LTD TE-202 £419

The metal guitar giant attempts to reinvent a vintage classic. Should we expect scenes of a distressing nature?

TG WAS on hand when Fender master builder John Page showed off the company's first relic'd guitar in 1997. We have to admit we thought the concept was a bit bonkers at first: perfectly good guitars beaten up and sold at a premium. Then we tried one and fell in love with the comfortable feel that comes with a new guitar that's had a good seeing to.

The new 'distressed' LTD TE-202 looks like it's had a tough life too, but only from a distance. Take a closer look at the four-piece alder body and you'll see that the worn sunburst finish has been sprayed over with a satin varnish. There are no exposed patches of wood or the laquer cracks that you'd find on a heavily relic'd Fender, and the distressed vibe isn't random either. Each example of the TE-202 we've seen has almost identical wear.

> "Visually, it pays homage to Ronnie Wood's ESP"

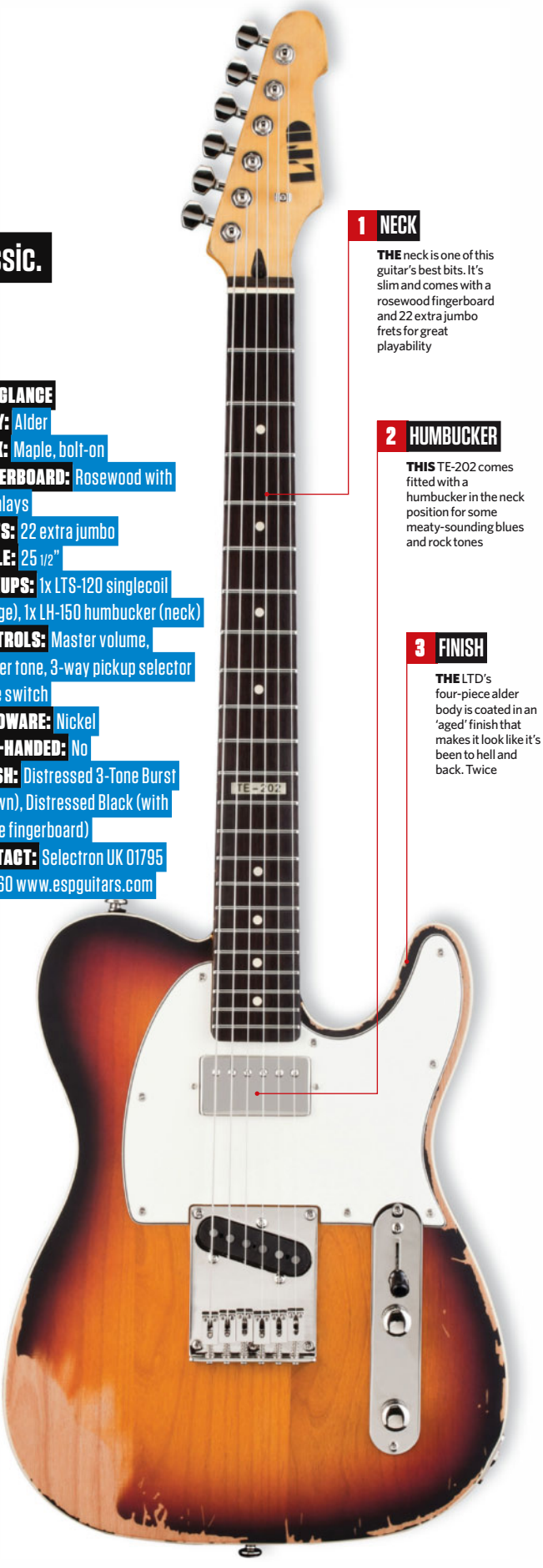
The TE-202 does have a few things that set it apart from the T-style crowd, though. It's not a signature model, but visually it pays homage to Rolling Stone Ronnie Wood's signature ESP, with a 3-Tone Burst finish and singlecoil (bridge) plus humbucker (neck) configuration. The slim bolt-on neck has a rosewood fingerboard with a 14-inch radius that's flatter than modern Fender and Squier Telecasters, which makes bending strings above the 12th fret easy. You can set the action nice and low as well, which could be a big deal if you're more used to playing modern shred machines than vintage classics. Access to the guitar's upper frets is made simple thanks to a tapered neck joint, and the 22 bend-friendly jumbo frets seal the deal on the TE-202's great playability.

The bridge singlecoil is loaded with an alnico magnet, while the neck 'bucker is powered by ceramic numbers. The bridge unit twangs like a beast through a clean channel, but possesses enough power and focus to sound the absolute balls with overdrive; you can get a seriously great AC/DC-style rhythm tone with this pickup. The neck humbucker is perfect for overdriven blues and Page-style wailing, and the ceramic magnets provide the 'bucker with some bite so it never sounds muddy.

If you're in the market for a Tele, there's a world of choice. Try to get your head around this: there are over 80 Telecaster-based models in the Fender and Squier catalogue alone. That includes the Classic Series '72 Telecaster Custom (£970) our LTD model loosely pays tribute to. While the TE-202 can't compete with that guitar's authentic vintage vibe, its playability and stonking pickups make it the guitar equivalent of a Tommy gun in a violin case. OK, the finish might not suit everyone, but you'll be able pick up one of these guitars for a fair chunk under £400. Now, there's nothing distressing about that.

Ed Mitchell

AT A GLANCE
BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with dot inlays
FRETS: 22 extra jumbo
SCALE: 25 1/2"
PICKUPS: 1x LTS-120 singlecoil (bridge), 1x LH-150 humbucker (neck)
CONTROLS: Master volume, master tone, 3-way pickup selector blade switch
HARDWARE: Nickel
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Distressed 3-Tone Burst (shown), Distressed Black (with maple fingerboard)
CONTACT: Selectron UK 01795 419460 www.espguitars.com



SUMMARY

FEATURES	
SOUND QUALITY	
VALUE FOR MONEY	
BUILD QUALITY	
PLAYABILITY	
OVERALL RATING	★★★★