

Words: Michael Brown Photography: Simon Lees

# JACKSON JS SERIES ROUND-UP

The 80s shred master presents its biggest bargains yet, all equipped with high-output humbuckers, and primed to rock

**GROVER** Jackson's name is synonymous with high-speed metal machines. After honing his craft in the Charvel repair shop in the 70s, Jackson began sticking his own surname on prototype Vs for Randy Rhoads in 1980. Although Grover has long since left the company, the Jackson brand – now operating under the Fender umbrella – has a wealth of pointy models to its name, spanning just about every price point.

The JS series represents Jackson's most affordable models ever – you can bag any of them on the street for under £300 – thanks to Chinese construction, but they don't skimp on quality. On test, we

have a pair of Dinkys, best known as one of the definitive 80s hot-rodged double-cuts, plus the guitar with which Grover Jackson made his name, the Rhoads. Each axe offers a different bridge/vibrato setup, but all three feature graphite-reinforced maple necks for supreme stability regardless of tuning and temperature changes, plus a pair of high-output Jackson humbuckers. There are no coil-splits or fancy switching options here, either – these guitars are made for one purpose only: to rock. So, let us do just that...



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## JACKSON JS12

DINKY £154

Sharpest tool in the shred

**WITH** two own-brand humbuckers and a two-point non-locking vibrato, we're deep in starter territory here, but while the pickup selector and tuners feel a little flimsy, everything else about the JS12's construction points towards a much more expensive guitar. And crucially, it retains tuning well, even with plenty of vibrato abuse.

When you're first learning, a low action can really speed up your progression, and judging from our review model's slinky playability, the JS12 won't give you any problems in that department. But while it doesn't feature the compound radius of our other review models, the 305mm (12-inch) fingerboard camber has stood Gibson in good stead

since the 50s, so you won't find any complaints from us here.

Plugging in is where cost-cutting can reveal itself, but the JS12's high-output humbuckers chug along nicely, although the bridge's proud saddle screws make palm-muting a tad uncomfortable. While the pickups have plenty of low-end, the highs are a little lacking, and individual chord notes can struggle to cut through. That rolled-off treble pays off for clean tones, however, doing away with the thin, ice-picky nature of some lower-end axes, instead offering clear, punchy tones. For £129, this is a quality guitar that outshines many similarly priced starters – if you'd handed this to us when we were first learning, we'd have been thrilled.

## JACKSON JS32Q

### DINKY ARCH TOP

£274

Work of Arch

**SCRAM** jazz cats: this is no conventional archtop. Rather, Jackson's use of the term signifies that the JS32Q's top is curved, rather than flat like the JS12's. The JF32Q is kitted out with classic Jackson touches, too, including sharkfin inlays and a double-locking Floyd Rose licensed vibrato. Add in the quilt maple top and white fingerboard/headstock binding, and it's one classy shredder indeed.

Playability-wise, there's not a huge amount of difference between this and the JS12: it has a similarly scratchy fingerboard feel that needs playing out, although that extra £120 does bag you a compound radius fretboard, starting at 305mm (12 inches) and flattening out to 406mm (16 inches) at the top of the fretboard –

it's a subtle taper, but it does make those wide upper-fret bends that tiny bit easier.

Elsewhere, our review model's double-locking Floyd Rose vibrato is set up with an unusually high tension, requiring some serious welly to divebomb to its limits. That said, there are no issues whatsoever with tuning stability, and at this price, that makes Jackson's licensed Floyd Rose one of the most reliable systems we've played.

Again, the pickups aren't going to set your world alight, but they're enough to get you started while you save for an aftermarket set, with sufficient output to deliver heavy tones of any persuasion. Equip this beast with a set of Seymour Duncans or DiMarzios and you'll have a serious electric that's anything but budget.





# JACKSON JS32T RHOADS

£274

## King of the Rhoads

**THE** Rhoads V-style is about as pointy as guitars get, and Jackson hasn't made any health-and-safety concessions with the JS32T: it can still pierce skin if deployed with sufficient force. Of the guitars on test, the Rhoads is the sharpest player, too. The tune-o-matic-style bridge makes low action a cinch, and the almost waxy feel of the satin neck finish is a dream to speed up and down. The only problem is how to play the damn thing seated. It requires you to position the short lower horn between your legs (ahem), balancing the body on your left leg, and putting you in a classical playing position – no wonder Randy loved V shapes so much.

According to Jackson, the JS32T is packing the same humbuckers as the other two models on test (albeit in zebra form), but to our ears, they sound considerably brighter, with plenty of snap and presence, providing the definition to handle distorted playing of all styles – it could be down to the body's relative lack of wood or the strings-through-body design, but dial in a Marshall-y distortion and bust out *Crazy Train*, and we dare you to stop grinning: the JS32T just nails that sound.

If you like the shape, there's very little to dislike about this Rhoads. It's cheaper than rival Vs, plays like a dream, delivers classic tones and even functions as a weapon off stage. A winner.

### Jackson JS12 Dinky

#### AT A GLANCE

- BODY:** Basswood
- NECK:** Maple
- SCALE:** 648mm (25.5")
- FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood
- FRETS:** 24
- PICKUPS:** 2x Jackson high-output humbuckers
- CONTROLS:** 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector
- HARDWARE:** 2-point fulcrum vibrato, Jackson sealed die-cast tuners – black
- LEFT-HANDED:** No
- FINISH:** Gloss White, Gloss Black, Metallic Blue, Metallic Red (shown)
- CONTACT:** Fender GBI 01342 331700
- [www.fender.com](http://www.fender.com)



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

### Jackson JS32Q Dinky Arch Top

#### AT A GLANCE

- BODY:** Basswood w/quilt maple top
- NECK:** Maple
- SCALE:** 629mm (24.75")
- FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood
- FRETS:** 24
- PICKUPS:** 2x Jackson high-output humbuckers
- CONTROLS:** 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector
- HARDWARE:** Floyd Rose licensed Jackson double-locking vibrato, Jackson sealed die-cast tuners – black
- LEFT-HANDED:** No
- FINISH:** Transparent Black, Transparent Amber (shown)



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

### Jackson JS32T Rhoads

#### AT A GLANCE

- BODY:** Basswood
- NECK:** Maple
- SCALE:** 648mm (25.5")
- FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood
- FRETS:** 24
- PICKUPS:** 2x Jackson high-output humbuckers
- CONTROLS:** 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector
- HARDWARE:** Jackson compensated and adjustable strings-through-body bridge, Jackson sealed die-cast tuners – black
- LEFT-HANDED:** No
- FINISH:** White w/ Black Bevels, Satin Black (shown)



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