



EIGHT-STRING ROUND-UP ~~£899~~ £1,699
ELECTRICS



Eight-string round-up ~~£899~~ £1,699

Why have a seven strings when you can have eight? Do more strings equate to a new style or are they an over-indulgence? Let's find out... *by Simon Bradley*

Guitars with more than six strings have been around for centuries. For example, the lute – a bowl-backed instrument popular during Elizabethan times – sometimes had its 12-strings augmented by a further four bass strings. The mandolin traditionally offers eight strings, while Martin trumpeted the 000-12 harp guitar back in 1902 – probably the very first double-neck – that comprised a total of 18 strings!

In 1964 Rickenbacker presented a one-off 12-string version of the short-scale 325 to John Lennon, even though he rarely grabbed it from its case, and introduced the 450/12 later that same year. The Monkees' Mike Nesmith famously wielded a Gretsch 12-string,

while Roger McGuinn and The Byrds defined the 12-string style during the late sixties.

However, each instrument mentioned has one thing in common; their strings doubled

The rivals

There are a number of further eights to try, not least the **ESP LTD** version of Steph Carpenter's signature, the **SC-608B** (£1,249). To really turn heads try to track down **Taylor's GT-8 Baritone** (see next issue for review), an acoustic that offers doubled G and D strings. Alternatively, check out the **Black Widow 8** (£2,220) from UK builder **Paul Stevens**, a truly lovely custom option.

the standard six, whether tuned to the same pitch or, in the case of a traditional 12, had the four bass strings an octave above their parent.

Here we're concerned with guitars that have strings that have their own identity, as it were, and we'd reckon eight independent strings on a single neck is about as extreme as it can get, especially for mainstream guitars.

Seven-strings are familiar beasts these days – in fact arguably the most famous of all, Steve Vai's Ibanez Universe, celebrates its 20th anniversary this year – but, for all our

searching and resource-scouring, we could only identify these three eights (plus our Rivals) that are available for the mainstream market and that subsequently neither command a custom-order price nor require you to wait months for it to be constructed.

For the purposes of this review, all three have been tuned to standard eight-string intervals – low to high, F#, B, E, A, D, G, B, E – although we should point out that the Ibanez has a factory tuning that's down a further half step (F to E_b).

Each has its own slightly different scale length, which is certainly interesting, and all are fitted with a set of EMG-808 humbuckers, the only such pickup available prior to Winter NAMM, when Seymour Duncan announced the eight-string version of its active Blackout pickups.

We'd assumed that the three guitars here would be much of a muchness, but that couldn't be further from the truth. Who knew that the world of the eight-string solidbody electric could be so diverse?

Who knew the world of the eight-string electric could be so diverse? >

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSE WILD

EIGHT-STRING ROUND-UP | 699
ELECTRICS



Ibanez RG2228 Prestige £1,699

The RG2228 is a member of the exclusive Japanese-made Prestige Series and features a neck of standard baritone scale at 686mm (27-inches). It's constructed from a five-piece sandwich comprising maple and wenge: a tropical tonewood (also used on one of the Jaden Rose guitars – see p102) not too far removed from ebony. It's been left unfinished.

As this is a Wizard neck, it's very thin – just 20mm depth at the first fret – which helps counteract the unavoidably hefty width – 54mm at the nut. Uniquely, the guitar sports a locking nut, complete with four plates rather than the more familiar three, and the Edge-III bridge bristles with an octet of fine tuners.

It's also worth emphasising that the guitar is factory tuned half a step further down, running from F to E_b, low to high, and is strung with a 0.009-0.065 set. Why the locking nut? We're not entirely sure, other than negating a well cut nut for tuning stability and maintaining the Ibanez 'norm'.

Sounds

The RG's ultra-thin neck does make it the easiest guitar to get

to grips with here, especially if you play with your thumb rooted to the centre of the neck. As ever, the ergonomic RG body shape is a pleasure to caress and, as eights do tend to waver in and out of pitch until the strings settle, the fine-tuners here make for a convenient tuning method.

The longer scale also allows for the firmest string tension, which allows hardcore riffing on the low strings to not only be particularly precise but also to have the clearest notes.



The bottom line

We like: Great neck and performance; excellent build quality

We dislike: The price, to a certain extent, but the guitar is worth it

Guitarist says: The Ibanez J-Custom team have produced yet another innovative and eminently playable guitar. We just can't put it down

ESP LTD FM-418 £1,189

The ESP line contains the only production signature eight-string that we're aware of, Steph Carpenter's STEF-B8, and although there is a version available in the cheaper LTD range too, this FM, which bears the body of an M Series guitar alongside the headstock of an F Series, is a standalone mainstream eighter.

Manufactured in Indonesia, the FM offers the shortest scale of the three (660mm/26-inches), which, in theory at least, will give the floppiest string tension, and a 55mm-wide graphite nut adorns the nicely proportioned headstock. The neck is fatter than that of the Ibanez and is factory strung to pitch with a set of 0.010-0.068 wires.

Again, pickups comprise an EMG-808 set, which are controlled by master volume and tone controls, plus a standard three-way toggle selector, and the LTD is one of two protagonists here to feature a Hipshot 8 bridge.

If we were to split hairs, we'd bemoan the lack of the ultra-metal ESP pointed headstock, but this is a nicely made eight-stringer that's very comfortable to play.

Sounds

In fact the more compact scale length does make the LTD feel slightly more conventional when compared with the others, which in turn makes it simpler to keep track of where your fingers are at any one time.

Offering a nicely tight tone overall, the floppy F# string does make defined riffs slightly trickier to control, although with extreme gain settings Zakk Wylde-style bent pinched harmonics do resemble whale song: a good thing.

The neck pickup gives a cool solo tone, the techniques for which are aided by the looser string tension, while the toggle's central position is great for cleaner passages.

The bottom line

We like: Shorter and more comfortable scale; floppy string tension feels great...

We dislike: ...but can cause tuning issues if you hit the strings too hard

Guitarist says: A perfectly good eight-string that's an option for those who don't like to struggle to play



Schecter Hellraiser C-8 £899

We've covered several examples of Schecter's Hellraisers over the past couple of years and no less than two eight-strings can be found among their number. As is the cornerstone of the Hellraiser spec, the body is mahogany with a quilted maple top, outlined with abalone binding. A three-piece mahogany neck includes the Ultra Access heel and wears its dark metal heart on its rosewood sleeve with a smattering of Gothic Cross inlays on the fingerboard.

With a 26.5-inch scale that sits between the length of the other guitars here, the Schecter headstock is, if anything, a little crowded with the D and A tuners almost – but not quite – touching each other.

It's arguably the most traditional in feel, too, with the 'board edges slightly squarer. That said, the sheer width of any eight-string neck does away with virtually any chance of playing with your thumb over the top of the fretboard, but it does play agreeably.

The two EMGs are controlled by individual volume pots plus a single tone and three-way toggle selector, and we have to say that – not for the first time –

grabbing the central knob to turn the bridge pickup's volume off is made needlessly vexing due to its positioning.

Sounds

It's the only guitar here with a mahogany body, so is this the reason for its darker voice? Quite possibly, it certainly is dark compared to the other two and provides a crushing metal-tone: think Meshuggah injected with lead.

Both the maple top and the active pickups contribute to a high-end boost that lets the huge tone cut when required, and clean it's probably the best of the bunch: adding a touch of chorus and delay to the neck pickup gives a lovely sparkling tone for augmented and suspended chords.

The bottom line

We like: Cool looks; huge tone; good price

We dislike: Crowded headstock; not much else

Guitarist says: An impressive and attractively priced eight-string with looks that set it apart



Don't panic! It's only two extra strings to worry about...



Black chrome, shell-like inlays and quilted maple: very classy!



The EMG-808 is the pickup of choice for all three guitars



Verdict

We've very much enjoyed our foray into the world of the eight-string, and heartily recommend them to those of you with the resources, patience and talent give one a go. It takes about an hour's worth of faltering playing before your brain catches up with your fingers and you stop fretting one string while picking another. Once up to speed, however, you'll soon stumble on some cool chord voicings to add to your repertoire.

If we were to choose just one of these guitars, we'd plump for

the Ibanez RG2228 because its longer scale length gives it the edge as far as playability is concerned. The Prestige range is always excellently put together and this example is no different. It has a lovely neck that's thin enough to encourage experimentation, and the ergonomic RG body shape will always have a place in our hearts. Yes, it's the priciest, but it's also the only one to include a high-spec flight case and we feel it's well worth the outlay.

That being said, both the Schecter and ESP models have

enough differences about them to merit their own plaudits. With differing scale lengths that equate to looser string tensions, each guitar plays well, and if extreme metal is your style, we can heartily get behind the C-8's mahogany body as its basic rhythm tone is truly gargantuan.

Marrying that 660mm (26-inch) scale with a basswood body, the ESP mixes what is arguably the most traditional playing experience with the most relaxed string tension and, as such, would be one to try if

you have no clue what to expect from an eight.

The Schecter is excellently priced at under the £1,000 mark but all three are well worth forking out for and our rule of thumb would be that the more experienced a player you are, the longer a scale your eight-string should have.

The Black Widow we mention in the Rivals section of this review offers a 29.45-inch scale, which we're eager to try, but for now we'll continue to experiment with the lovely Ibanez RG2228.

Eight Breed

What does it take to get the most from an eight-string? Here are some tips...

The main consideration once you've bought an eight-string is where to get new strings. Just about every major manufacturer produces seven-string sets, but almost none go one string further. With the low F# coming in at between 0.065 and 0.070, the temptation would be to buy a single bass string to augment a seven-string set; however, the enlarged ball end wouldn't fit the ferrules of any of these three guitars. Fortunately, single ultra-heavy guitar strings are available from sites such as StringsDirect.co.uk or Stringbusters.com. Both D'Addario and Elixir offer a range of gauges, and we hear that Schecter will soon introduce an eight-string set, for around £15. Be aware that at 440Hz tuning, the lowest strings can be very floppy, even with a guitar boasting a longer scale length, so intonation can be a real issue with the lowest chord voicings. Also, it does take a while for your hands and grey matter to get in sync when playing individual strings so our advice would be to stick with it; once you get over defaulting to the keys of F# or B, the additional strings can really give your style a shot in the arm.

Don't miss the video on the Guitarist CD for more.



Ibanez RG2228 Prestige

PRICE: £1,699 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Japan
BODY: Basswood
NECK: Five-piece maple/wenge laminate
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 24 jumbo frets
SCALE: 685.8mm (27-inch)
NUT/WIDTH: Locking / 54mm
HARDWARE: FX Edge III-8 fixed bridge, locking nut, Ibanez tuners
ELECTRICS: Two EMG-808 humbuckers, volume, tone, three-way toggle
FINISHES: Galaxy black only
Headstock
0121 508 6666
www.ibanez.com

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



ESP LTD FM-418

PRICE: £1,189
ORIGIN: Indonesia
BODY: Basswood
NECK: Maple
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 24 jumbo frets
SCALE: 660mm (26-inch)
NUT/WIDTH: Graphite 55mm
HARDWARE: Hipshot 8 bridge, locking nut, Grover tuners, all black
ELECTRICS: Two EMG-808 humbuckers, volume, tone, three-way toggle
FINISHES: Black only
Selectron
01795 419460
www.espguitars.com

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Schecter Hellraiser C-8

PRICE: £899
ORIGIN: South Korea
BODY: Mahogany, quilted maple top
NECK: Mahogany
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 24 jumbo frets
SCALE: 673mm (26.5-inch)
NUT/WIDTH: Tusq/54mm
HARDWARE: Hipshot 8 bridge, Schecter locking tuners, all black chrome
ELECTRICS: Two EMG-808 humbuckers, volume, tone, three-way toggle
FINISHES: Black cherry only
Westside Distribution
0141 248 4812
www.schecterguitars.com

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★