT-HANDERS: To order only (£POA)

FINISH: Black (as reviewed), wild cherry transparent

Hagstrom UK&I

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The expected twin-pickup blends are particularly satisfying as they boost warmth and clarity at the same time



The string-through-body eight-string bridge is fully adjustable

Test results

Build quality ★★★★★
Playability ★★★★★
Sound ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★