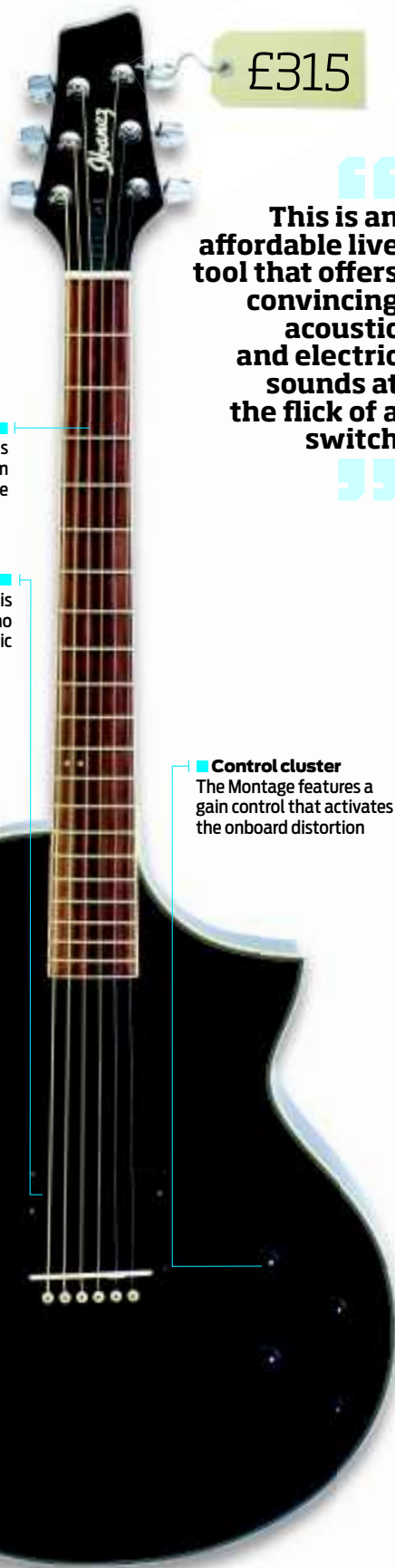




At a glance

Ibanez Montage MSC350

BODY: Spruce top, mahogany back and sides
NECK: Mahogany
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
SCALE: 641mm
ELECTRONICS: Ibanez AP10 mag pickup, under-saddle pickup, M300 preamp
HARDWARE: Chrome
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Black (pictured), Natural
CONTACT: Headstock Distribution Ltd 01215 086666
WEB: www.ibanez.com



£315

This is an affordable live tool that offers convincing acoustic and electric sounds at the flick of a switch

Neck

The Montage neck is classic Ibanez – it's slim and easy to negotiate

Magnetic pickup
 The soapbar pickup is a clue that this is no ordinary electro-acoustic

Control cluster
 The Montage features a gain control that activates the onboard distortion

Ibanez Montage MSC350

This electro-acoustic hybrid offers the best of both worlds on a budget

The concept of 'Swiss Army knife' guitars is nothing new. The guitar gene pool is oozing with configurations that aim to give you all the sounds you need from one guitar, but only in the past few years have manufacturers attempted to build acoustic instruments that also cut it as electrics in a live setting. The latest of these multi-tasking contenders is Ibanez's Montage MSC350, a smart hybrid with built-in distortion. Yes, really.

This model has a cool, contemporary look with a deep cutaway, gloss black finish and 'exclamation mark' soundhole. The slim neck should suit most players, regardless of hand size, and access to the upper frets is excellent if you like to venture that far. That's all the meat and potatoes. Time for the gravy.

The Montage has a piezo pickup in the bridge for amplified acoustic tones and a magnetic soapbar-style pickup mounted on the body for electric sounds. Each pickup has its own control panel and there's a three-way pickup selector switch that offers the acoustic pickup solo, the electric pickup on its own or both pickups combined. The piezo pickup's side-mounted preamp offers volume, a three-band EQ and an anti-feedback control. There's also a button to activate

an onboard electronic tuner. Textbook stuff. The magnetic pickup's control cluster consists of volume, anti-feedback, tone and gain that dials in distortion.

Unplugged, the Montage has a lively sound that's beautifully amplified by the piezo pickup. By way of contrast, the magnetic pickup makes most sense with the distortion on 11. While chugging out powerchords and riffs is a joy, you may find lead work tough and bending those acoustic strings can be a chore. You can, however, use the acoustic and distorted electric sounds simultaneously to fatten up your live sound. Speaking of live, the feedback controls squelched any squealing when we whacked up the volume.

Conclusion: The MSC350BK is the entry-level Montage (the upscale MSC650 and MSC700 models come in at £540 and £565 respectively), and for just over £300 you get an affordable live tool that offers convincing acoustic and electric sounds at the flick of a switch. OK, the onboard distortion won't give a Les Paul and Marshall amp any sleepless nights but it definitely sounds the part when you give the strings a good seeing to. We can't think of another budget hybrid that rocks quite as hard.

Ed Mitchell

SUMMARY

For: Tonal versatility, playability, price

Against: Playing leads can be tricky



TG says... A guitar with tonal schizophrenia

Even Rocky had a Montage, apparently

