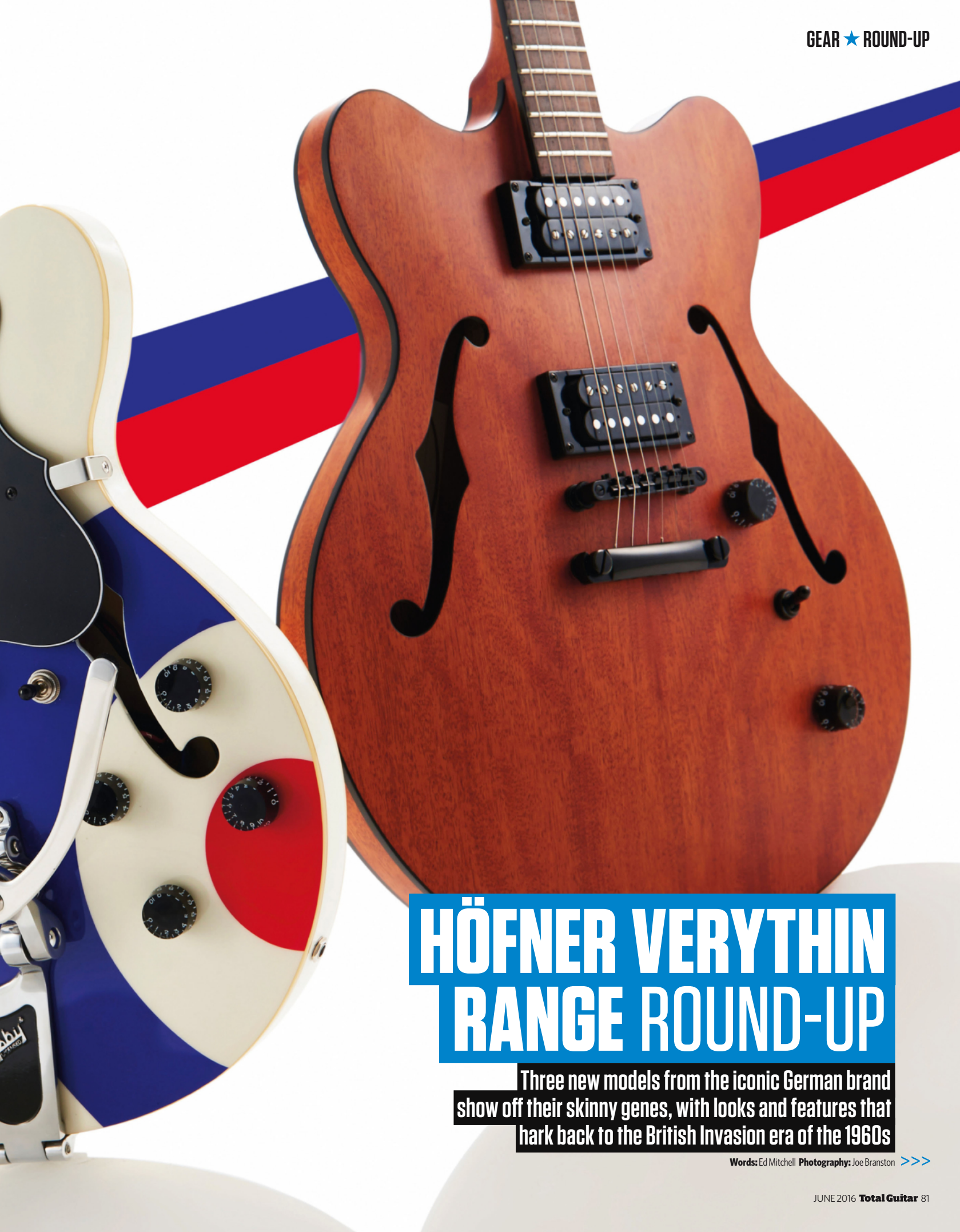


GEAR

ROUND-UP
HÖFNER VERYTHIN





HÖFNER VERY THIN RANGE ROUND-UP

Three new models from the iconic German brand show off their skinny genes, with looks and features that hark back to the British Invasion era of the 1960s

Words: Ed Mitchell Photography: Joe Branston >>>

DURING the first electric guitar explosion of the 1950s, it was almost impossible for young Brits to get their hands on a USA-made instrument. Seizing upon an opportunity, a bunch of European manufacturers, including Framus and Hagstrom, met the demand for good quality affordable guitars and basses. The most iconic of these brands was Höfner – a German company that attained legendary status when Paul McCartney picked up one of its 500/1 violin basses in Hamburg and stuck with it throughout his career as a Beatle. He still plays his violin basses today.

Macca's 500/1 may be the best-known Höfner model, but the three models in this round-up feature the Verythin (or 'Verithin' as it was known in the 60s) semi-acoustic body style first seen in 1960. Like the Gibson ES-335 model it was based on, each Verythin has a solid block running up the centre of its body to provide sustain, and reduce unwanted feedback. And Verythin wasn't just a clever name. Like the original 60s guitars, the new models feature a body depth – at the rim – of just 30mm (1.2"); a Gibson ES-335 is 43mm (1.7") deep – giving them a feel that's closer to a solidbody electric than a regular semi-acoustic guitar.

The most iconic European brand of the 60s was Höfner



HÖFNER HCTVTHMOD VERYTHIN BIGSBY MOD

£649

Mod grooves in delirious ways...

ALONG with Lambretta scooters, Steve Marriott haircuts and scrapping with rockers on Brighton's seafront, the RAF roundel has come to define the 60s mod era and Britishness in general. Originally seen on the wings of fighter planes, the red white and blue circles were famously adopted by mod gods such as The Who, and their followers, who sewed them onto their parkas.

Here, the iconic roundel sits upon the Verythin's laminated spruce top, which is allied to maple ply back and sides. The slim-profile, glued-in neck is a single piece of maple mated with a rosewood fingerboard, 22 medium frets and a set of machineheads with pearloid buttons.

All three models here come with Höfner's own humbuckers. The four-control – Quadrophonic? – wiring is your classic two-volume, two-tone setup

with a three-way pickup selector toggle switch. The big news is that this guitar is fitted with a licensed Bigsby vibrato for some subtle note wobbling. Hardware is completed by a tune-o-matic bridge with roller saddles to reduce string drag and tuning problems.

In keeping with its intended audience, the Mod pumps out a vibrant crunch when you subject its bridge humbucker to overdrive. Think the Small Faces epic, *Tin Soldier* or Weller's tone on The Jam's *In The City*. Crank the dirt up and you're in Oasis territory, while tonal versatility is maintained by the bluesier response of the middle and neck notches.

Some might say anyone can play this beautifully made guitar, but the Mod is obviously targeted at fans of 60s British power-pop and later icons like Paul Weller, and later still, Oasis. If that's your bag, baby, then best of British to you.





HÖFNER HCTVTHUK VERYTHIN MAHOGANY **£299**

Thin? Yes. Affordable? Very

WHILE its dimensions are the same as the Mod, the more affordable Mahogany model has a slightly chunkier neck. Where it really slims down, though, is in its price tag. For a quid shy of £300, you get an all-mahogany laminate construction, including the body top, back and sides, and the neck, topped off with a rosewood fingerboard that comes well-dressed with 22 medium frets.

The control layout is simpler than the Mod. Yes, you get a couple of the house humbuckers, but you'll have to make do with a single volume and tone, and the three-way pickup selector toggle switch. The hardware is all black and consists of a classic tune-o-matic bridge and fixed tailpiece, and a set of chunky die-cast machineheads.

The Verythin Mahogany feels like a stripped-down rock machine. Played

acoustically, it has a loud, bright voice and that response survives when you plug the thing in. The bridge 'bucker has a bright, punchy tone through a clean channel and retains an impressive level of clarity and note separation when you begin adding the dirt. Although metalheads are unlikely to go shopping for a semi, there's no reason they couldn't get what they need tone-wise from this Verythin. The centre-block provides plenty of sustain and a load of bottom-end thump for heavy riffs on the lower strings. The middle and neck positions on the pickup switch predictably warm proceedings up for those who like to play the blues.

It may not be as sartorially elegant as the Mod, but the Mahogany offers much of its smarter brother's tone and feel for much less money. And tonally, it's way more versatile than you might imagine.

HÖFNER HCT5008DC VERYTHIN BASS **£659**

Size does matter...

WHEN Paul McCartney put the 500/1 violin bass on the map back in 1963, he also defined the tone we expect from a Höfner four-string. The brand became famous for its woolly bottom-end, the result of a short scale and tape-wound strings. The new Verythin model breaks that mould with a 864mm (34-inch) full-scale neck. The result is a much more focused tone than Macca would be used to, and something that expands the Verythin Bass's potential pool of users.

Construction-wise, the Verythin's top, back and sides are formed from laminated flame maple, and there's that solid centre-block to maintain mass, support sustain and help minimise feedback. The neck is crafted from a sandwich of maple with a filling of beech to provide extra stability, and then there's a rosewood 'board with 22 medium frets. Hardware is represented

by a chunky bridge with fully adjustable saddles and a fixed tailpiece. The robust vibe is maintained by the large machineheads up on the peghead.

Like the Mod, the bass features a pair of Höfner humbuckers, each assigned to dedicated volume and tone controls. There's no pickup selector switch. Plugging in, you'll find a great variety of tones by blending the pickups using the volume controls. The bridge unit is punchy as hell, and works great for funk or any style where you want the bass to dominate a mix. Vintage lovers will prefer to use the softer tones of the neck pickup: think 60s pop, Stax and Motown soul.

The increased scale length gives the Verythin a wider tonal palette than, for example, the short-scale 500/1 violin bass. If you're into the way it looks, tonally this bass will cover all the bases... >>>



VERDICT

PARDON THE PUN, but good-quality semi-acoustics aren't exactly 'thin' on the ground these days. What makes these Höfner models worthy of your attention is a wealth of history, tone, great playability, and that unique body thinness. You would think that less depth equalled a reduction in tonal

delivery, but the Verythin models counter that with that solid centre-block. While the Mod edition will attract a certain type of player – ie, mods – the Mahogany and Bass are perfect for anyone looking for a retro tone machine that keeps them coming back for more. Just like Macca.

HÖFNER HCTVTHMOD VERYTHIN BIGSBY MOD £649

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Laminated spruce top, maple back and sides
NECK: Glued-in, one-piece maple
SCALE: 629mm (24.75")
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 22
PICKUPS: 2x Höfner humbuckers
CONTROLS: 2x volume, 2x tone, 3-way pickup selector toggle switch
HARDWARE: Chrome Licensed Bigsby vibrato, tune-o-matic bridge, die-cast machineheads
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: White w/ RAF roundel only
CONTACT: Barnes & Mullins
 01691 652449
www.hofner.com

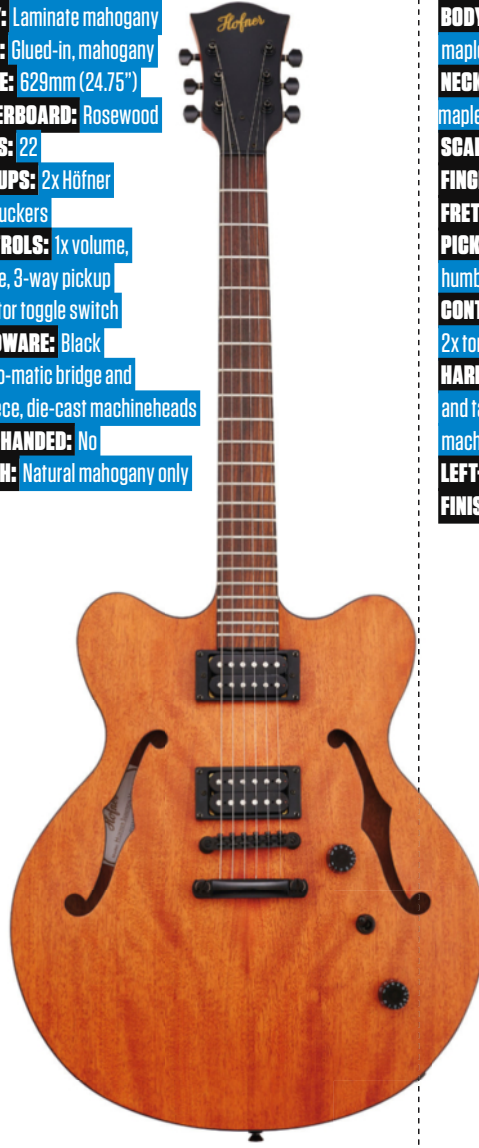


SUMMARY	FEATURES	■	■	■	■
	SOUND QUALITY	■	■	■	■
	VALUE FOR MONEY	■	■	■	■
	BUILD QUALITY	■	■	■	■
	PLAYABILITY	■	■	■	■
	OVERALL RATING	★★★★★			

HÖFNER HCTVTHUK VERYTHIN MAHOGANY £299

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Laminated mahogany
NECK: Glued-in, mahogany
SCALE: 629mm (24.75")
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 22
PICKUPS: 2x Höfner humbuckers
CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector toggle switch
HARDWARE: Black tune-o-matic bridge and tailpiece, die-cast machineheads
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Natural mahogany only



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

HÖFNER HCT5008DC VERYTHIN BASS £659

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Laminated flame maple top, back and sides
NECK: Glued-in, maple/beech/maple
SCALE: 864mm (34")
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 22
PICKUPS: 2x Höfner humbuckers
CONTROLS: 2x volume, 2x tone
HARDWARE: Nickel bridge and tailpiece, die-cast machineheads
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Dark Cherry only



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