

Quicktest

Welcome to Guitarist's regular round-up of the best of the rest of the gear that's passed through our hands this issue

Washburn J7 £675

A strong candidate for your first jazz guitar

CONTACT Sound Technology PHONE 01462 480000 WEB www.washburn.com



This striking fat-bodied Chinese-built semi-acoustic sits at the head of Washburn's Jazz Series, a range that also includes the hardtail J5, the truly versatile J4 and the J3, which features a Florentine rather than Venetian cutaway.

The obvious inspiration here is the Gibson L-5 and, with a depth of 94mm at the rear strap pin, the body, which comprises a bound top of solid spruce and heavily quilted maple back and sides, offers the customarily intimate playing experience.

As a whole it looks truly stunning, with the natural finish and gold hardware complementing each other nicely, and we particularly appreciate the use of Grover Imperial machineheads to mimic those used on classic

Gretsch semi-acoustics.

Pickups comprise a pair of Washburn humbuckers, with wobbles coming courtesy of a licensed Bigsby B6G tailpiece, tune-o-matic bridge and a rosewood bridge base.

Sounds

The Bigsby has been set rather stiffly, which in turn allows for subtle movements rather than Duane Eddy-style dives, but with a suitably warm and clean jazz tone, the guitar sounds, as expected, fat and deep.

Spruce and maple, by their very nature, are predisposed to produce a tight and trebly tone that, in this case, is more than offset by the body's cubic volume. The tone is well-balanced, even if it is a little uninspiring when strummed acoustically, and it's eminently usable for associated styles when plugged into a good amp.

Verdict

This is a comfortable player, something that may well attract guitarists who are considering the purchase of a jazz or rock'n'roll guitar for the first time. The J7's price even includes a padded gig-bag and, on this evidence, it's certainly well worth a try. [SB]

The Bottom Line

We like: Looks great; friendly neck; price

We dislike: A little flat acoustically

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



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MOTU ZBox £35

Get more of a real amp feel from your software

CONTACT Music Track PHONE 01767 313447 WEB www.motu.com

With each new update, companies producing software amp simulations strive to not just get their models sounding accurate but to also build more 'playability' into them, providing more of the feel of playing through a real amp. It may be, though, that any lack of 'feel' has a more physical cause due to an impedance mismatch with your guitar.

Instrument inputs on some audio interfaces, mixers, PAs, wireless transmitters and the like can have impedances that differ radically from guitar amps, maybe resulting in a thin sound as well as a perceived lack of responsiveness – something that the ZBox is designed to remedy, by matching the output of your guitar to the input of your audio interface. It does this by using circuitry that emulates the two-jack switching network found on many classic amplifiers, complete with an analogue simulation of the input valve grid.

Not much bigger than a matchbox, the passive ZBox needs no battery and features

a 4.9m cable with 6.4mm jack to plug into your audio interface plus Hi-Z and Lo-Z jack inputs for your guitar – choose whichever sounds best.

In Use

The ZBox yields sonic and tactile improvements, more dramatic, we found, with some interfaces than others, but typically providing a less brittle sound with a more rounded tone and improved response to picking dynamics, making playing guitar into a computer feel a little more natural.

Verdict

If you feel you need an immediate and affordable upgrade to the amp sims playing experience, ZBox will give you it. [TC]

The Bottom Line

We like: Can transform playing through a DI/instrument input

We dislike: Nothing

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Electro-Harmonix Enigma: Qballs For Bass £160

Intelligent sound-shaping for bass

CONTACT Music Ground PHONE 0113 243 8165 WEB: www.ehx.com

This is yet another Electro-Harmonix pedal specifically designed for bass and another positive addition to its range. Expect the usual robust construction and discover the most adjustable envelope shaper ever packed into a stompbox. No less than eight rotary controls that essentially work in pairs to alter the mode of the effect, the response time, duration, filter sweep and also include the Q control. For even more sound options there's the switchable analogue distortion. Separate sockets are provided for dry

and effects plus connection for an optional expression pedal.

Sounds

Envelope-shaping is one of the more extreme effects that really works well with bass, as it also adds an extra rhythmical dimension to your sound. From tight autowah-type sounds through to the slower, more expansive termination of the 'fold', this guarantees to add some funk into your playing. Adding distortion provides the opportunity to unleash the dirtier elements of the Qballs and accentuates the enveloping

to mega proportions. It's often said that less is more, but when it comes to bass effects you often need to push things to extremes – this is one of those pedals that benefits from the 'give it some welly' ethos.

Verdict

If you feel your bass playing sometimes lacks excitement and would benefit from becoming phat and phunky now and again, this is definitely for you! From the sublimely

subtle to the full-on, plus some low down dirt, Enigma delivers the lot while still retaining great note definition. [RN]

The Bottom Line

We like: Fine-tuning without a loss of dynamics

We dislike: Initial set-up may seem a bit complex – it's worth taking your time

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Yamaha CG122MS £219

One of the best start-up nylon-strings you can buy

CONTACT Yamaha Music UK PHONE 01908 366700 WEB uk.yamaha.com

Earlier this year Yamaha re-jigged its line of affordable CG 'classical' guitars, but you don't need a footstool and a Spanish repertoire to appreciate them. The Chinese-made CG122MS kicks off the new range and with its understated classical style,

solid, albeit wide-grained, Englemann spruce top, laminated nato back and sides and three piece-laminate nato neck with a tidily-fretted and bound rosewood fingerboard, it's a good place to start your nylon journey. But it isn't just the specification and price – not

for the first time, Yamaha's obsessive attention to detail creates an instrument that plays, feels and sounds like something more expensive.

Sounds

With its full, classical-style 52mm (2.05-inch) nut width

and 58mm spread at the bridge, married to a very comfortable neck profile, the CG122MS plays well straight out of the box and is only let down by slightly round-topped frets.

Sound-wise it has a nice clear, dry high end, robust mid-range and only slightly light bass. It's nicely in-tune (not least thanks to a compensated saddle) and we get position markers at the fifth and seventh frets.

Verdict

Great quality for the price, impressive sound and projection, and nicely in-tune with easy playability – here's a perfect nylon-string for beginners and an ideal inexpensive guitar to have kicking about at home for more experienced players. [DB]

The Bottom Line

We like: Quality spec, build and sound; price; matt finish

We dislike: Slightly rough topped frets

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Headway EDB-1 £199

Get that electro-acoustic sounding sweet

CONTACT Headway Music PHONE 01869 338393 WEB www.headwaymusicaudio.com



The EDB-1 (Sheer Acoustic Equaliser Direct Blend) is a battery (or adaptor)-powered external preamp for electro-acoustic guitars and other stringed instruments. It's based around a five-band interactive EQ with which you can shape your sound.

There are mono and stereo jack inputs for plugging directly in and there's also an XLR mic input with phantom power. Your first port of call is a three-way range switch with guitar, bass or violin

settings, which cuts unwanted low-end tones below the usable frequency range of the instrument. A tunable notch filter and a phase-reverse switch can counter feedback and other resonance problems. Two outputs allow you to split the signal, perhaps to an onstage amp for monitoring and the FOH mixer.

In Use

Compact enough to fit into your guitar case, the EDB-1 can sit on a flat surface or be attached to a mic stand. It can also be clipped to your belt, although it may be too heavy to be comfortable. The notch filter is very effective for zeroing-in on a problem frequency and eliminating it, while the five EQ knobs operate in well-chosen ranges to get an electro sounding just right – a Godsend if you have no EQ integral to your pickup system.

Verdict

A great box of tricks that can painlessly improve the experience of gigging with your electro-acoustic. [TC]

The Bottom Line

We like: Musical EQ; effective notch filter; signal splitter

We dislike: A little bulky for belt-hanging

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Rare Breed Guitars guitar parts from £32

A new British company making fine quality hardware. About time!

CONTACT: Rare Breed Guitars PHONE 07595 388360 WEB www.rarebreedguitars.com

A great way to give a guitar a makeover without breaking the bank is to fit some higher-grade parts. Rare Breed Guitars might not have the largest selection as yet, but this Oxford brand fits nicely in the mid-range, price-wise, and judging on the parts we received, centres on quality.

Two pairs of knobs (flat- and dome-top) for T-style guitars (£35 a pair) plus a set of three compensated saddles (£32) illustrates what's on offer. Aside from this, Rare Breed currently offers other knurled knob choices and six-saddle solid brass bridges for S- and T-style guitars (both £150).

"We draw inspiration for our products from many areas and famous players," says Rare

Breed. "Our heavy knurled solid brass knobs, for instance, were inspired by the late, great Danny Gatton... our solid brass T-style bridge is inspired by Keith Richards' famous heavily customised 'Micawber' Telecaster."

In Use

The heavily nickel-plated knobs feel weighty and exude quality – the heavily-knurled sides will help anyone who needs more onstage grip. The compensated saddles are beautifully made and improved intonation (and overall 'ring') on our Far Eastern host guitar.

Verdict

If you need your T-style guitar to play a little more in-tune,

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then these Rare Breed saddles are highly recommended. New knobs are a luxury, but these are very well done. It's nice to see they're made in the UK too. We look forward to seeing more from this firm... [DB]

The Bottom Line

We like: Design and quality

We dislike: Nothing

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Yamaha Pocketrak W24 £270

A new version of Yamaha's portable stereo recorder that slips into your pocket

CONTACT Yamaha UK PHONE 01908 366700 WEB uk.yamaha.com

In our last stereo recorder round-up, Yamaha's very compact and lightweight Pocketrak 2G got the prize for the best portability, due to its ability to slip into virtually any pocket that isn't on the size 10 girl's jeans your bass player is squeezing himself into because someone told him it looks cool. Now there are two new equally diminutive Pocketraks, the C24 (£159) and the W24, tested here. Featuring a built-in stereo microphone in X-Y configuration, the W24 can record three hours worth of 24bit/96kHz sound (or 13.5 hours of MP3) to its onboard 2GB flash memory, with more recording capacity available by adding a microSD card. A single

AA battery will yield up to 38 hours of 16-bit pcm recording or 56 hours of mp3. Other features include a peak limiter to prevent overload, a small playback speaker, onboard tuner and metronome, plus a remote control.

In Use

The Pocketrak is easy to use and quick (recording can begin just 4.5 seconds after pressing the power button) and sound quality is excellent for something so small. The remote control frees you up to place the recorder in an optimum position (it can screw onto a mic stand) and will eliminate any handling noise. It's also convenient for band practices,

as you can start and stop recording without moving from your playing position.

Verdict

The ultra-portable Pocketrak W24 is ideal for capturing gigs, practices and your musical ideas wherever you are and transferring the audio to computer at your leisure. [TC]

The Bottom Line

We like: Truly pocket sized; X-Y mic configuration for stereo; remote control
We dislike: The onboard speaker is a bit quiet

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Planet Waves NS Capo Lite £10.99

There's now really no excuse not to own a capo

CONTACT D'Addario UK PHONE 0191 300 3000 WEB www.daddario.co.uk

This is by far the least substantial member of the NS Capo range and is manufactured, not from aerospace grade aluminium, but a hardy thermoplastic called Acrylonitrile Butadiene Styrene (or ABS).

Comprising two rubber-edged claws, the capo is

tightened by means of a screw wheel that increases pressure in a very straightforward manner. It weighs mere ounces, so there's no danger of your guitar becoming in any way unbalanced and, as befits many of Ned Steinberger's designs, it's a very sleek yet practical piece of kit.

In Use

We found that the capo works perfectly on every six-string electric we could lay our hands on, as well as standard four-string basses. It was also usable on most acoustics too, although it struggled with the Taylor Baritone GT-8 featured on page 88. However, for classical

guitars, you should use the specific NS Capo.

The NS Capo Lite applies equal pressure across all strings and although we found Planet Waves' boast of a one-hand positioning regimen a tad optimistic, it's certainly easy to use and quick to loosen, move and re-tighten with two mitts.

Verdict

There's no reason that we can think of why every player shouldn't possess one of these cool little capos in their gigbag or knocking around a rehearsal space. The fun that can be had with even a rudimentary use of such a thing shouldn't be underestimated and it's refreshing to be able to categorically state that, at a mere £10.99, this is an absolute, bona fide bargain. [SB]

The Bottom Line

We like: Ease of use; lightweight construction; low price
We dislike: Nothing

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

