

LTD KH
Junior

Washburn
PS80

Group Test

Signature models under £300

Can you really bag a decent signature model for less than 300 sheets? TG rolls out the red carpet for the entry-level axes of Mssrs Mustaine, Stanley, Hammett and Petrucci...

WORDS **HENRY YATES**



OLP John
Petrucci



Flip the page to
find out which
one won our
Group Test
head-to-head



Dean Dave
Mustaine
Vehement

Guitar heroes tend to be rubbish at carpentry. Luthiers tend to be bearded introverts with negligible sex appeal. Fortunately, at some point over the last century, both parties acknowledged their respective shortcomings, decided to work together, and so gave birth to the concept of the signature model. And the idea went down quite well.

Since the shred era of the 80s, the signature model market has exploded, and in 2008, our desire to walk in the shoes of our heroes means there's never been a greater level of supply and demand. Best of all, most luthiers now cover all the bases with premium US models (as played by the rock star and his wealthier stalkers), entry-level axes made in the Far East (as played by you and I) and everything in between.

Now, as Dave Mustaine's long-awaited Dean Vehement electric

arrives on British shores, TG decided it was time to find out if the common man can get a star performance for less than 300 sheets.

Bring in the fighters

When TG spoke to Dave Mustaine on the phone last month, the implication was that his new Vehement (£269) was the best thing since sex on sliced bread. "I don't believe a tennis racket makes someone a better tennis player," the Megadeth lege' said. "And I didn't believe that any one guitar could make someone play better. But this one did. When I pick it up, I know I'm ready to get down to business."

Of course, TG could have found three lame-assed signature electrics

to act as cannon fodder for the Vehement. Instead, we've poked around in the market, lined up a trio of big-name axes that we hope will give crazy Dave a run for his money – then stood round in a circle chanting, 'Fight! Fight! Fight!'

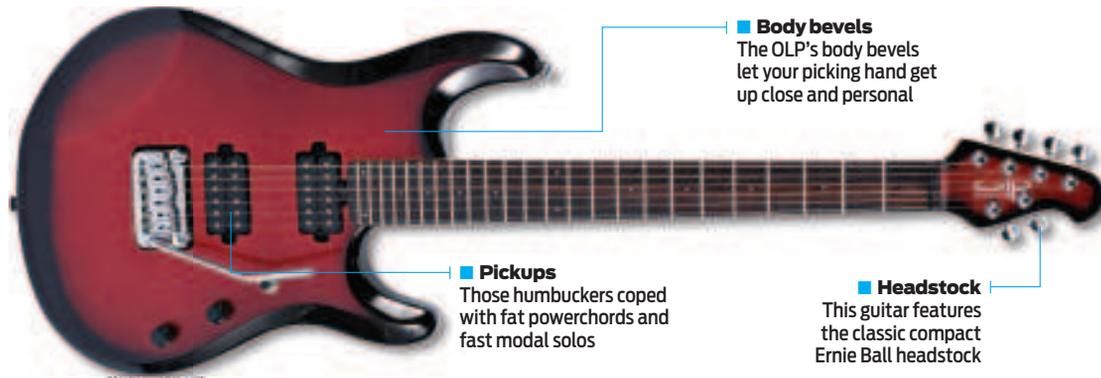
First up, to lend a grudge match vibe to proceedings, we've got the LTD KH Junior (£219) – a scaled-down electric designed by Mustaine's Metallica replacement, Kirk Hammett. Next is the Washburn PS80 (£299), conceived by KISS frontman Paul Stanley, and scraping the price ceiling we've set for this review. Finally, we'll rock OLP's John Petrucci (£264), a guitar which has a reputation as big as the man himself.

"MOST LUTHIERS COVER ALL THE BASES WITH PREMIUM MODELS, ENTRY-LEVEL AXES AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN"



OLP John Petrucci £264

Here's Johnny!



Body bevels
The OLP's body bevels let your picking hand get up close and personal

Pickups
Those humbuckers coped with fat powerchords and fast modal solos

Headstock
This guitar features the classic compact Ernie Ball headstock

You know how this works. If you're minted, you go direct to Ernie Ball and fill your boots with Petrucci's bells-and-whistles signature model. If not, you take a punt on the official entry-level version from OLP.

The sizzle: "I'm really excited about this affordable version of my current guitar!" frothed the Dream Theater virtuoso as the OLP model made its debut. As are we, Johnny. Despite the lowly price tag, this China-built



model boasts arguably the most imaginative spec of the four models, with a heavy mass tremolo unit wobbling at the bridge, a tasty bevelled body and the distinctive 4-to-2 headstock that has been carried over from

the Ernie Ball original. It even comes with a free poster. Wool!

We say: Rock stars tend to create signature models in their own image – thus, while the OLP John Petrucci isn't much to look at, it turns in a dazzling technical performance. From the moment we picked it up, TG was struck by how sleek and co-operative this model feels, with a gorgeous fretboard letting us slide through modal solos apace and a comfortable neck heel working with twin cutaways to ensure

nothing held us back. The vibrato unit didn't feel quite as flexible as your average Floyd Rose, but it's a fantastic feature for the money. Along with a pair of versatile humbuckers that convey every nuance of a slippery run, this cemented our impression that the OLP would suit technical players behind with the rent.

SUMMARY

For: Imaginative spec, luxurious feel
Against: Not very flamboyant



TG says: It's the technician's choice

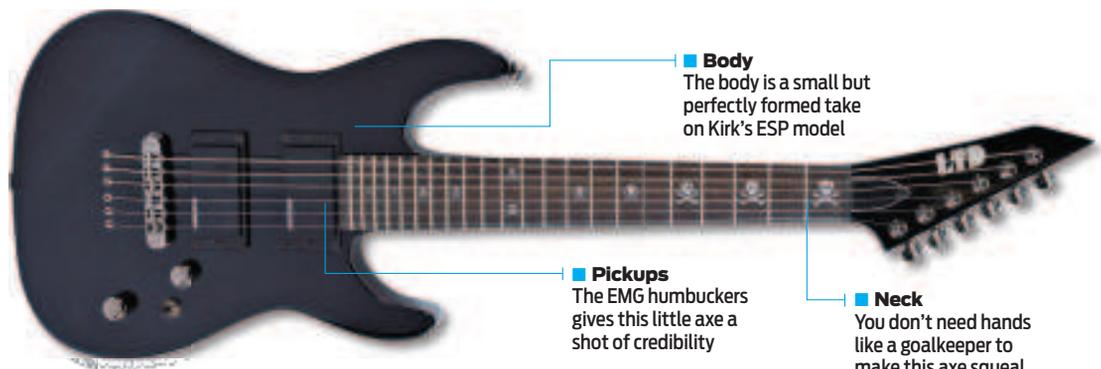
At a glance

OLP John Petrucci

BODY: Solid basswood
NECK: American maple, bolt-on, thin profile
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, with dot inlays
SCALE: 25"
PICKUPS: 2x OLP direct-mounted humbuckers
CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Chrome tuners, heavy mass tremolo system
FINISH: Red Pearl Burst [shown], Black
CONTACT: Strings & Things 01273 440442
WEB: www.olpguitars.com

LTD KH Junior £219

Some kind of midget



Body
The body is a small but perfectly formed take on Kirk's ESP model

Pickups
The EMG humbuckers gives this little axe a shot of credibility

Neck
You don't need hands like a goalkeeper to make this axe squeal

Metallica's Kirk Hammett has shifted more ESPs than any other player – now he turns his attention to the bumfluff market with LTD's dinky take on the KH202. Don't expect James Hetfield to do the same...

The sizzle: There's a genius concept behind Kirk's scaled-down LTD Junior. At three-quarters the size of a normal electric, and with a 20.5-inch scale, this model can be



negotiated by small hands and is sufficiently light that it won't stunt anyone's growth. There aren't many credible 3/4 electrics on the market, and with a cool reverse headstock, skull inlays

and EMG humbuckers, this is the coolest that TG has seen.

We say: The KH Junior probably isn't an option for full-grown guitarists. You'll almost certainly graduate from this mini model as your hands get bigger. Still, for its market, you can't fault the quality of this pocket rocket. Dig beneath the cool looks and you'll find some solid materials put together with great attention to detail, meaning that the fingerboard is smooth and

playable, the neck profile won't slow anyone down, and the twin cutaways let you rock right up to the 22nd fret. Sealing the deal are the EMG humbuckers – even though they're passive, TG coaxed out a searing *Enter Sandman* lead tone and a brutal grind at the neck. Great stuff.

SUMMARY

For: Cool concept pulled off in style
Against: Only a short-term solution



TG says: Pint-sized metal mayhem

At a glance

LTD KH Junior

BODY: Solid basswood
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, with skull 'n' crossbones inlays
SCALE: 20.5"
PICKUPS: 2x EMG-ESP passive humbuckers
CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: ESP tuners, tune-o-matic bridge, thru tailpiece
FINISH: Black [shown]
CONTACT: Selectron UK 01795 419460
WEB: www.espguitars.com

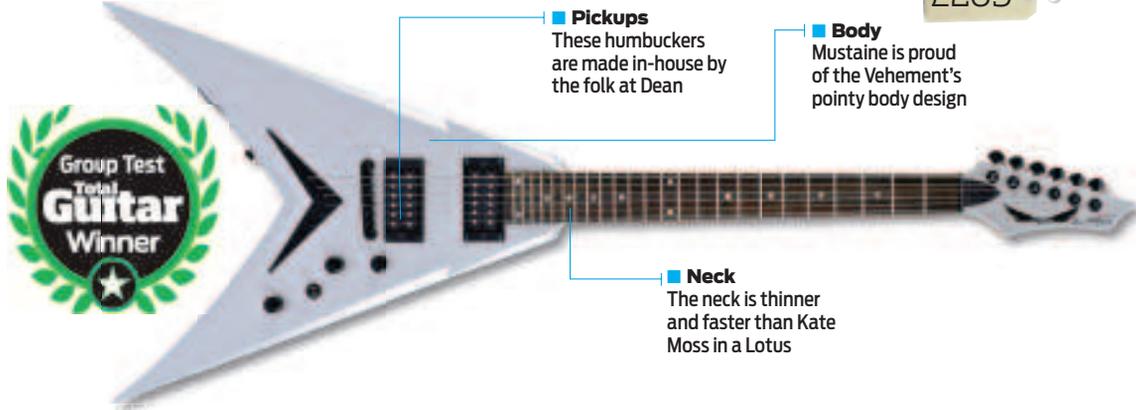
"FOR ITS 3/4 FORMAT MARKET, YOU CAN'T FAULT THE POCKET ROCKET OF LTD'S KH JUNIOR"

SIGNATURE MODELS UNDER £300 **★ GROUP TEST**

Dean Dave Mustaine Vehement

When Dean met Dave

£269



Pickups
These humbuckers are made in-house by the folk at Dean

Body
Mustaine is proud of the Vehement's pointy body design

Neck
The neck is thinner and faster than Kate Moss in a Lotus

At a glance

Dean Dave Mustaine Vehement

BODY: Solid basswood
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, with dot inlays
SCALE: 25"
PICKUPS: 2x Dean-designed open humbuckers
CONTROLS: 2x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Black
FINISH: Metallic Silver [shown], Classic Black
CONTACT: Bill Lewington 01268 413366
WEB: www.deanguitars.com

Dean Zelinsky's hand was on the bandsaw when Dime created the Razorback, and the luthier's talent for getting hellraising metallers to knuckle down and deliver the goods continues with Mustaine's beast.

The sizzle: If you've got Dave's face tattooed on your kneecaps, you'll want the USA Vehement at £3,439 – or at least the Korean version for £799. Those who just 'quite like Megadeth' will be satisfied with this Chinese



equivalent, which slashes the price to £269, but doesn't suck the blood from the spec.

We say: Mustaine proudly informed TG that he designed the Vehement shape himself,

but it's not so far removed from other V-style electrics, albeit with cool 'notches' that give the basswood body the look of a barbed arrow. We expected something more from the most outrageous man in metal.

Things get better fast when you pick up the Vehement though. As the only Dean model to feature the thin-as-a-broomstick neck profile specified by Mustaine, this is an absolute belter for technical play and equally satisfying for thrash rhythms at the bottom

end. It's inevitable that the Seymour Duncan LiveWires of the US model are AWOL, but these own-brand humbuckers were enough to seal the deal, supplying a thick and complex tone that'll hit you like a right hook from the big man himself. You'd have to be (ahem) mega-deaf not to appreciate this.

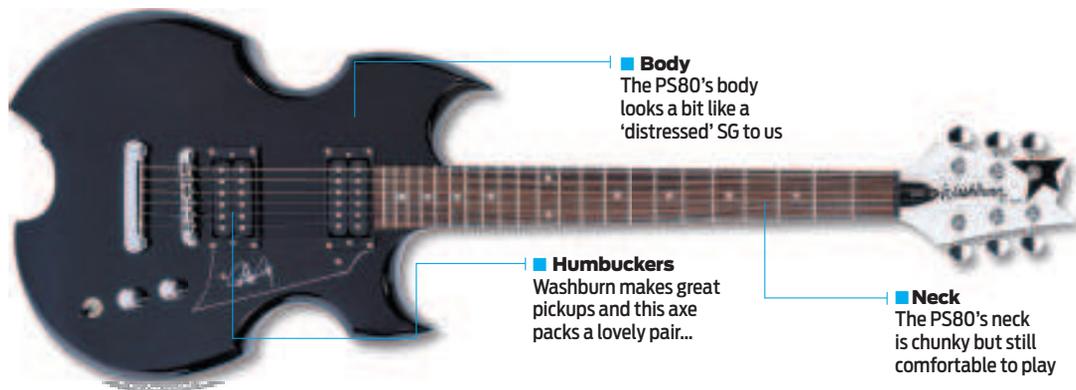
SUMMARY

For: Thrash sounds, superb neck
Against: Not the most radical design
★★★★★

TG says: The best of the big four

Washburn PS80 £299

Give us a KISS!



Body
The PS80's body looks a bit like a 'distressed' SG to us

Humbuckers
Washburn makes great pickups and this axe packs a lovely pair...

Neck
The PS80's neck is chunky but still comfortable to play

At a glance

Washburn PS80

BODY: Solid select wood
NECK: Mahogany, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, with dot inlays
SCALE: 24"
PICKUPS: 2x Washburn humbuckers
CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Chrome tuners, tune-o-matic bridge and stop bar
FINISH: Black [shown]
CONTACT: Sound Technology 01462 480000
WEB: www.washburn.com

Considering KISS merch ranges from condoms to coffins, it shouldn't surprise anyone that frontman Paul Stanley has licensed his name to a series of Washburn electrics.

The sizzle: Ever the narcissist, Stanley has thrown in a personalised gigbag, a glossy photo of himself, a handful of plectrums and a studded leather strap. Once we'd tipped that lot out of the window, TG was faced



with the PS80, which the KISS man reckons is the kind of guitar that "can only come from a great partnership of talents and experience". Well, nobody does cheap electrics like Washburn.

We say: Anyone who followed KISS across America in the 70s will lap up PS80 trimmings like the star child 'stock logo and bespoke pickguard. Rockers who weren't born until 1991, meanwhile, might argue that Paul's baby beauty looks like an SG after a shark attack, is too heavy and almost the wrong side of £300.

Luckily, the PS80's graceless visuals are outweighed by a strong physical performance and one of the best tones in the

group for straight-ahead stadium rock, courtesy of two rich and responsive humbuckers. Chords are raunchy, solos are rough round the edges, and while it doesn't play as fast as some, you can trust this to excel in a hard rock context. With a bit more make-up, this could've won.

SUMMARY

For: 'Classic rock' voice, KISS details
Against: Not the best-looking axe
★★★★★

TG says: Rock 'n' roll for £299