





SCHECTER HELLRAISER SPECIAL SOLO-6 £599

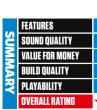
aim of this test is to grow up without growing old, the Hellraiser hits the bullseye. You'll clock the luxurious maple grain through the smoky finish of the contoured body and think

'mature'. Then you'll spot the occult inlays and active EMGs and think 'mental'. This model is dignified, statesmanlike and fiendishly metal – a bit like Tony Iommi. And it's only £599. Result.

The sticking point is that Schecter appears to have taken the term 'heavy metal' literally. The Hellraiser is a serious spinebender. That 'more is more' philosophy extends to the

maple neck. The jumbo frets and unobtrusive heel are great for hard, soulful, Zep-speed riffing, yet the 22nd-fret cut-off point and palm-filling profile means it doesn't feel as acrobatic as some of the other contenders.

Physically, it's divisive, but when it comes to tone, this guitar was born to tear it up. The by-product of all that timber is bags of sustain and character, and while the 85 has a fat, wide grind, the biggest thrill comes when you push that EMG 81 bridge unit hard and unlock a scything high-gain lead tone. We're not sure the Hellraiser qualifies as a shredder's choice, but if you're after a singlecut with rocket fuel, it demands attention.





DEAN DECEIVER FM BLUE £799

HAS Dean grown up?
The busty babes and
hairy endorsers are still present and
correct, but the launch of models
such as the Deceiver suggests

they're now targeting hardrock players who don't consider themselves the emissaries of Satan.

The Deceiver doesn't look particularly metal. On the shelf, this is the anti-Razorback, with a wholesome aquatic finish (other options are available,

but you'll trade the active EMGs for Dean's passive Time Capsules). To play, it's comfortable but hardly shred-tastic, with a body that's the most contoured of the bunch and a chubby C-shaped neck that eats up bends and vibrato. You can play fast, but it's no Jackson – more like a Les Paul with bigger balls.

Physically, it's comfortable and familiar, but not particularly memorable, and we'd be moving on if it weren't for the tone. Not every model in our test has a maple top,

flame maple top

FRETS: 24

SCALE: 24 3/4"

humbuckers

EMGs)

NECK: Mahogany, set

FINGERBOARD: Ebony

PICKUPS: EMG active 81

CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x

tone, 3-way pickup selector

HARDWARE: Black nickel

FINISH: Trans Blue (pictured

other options don't have

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LEFT-HANDED: No

(bridge) and 85 (neck)

and it does make a subtle difference. When you play clean, there's a bit of class and brightness. Then, when you hit it, the combination of the 81 and 85 'buckers, maple and mahogany adds up to a stinging brick-wall-like tone.

So the Deceiver rocks, but it's also pricier than its rivals and doesn't always make a convincing case as to why. That price tag probably rules out hard-up metallers and it's battling with the big boys to attract the metal aficionados.



EC-401 £739

FROM our trucker caps to our facial fuzz, TG Towers is a haven for frustrated James Hetfield wannabes. His vibe doesn't come cheap, though. The ESP catalogue lists the big man's Truckster at £1,985, and even the LTD version will sting fans for £1,099.

AT A GLANCE

FRETS: 24

SCALE: 243/4"

humbuckers

BODY: Mahogany

NECK: Mahogany, set

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood

PICKUPS: EMG active 81

CONTROLS: 2x volume, 1x

tone, 3-way pickup selector

HARDWARE: Black nickel

FINISH: Black (pictured),

Olympic White, Vintage Black

CONTACT: Selectron 01795

419460 espguitars.com

LEFT-HANDED: No

(bridge) and 60 (neck)

Officially, the EC-401 has nothing to do with Metallica, but if you've been priced out of the Truckster market, this model could be your back door into that arena. There's no maple top, and that derivative mahogany singlecut doesn't do anything we haven't seen before, but the neck is our second-favourite in the group. It has a skinny U profile that nails the lot, from heavy down-picked thrash through wahtastic doublestop

bends to Hammett histrionics at the top frets. It even has the same fret inlays as the Truckster, although the fretboard isn't the most comfortable.

Refreshingly, like the Truckster and unlike the previous contenders, this model features EMG 60 and 81s. While the bridge deserves props for its searing lead, it's the neck 60 that's the star turn, supplying a kill 'em all crunch whose body, bark and brightness remind you why active pickups own this genre.

Despite its modest looks the EC-401 is a monster. In a lesser Group Test, it would have stormed home, but it narrowly misses the gold today.

FEATURES
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE FOR MONEY
BUILD QUALITY
PLAYABILITY
OVERALL RATING



ditched BC Rich for Ibanez, it
was another reminder that
for all the latter's monkey
grips and flouncy pickup
switching systems, the
firm can still get down,
dirty and hellishly heavy.
On paper, the ARZ700
has heavyweight artillery,
with a straight mahogany
body and a fusion of EMG
60/81 active humbuckers.

The ARZ700 also comes in second cheapest and has arguably the most iconic logo on its headstock. You might say it looks identikit, but this is the sleekest, most comfortable model we've tested, with a gorgeous heel, fast-riffing profile, slippery board with well-finished medium fretwire and a slightly 'firmer' feel to the 25-inch scale.

Tone differences between

these four axes were always going to be subtle, but the hard. edgy, characterful roar of the Ibanez swung it. EMGs can be less convincing when played clean, but we love the rich, woody, slightly angry twang in that context, and that's nothing compared to the mayhem when you push those units over the edge.

Any of these axes would do the business, but there's just something about the go-faster, play-harder,

rock-louder ARZ700 that knocks the mature-metal vibe out of the park. It's the sound we heard in our heads and suits the number of sheets we have in our wallet.



