


**VS**

CHARVEL SKATECASTER SK-3 ST VS WASHBURN RX 30

This month, two US behemoths meet in an alley for an entry-level dust-up. TG was there to pick up the teeth

Words: Henry Yates



YOU are not a sheep. You are not a lemming. You do not have to follow the zombie herd and buy a Les Paul copy with that fistful of bank notes that your eccentric uncle thrust into your hand over Christmas. Just as there's more than one way to skin a cat, so there are countless electric guitars out there that will scythe an audience in half without blowing your wallet off its hinges. The modern world is your six string salad bar, my friend, so tuck in.

TG has perused a slew of budget singlecut LP-style models lately, but this month we're serving up

something a little different via a pair of doublecut electrics that threaten to blow the roof off without bursting through our £300 price ceiling. Granted, they both have spec sheet features in common, including twin humbuckers, hardtail bridges, double-octave bolt-on necks and the rubber-stamp of a legendary US luthier. But with the Charvel Skatecaster SK-3 ST (£298) bristling with minimalist punk-rock attitude and the Washburn RX 30 (£210) leaning toward a go-faster shred vibe, this Head To Head is gonna be decided by our ears, our fingers and our full-length mirror.

>>>

CHARVEL SKATECASTER SK-3 ST

£298

Punk meets shred on Charvel's minimalist new model...

THE semi-hollow Charvel Surfcaster died too young. Launched in the early 1990s, this quirky, cock-eyed curiosity was a breath of fresh air, but ultimately just too damn weird. Five years after it bit the dust, Charvel is having another stab with the Skatecaster model that pinches the Surfcaster's original body shape, if not the semi-hollow construction.

Between the name, the matte-black finish, the snub-nosed contours and the punky one-volume format, early signs suggest that the Skatecaster SK-3 is aimed squarely at the mall-rat in the Good Charlotte hoodie. Confusing, then, that this guitar also throws in a compound-radius fretboard, double-octave neck and jumbo fretwire – all features that imply the virtuoso market. Best of both worlds, or an identity crisis? Guess we'd better sling this bad boy around and find out.

The Skatecaster is one of *those* body shapes. It's light and comfortable, hangs well on a

“A decent enough first guitar but it won't set off stampedes”

strap and, as you'd expect, the board plays smoother and faster the higher you climb. At the same time, though, it's not quite a proper doublecut, with the upper side of the neck hitting the body at fret number 17, restricting our low string access to the very top frets.

There's no faulting the no-nonsense China build, but it's hard to shake the sense that this slab-with-strings is almost a little too basic.

Certainly, that's an impression hammered home once you plug in. When clean, there's a slightly woolly quality to these Desolation humbuckers and frequently you will find yourself reaching for your amp's treble control, especially if you're a go-faster player who values pin-sharp note clarity over fat rhythm. As you'd expect from a Charvel axe, things improve when you flick to the filth,

but there's not enough sonic distinction between the pickups and the overall sense is of too much boom and not enough characterful bite.

It's a frustrating situation since the Skatecaster is a good overall package, and with just a bit more sense of control – surely not an unreasonable request for £298? – this guitar could have really impressed us. As it stands, it's a decent enough first guitar but hardly the sort of release that sets off stampedes.

AT A GLANCE

- BODY:** Solid mahogany
- NECK:** Mahogany, bolt-on
- FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood with keystone inlays
- FRETS:** 24
- SCALE:** 25 1/2"
- PICKUPS:** 2x passive Desolation pickups (neck/bridge)
- CONTROLS:** 1x volume, 3-way pickup selector
- HARDWARE:** Black nickel
- LEFT-HANDED:** No
- FINISH:** Flat Black (pictured), Flat Grey, Transparent Red (£346)
- CONTACT:** Fender GBI 01342 331700 www.charvel.com

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



The SK-3 ST's minimalist vibe is a bit too sparse



WASHBURN

RX 30 £210

...But cheap thrills win the day for Washburn

RESPECT

to Washburn. Even when the Chicago giant is manning the band saw for Nuno Bettencourt, it has one eye on the working musician with the Nando's loyalty card. And it's said musician who's in the sights of the RX 30: a doublecut that sails worryingly close to the £200 financial cliff-edge, beyond which electrics often turn to driftwood, yet packs a spec with no obvious Achilles heel. If this baby doesn't drop the ball, we could have ourselves an entry-level bargain.

There are decent ingredients here and they've been lashed together with a little more panache than the Charvel, with a carved maple veneer suggesting a pricier guitar, and control knobs (plural, take note) recessed into the basswood body. It would all be very adult and classy were it not for the back-kinked pointy headstock and reassuring presence of twin Duncan USM humbuckers,

apparently wound for some high-output rock.

Physically, we're not getting carried away. A rock bottom electric will never tear it up like a 70s Strat and the RX 30 is better described as comfortable and

more professional than an extension of your arm. That said, the cutaway is stellar, the unfinished neck works wonders for sweat monsters, and the widening radius is solid for chords and lead. It doesn't have any real identity but it's good enough to learn on and gig, and it matches the Charvel for comfort, and tops it for access.

Ultimately, the deciding slam-dunk comes from those aftermarket Duncan pickups. Twangy and woody when played raw, they offer three distinct voices when

you clunk between settings – the neck is warm and full; the bridge lean and mean – and it's a relief to be able to tailor this superior voice. Plus, Washburn wasn't kidding. When you push these units into the red they've got a napalm punch that belies the cultured looks.

Everybody's a winner in this review proving the entry-level sector is as competitive as ever. But that tree-hugging sentiment ain't gonna wash so let's be clear: the Washburn wins by a nose while the Charvel leaves with its just a little out of joint.

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Solid basswood with flame maple veneer

NECK: Maple, bolt-on

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with dot inlays

FRETS: 24

SCALE: 25 1/2"

PICKUPS: 2x Duncan USM humbuckers (neck/bridge)

CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector

HARDWARE: Chrome

LEFT-HANDED: No

FINISH: Flame Red Sunburst [pictured], Flame Blueburst

CONTACT: Sound Technology 01462 480000

www.washburn.com

The Washburn nudges ahead thanks to its pickups

“The guitar's unfinished neck works wonders for sweat monsters”

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