

IBANEZ RG3250MZ, RGD2120Z & RG870Z £1,789, £1,399 & £739
ELECTRICS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY SIMON LEE

ROCK STEADY

Ibanez streamlines the workhorse RG Series, with a number of new electrics from both the high-end Prestige and the more affordable Premium series. We dig out our spandex and prepare to rock... **by Simon Bradley**





What We Want To Know

1 So, what are the headline features of these new guitars?

Well, there are quite a few and we will, as ever, outline them, talk about their relevance and explain how they affect the playability of the guitars. There's a new neck design, new pickups and a revamped locking vibrato system, so there's lots to get into.

2 What's the difference between Prestige and Premium guitars?

In a nutshell, the recently introduced Premium range is intended to match the build quality of the high-end Japanese Prestige series with models built in Indonesia. The RG870Z is part of the series and we'll point out the basic distinctions between the two ranges.

3 That Desert Sun yellow finish looks awfully familiar to us...

It's actually even more garish than the colour upon which it is based: the desert-yellow finish of the first production run of Vai's Ibanez JEM. It also echoes the original RG550, a guitar that has its own place in the RG3250's legacy, and we'll compare the two.



The Desert Sun yellow finish is gloriously garish



DiMarzio's Air Norton is quite P-90ish

Ibanez can take a great deal of credit for reinvigorating the 1980s rock guitar market. In 1986, Van Halen had parted company with original singer David Lee Roth, who immediately teamed up with another hot shot, a certain Steve Vai, to produce two albums of jaw-droppingly brilliant music. The story of the development of Vai's then-new signature model, the JEM, has been told several times within these pages, but the knock-on effect was that other players wanted the same style of instrument. Ibanez quickly realised this and within months of the introduction of the JEM777 in 1987, had also introduced the RG550, with four colour options that included both Desert yellow and the newer Fire Alarm red, alongside black and white.

Resetting the controls of our time machine to 2011, we welcome a trio of new Ibanez electrics – including one that heartily echoes those halcyon days; an extended scale metal machine and the third with

forms part of a new, more affordable series.

RG3250MZ

The RG3250 is part of the Japanese-made Prestige series, but its eye-popping finish isn't its only feature to hark back to the eighties. The mega-skinny Wizard neck is certainly something else that made the RG so fashionable back in 1987 and here it's constructed from a five-piece laminate composed of three strips of hard rock maple and a further two thinner pieces of walnut, a concept Ibanez employed on the 20th Anniversary model, the RG20th. So thin were the necks of the early 550s that some suffered from a serious amount of neck warping, so this design, further stabilised by two titanium rods that run either side of the central truss rod, should dispel any concerns.

The fingerboard offers a quite 'flat' 430mm radius, with huge frets, and the rear of the neck is almost as flat in feel. It certainly won't be for everyone, but that was never the idea, and with its

The Rivals

RG3250MZ

Three high-end examples from some household names; the **Jackson USA SL1 Soloist** (£2,398), **ESP's Custom Shop Kamikaze-1** (£3,250) and John Petrucci's **Music Man JPXI** (£2,800). We'd happily have them all.

super-low action this is a rock soloist's dream.

Controlled by a five-way lever selector, volume and tone the pickups are an H/S/H/ configuration of DiMarzios – a Tone Zone unit at the bridge, a centrally-situated True Velvet single-coil and a neck-mounted Air Norton humbucker.

The influence of Vai's JEM is continued by the expansive cutaways of the basswood body and the vibrato is the modern version of the critical Edge design that took the Floyd Rose principle to even more extreme heights of upward play and



At higher gain settings, the RG3250MZ brings out the harmonics for all sorts of Vai-style histrionics

in-use comfort. It also features the innovative ZPS3 string system, which allows you to alter the stiffness of the vibrato unit via a set of removable springs that can be clipped off the block.

Sounds

Considering the weight of the music that has been made with representatives of the RG series, the basic tone is brighter than you may assume, not least due to the aforementioned low action and neck dimensions. Positions two and four of the five-way, which marry the inside humbucker coils of the relevant DiMarzio with the middle True Velvet, give a Strat-like tonality perfect for both those Knopfler moments and funky chords. Add some digital delay and chorus, and you have the perfect eighties-style clean tone.

With additional amp drive, the bridge humbucker gives an extremely clear overdrive sound, nicely suiting styles based around flurries of semiquavers; higher gain settings bring out the harmonics for all manner of Vai-style histrionics.

The neck Air Norton doesn't provide similar lengths of smooth sustain at higher gains as the JEM's Evolution pickup, sounding more akin to a P-90-style pickup than anything else, but the quintet of pickup selections proves to be very versatile indeed.

The Edge-Zero vibrato stays perfectly in tune irrespective of the abuse it receives, and even though the guitar is bereft of the JEM's iconic lion's claw routing behind the bridge, it's still possible here to pull the G-string up to a full fifth without any ill effects.

RGD2120Z

With an extended scale of 672mm (26.5 inches), the RGD2120Z is intended for down-tuned use and, as such, is strung D to D out of the box. It's just shy of the 'official' 27-inch baritone scale and is comfortably playable without ever feeling that you're in danger of overreaching for the low chords. A differing scale length rarely requires a change in fingerboard radius, and it remains at 430mm here. The neck feels slightly rounder than the RG3250 and, huge though



A four-bolt neck keeps things secure

the 24 frets undoubtedly are, the guitar has again been nicely set up.

This is an RGD, which includes guitars that feature the same RG body design, albeit with a serious amount of additional shaping, most significantly at the forearm and belly contours. The end result is a look that's not too far away from the Music Man JP range and the stunning Silver Cobweb finish of our example lends itself perfectly to the guitar's metal intentions.



The Silver Cobweb finish of the RGD sets out its metal intentions clearly

The Rivals

RGD2120Z

Extended-scale guitars often come under the baritone banner, so try the **Schecter C-1 EX** (£729) or even the **Gibson Explorer Baritone** (£1,099 approx). With a 26.25-inch scale, **Yamaha's** now discontinued **Drop 6** models are well worth tracking down on eBay.

Sounds

Where baritone guitars can lose clarity at high levels of gain, the combination of the hot V Custom pickups and the low action gives a tight and abrasive tone that also marries cut with adequate beefy midrange. It doesn't have the shrill high-end of an EMG89 and provides the perfect tones to satisfy one's classic metal thirst.

There's no discernible change in string tension either, even though the guitar is strung with a standard 0.010-0.046 set, so Hetfield-style staccato downstrokes feel as authentic as they did on the ESP LTD SnakeByte that we reviewed recently, and using the toggle's middle position warms proceedings up for a fuller tone that's ideal for solos.

Cleanly, the richness of the lower tuning gives slower passages just the right amount of brevity and adding a slow phaser gives a tone Mark Tremonti would surely enjoy. The neck pickup retains the treble edge, and single-note Mastodon-style licks remain clear, fat and distinct here.



RG870Z

This is the most affordable model in the new Premium series, and is therefore best suited to demonstrate the thinking behind it. “The concept of the Premium range was to bring high-end features and production methods into the price bracket of the normal gigging musician,” says Chris Taylor of Ibanez’s UK distributors, Headstock. “Craftsmen from the Japanese Prestige production factory were used to implement the Premium production line in Indonesia to ensure that quality was of a high standard.”

The DiMarzios are replaced with CAP-VM pickups designed by Ibanez using oxygen-free copper wire specifically for use with selected Premium instruments and the neck, although comprising the five-piece laminate as discussed, has a rosewood board with a slightly more curvy 400mm (15.75-inch) radius. It does feel a bit fatter than the RG3250’s, and the smooth feel of the fret ends adds a true dollop of class.

Hardware is an obvious area from which to shave costs without necessarily impeding the performance, and the vibrato here is an Edge-Zero II, which is the cast rather than machined version of the full-spec Edge-Zero, and it operates in the same manner.

Sounds

The marginally tighter radius allows for a more conventional feel and the fretwork is without doubt of the highest quality. In other words, the RG870 is a player’s guitar and although the



The new Premium range is designed to provide superior build quality at a more affordable price



The DiMarzio pickups are replaced with Ibanez CAP-VM units

Edge-Zero II doesn’t allow quite as much upwards play as the other guitars here, the gamut of vibrato techniques are realistically attainable.

If anything, the tone is slightly fuller here – no doubt thanks to the bigger neck and slightly higher action – and is therefore a more versatile option. Rocking out on all three guitars is great fun, but AC/DC

riffs sound more convincing here than they do with the RG3250. So, admirable tonal versatility, excellent construction and a more than attractive SRP? Sign us up.

Verdict

The two Prestige guitars are certainly eye-catching and are as likely to repel as they are appeal. The RG3250MZ is a

The Rivals

RG870Z

Two modern rock machines, the **LTD M-330R** (£625) and **Jackson DK2** (£682) offer a great feel at a decent price. **Yamaha’s Pacifica 510V** (£399) offers a boutique vibe and tonal versatility at an even more enticing price.

true blast from the past and the skinny neck, awesome fluorescent finish and slick performance make it an ideal metal rock machine. The RGD2120Z’s extended scale and dark looks will ensure it has a place in many a metal player’s heart and the contouring to the RG body shape does increase its comfort. Both do cost a fair bit, but remember that they are



high-end Japanese-made instruments, and as such we're comfortable with the price points for both.

However, the RG870Z will arguably have the widest appeal, retaining the luxurious Prestige feel at a significantly lower price and, aside from the pickups and hardware, we're hard pressed to spot where any cost-cutting measures have been made. It offers the classic Ibanez feel without any over the top livery and, as a first proper rock guitar or even a quality spare, it'd serve you very well indeed.

Playing guitar is supposed to be fun, and you'll be grinning like a loon when you have any of this trio in your hands. Why not try them out and see what we mean?



Ibanez RG3250MZ

PRICE: £1,789 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Japan
BODY: Basswood
NECK: Maple/walnut composite with titanium reinforcement
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5 inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Locking/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Maple, 430mm (17-inch) radius
FRETS: 24, jumbo
HARDWARE: Edge-Zero vibrato with ZPS3 Zero Point system, Gotoh tuners, all Cosmo black-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54mm
ELECTRICS: DiMarzio DP155 Tone Zone (bridge), DP175 True Velvet single-coil (middle), DP193 Air Norton humbucker (neck), five-way lever pickup selector, volume, tone
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.72/8.2
RANGE OPTIONS: RG3550MZ (£1,789), RG2570 (£1,399), RG2550Z (£1,355)
FINISHES: Desert Sun yellow (as reviewed), Frozen Ocean blue
Headstock
0121 508 6666
www.ibanez.co.jp/eu

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Ibanez RGD2120Z

PRICE: £1,399 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Japan
BODY: Basswood
NECK: Maple/walnut composite with titanium reinforcement
SCALE LENGTH: 672mm (26.5 inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Locking, 43mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 430mm (17-inch) radius
FRETS: 24, jumbo
HARDWARE: Edge-Zero vibrato with ZPS3 Zero Point system, Gotoh tuners, all Cosmo black-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54mm
ELECTRICS: Ibanez V8 Custom humbucker (bridge), V7 Custom humbucker (neck), three-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.95/6.5
RANGE OPTIONS: RGD2127Z seven-string (£1,485), RGD320Z (£499) or RG7320Z seven-string (£859)
FINISHES: Cobweb Silver metallic (as reviewed), Invisible Shadow

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Ibanez RG870Z

PRICE: £739 (inc soft flightcase)
ORIGIN: Indonesia
BODY: Basswood
NECK: Maple/walnut composite with titanium reinforcement
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5 inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Locking/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Maple, 400mm (15.75-inch) radius
FRETS: 24, jumbo
HARDWARE: Edge-Zero II vibrato with ZPS3 Zero Point system, Ibanez tuners, all Cosmo black-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54mm
ELECTRICS: Ibanez CAP-VM2 humbucker (bridge), CAP-VM1S single-coil (middle), CAP-VM1 humbucker (neck), five-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume and tone
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.9/8.6
RANGE OPTIONS: RG870QMZ (£875)
FINISHES: Black (as reviewed), Laser blue



Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

The Bottom Line

Ibanez RG3250MZ

We like: The great finish; high-octave rock tones; truly incredible neck
We dislike: It's not cheap; the garish finish won't appeal to everyone
Guitarist says: A true slice of eighties rock – this is a wonderful and fun guitar with which to escape these miserable times

Ibanez RGD2120Z

We like: Great metal tones; cool finish; very comfortable to play
We dislike: Only the unavoidable restrictions caused by the factory-set D to D tuning
Guitarist says: As an alternative to a baritone, this is a great option for truly crushing metal tones. It plays nicely and looks great too

Ibanez RG870Z

We liked: Great feel; more conventional fingerboard radius; versatile tones
We disliked: Nothing
Guitarist says: A genuinely impressive modern rock guitar, with a feel and tone that belies the rather attractive pricetag