





## FIRST PLAY



**ESP E-II ECLIPSE**  
£1,769

**WHAT IS IT?** Japanese-made modern single-cut with classic Seymour Duncan pickup combo



**ESP E-II ECLIPSE DB**  
£1,879

**WHAT IS IT?** Japanese-made modern single-cut with made-for-metal active EMG pickup set-up

# Brothers In Arms

The latest pair of ESPs offer high spec versions of its iconic models with options that will appeal to those beyond its usual metal customers

**Words** Ed Mitchell **Photography** Joseph Branstom

**D**esigned to “bridge the gap between ESP’s premium and more affordable LTD models,” the relatively new E-II range features high-spec Tokyo-built renderings of the Japanese brand’s rock and metal-flavoured favourites.

You shouldn’t need Lieutenant Columbo to help you figure out what guitar our new E-II Eclipse and Eclipse DB models take inspiration from. The shadow cast by those single-cutaway bodies is a big clue. Figure in a mahogany back mated to a contoured maple top and you’re in classic Les Paul territory. Ditto, the anchored tune-o-matic bridge and stop tailpiece (both sourced via Gotoh) and the twin humbucker format.

The trail only begins to go cold when we turn the guitar over. The Eclipse body is thinner than that of the 50s icon, which is reflected in its weight of just under eight pounds – a non-weight relieved Les Paul is usually 10 pounds or more. It’s like ESP hot-rodged a Les Paul by stripping it of



1. This Eclipse comes spec'd with the iconic Seymour Duncan JB and '59 humbucking partnership making it more of an all-rounder than the DB



2. The Eclipse design may take its inspiration from the Les Paul but its body is thinner and lighter than its muse

some body weight, re-profiling the cutaway, and dumping stuff like the pickguard and one of the tone controls. That hot-rod vibe is enhanced by the cool racing flag fingerboard inlays, matching truss rod cover and headstock profile.

The Eclipse and Eclipse DB feature the same thin one-piece mahogany neck with a 305mm (12") fingerboard radius and 22 beautifully seated and crowned extra jumbo frets. Both necks come with locking Gotoh tuners with metal tulip buttons, a perfectly cut bone nut, and a volute at the point where the headstock begins to add some strength. Additional security is provided by a set of Schaller strap-locks and a tough oblong case with a fitted interior and accessories pocket.

Aside from the Eclipse's Vintage Honey Burst finish flame maple top, rosewood fingerboard and chrome hardware, and the Eclipse DB's Vintage Black finish, ebony 'board and gold metal parts, there are other major differences. The Eclipse has a single-bound body with a sculpted thru-neck construction. This means there's no neck heel to get in the way when you venture up to fat fret number 22. There's more creative





3. The hardware on both is sourced from Gotoh including a tune-a-matic bridge, stop tailpiece and a set of locking tuners. You also get a set of Schaller strap locks

4. The Vintage Honey Burst Eclipse features a set-thru neck with a sculpted area where it meets the body. This provides superb access to the upper frets

## A microbe wandering on these fingerboards might bump its head on the bottom of the low strings, which makes them ideal for shredders

woodwork in the form of a belly cut for added comfort, and a couple of control cavities for access to the wiring.

The Eclipse DB has a LP Custom-style double-bound body with a more traditional set-neck construction. The path to the upper fret isn't quite as clear as the other Eclipse but still that aged binding looks the absolute business set against the Vintage Black paintwork. We also love how the DB's rear belly scoop cuts cleanly through the binding. It's a beautifully executed touch of class. In addition to the two control cavities shared with its Vintage Honey Burst flavoured-brother, the DB features a nine-volt battery cover with a military spec aesthetic, not unlike the rear panel on a Casio G-Shock watch.

The battery hatch on the DB is a clue to the most important difference between these two Eclipse models: the engine room. The DB comes with *the* classic metal setup

of active EMG 81 pick up in the bridge position and EMG 60 at the neck.

The other Eclipse conducts its business via the iconic Seymour Duncan humbucker pairing of a bridge-mounted SH-4 JB 'Jazz Blues' – best known by everyone as the 'Jeff Beck' – and its faithful companion, the SH-1 '59, in the front position.

Both guitars feed their pickups through a wiring loom spec'd with two volumes, master tone and three-way pickup selector. And there's our cue to plug in...

### Sounds & Feel

Straight from the case, the action on these guitars is so low a hapless microbe wandering across these fingerboards might bump its head on the bottom of the strings. This state of affairs is perfect for legato-lusting shredders with a light touch. If, on the other hand, you like to thump your strings to jelly you'll likely have to raise

the action a bit to bump off any unwanted buzzes and rattles. Both Eclipses play identically on the fretboard. Upper access is smoother on the Vintage Honey Burst model but it's still pretty good on the DB thanks to the slim body dimensions.

Most of us have tried the Seymour JB/'59 setup, haven't we? The JB sparkles on a clean setting but really comes into its own with some old school overdrive. It's a cracking classic rock meets blues pickup and produces enough power without compromising tone and warmth. The '59 is everything its name suggests. Smooth and woody, it works well for clean blues or jazz. We like the way it warms up when you take the tone control down a couple of notches. Adding some grit dials in a flutey sounding sustain that favours laconic blues noodling.

Next up is the Eclipse DB. The old cliché that the EMG 81 and EMG 60 don't do clean has its basis in truth. Those powerful ceramic magnets held within are at their happiest with a serious dose of distortion. We doubt that anyone has ever installed an EMG 81 bucker only to strum through Terry Jack's *Seasons In The Sun*. Nope, these pups are better suited to much more vicious fare



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5. Those Les Paul comparisons are going nowhere, but with such a classy black finish and gold trimmings what's wrong with emulating your heroes and looking so good in doing so?

6. Send a wave of distortion through the DB's active EMG 81 pick up in the bridge and see what all the fuss is about

7. Both guitars come with ESP's super slim Thin U neck profile and a set of 22 extra jumbo frets. The action is set incredibly low



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## A comfortable neck, excellent upper fret access and super low action aren't just for metalheads

like Slayer's *Seasons In The Abyss*. That's why the 81 has become so important in metal, thanks to the likes of Zakk Wylde.

Yes, the EMG 81 is a beast with an impressive power output, but what makes it so enjoyable is its razor-sharp articulation. You can discern every note regardless of how miffed your gain section is, and it works great with the DB's mahogany/maple carcass: there's a huge amount of sustain.

Adding the ceramic-mag powered EMG 60 introduces a bit more bottom end grunt to the proceedings, and running it solo makes for a stellar, almost synthesizer-like, lead tone. Even in that position, there's still plenty of clarity. Active EMGs don't suffer from the muddiness inherent in many passive neck 'buckers.

### Verdict

ESP has long been typecast as a go-to make for metalheads and shredders, a situation



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happily perpetuated by the brand itself. So where does that leave the rest of guitar playing humanity who might otherwise dismiss ESP's wares while looking for a new six-string squeeze?

Well, as its lines are informed by an all-time classic, the Eclipse is the least overtly 'metal' looking thing in the ESP catalogue. Sure, there's a touch more aggression in the sharpened cutaway, and some Kustom Kulture vibe-age in the racing flag fingerboard inlays and headstock. Yet, even if the EMGs alienate some, we can see both of these beautiful guitars looking the part in a classic rock, blues rock or even jazz setting. And since when was a wish list that includes an ultra comfortable neck shape, excellent upper fret access and a super low action solely the preserve of the metal fraternity?

If you're on the sniff for a single-cutaway, mahogany/maple, twin-humbucker-loaded tone machine, you might just find these ESPs 'eclipse' the charms of the competition from the likes of Gibson and PRS. In terms of fit and finish the Eclipse and Eclipse DB are as good as anything you'll find for around £2,000. **G**

**8.** The Eclipse DB comes loaded with possibly the greatest metal pickups of them all, the active EMG 81 in the bridge position and the EMG 60 at the neck



### ESP E-II ECLIPSE

**PRICE:** £1,769 (inc case)  
**ORIGIN:** Japan  
**TYPE:** Single-cutaway electric guitar  
**BODY:** Mahogany back with flame maple top  
**NECK:** One-piece mahogany, set-thru  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 628mm (24.75")  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/42mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood 305mm (12") radius  
**FRETS:** 22, extra jumbo  
**HARDWARE:** Chrome Gotoh tune-a-matic bridge and stop tailpiece and Gotoh locking tuners  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 53mm  
**ELECTRICS:** Seymour Duncan SH-4 JB (bridge) SH-1 '59 (neck) humbuckers, 2 x volumes, master tone, and three-way pickup selector toggle switch  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.5/7.9  
**OPTIONS:** None  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** Other SD equipped Eclipses include the Evertune in Black Satin with Pegasus and Sentient humbuckers (£2,209); in Lemon Burst and Tobacco Sunburst with JB/'59 humbucker set (both £1,769)  
**LEFT HANDERS:** No  
**FINISHES:** Vintage Honey Burst (as reviewed)

**Selectron UK**  
**01795 419460**  
**www.espguitars.com**

**8/10**

**PROS** Awesome build quality combined with excellent playability and an iconic set of Seymours to produce a widespread appeal

**CONS** The super slim neck might not make everyone's day



### ESP E-II ECLIPSE DB

**PRICE:** £1,879 (inc case)  
**ORIGIN:** Japan  
**TYPE:** Single-cutaway electric guitar  
**BODY:** Mahogany back with maple top  
**NECK:** One-piece mahogany, set-in  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 628mm (24.75")  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/42mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Ebony, 305mm (12") radius  
**FRETS:** 22, extra jumbo  
**HARDWARE:** Gold Gotoh tune-a-matic bridge and stop tailpiece, Gotoh locking tuners  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 53mm  
**Electrics:** Active EMG 81 (bridge) and EMG 60 (neck) humbuckers, 2 x volumes, master tone and three-way pickup selector toggle switch  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.4/7.6  
**OPTIONS:** None  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** Other EMG 81/60 Eclipses include the BB in Black Satin (£1,939); in Marine Blue (£1,879), in See-Thru Black Cherry Sunburst (£1,879). The See-Thru Black model comes with EMG 57/66 humbucker set (£1,879)  
**LEFT HANDERS:** No  
**FINISHES:** Vintage Black (as reviewed)

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**8/10**

**PROS** It looks the business thanks to the finish and the aged binding. Gain freaks will love the power of those active EMGs

**CONS** The thin neck and blast of the EMGs may alienate some