



PRS SE Paul
Allender

Eastwood
Airline H44
Deluxe

Group Test

Seriously sexy mid-priced axes!

Ugly guitars? No thanks! Welcome to TG's mid-priced beauty pageant. We have four hot contestants, but which will be crowned the fairest axe of them all?

WORDS **ED MITCHELL**

BC Rich
Assassin FX6Flip the page to
find out which
one won our
Group Test
head-to-headDean Cadillac
1980

What do you look for in a guitar? You want to say that playability and inspiring tone comes first, don't you? OK, those are obviously important things on your wish-list, but let's end this dance right here and admit the real reason we fall in love with certain guitars. It's because of the way they look. The bottom line is that we buy with our eyes. If a guitar doesn't look the business you'll walk right past it and try something else.

Having a great-looking axe is the reason why Eddie Van Halen covered his guitar with tape; why Zakk Wylde took the time to nail beer bottle tops to the front of his Gibson Les Paul Custom; and it's what made you want to play guitar in the first place. Playing a great-looking guitar makes you feel cool. There's no shame in it! That's why for this Group Test we went looking for guitars that not only

promised a great playing experience and lashings of quality tone, but that would also satisfy your eyeballs when you're trawling the music shops. Ultimately, we want the ones that look best when you're standing in front of your bedroom mirror or rocking a Battle Of The Bands night.

Meet the lovelies...

The four guitars in TG's beauty pageant don't want to work with children and animals and they couldn't give a toss about world peace. These axes just want to kick your ass. On paper, three of our contestants (the BC Rich Assassin, Dean Cadillac 1980 and PRS SE Paul Allender) look evenly matched. Each

offers a similar specification that includes a pair of humbuckers, set-necks and, not forgetting, seriously sexy cosmetics.

This being a TG Group Test we decided to throw in a wild card to keep things interesting. The Airline H44 Deluxe, an Eastwood reissue of an obscure 50s Stratotone model, couldn't be more different in appearance to the other three guitars in this month's Group Test. That said, the H44 Deluxe shares the twin humbucker, set-neck spec of the PRS, Dean and BC Rich guitars. With four hot electrics on test, this should be quite a contest. But which guitar will be crowned TG's belle of the ball? Turn the page to find out...

"THE AXES IN TG'S BEAUTY PAGEANT DON'T GIVE A TOSS ABOUT WORLD PEACE. THEY JUST WANT TO KICK YOUR ASS"



BC Rich Assassin FX6 £495

Bang on target?



Body

The body is a bit overdressed for our taste but BC Rich has still made a great guitar

Knobs

The Assassin's control knobs look like revolver cylinders. How cool is that?

Headstock

We can't help feeling that this head is too small for a BC Rich axe

BC Rich: purveyor of the finest pointy bits, scary headstocks and model names that make the competition quake in their boots. We love the Ironbird, Warlock, Bich and Warbeast. But can BC Rich do tasteful? Let's find out.

The sizzle: This isn't your typical BC Rich. It's all a bit, well, pretty, isn't it? Fear not, hairy brethren. Beneath that glossy exterior lurks a slaving metal monster that has every right to wear the BC Rich logo on its headstock.



We say: You know that expression 'less is more'? Well, BC Rich doesn't. Understatement just isn't its bag, but we can't help feeling that the company went a bit too far with the Assassin FX6. The overblown

cosmetics of this six-string Christmas tree left us feeling a little queasy. And that's a shame because we think the Assassin is a great guitar in just about every other department.

The chunky neck with its full compliment of 24 jumbo frets is a shredder's dream while the Mafia humbuckers are as fat as Tony Soprano. The range of tones available is staggering: each pickup has a coil tap (to transform it to a singlecoil) and there's a reverse phase switch that produces a nasal tone,

which sounds better than that description suggests.

Cosmetics aside, the only other thing we don't like is the tiny headstock. This is a BC Rich – it should have a big, daft headstock! Ditch the tinsel and fatten up the head and this Assassin would blow our heads off. Are you listening, BC Rich?

SUMMARY

For: Great playability, tonal options

Against: Bit of a tart's handbag

★★★★★

TG says: Plenty bang for your buck!

At a glance

BC Rich Assassin FX6

BODY: Nato with maple veneer

NECK: Maple, thru-neck

FINGERBOARD: Ebony

SCALE: 25.5"

PICKUPS: 2x Rockfield Mafia humbuckers

CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone, three-way pickup selector switch, coil tap switches and reverse phase

HARDWARE: Chrome

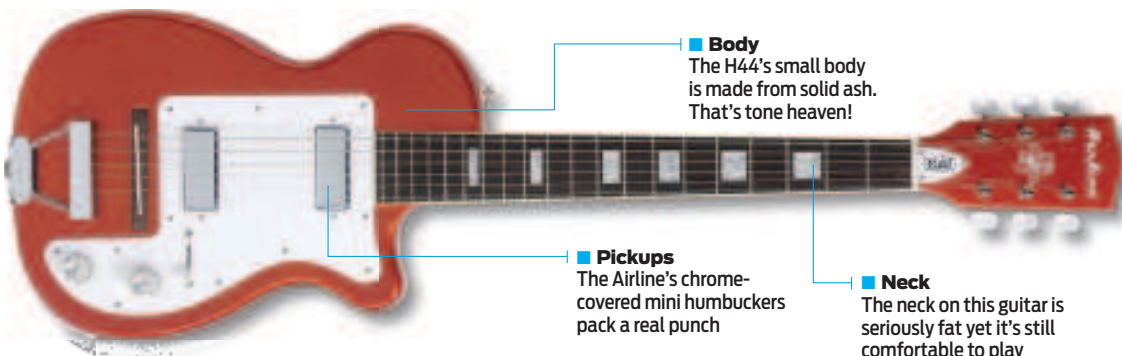
FINISH: Dragon's Blood [shown], Trans Black, Trans Blue

CONTACT: Rosetti 01376 550033

WEB: www.bcrich.com

Eastwood Airline H44 Deluxe £349

First class axe, Easy-Jet price



Body

The H44's small body is made from solid ash. That's tone heaven!

Pickups

The Airline's chrome-covered mini humbuckers pack a real punch

Neck

The neck on this guitar is seriously fat yet it's still comfortable to play

We've got a full-on monster chubby for Eastwood's reissues of forgotten classics. There we've said it: we feel better. While the original axes that its reissues are based on can be expensive (and hard-to-find), Eastwood's guitars are affordable and generally better built than the originals.

The sizzle: According to Eastwood, the 1950's Stratotone H44 guitar is "one of the coolest



blues/slide guitars ever made. We've kept 99 per cent of this baby true to the original, but we've improved the pickups and upgraded to an adjustable neck." But was it worth all that effort?

We say: The H44's neck is so chubby it could give flab-Nazi Gillian McKeith sleepless nights. You'd think its considerable girth would make it tough to play, but fat necks can feel surprisingly comfortable. The H44 sweetens the deal with a low action. This guitar is a blast to play.

Thanks to the solid ash body and twin mini humbuckers this sweet little Airline sounds as fat as it feels. We spent most of our time playing slide on the H44 (it absolutely rules for slide!) but it'll

handle anything you throw at it: trashy blues, punk, you name it.

The H44 is a bit quirky to win this Group Test outright, but it made our final decision a tough one. The other three guitars may be slim and glamorous, but Eastwood's cute little chubster offered us plenty to love.

SUMMARY

For: It's pretty, awesome playability

Against: Too quirky for some?

★★★★★

TG says: Eastwood makes our day

At a glance

Airline H44 Deluxe

BODY: Solid ash

NECK: Maple, set-in

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood

SCALE: 24.75"

PICKUPS: 2x mini humbuckers

CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone, three-way pickup selector switch

HARDWARE: Floating bridge, trapeze tailpiece

FINISH: Copper [shown], black

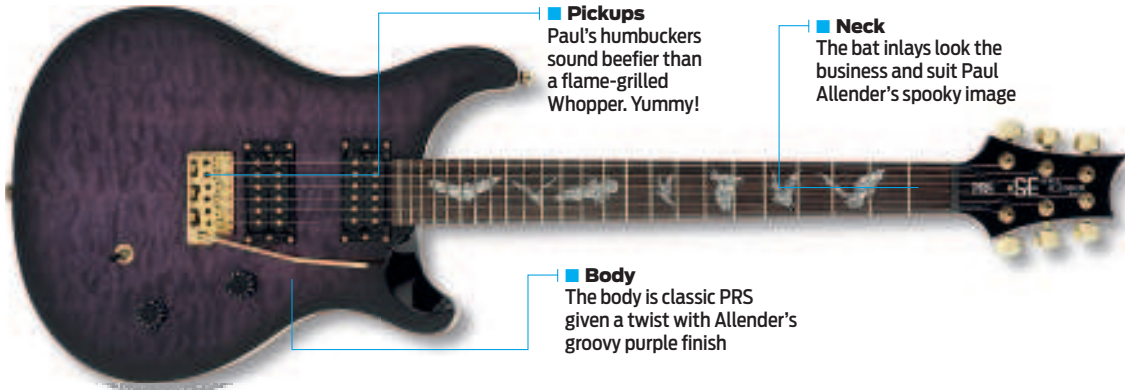
CONTACT: michael@myrareguitars.com

WEB: www.myrareguitars.com

"WHILE WE'D PREFER THE US CADILLAC IF WE HAD THE CASH, DEAN'S 1980 IS NO BOOBY PRIZE"

PRS SE Paul Allender £649

Cradle of loveliness!



Pickups
Paul's humbuckers sound beefier than a flame-grilled Whopper. Yummy!

Neck
The bat inlays look the business and suit Paul Allender's spooky image

Body
The body is classic PRS given a twist with Allender's groovy purple finish

At a glance

PRS SE Paul Allender

BODY: Mahogany, maple
NECK: Maple, set-in
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
SCALE: 25"
PICKUPS: 2x Allender humbuckers
CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone, three-way pickup selector switch
HARDWARE: Gold
FINISH: Allender burst
CONTACT: Headline Music 01223 874301
WEB: www.prguitars.com

Come the day that he decides to give up dressing in scary make-up and calling Jesus a lady's front bottom or something, Cradle of Filth's Paul Allender could consider a career in guitar design. His SE model proves that a guitar can sound mean and still look pretty.

The sizzle: Earlier this year when we interviewed Paul, he had this to say about his SE signature model: "It sounds so aggressive and plays amazingly. I can't



believe it's an SE. It's so good that I'm going to play it onstage with Cradle of Filth."

We say: We're with Paul on this one – this guitar is the balls! It's light and well-balanced, plays

beautifully (thanks to a slim neck), and looks the business. Allender has managed to breathe some fire into the well-worn PRS formula replacing the classic bird fingerboard inlays with awesome-looking bats. We love that purple Allender Burst finish too. Plugged in, this guitar is versatile with enough tonal variation to handle any genre from country to rock, though most of these guitars will end up in the hands of metal players.

SE Allender models are flying out of music shops like a bat out

of hell at the moment, in part because of its street price of around £560. We only managed to get hold of one thanks to Trevor Durrant's Guitar Centre in Colchester (01206 794470), but by the time you read this there will be more SE Allenders in the shops. Just don't expect these beauties to hang about.

SUMMARY

For: Stunning looks, playability

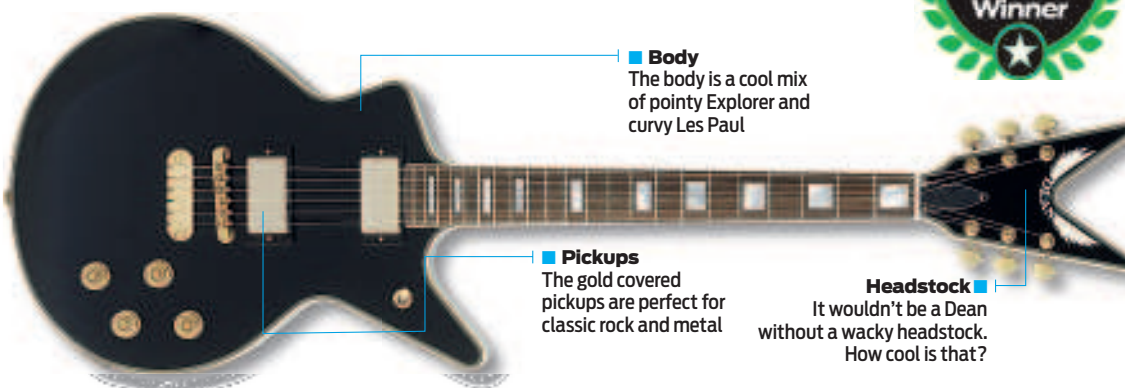
Against: You need Paul's taste

★★★★★

TG says: Bat's the way to do it

Dean Cadillac 1980 £499

Explorer meets Les Paul



Body
The body is a cool mix of pointy Explorer and curvy Les Paul

Pickups
The gold covered pickups are perfect for classic rock and metal

Headstock
It wouldn't be a Dean without a wacky headstock. How cool is that?



At a glance

Dean Cadillac 1980

BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Mahogany, set-in
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
SCALE: 24.75"
PICKUPS: 2x Dean humbuckers
CONTROLS: 2x volume, 2x tone, three-way pickup selector switch
HARDWARE: Gold
FINISH: Black
CONTACT: Bill Lewington 01268 413366
WEB: www.deanguitars.com

Regular TG readers will know how much we love the wonderful guitars of Dean. While Dimebag Darrell's Razorback and Razorback V guitars rock our world, our favourite Dean of all time is the Cadillac.

The sizzle: Famous Cadillac players include Steve Stevens and Glen Drover of Megadeth. This Cadillac 1980 is the mid-priced model, and we've found it online selling as low as £399.



We say: We were lucky enough to have a US-made Dean Cadillac in the TG office to compare the mid-priced 1980 model to. Maybe that's an unfair comparison – the 1980

is a quarter of the price of the American guitar, after all – but hey, that's life. As it happened, the cheaper Cadillac needn't have worried. For your 500 sheets you get quality hardware, 22 fat frets, gold hardware and a decent pair of gold covered humbuckers. This guitar is so affordable that we'd even consider splashing out on a pair of Bare Knuckle pickups.

While we would prefer the US Caddy if we had the cash, the Cadillac 1980 is no booby prize.

This guitar plays and sounds great. We're natural born posers at TG too, so we really dug the fact that strapping on this killer looking guitar made us feel like instant rock stars. Yep, the Caddy 1980 from Dean is the whole package. And that's why it won this Group Test.

SUMMARY

For: Awesome looks, killer playability

Against: Nothing to see here!

★★★★★

TG says: Another Dean dream