



Ibanez RG1527
Prestige

Schecter
Blackjack C-7

Group Test

Seven-string electric guitars

Nu metal might be gone, but a whole new generation of guitar players is discovering the joys of 'one extra'. TG rounds up a quartet of magnificent sevens from Ibanez, Schecter, LTD and Dean

WORDS **HENRY YATES**



Dean RC7X



LTD Viper-417

Let's start with some clichés. Seven-string guitars are the reserve of angry US metallers with boilersuits and cornrows. They are only good for playing drop-tuned sludge, will see you laughed out of rock clubs, sneered at in guitar shops and befriended by an annoying bloke in a red cap. They are a relic of an age when nobody played solos; a post-millennial fad-in-the-pan, like three-quarter-length trousers and those daft little scooters. Thank God nobody makes them any more.

Reality check. In the right hands, seven-strings rock. The simple addition of a thick-as-hell bottom string (typically tuned to A or B) can blow your playing out of its rut, put a hugely extended note palette at your fingertips, unlock new chords, and provide the kind of seismic rumble that means you

can finally sack your bassist. Sevens existed long before Korn (check out Steve Vai's *Passion And Warfare* for a masterclass) and have survived after them, finding favour with players from Matt Bellamy to Matt Heafy – along with endless jazz cats.

And luthiers do still list them, actually, making it a tough job cutting this Group Test down to four. First up is Ibanez's RG1527 (£949), followed by Schecter's Blackjack C-7 (£749), the LTD Viper-417 (£779) that hopes to hiss all over the competition and finally Dean's RC7X (£1,099). ■

"SEVEN-STRINGS CAN BLOW YOUR PLAYING OUT OF ITS RUT"

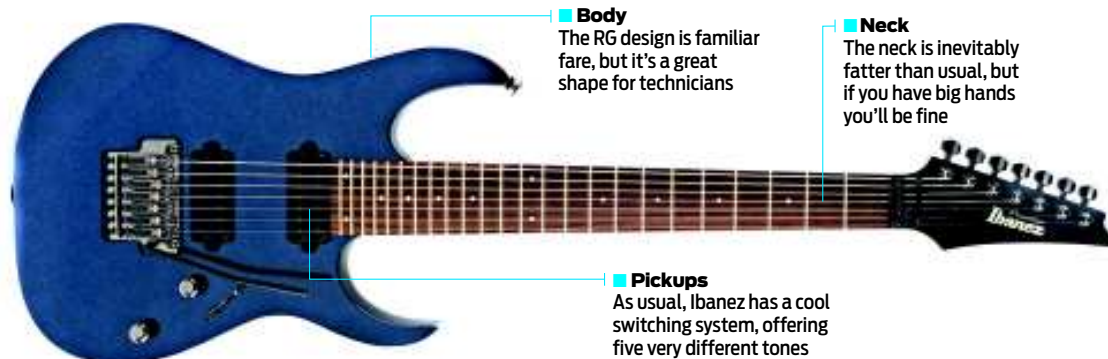


Flip the page to find out which one won our Group Test head-to-head



Ibanez RG1527 Prestige £949

Roar power



Body

The RG design is familiar fare, but it's a great shape for technicians

Neck

The neck is inevitably fatter than usual, but if you have big hands you'll be fine

Pickups

As usual, Ibanez has a cool switching system, offering five very different tones

At a glance

Ibanez RG1527 Prestige

BODY: Solid basswood
NECK: Maple/wenge, 5-piece, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with dot inlays
FRETS: 24
SCALE: 25½"
PICKUPS: V77 (neck) and V87 (bridge) humbuckers
CONTROLS: Volume, tone, 5-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Black chrome
FINISH: Royal Blue [pictured]
LEFT-HANDERS: No
CONTACT: Headstock Distribution Ltd 0121 508 6666
WEB: www.ibanez.com

Back in the late 80s, when Munky and Head had yet to graduate from short trousers to long shorts, Ibanez and Steve Vai designed the first commercial seven-string with the Universe UV7. The Japanese giant stuck with the format when everyone else hid theirs in the attic, and at the top end of the product range, nobody does it better. No pressure on the RG1527, then.

We've played the RG in a million incarnations, but it's a watertight design for speedy



techniques, even if this Ultra neck can't quite motor like the 'Wizard' profile. Cynics argue that seven-string players all sound the same, and the strongest argument for the RG1527 is that it offers massive tonal versatility.

Drop a step and the bite of the V87 bridge unit stops you sounding turgid; tune back up and you can isolate the inner coils of each humbucker for a glassy rock 'n' roll punch. A jack of all trades, then, even if it doesn't quite match the depth and muscle of the EMG brigade.

Conclusion: As the first contender in this test, the RG1527 flags up two home truths: that sevens are pricey and that they have more challenging necks. Accept that and this is a

bulletproof choice for the player who wants to do more than chug, offering a diverse tonal palette whose only drawback is that – in the context of this test – it doesn't grind like some still to come. Throw more dough at Ibanez and you'll get the finest of seven-strings, but today the king has been beaten to the throne.

SUMMARY

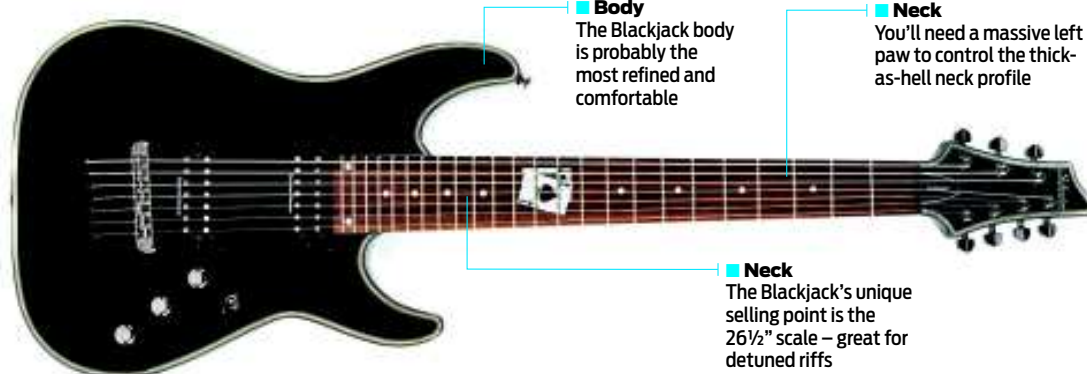
For: Versatile tone, great finish
Against: Lacks EMG punch, pricey

★★★★☆

TG says: You won't be disappointed

Schecter Blackjack C-7 £749

Stick or twist?



Body

The Blackjack body is probably the most refined and comfortable

Neck

You'll need a massive left paw to control the thick-as-hell neck profile

Neck

The Blackjack's unique selling point is the 26½" scale – great for detuned riffs

At a glance

Schecter C-7 Blackjack

BODY: Solid mahogany
NECK: Maple, set, 3-piece
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, with Blackjack inlay
FRETS: 24
SCALE: 26½"
PICKUPS: Seymour Duncan JB/59 [with coil tap]
CONTROLS: Volume, 2x tone, 3-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Black chrome
FINISH: Gloss Black [pictured]
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes
CONTACT: Westside Distribution 0141 248 4812
WEB: www.schecterguitars.com

Screw the 'ace of spades' fret inlay: the Schecter Blackjack's real trump card is up its sleeve. It's the only axe here that features a 26½" scale length, meaning that you should be able to ditch the pitch through the floor to Korn-style ADGCFAD tuning, and bask in bottom-end ecstasy.

Contoured, bound and buffed, the Blackjack seems pretty sleek... until you start fretting and realise the neck is seriously chunky, to the point of cancelling



out the benefit of the ultra access cutaway. The flipside is the monster warmth and sustain, helped along by the sheer mass of the mahogany body, and working best when you detune

by a 5th and start churning out single-note rhythms like it's 1999.

The Seymour Duncan units are great for this sort of mayhem, while the longer, almost baritone scale means this is easily the most convincing for nu metal, making your ears flap, but not your strings. We like.

Conclusion: The C-7 is for players who never stopped loving Korn, and who want to nail those stalking low-tuned grooves. If that's your aim, then mission

accomplished – this baby will empty the bowels of any audience. By contrast, if you're happy to dip a toe into nu metal, but want to play jazz leads too, you could be better off choosing a more balanced model with a standard neck. Might we recommend the Ibanez?

SUMMARY

For: Long scale, seismic sound
Against: Very fat neck

★★★★☆

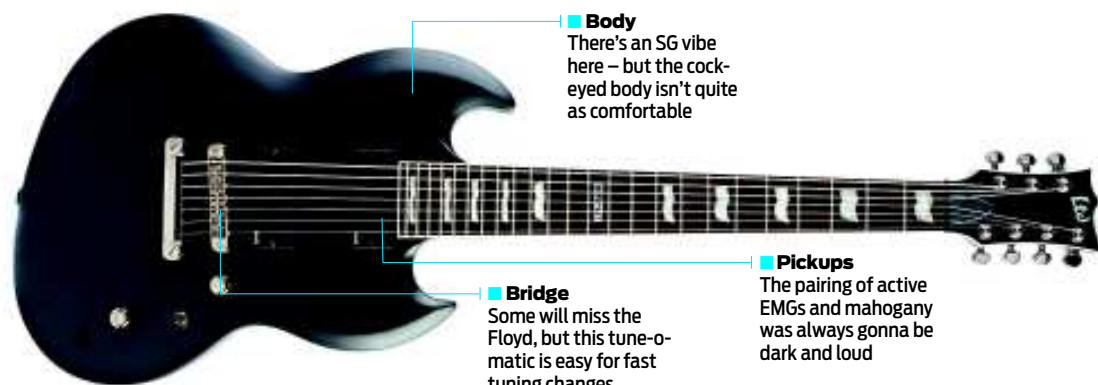
TG says: It's off the scale

"RUSTY COOLEY HAS EASED ONE OF THE PERENNIAL HEADACHES OF THE SEVEN-STRING WITH THE RC7X"

SEVEN-STRING ELECTRICS ★ **GROUP TEST**

LTD Viper-417 £779

Love at first bite?



Body
There's an SG vibe here – but the cock-eyed body isn't quite as comfortable

Bridge
Some will miss the Floyd, but this tune-o-matic is easy for fast tuning changes

Pickups
The pairing of active EMGs and mahogany was always gonna be dark and loud

Few entry-level ranges get us hotter than LTD, and with a mahogany body that looks like it's permanently throwing the horns, a double-dose of active EMGs and the same colour scheme as Tony Iommi's bedroom, the Viper-417 screams 'rock!' without saying a word. Heroes like Deftones' Stef Carpenter trust LTD to make their signature models – should you trust them with your wedge?

OK, so the 'squashed SG' shape sits awkwardly on your



knee and doesn't balance that well on a strap, but its physical performance is brought back from choppy waters by a neck that counteracts its inevitable width with a slender U-shaped profile, monster fretwire, and a

simple tune-o-matic bridge that lets you drop and raise tunings without Allen keys. You'll find yourself punching out the same big riffs and searing solos as you would on a six-string, but the back-breaking prevalence of mahogany also gives awesome capacity to shake the room when you hit the bottom string.

Conclusion: Every Group Test has a Viper-417. It's the rock-solid choice, well priced and well spec'd, executed to a high standard, leaving little to criticise

(except the slightly iffy weight distribution). The mahogany body and EMGs make it a great option for rockers of a 'classic' persuasion, its iconic body leaves you with no fear of ridicule on the club circuit... and yet the Viper doesn't end on the podium because it's up against such stellar rivals. Life's tough, eh?

SUMMARY

For: Pickups, beefy body, fair price
Against: A bit unbalanced on a strap

★★★★☆

TG says: Once bitten, you're smitten

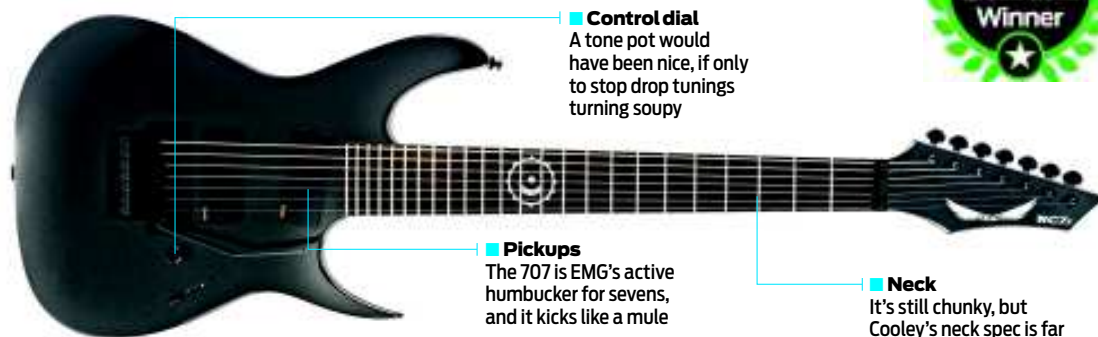
At a glance

LTD Viper-417

BODY: Solid mahogany
NECK: Maple, set
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 24
SCALE: 25½"
PICKUPS: Active EMG 707 (neck) and 81-7 (bridge)
CONTROLS: Volume, tone, 3-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Black nickel
FINISH: Black [pictured]
LEFT-HANDERS: No
CONTACT: Selectron UK 01795 419460
WEB: www.espguitars.com

Dean RC7X £1,099

Seven heaven



Control dial
A tone pot would have been nice, if only to stop drop tunings turning soupy

Pickups
The 707 is EMG's active humbucker for sevens, and it kicks like a mule

Neck
It's still chunky, but Cooley's neck spec is far speedier than most sevens



When Rusty Cooley describes his Dean signature as "the Lamborghini of seven-strings", he means it's fast, not expensive (although it's that too). "The neck is really thin so you can do maximum shredding," says the Outworld wizard. "Also, the frets are, like, the biggest frets on the planet, so your fingers never drag across the fretboard or get slowed down..."

Whether by accident or design, Cooley has eased one of the



perennial headaches of the seven-string – that most necks are so thick it's like playing a lute. The maple bolt-on is still fat but it's manageable; you can happily wallow around with drop-tuned

textures and still fill out your sound with bassy notes while pulling out the fireworks. Cooley should have included more dials (it's useful to tweak your tone when you drop tune) but these EMGs are magic, sounding seriously ballsy due to the mid-range punch of the alder body. This couldn't be further from the nu metal stereotype.

Conclusion: Seven-string isn't something you can 'dip into'; you need to rebuild your guitar

technique to an extent, and not everyone will stay the course. As such, if this is a passing interest, then sinking £1,099 into the RC7X is reckless at best. This guitar is an investment, perhaps for a seven player who's ready to upgrade from a cheaper model. If that's you, this is the one.

SUMMARY

For: Mighty tone, nice feel, great neck
Against: Price, lack of controls

★★★★★

TG says: It's a Cooley customer

At a glance

Dean RC7X

TYPE: Solid alder
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Ebony with octave inlay
FRETS: 24
SCALE: 25½"
PICKUPS: 2x active EMG 707 humbuckers
CONTROLS: Master volume, 3-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Black chrome
FINISH: Metallic Black [pictured], Metallic White [pictured]
LEFT-HANDERS: No
CONTACT: Bill Lewington Ltd 01268 413366
WEB: www.deanguitars.com