



Gretsch G6128B-TV Thunder Jet Bass £1,879

GRETSCH THUNDER JET BASS

PRICE: £1,879 (inc case)

ORIGIN: Japan

TYPE: Short scaled, four-string semi in the Professional Collection Series

BODY: Arched laminated maple top, semi-hollow mahogany

NECK: One-piece mahogany, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 770mm (30.3-inches)

NUT/WIDTH: White synthetic/43mm

FINGERBOARD: Ebony, 305mm (12-inch) radius, 'Thumbnail' (half-moon) inlays

FRETS: 22 medium jumbo

HARDWARE: Chrome-plated Sperzel locking tuners, ebony-based Bass Space Control roller-bridge, separate Gretsch G-Cutout tailpiece

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 17mm average (centres)

ELECTRICS: Two TV Jones Thunder Tron Bass pickups, two pickup volumes, master volume, master tone, three-way pickup selector switch

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.5/7.7

LEFT-HANDERS: No
RANGE OPTIONS: Other Gretsch basses include the Broadkaster Bass (orange £1,879; walnut stain, £1,699), the Long Scale Hollow Body Bass (£1,699) and the Electrotone bass (£1,699)

FINISH: Black gloss polyurethane (as reviewed)

Fender GBI

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At last a Gretsch bass that feels and sounds as good as it looks by Roger Newell

Even on the very first impressions this has got to be one of the best-looking basses that Gretsch has ever produced – a far cry from some of the more ungainly models from the distant past. It's a good sign of how much Gretsch has bloomed as a company in the last few years, making the most of modern technology and production methods. Under the direction of parent company Fender, Gretsch has taken the sensible route of reproducing some of its best-loved and truly classic models mixed in with a few fresh ideas and designs. The quality level has also improved and the current ranges are nothing short of spectacular as a result.

For you designation buffs out there

the 6128 model number of the Thunder Jet was originally allotted to the Duo-Jet guitar, the B denotes that it's the bass version and the TV refers to the Thomas Vincent Jones hand-wound pickups. Somewhat surprisingly this is the first time this model has been given the bass treatment. The single cutaway design and uncluttered body surface give instant visual appeal that really invites you to pick up and play it. All those unnecessary knobs and switches that festooned some of the early bass models are stripped away to leave just the essentials. Well almost... even now it possesses three volume controls plus a fourth rotary for overall tonal adjustment. And there's also a three-way pickup selector switch. The black

finish is restricted to the fascia and the headstock, while the neck and semi-hollow body (337mm wide, 44.45mm deep) retain the natural look of the mahogany under a deep gloss lacquer.

Although the fingerboard is ebony, on this particular instrument it's not as black as you might expect, it looks more like really dark rosewood but it still feels absolutely sumptuous. The neat thumbnail (or half-moon) inlays are a subtle touch and the edge bound body and neck finishes the whole thing off beautifully.

Gretsch guitars became a real driving force in the fifties and many of the appointments here hail from that hallowed era, like the curious design of the Bass Space Control bridge. With its wooden base, screw-threaded support and round slotted string adjusters, it's far from being a technological innovation yet it works fine. It's also known as a roller bridge and sits well with the classic 'G-Cutout' tailpiece and 'G-Arrow' knobs. The Thunder Tron pickups also smack of past times – particularly with the silver surrounds that match the pickguard. On the more practical side the Thunder Jet is fitted with Schaller straplocks for extra security and the Sperzel locking tuners approximate the distinctive shape employed on Gretsch guitars for many years. If looks could kill this machine would be deadly.

SOUNDS: Basses that follow the lines of popular guitar designs are by and large a total disaster when it comes to playing comfort, yet that is most definitely not the case here. Light, evenly balanced and very easy on the fingers, this is a superb bass to play. The way it sits comfortably into your

Basses that follow the lines of popular guitar designs are by and large a total disaster when it comes to playing comfort, yet that is most definitely not the case here



Sperzel locking tuners provide the modern, practical touch



The edge binding on the headstock and body works beautifully

GRETSCH G6128B-TV THUNDER JET BASS £1,879

BASS



The Thunder Jet avoids the quirks of past Gretsch bass designs

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PHOTOGRAPHY JOBY SESSIONS

The rivals

G&L ASAT Bass £1,279

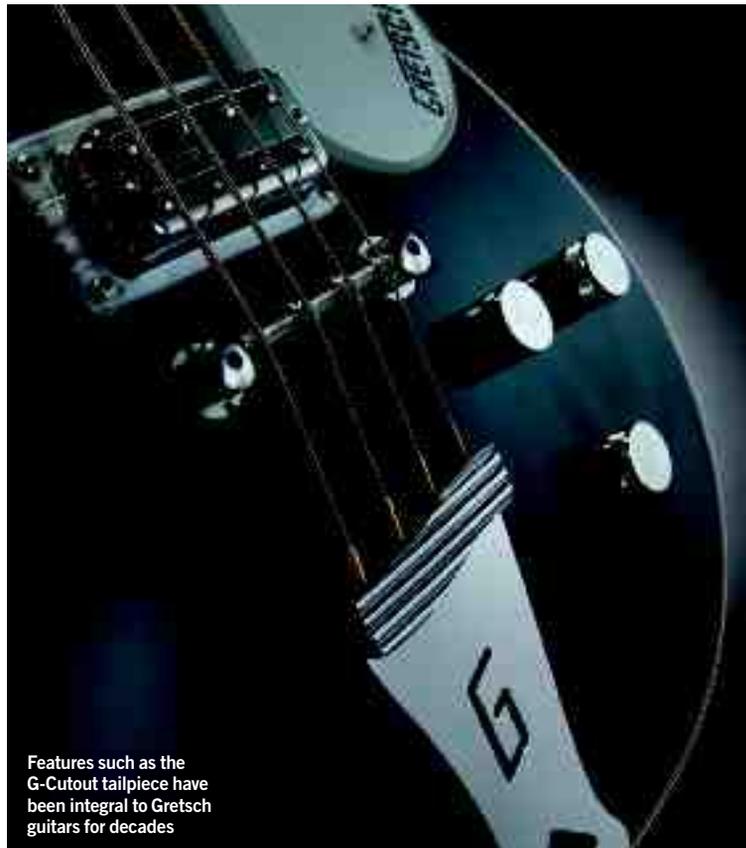
Hofner H500/1-61-AV

£1,500

Warwick Infinity

from £1,533

The G&L ASAT bass has the classic Telecaster shape, twin voice chambers and comes with or without f-holes. Great sound but balance leaves a lot to be desired. Hofner's Cavern-style Violin bass is the one with two humbucking pickups positioned towards the neck – just like Paul McCartney's first bass – and comes with the appropriate 'antique' finish (expect a limited edition Anniversary version of this one soon). One of the most visually striking basses in the huge Warwick range is the Infinity with a super thinline hollow body. Prices start at £1,533 for the four-string version in natural oil finish. Loaded with J-type and twin J-type pickups, the price will escalate as woods and appointments vary so it can cost way more than the rest



Features such as the G-Cutout tailpiece have been integral to Gretsch guitars for decades

→ body, combined with a slim profile neck, seduces you into thinking this is a regular-scale bass where in fact it's significantly shorter. As a result you get the benefit of improved balance without any of the short-scale disadvantages, and there's no loss of natural string tone either. In fact, the bass speaks clearly and authoritatively in an unmistakably Gretsch fashion.

One reason for the distinctive sound is the unusual circuitry that employs a master volume control. It's the one sitting all on its own on the lower body cutaway and is, of course, a Gretsch trademark. Yet far from being retained for its design value alone it's actually one of the most important factors in making Gretsch basses sound the way they do. When you first play, rather than offering any obvious benefit to the sound it actually seems to inhibit the delivery as backing it off does tend to choke the output signal; but it's where that unique sound is generated. However, if you do find it tonally inhibiting then simply leave it flat out when playing a gig and just adjust the individual pickup volumes.

In spite of the complexities of having three volumes, when it comes to fundamental tonal qualities the Thunder Jet actually stays well within the middle ranges rather than offering anything excessive at the top or lower frequencies. It won't crack your eardrums or rumble your nether regions but it will provide a variety of

super fat tones that will suit all styles of playing with perhaps the exception of slap bass. The TV Jones pickups are a great choice and individually perform with a pleasing robustness and give the opportunity for the bass to rasp and bubble in the lower regions as well as providing some fruity mid tones. When switched together the hollow quality reveals itself, more subtly than on many basses but with that singing

GRETSCH THUNDER JET TEST RESULTS

Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** Classic design; comfortable and easy to play

■ **WE DISLIKED** Twin tone controls would add greater general appeal

warmth which is always pleasing to these ears.

Verdict

Much as we've always appreciated the look of past Gretsch basses, playing them can be a quirky experience that can alienate all but the most diehard devotee. Yet this one is in a whole new league for the company: it's sleek, elegant and, dare we say it, comfortable. Although not over-endowed with tonal possibilities it has more than enough options on hand to keep the vast majority of players blissfully happy.

We heartily applaud any manufacturer that can retain its identity whilst embracing new ideas and production methods, and with the Thunder Jet Bass Gretsch has truly played a trump card. As you can tell we're mightily impressed, and although it's expensive we feel that it's not over-priced so we fully expect to see a lot more players switching to Gretsch. The whole experience of playing the Thunder Jet has been nothing short of a delight and we recommend you try one when you get the opportunity. **G**

Gretsch Thunder Jet Bass

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Gretsch basses of historical note

With Fender and Gibson already dominating the bass market the first Gretsch bass guitar was something of a late arrival, and producing a bass version of an established guitar model was a poor move. For although there was a certain appeal about the quirkiness of their electrics to guitarists, bass players found the circuitry frustrating and the dimensions ungainly and difficult to play.

The hollow-bodied 6070 double-cut appeared around 1963 with a single pickup, painted f-holes and an extension endpin to retain a link with upright bass players. The 6072 twin pickup version eventually followed and in 1968 a smaller bass with a 29-inch scale appeared, the 6071. There was also a two-pickup version, the 6073, and this was the first Gretsch bass to have any real appeal thanks to The Monkees' TV show. Guitarist Mike Nesmith used a Gretsch

6075 guitar and a 6076 12-string while Peter Tork had a 6073 bass. The show inspired the 6123 Monkees guitar and Tork had his own signature bass model but it never went into production.

When the company was taken over by Baldwin it spelled the end of the hollowbodies. Solid models were introduced in 1972 with the appropriately titled Solid Body Bass. Double-cutaway with mahogany body and two Super Tron pickups, it stayed in production until 1975 when the Broadcaster Bass, with twin Strat-like horns, arrived. The neck-through, symmetrical double-cut, Committee Bass followed and in 1977 the TK 300 Bass appeared and marked the end of the bass line for Baldwin. For collectors, the Gretsch hollowbodies still retain some appeal and, even though there were fewer solid models produced, they hold little interest at present.