

# Rising Stars





After three years in development, Yamaha 're-enters' the electric guitar market with a new range that nods to the brand's considerable heritage

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## YAMAHA REVSTAR RS502T & RS820CR £565 & £807

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### What You Need To Know

#### 1 Revstar? What's the deal?

Simple: a new range of affordable, original Yamaha electrics that feature a new-for-Yamaha body outline that's inspired by its 50-year heritage of electric-guitar making.

#### 2 50 years? Don't Yamaha just make the Pacifica?

The Pacifica – Yamaha's update of the Fender Stratocaster – has indeed been a huge seller. But there's little of that concept here. All the guitars, for example, are set-necks, not bolt-ons, and feature a more Les Paul-like mahogany (or nato) construction, mainly with a thin maple top.

#### 3 Who's gonna play 'em?

With highly focused marketing, Yamaha sees the Revstar as a 'yoof' guitar, but even if you fall outside of the intended demographic, they're pretty classic-style guitars with an almost retro, albeit new, design.

It's been some time since Yamaha has unleashed a really new electric guitar. And while we reveal the convoluted story behind the birth of these new Revstar instruments elsewhere in this issue, new they most definitely are.

Having said that, the body outline owes much to the original Yamaha 'Les Paul beater', the SG2000, but the Revstars are a shade broader across the lower bouts and the pointed horns are offset compared to the SG2000's symmetrical outline. The mahogany body has a rib-cage contour on the back and a forearm contour on the front, giving it a less slab-like feel compared to the start-up 320 (see Revstar Range gallery, p132), but less of the violin-carve Les Paul-like geometry of the SG2000. There's still quite a chunky vibe, however, although the overall depth of 44mm is more akin to a Telecaster than the fatter Les Paul, or indeed SG2000.

All the seven guitars in the new range employ the same Gibson-like 629mm (24.75-inch) scale length, which suits the mainly mahogany construction and set neck. There is a thin 5mm maple cap on both of our review guitars, and cream edge binding around the top edge only.

Neck profiles are consistent from the 502 upwards – the 320 and 420 have slightly thinner depth necks – with a biggish rounded C profile that measures 21.3mm at the 1st fret and fills out to 24.8mm by the 12th. The slightly flatter-than-Gibson radius fingerboard with nicely installed jumbo wire, however, hints at a more rock intention – but these really don't feel like 'shred' guitars to us.

Headstocks are never easy to create but here, inspired apparently by the Yamaha SA-15 from 1966, the head looks way less, ahem, functional than, for example, that SG2000, and there's only the classic Yamaha tuning-fork logo – no 'Yamaha' is visible on the guitar. On the reverse of the head, however, along with the model number and serial number, there's a Japanese hanko stamp-like decal, which, we're told, says Revstar – a nice touch.

The designs are full of nice touches. There's satin-nickel hardware – the hand-cut steel woolled 'satin' finish of the 820CRs front with the subtly visible dual stripes creating a little more of the original Café Racer design concept, hence the CR suffix. Then there's the height-adjustable aluminium tailpiece and tune-o-matic on the 502, contrasted by the TonePros wrapover of the 820. While the 502T sticks with its gloss Bowden Green-only finish, we have two colour choices on the 820, plus that copper-coloured anodised aluminium and its satin nickel-covered humbuckers – as opposed to the 502's more classic-looking cream-covered soapbar single coils. Pickups are designed by Yamaha and built by Far Eastern pickup giant G&B, which makes pickups for numerous big brands, not least PRS (SE and S2) and Godin.

### Sounds

We first got our hands on a pre-production prototype 502T, strung it up with 0.011s and headed off to a gig. As ever, a rather hasty setup meant the first time we hear the guitar is as we edged into the first number, a mid-tempo swinging blues, and although





1. This tailpiece was part of the original concept and is height adjustable for a more 'trapeze' or 'stud' tailpiece-like tonality
2. Each Revstar has a Japanese hanko stamp-like decal. It means 'Revstar'
3. The RS502T's Alnico soapbar single coils add to the retro vibe in both looks and sound





## Rivals

Any new electric guitar at these price points faces a host of serious competition. Gibson's new 2016 range is USA-made and more traditional in design than its 2015 offerings. Store pricing puts the SG Faded and SG Special at £599, with the Les Paul Studio Faded at £649. PRS has just announced the S2 Satin Standards (a Custom 24, 22 and Singlecut) with a suggested street price of £899 with satin nitro finishes. Schecter's Korean-made Diamond Series is right in the same price point, too, with new, more retro designs like the S-1 Custom selling in store around £599.



These guitars will sit happily in a sonic stew alongside the well-worn classics we all love

4. All the Revstar pickups are designed by Yamaha, but made by G&B. Here, the Alnico humbuckers have aged-looking nickel covers

5. Inspired by Yamaha's 1966 SA-15, the range's three-a-side headstock doesn't have a Yamaha logo; just a classic 'tuning fork' emblem

6. Instead of standard coil splits, both guitars use a simple passive high-pass filter, called a Dry Switch, which thins out the sound to produce a more 'single coil'-like character

7. The 820CR sports a businesslike TonePros wrapover tailpiece

a more direct tone than this writer's go-to Guild Starfire, and a little more powerful, we have no problem getting into the correct tone zone with the mixed pickup position on rhythm duties and the fuller neck pickup for solos. Next up, a more rock 'n' roll classic requires a bit more 'single coil', and although, of course, we're using single coils, the pull/push passive Dry Switch on the tone control acts like a high-pass filter and thins out the low end. It's all an easy drive.

The neck profile will certainly appeal to an older demographic: it's really well shaped, with plenty of girth as you move up the fretboard; the chunky frets, too, really suit and aid top-fret access, not least with the double-cut design and the shaped heel joint, making this dead easy. It's hardly rocket science, of course, but the 'I've played this before' feeling is comforting, and the combination of the balanced voices, three-way lever pickup selector, volume, tone and that Dry Switch all make for a pretty intuitive experience.

The 820CR is pretty similar, although its humbuckers give us a different basis to the sounds and with it, a more generic Les Paul-ish tonality. That's no criticism, as many players will simply feel more at home here. We'd probably class the pickups as 'hot vintage' and, although we don't have a Les Paul's four-control layout, in conjunction with the Dry Switch, there's surprising versatility. With cleaner amp settings, the full pickup tones have a rich thickness, though not in a muddy sense; pull up the Dry Switch on the neck pickup and, along with a perceived slight volume drop, your sound cleans up – with more 'attack' that's definitely more single coil-like. But kick in your dirt channel and push the tone switch down and you'll wail like any of the Les Paul greats. It's a similar story on the bridge pickup. With the Dry Switch engaged and

plenty of power amp, earlier Townshend springs to mind – there's no lack of ring here – but up the gain and push that tone switch back down, and it's everything from classic rock forwards. The mixed pickup sound, again with the Dry Switch engaged, certainly drops us into Fender-y territory and we wonder if a five-way lever switch that offers a selection of full coil and the Dry Switch tones wouldn't have been more useful. Certainly, if you're unused to using coil taps and your volume and tone controls to create your sounds, there's a lot you'll miss here.

So, all good? Well, you might not want to use the 502's single coils for out-and-out metal, although they certainly take gain pretty well. And, yes, things can get a little noisy (at least both pickups on together are hum-cancelling) but with more classic rock, or indeed some more retro-y fuzz tones, the 502T sits really well. Both guitars, too, are quite weighty – not overly so – and there's a slight neck pull on the strap, but nothing that bothers us.

## Verdict

Combining the words cool and Yamaha into a sentence is, if we're honest, a rarity. 'Value for money' and 'fit for purpose' are the phrases we'd normally attach to one of the biggest names in the MI industry, but cool? Of course, that's all down to the player, but the careful, considered design of these guitars is refreshing and the resulting guitars – rather like Yamaha's 'third amp' concept with its original THR amps – are not only, we think, cool-looking but surprisingly classic in feel and sound, and would sit happily in a sonic stew alongside the well-worn classics we all love. In other words, apart from being pretty fine guitars in their own right, they'll make excellent additions for drop or alternate





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8. The gloss top is cut back with wire wool to create a used-looking satin finish. The scratchplate is anodised aluminium, all part of the Café Racer vibe

9. The shaped heel contouring aids upper-fret access

tunings, mean slide guitars, or simply an instrument for someone who actually dares to be a little different.

Of the two guitars on review, for us, the 502T epitomises the Revstar concept, with its diverse design inspiration and slightly more retro style. That said, the 820CR makes the ‘Café Racer’ concept a little more prominent and really looks and feels more like a small-workshop custom guitar than a mainstream, big-factory construct.

Is Yamaha bringing anything ‘new’ to the sonic table with these two, and indeed, the entire Revstar range? No, not really, but we guitarists are a peculiarly conservative bunch and perhaps the key to the concept is that they’re different, without being out-there in terms of style, sound or indeed price. Nice job. **G**



**YAMAHA REVSTAR RS502T**

**PRICE:** £565 (inc gigbag)  
**ORIGIN:** Indonesia  
**TYPE:** Double-cutaway, solidbody electric  
**BODY:** Mahogany with thin maple cap  
**NECK:** Mahogany, glued-in  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 629mm (24.75")  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Black synthetic/42.8mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Single-bound rosewood with cream dot inlays, 350mm (13.75") radius  
**FRETS:** 22, jumbo  
**HARDWARE:** Satin nickel-plated tune-o-matic-style bridge, height adjustable aluminium tailpiece, enclosed tuners  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 52.5mm  
**ELECTRICS:** 2x YGD-designed V5 Alnico soapbar single coils, 3-way lever pickup selector switch, volume and tone (with pull/push ‘Dry Switch’ high-pass filter)  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.98/8.76  
**OPTIONS:** The RS 502 (£485) has an adjustable wrapover bridge and satin-top finish in Bowden Green and Shop Black  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** See p132  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**FINISHES:** Bowden Green (as reviewed)



9/10

**PROS** Refreshing, intelligent design, classic sounds and neat ‘single coil’ Dry Switch

**CONS** It’s a little weighty and there are no colour options



**YAMAHA REVSTAR RS820CR**

**PRICE:** £807 (inc gigbag)  
**ORIGIN:** Indonesia  
**TYPE:** Double-cutaway, solidbody electric  
**BODY:** Mahogany with thin maple cap  
**NECK:** Mahogany, glued-in  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 629mm (24.75")  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Black synthetic/42.8mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Single-bound rosewood with cream dot inlays, 350mm (13.75") radius  
**FRETS:** 22, jumbo  
**HARDWARE:** Satin nickel-plated TonePros AVT-II adjustable wrapover bridge and enclosed tuners  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 52.5mm  
**ELECTRICS:** 2x YGD-designed V5 Alnico humbuckers, 3-way lever pickup selector switch, volume and tone (with pull/push ‘Dry Switch’ high-pass filter)  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 4/8.8  
**OPTIONS:** None  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** See p132  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**FINISHES:** Steel Rust (as reviewed) and Rusty Rat and w/ ‘hand-cut steel wool’ top finish and anodised aluminium scratchplate



9/10

**PROS** Refreshing, intelligent ‘Café Racer’ design, versatile sounds and neat ‘single coil’ Dry Switch

**CONS** Again, it’s a little weighty and limited colour options

\*Prices are confirmed at time of going to press but may be subject to change. Please check with your store