



Hofner Contemporary Series Verythin guitar & Violin bass

£425 & £450

HOFNER VERYTHIN CT

PRICE: £425
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Hollowbody f-hole electric
BODY: Pressed laminate with flame maple veneer, fully bound
NECK: Maple
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5-inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Plastic/45mm
FINGERBOARD: Pearl-dotted rosewood
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Nickel-plated stud tailpiece, tune-o-matic bridge and sealed 'tulip' button tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Two Hofner humbuckers, volume and tone for each pickup and three-way toggle selector switch
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3/6.6
RANGE OPTIONS: The Verythin Standard (£1,320) kicks off the German-made range. Look out for the new single-cutaway Club CT to be released later this year (approx. £450)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Black, sunburst (as reviewed), transparent red, natural
Hofner UK
07977 402016
www.hofner.com

Hofner takes two of its classic designs and adds Chinese manufacturing. The result? Affordable heritage by Neville Marten (Verythin guitar) and Roger Newell (Violin bass)

Any Guitarist reader who lived through Merseybeat or the British rock 'n' roll boom that preceded it will know the value of the Hofner brand. While Burns was a sort of British Fender, Hofner guitars – built in Germany but distributed through Selmer's in London – were our Gibsons at a time when neither American marque was available in the UK, due to an embargo on 'luxury' US imports.

Guitarists like David Gilmour, Justin Hayward and Roy Wood all learnt their craft on Hofners, while the three guitar-playing Beatles (and original bassist Stu Sutcliffe) picked up various models during their stints in Hamburg.

The two instruments reviewed this month echo both that Beatles influence and Hofner's 'mock Gibson' history. Paul McCartney's choice of 500/1 'violin' bass made the Hofner name world famous, while the Verythin (once called Verithin) was the semi of choice for those who found the ES-335 simply too elusive, or expensive.

Both guitar and bass come from Hofner's new Contemporary Series: classic models made in China, with prices that belie their sumptuous looks.

Verythin CT

Just as many British guitarists of the sixties were shocked to discover that the Gibson Les Paul was solid, due to their familiarity with Hofner's hollowbody Club range, so they were equally bemused to find the ES-335



The Verythin's flame-maple looks may divide contemporary tastes

HOFNER VERYTHIN	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<p>WE LIKED Great looks; vintage vibe; individuality; sweet tones</p> <p>WE DISLIKED The slightly generic feel of the neck</p>	

wasn't completely filled with air. The original Hofner Verithin was a semi-acoustic in the true meaning of the word, in that it was slender-bodied and hollow. The latest Verythins – both the German-made top-end models and this Contemporary (CT) version – have

an ES-335-style solid centre section designed to curb the hollowbody howl for which they lost popularity in the high-volume late sixties.

Put together from laminated timbers with a finely flamed maple veneer on the top, back and sides, at 30mm at its rims, the Verythin's body is thinner than an ES-335 by a full 10mm. Its twin cutaways are a good deal shallower too, lending a particularly elegant look to the instrument. Hofner may well have taken its cues from the great US makes, but from American inspiration came some genuine originals.

The guitar's one-piece glued neck is also maple and joins the body at the →





HOFNER VIOLIN CT

PRICE: £450

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Hollowbody four-string bass

BODY: Pressed laminate spruce top and laminated flame maple back and sides, fully bound

NECK: Laminated maple with mahogany centre strip

SCALE LENGTH: 768mm (30.25-inches)

NUT/WIDTH: Plastic/41.5mm

FINGERBOARD: Pearl-dotted rosewood

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo plus zero fret

BRIDGE: Traditional Hofner floating wooden bridge with fret wire saddles, separate tailpiece, chrome-plated twin-strip open-gear tuners with pearlloid buttons

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 14mm average (centres)

ELECTRICS: Two Hofner 'Staple'-design pickups, two volume controls, lead/rhythm switch, treble and bass switches

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.8/4.0

LEFT-HANDERS: No

RANGE OPTION: The Vintage 63 kicks off their German-made Violin bass range at £1,210. The 50th Anniversary Violin bass is now available at £3,100

FINISHES: Sunburst (as reviewed), black

→ 18th fret, giving unfettered access to the Verythin's 22 medium jumbo wires. Unlike early models, famous for their black and white tramline position markers, the Contemporary's cream-bound rosewood fingerboard is home to pearl dot markers, with a trio of them at the octave. Hofner's vine inlay and script logo fill the large, rounded headstock perfectly, with tulip-style tuners completing the picture.

Unlike early Verithins, which sported the jazzier trapeze tailpiece, the Standard CT brings us more familiar fare, with stop-bar and tune-o-matic bridge anchoring and guiding the strings over two humbucking pickups. Hofner tells us that while the instrument is built in China, the pickups are superior Korean units. These are governed by a Gibson-like quartet of control knobs, with a volume and tone for each pickup, along with a three-way pickup selector.

Generally, build quality and finish are excellent, although there's some polyester lacquer build-up around the neck joint. However, most players won't even notice this.

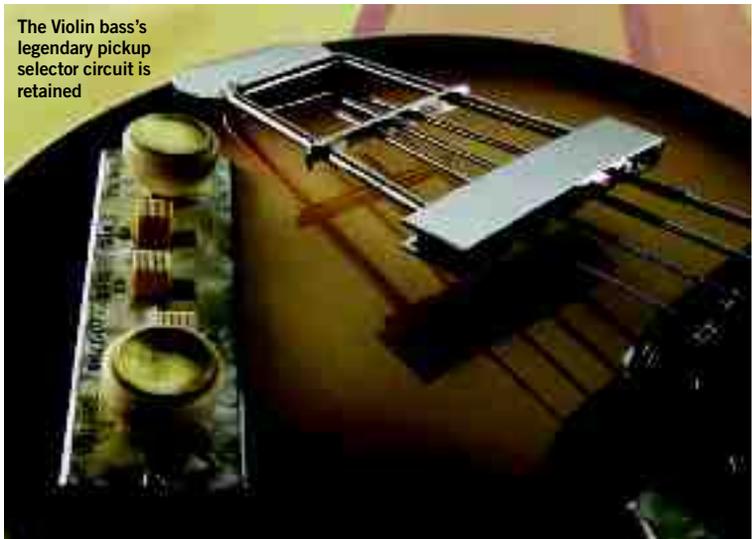
On picking up the Verythin, a wide and medium-deep 'C'-section neck greets the left hand. The action is low enough for comfort but with enough string clearance for bending, while the frets are well finished and the action rattle free. There's plenty of space for the hand up to first position A at the 15th fret, but the Hofner's shallow cutaways mean access to the ultimate fret isn't perfect.

However, we had a vintage Gibson ES-335 for comparison, and surprisingly, there was no difference at all.

The guitar's minimal weight certainly adds to the overall playing experience too – on a strap, you'd hardly know it was there.

SOUNDS: Korean pickups have earned a great reputation for producing tough, powerful tones. They're used by some of the world's

The Violin bass's legendary pickup selector circuit is retained



HOFNER VIOLIN	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<p>WE LIKED Classic design; big sound; second strap button</p> <p>WE DISLIKED The keener price means a case costs extra</p>	

top manufacturers so their presence on this Chinese guitar is reassuring.

A much more lightly built instrument than an ES-335, we were expecting springy, dynamic tones from the

Verythin CT – its maple neck and solid centre section seemed likely to add both brightness and sustain. Using a Cornford Hurricane set clean with a touch of ambient reverb, the neck pickup produced warm and clear tones that owed more to Fender, or Epiphone's P-90-equipped Casino, than Gibson. There's

power aplenty, but delivered in a measured way, with more bass and treble tones than honking middle.

Flipping over to the bridge, there's an edgy, bright sound that demands big Oasis open chords or jangly indie solos. In the centre, things go distinctly

country, with one pickup subtracting from the other to reveal a twangy tone of which Duane Eddy would be proud.

The Verythin handled overdrive surprisingly well, too. However, if you crank up the front end too much, the definition becomes lost, and too much power will still evoke that hollowbody yowl of yore.

There's real personality to this guitar's tones, though, with a range that would make it perfectly suitable for anything from jazz through to blues, pop and light rock.

Violin Bass CT

There's something about a live encounter with the Hofner Violin bass that turns this usually rational reviewer's legs to jelly, as well as inducing an "I need one" thought. It goes deeper than the Beatles connection too. Perhaps it's the symmetrical shape, so familiar on several long-established string instruments, the diminutive size and weight, or the unexpected thump that it delivers. Whatever it is, the attraction is palpable.

Once upon a time, these were cheaply available alternatives to owning a 'real' bass like a Fender or a Gibson, but the Merseybeat boom changed all that. Like the Verythin CT, this new Violin bass is way more affordable than the German-made

This is a beautifully constructed bass that will fool even the best of experts into thinking it's the real thing, without some very close inspection indeed

The rivals

VERYTHIN

Ibanez AS103NT £549
Yamaha SA500 £299
Gretsch Electro Hollow
G5129 £599

You don't always think of Ibanez when it comes to thinline semis, but the AS103NT is a great-looking, affordable guitar with high specs, including an adjustable Quik Change Ultra tailpiece, all-maple finish with maple pickguard, gold hardware, and a pair of Super 58 humbucking pickups. Yamaha's excellent SA500 is a steal at under £300. With all-maple centre-block construction, it also features 'finger' string retainers and twin, open-topped humbucking pickups. Gretsch's admittedly singlecut Electro Hollow has all the vibe of the Hofner, with a distinct rock 'n' roll edge. Featuring a pair of DeArmond pickups, a rosewood 'board with neo-classic markers and, of course, a Bigsby vibrato, it's as cool as a cucumber!

VIOLIN BASS

Tanglewood RVB-2
from £250

Epiphone Viola Bass
£399

Duesenberg DBV Violin
Bass £865

Epiphone's Viola Bass is probably the closest in character to the original. It features three rotary controls on a pearloid panel but has no scratchplate. The Duesenberg also benefits from modern construction methods and also presents a more efficient circuit, with three surface-mounted controls. It's another German-designed bass and while it retains the shorter scale length, it has a cleaner delivery and a wider tonal range. Consequently, it costs more than the others. Tanglewood's RVB-2 bass is fantastic value for money and is available in a left-handed model. From a distance, it looks pretty authentic, although it lacks the sonic punch associated with the original



Hofner's vine inlay and script logo add a touch of class to the Verythin's trad looks

There's real personality to the Verythin's tones, with a range that would make it suitable for anything from jazz through to blues, pop and light rock

models, and it makes it hard to keep your credit card in your wallet.

The rising quality of manufacturing means China is producing some scarily good instruments and that's certainly the case here. This is a beautifully constructed bass that will fool even the best of experts into thinking it's the real thing, without some very close inspection indeed. The two visible giveaways are the laminated neck construction and the second strap button, and neither of these is noticeable when you're playing.

While the top has nothing fancy in the grain department, the rear sports some lovely flamed maple. Construction is much the same as always – a fully bound hollowbody – but this version has an internal block to aid stability and add robustness. This makes it safer to carry and the added weight is minimal.

The curious German 'open circuit' wiring is also retained, where each switch turns off the other pickup, so when they're both switched to 'on', they're actually both off. Brilliant! These idiosyncrasies create this instrument's unique appeal, and we reckon that holding with tradition is absolutely correct in this instance.

SOUNDS: The lack of bulk and weight is slightly unnerving to the average bass player, and the desire to make sure the

bass is still there is unavoidable. The neck has the old 'broom handle'-type feel, with a deeply rounded profile and relatively meagre tapering from body to nut. The shorter scale means less of a stretch too, so this falls nicely into the comfort zone. The scale length, flatwound strings and surprisingly high output mean it delivers a hefty thump, with an even output across the strings and up the board. Compared to most modern basses, the tonal range is restricted, but it can be improved with roundwound strings. However, this tends to destroy the very fabric of what the Violin bass is all about.

Verdict

While not fitted with Hofner's own smaller humbucking pickups or tramline fingerboard inlays, and erring on the side of convention with the Gibson-style bridge, tailpiece and control set-up, this new Verythin CT still retains enough personality from the original design to please most lovers of this famous German maker. In fact, these compromises make it an altogether more rounded and usable instrument in today's hotly contested 'budget semi' market.

Sonically, the Verythin has a range of voices that, while suited to many modern styles, also manage to retain that all-important individuality. Build

quality is excellent, as we've come to expect from China, and playability is well up to par. However, what the Verythin has over almost any other brand in this market – except perhaps Gretsch – is a unique heritage that links directly to one of the most influential periods in popular music.

Ditto the Violin bass. If you want the 'real thing' but have a limited budget, then this is definitely the one to buy. It has the looks and feel, while the sound is remarkably close to the German-made full-price model. It even includes a second strap button, so at a third of the price of an original, it's hard to fault. However, perfectionists should note that this pre-production model has a cream scratchplate and control panel, whereas the production model will have a white pearl scratchplate and panel. If that's a problem, though, you really need to get a life!

The Violin bass, even more than the Verythin, provides a unique playing experience, and while it won't be to everyone's taste, there have been many converts over the years, including yours truly and Mr McCartney.

Both of these instruments represent really affordable tastes of Hofner's heritage, and with bands like The Zutons and The Coral putting Liverpool right back on the musical map, this could be the perfect time to try one. **G**

Hofner Verythin CT

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Hofner Violin Bass CT

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★