

WARWICK THUMB BO FOUR-STRING BASS £1,959

BASS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOBY SESSIONS



Guitarist
CHOICE

Warwick Thumb BO four-string bass £1,959

Warwick thumbs its nose at the competition as we acknowledge an unsung bass classic *by Roger Newell*

Launched at a time when graphite was considered the bass material of choice, Warwick's exotic, all-wood Thumb bass was seen by some to be totally dead in the water from the outset. Strange then that 25 years later, not only is the Thumb still very much in the running, it has become something of a classic, while those fibrous fancies have

waned in popularity. A review of the latest Thumb BO (Bolt-On) will show why these basses are still very much appreciated, but when it comes to analysing what happened to the graphite phenomenon, well, that can wait for another day.

The initial neck-through-body construction and hand finishing processes used on the early Thumb bass made it a

prohibitively expensive instrument for many, but with the introduction of the bolt-on alternative, costs have been modified so that more players can enjoy the experience.

But like any Warwick bass this has a very organic and tactile quality that is delightful to the touch. And there is an added ergonomic element here coming from the curved and downsized body that fits so snugly into the player. Being both practical and comfortable it soon has player and instrument working as one.

Despite its bolt-on nature this is also still a solidly constructed instrument, and where the neck joins the body there is a whole area of the concave back shaved down to make upper fret access even easier than on a regular reduced heel design. In spite of the full scale length and small body this is a beautifully balanced bass that positively begs to be played.

Along with the natural wood construction comes a set of active electronics to support the trademark sound of the Thumb, which is known for its clear punchy attack and full-blooded mid-range.

The Rivals

If it's the 'classic' element that appeals then the **Sadowsky Metroline** four-string (£2,200) boasts 'ultra-vintage seventies' features. A Fender Jazz Bass-inspired beast, it's one of the best production line models around, equipped with the same pickups and preamp as the pricier NYC basses. The **Music Man StingRay HH** double humbucker (from £1,595) has made a big impact. With a six-bolt neck it's tough and roadworthy, offered in a variety of hardwoods and also available as a five-string. **Spector's Legend 4 Custom** (£720) is a good value-for-money choice, complete with the Spector NS curved body shape and a quilted maple top. Two EMG-HZ pickups are supported by the EMG B30 RevS three-band active EQ.

Sounds

All Warwick basses have the ability to excel in both throaty tonal qualities and sound projection but this fully active circuit takes those elements to a higher level. This tonal slant is usually associated with good use of middle frequencies, yet interestingly this doesn't come from a dedicated onboard middle control, but rather from the blending of the pickups. This is never an exact science but the Thumb operates within tight parameters with plenty of options as you alter the blend,



The back is concaved where body and neck meet to aid upper fret access

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The MEC pickups can be run active or passive for a wide range of tones

History of Thumb

The story behind an elusive classic of the bass world

In 1985 Hans Peter Wilfer, the founder of Warwick, decided to make a modified, headless version of its popular Streamer bass incorporating ideas from pro bassist John Davis. However, it looked so good with a headstock that it was fortunately retained and it has gone on to become Warwick's best selling bass.

The initial body shape has been slightly modified and four-, five- and six-string formats, fretted or fretless versions and right- or left-handed models made available. Wood combinations have varied and neck-through-body construction (NT) was joined by bolt-on (BO) in the 1990s.

Active electronics and pickups fitted in pairs have been employed from the outset but the early J-style EMGs have been surpassed by the MEC pickups of today. However, thanks to Warwick's 'happy to customise' policy you'll see all sorts fitted.

With so many build, string complement, woods and pickup options, the definitive Thumb bass is an elusive beast. It does however, open a world of possibilities.

Fitted with a brace of MEC J-style pickups and associated two-way electronics it packs plenty of wallop

so finding the tone you want soon becomes second nature.

Fitted with a brace of active MEC J-style pickups and associated two-way electronics it packs plenty of wallop over that tasty tonal spectrum. It has a distinctive growling character with great low end but remains clear and well defined in action and packs a mighty punch. The dual stacked bass and treble controls work from centre detents, as does the blend control, so touch reference is easy. Although there is plenty of variation on offer, pull up the volume control and you defeat the active circuit to unleash a second sweep of passive sounds. This sound is considerably tighter and cleaner and relies totally on the blend control and physical pickup positioning to vary the tone. It allows the natural sound of the bass to emerge and the lower output reveals some lovely funky hollows so is ideal for studio use.

Verdict

The Thumb bass is something of an unsung classic, and could perhaps be considered the PRS Custom of the bass world. It certainly has that exclusive quality about it, yet in this more

cost effective – albeit still pro – bolt-on guise it has become more attainable. It's one of the most compact full-scale basses ever produced and still feels like a hand-built instrument in every respect.

With an abundance of presence and attack added to that bottom-end growl, it's no wonder that Warwick basses are so loved by metallers and funkists. Yet a bass as good as this can be whatever you desire it to be – it's all down to your imagination and flair so make sure you try one. But beware, the more you play it the more you'll want it. **G**

The Bottom Line

We like: Ergonomic, down-sized body; throaty rasping tones; punchy delivery; excellent quality build

We dislike: The price used to be an issue, but thanks to this new construction there is little to fault now

Guitarist says: A stunning and unique instrument that really needs to be tried before you can fully appreciate what it can do. A classic bass? We think so



Warwick Thumb BO four-string bass

PRICE: £1,959 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: Germany

TYPE: Twin cutaway, solidbody, four-string, active

BODY: Ovangkol, arched top & concave back

NECK: Three-piece Ovangkol, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 864mm (34-inch)

NUT/WIDTH: Warwick Just-A-Nut III/39mm

FINGERBOARD: Wenge

FRETS: 24, ultra-hard jumbo

HARDWARE: Black-plated Warwick two-piece bridge, Warwick-logo'd closed gear tuners

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 19.25mm average (centres)

ELECTRICS: Active MEC J/J pickups, active MEC two-way electronics, volume (pull up for passive), blend, bass and treble controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4/8.8

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, and fretless versions available at no extra cost

OPTIONS: Basic options include chrome or gold hardware plating and finish, while custom options cover virtually every aspect of the instrument. See website for details

RANGE OPTIONS: Thumb Bass BO five-string, oil finish (£2,122); Thumb Bass BO six-string, oil finish (£2,359); Thumb Bass NT (neck-through) four-string, oil finish (£3,256); Thumb Bass NT five-string, oil finish (£3,494); Thumb Bass NT six-string, oil finish (£3,804)

FINISH: Natural oil (numerous coloured oil and high gloss options)

Warwick

0161 839 0666

www.warwick.de

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★ >