

VS

Words: Jonathan Horsley Photography: Dave Caudery

LTD EX-360 VS CHARVEL DESOLATION DST-1 ST

You needn't be restricted to conventional shapes when looking for a high-spec metal guitar. Let's get on point with two angular beauties from the metal establishment

IN this enlightened age of guitar manufacture, the rock and metal guitar player is spoilt for choice. The geometry is getting more wacky, with body shapes taking design cues from medieval weaponry rather than classic designs of yore. But then, so too is the spec; it's like each passing NAMM show after-party is getting more raucous, with manufacturers signing off deals with suppliers after drinking buckets of Anaheim hooch. How else can you explain the sort of generosity that sees this month's six-string deathmatch so typical of the proliferation of top-end spec in the mid-priced market?

Charvel's Desolation DST-1 ST is never going to break the bank, with some deals giving you change

from £500, and for this meagre sum it comes loaded with active EMGs, a solid mahogany body, through-neck construction and a flame maple finish. ESP's everyman manufacturing wing, LTD, has always considered bang-for-buck as central to its company credo, and similarly the EX-360 is a generous slab of mahogany with the one-two punch of those high-output, much coveted EMG pairings. And just because there's no Floyd Rose vibrato, that shouldn't put fretboard show-ponies off: both are set up for speed.

And so, to the battle: the pretty boy Desolation versus the noir hulk of the EX-360, the flamboyant rapier versus what looks like Lord Vader's first pro-quality planet smasher.





CHARVEL DESOLATION DST-1 ST **£634**

Hey, the 1980s called – they want the future back

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

CHARVEL'S

Desolation series comes in a variety of shapes. There's the Soloist for which the company is famous, a single cutaway Les Paul-style model, an elegant and curvy double cutaway, and a cool Surfcaster that's like a vintage pawn shop oddity that has been beefed up for metal. But the star-shaped Desolation is the most aesthetically bold. Beholden to 80s nostalgia for a commercial mandate, the Desolation is ample compensation for the non-existence of hoverboards and self-tying shoelaces, with playability that puts some serious hemi and demi to your semi-quavers.

Typically Charvel, the build quality is such that, even though playing in a seated position is slightly compromised by

the Desolation's lower wing, everything is geared for a comfortable speedy ride across the fretboard. Its slimline satin neck is equal to the lithe alternatives offered by Ibanez, and quicker than its LTD rival. The compound radius fretboard offers safe passage to the most ambitious lead player, with fat jumbo frets rewarding all those who stayed behind after guitar class to ask their tutor for extra-curricular instruction in Malmsteen-esque arpeggios.

There's no tone knob, but given that most players let their tone controls gather dust, is that such an issue? Well, kind of: it means the Desolation has effectively three tones (without, say, rolling back the volume

for more subtle crunch). In the bridge position, the EMG 81 is bright, harmonically responsive, and a little shrill in clean tones, but absolutely pulse-quickeningly

hot when handling leads and high-gain crunch. The mid-way position engages both the bridge's 81 and the neck's 85, and offers a happy medium for when you need shimmering cleans with a more low-end resonance.

With an EMG 85 billeted at the neck, it performs admirably for soloing in what that wise old sage Ozzy Osbourne likes to call 'the cow tone'. The Desolation's lead voice in the neck pickup certainly rounds out and tidies up intricate shred solos, letting clumsy players off the hook – the bridge pickup

just throws every mistake out there when you've got the gain cranked hard. But hey, let's not forget that power is what made you choose the Desolation in the first place. The through-neck construction and solid mahogany makes for predictably great sustain, and while the maple top and Abalam (laminated abalone shell) inlays aren't for everyone, you could always order the black finish. But c'mon: this is for the flamboyant among you. Are you going to live your life a chicken, or strut like a peacock?

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Mahogany, with flame maple top
NECK: Maple, neck-through
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with Abalam shark tooth inlays
FRETS: 24
SCALE: 25 1/2"
PICKUPS: EMG 81 (bridge), EMG 85 (neck)
CONTROLS: 1x volume, three-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Black nickel
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Trans Red (shown), Trans Blue, Trans Black, Black
CONTACT: 01342 331700
www.charvel.com



This guitar could only be more flashy if it had its own light and laser show

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LTD EX-360 £689

Black as midnight on a moonless night

SLEEK and sharp, all kinetic angles with a bulk befitting a scale model of a Star Destroyer, the EX-360 looks like some weaponised guitar from the future. Yet design-wise it's an antique, a bona fide classic whose genetic lineage stretches back to the 1958 debut of the Gibson Explorer.

The angles have been sharpened, but that asymmetric body shape is unmistakably Explorer. In 1958 it was ahead of its time for an electric guitar to capture the imagination, and only when James Hetfield of Metallica became synonymous with the Explorer did the guitar become an icon. In truth, that synonymous-with-Hetfield quality is hardwired to the EX-360's DNA – even the pickup configuration, with the EMG 60 in the neck and 81 on the bridge, is classic Hetfield. Metallica fans will be all over the chance to be

able to go some way in recreating Jaymez's tone for less than £700.

Where the Desolation is an out-an-out speedster, the EX-360 is all about the heft. It's considerably heavier. The neck, though a thin U-shape, is thicker. Most noticeably, the EX-360's voice is thicker, too. Just fire up your amp, add plenty of gain, and play an open E: there's a bestial quality to its tone that'd transpose even the most mundane riff into something sinister and worthy.

And where the Desolation panders to lead players' speed neuroses, the EX-360 is about deep, warm tones. EMG pickups are awesome, an essential piece of kit for dealing with down-tuned guitars and high-gain rough and tumble, yet on some guitars they can lack the warmth that characterises, say, the EX-360's Gibson-crafted design muse. That's not the case here;

LTD has done a great job in balancing a super-hot active pickup with an expanse of solid tonewood to truly do the pickups justice. The sustain, harmonic liveliness and jumbo frets are all there for lead playing, too.

While the Desolation's neck is quicker, satin smooth and svelte, the EX-360's is more comfortable, with a profile thin enough to help modernise a classic design into an electric that's a superlative all-rounder for contemporary metal. The variety of tone is incredible, especially for Metallica

fans – whether playing cleans with the neck pickup and a little modulation, or riffing hard on the bridge pickup and the gain maxed out, the EX-360 is capable of tones eerily similar to its hero's.

It's not as eye-catching as the Desolation; the rosewood fingerboard, dot inlays and model number at the 12th fret is a bit utilitarian – some fretboard binding would look neat. But, with that extra grunt and tonal versatility, we'd go with function over form, dress down and tool up with the EX-360.

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	VALUE FOR MONEY	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	BUILD QUALITY	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	PLAYABILITY	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
OVERALL RATING	★★★★★								

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Maple, set in
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 22
SCALE: 24 3/4"
PICKUPS: EMG 81 (bridge), EMG 60 (neck)
CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone, three-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Black nickel
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Black (shown), Snow White
CONTACT: Selectron UK
 01795 419460
www.espguitars.co.uk



It may not be as gaudy, but the EX-360 will still turn heads