

**GEAR**

**ROUND-UP**

RETRO BARITONE ROUND-UP



Words: Jonathan Horsley Photography: Olly Curtis

# RETRO BARITONE ROUND-UP

Take control of your low-end with three baritone electrics that harken back to a bygone era, when the electric guitar was redefining country and giving rock 'n' roll some growl and twang!



**FIRST** popularised in the mid-1950s, the baritone muscles in on the bassist's tonal fiefdom, and as a result has a reputation as a specialist's instrument. In truth, it's as versatile as any of its six-stringed kin. In country, the 'tic-tac' baritone bassline fast became a means of exorcising post-divorce angst. The baritone was a regular feature on Spaghetti Western scores, while saltwater surf-rock wouldn't be the same without its post-pubescent baritone twang, and in more recent years, the baritone has become a familiar weapon for metallers looking for new frontiers of heavy. Typically tuned a fourth below standard tuning, BEADF#B, or a perfect fifth, ADGCE, the baritone has a longer scale length, while added bulk in the body's bracing helps keep it in tune.

The launch of the PRS SE 277 Semi-Hollow Soapbar – with chambered back, f-hole and P-90 pickups – inspired us to look at two other baritones that also imbue a sense of classicism. Hagstrom's Viking Deluxe is a semi-hollow double-cut with a P-90, while a vintage-voiced humbucker in the bridge promises some snarl. The Danelectro, meanwhile... well, the Danelectro takes us right back to 1956 with lipstick pickups and a masonite body, tapping into our most bass-ic instincts.

## A baritone muscles in on the bassist's tonal fiefdom



## DANELECTRO '56 BARITONE £499

### Bass 'venturer

**THE** Danelectro '56 has a wonderful homemade feel. Its minimalist construction boasts two single-coil lipstick pickups, a three-way selector, a master volume, a tone knob that's arguably superfluous, and a Masonite front and back, braced with poplar frames. Masonite is more commonly used to make the tables in your local diner and will never be the most sought-after tone wood, but it adds a *Happy Days* vibe to the Dano's voice.

The '56 is all attitude and all neck. At 756mm (29.75 inches), its scale is the longest of the group – it's almost a bass – and has a clubby C-profile neck. Nobody sets up camp in the bass's frequencies to map out solo ideas, but think of the '56 as a guitar for lead rhythm playing.

Tonally, it has three distinct voices, all of which are a lot of fun. In the neck

pickup, the cleans are all wooden rumble and feel instinctively 'bass'. With the gain cracked up, the neck pickup rolls out a gutsy, crude tone, not as nasal as you'd get from a standard guitar but more of an elephantine, Serengeti mating call. Full-blown fuzz and hyper-gain bring out something truly bestial in the '56 that its creator, Nathan Daniel, could never have dreamed of.

Switching to the neck pickup is a paradigm shifter; this is where the twang is kept, all rockabilly bite and clarity, just begging for a little slapback echo or tremolo to bring out the best in what could be considered the Dano's Arthur Fonzarelli mode. Or you could take the nuclear option and engage both pickups for raucous, unruly gain, unleashing the rebel spirit that the '56 Baritone epitomises.





## HAGSTROM VIKING DELUXE BARITONE £699

The rumble for your jungle

**FIRST** impressions of Hagstrom's demure semi-hollow Viking are that it's a straight jazz and rock 'n' roller, and that's certainly half-true. The P-90-esque P-Urified single coil in the neck has enough teeth to bite through those low frequencies and articulate jazzy chords with a fair degree of separation, while with a breaking-up amp, the Viking can handle bluesy rock 'n' roll as easily as warm, sonorous jazz tones.

The neck, meanwhile, is thick but comfortable, while the Resinator fretboard, unique to all Hagstrom guitars, is a composite material that's designed as a more tonally reliable alternative to ebony. Although string-bending with a set of 0.013s is an Olympian chore and access to the upper frets is like getting a work visa for North

Korea, there's a litheness to the Viking. The Danelectro seems built for rhythm but the Viking feels like an all-rounder.

The Custom 58B humbucker in the bridge is bright and resonant, capable of dishing out a subterranean country vibe à la Lee Hazlewood, and chewy, sinewy classic-rock tones – albeit rendered in sphincter-troubling registers.

Indeed, the more you crank up the gain, the more the Viking Deluxe reveals itself as a surprisingly good option for metal, certainly alternative rock and grunge, with full-blown fuzz pedal action bringing out a harmonically rich and throaty roar, underpinned with the authority of its lower tuning.

Whether you love its Dr Jekyll cleans or succumb to its Mister Hyde alter-ego, the Viking Deluxe is sure to appeal to traditionalists and iconoclasts alike.

## PRS SE 277 SEMI-HOLLOW SOAPBAR £795

The beauty among the beasts



**MOVING** on from the Danelectro's rough 'n' ready charms and the Viking's few untidy niggles, it's striking just how meticulous the PRS 277's fit and finish is.

PRS has a history with baritones, of course. Its SE model for Stained man Mike Mushok became a cult classic, and has become much sought-after since its discontinuation. This semi is the tamer of the two new SE 277 models, the other of which is a twin-humbucker solidbody.

The 277 semi is a handsome beast, featuring that classic PRS silhouette with a flame maple veneer. The PRS bridge is a tidy string-through construction that's not only comfortable on the palm but anchors the guitar with a sense of stability. The 277 refers to its 27.7-inch scale length, and in terms of playability, it's the easiest of the three to

get to grips with, as a provider of low-end grunt and rhythm that also waves you on to the top of the fretboard.

While the PRS SE Soapbar P-90s mean the 277 isn't as tonally versatile as the Danelectro, there's still a dynamism to it. The bridge pickup has plenty of pugnacious snap with clean tones, and harmonic response when the gain is dialled in. Though the neck pickup takes a little of that trebly edge off, there's still plenty of chime, in what is a classically voiced baritone that's great fun to play.

If the Danelectro '56 is the guitar you might lend to your mate in that weird Ramones cover band, and the Viking Deluxe confounds expectations of what a sedate, semi-hollow can sound like, then this PRS SE 277 Semi-Hollow Soapbar is the one you'd take home to meet the parents... >>>



## VERDICT

**THE DANELECTRO '56** is a character that resists mass market appeal, and is sure to appeal to those raised on Dick Dale, Duane Eddy or Mudhoney alike. The Hagstrom Viking Deluxe, meanwhile, really surprised us with its raucous and animalistic appetite for lashings and lashings of gain. Set against those

two, the PRS SE 277 is the classiest proposition, and the most playable, courtesy of a wide, flat neck and shorter scale. All have a trebly brightness belying their frequency placement, and an individualist bent that could change the way you think about baritone guitars and revolutionise your playing.

### DANELECTRO '56 BARITONE £499

#### AT A GLANCE

**BODY:** Masonite, laminated wood frame  
**NECK:** Maple  
**SCALE:** 756mm (29.75")  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood  
**FRETS:** 24  
**PICKUPS:** 2x Lipstick single coils  
**CONTROLS:** 1x tone, 1x volume, 3-way pickup selector  
**HARDWARE:** Intonatable saddled bridge – chrome  
**LEFT-HANDED:** No  
**FINISH:** Gloss Black, Silver Flake (shown)  
**CONTACT:** John Hornby  
 Skewes 0113 286 5381  
[www.jhs.co.uk](http://www.jhs.co.uk)



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

### HAGSTROM VIKING DELUXE BARITONE £699

#### AT A GLANCE

**BODY:** Contoured ply flamed maple, semi-hollow  
**NECK:** Maple  
**SCALE:** 711mm (28")  
**FINGERBOARD:** Resinator (wood composite)  
**FRETS:** 22  
**PICKUPS:** 1x Hagstrom Custom 58'C (bridge), 1x P-Urified humbucker-sized P-90 (neck)  
**CONTROLS:** 2x volume, 2x tone  
**HARDWARE:** Long travel tune-o-matic bridge w/ Hagstrom stoptail – chrome  
**LEFT-HANDED:** No  
**FINISH:** Tobacco Sunburst (shown), Black Goss, Cosmic Black Burst  
**CONTACT:** Rosetti  
 01376 550033  
[www.hagstromguitars.eu](http://www.hagstromguitars.eu)



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

### PRS SE 277 SEMI-HOLLOW SOAPBAR £795

#### AT A GLANCE

**BODY:** Bevelled maple w/ flame maple veneer  
**NECK:** Maple  
**SCALE:** 704mm (27.7")  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood  
**FRETS:** 22  
**PICKUPS:** 2x PRS SE Soapbar  
**CONTROLS:** 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector  
**HARDWARE:** PRS-designed plate-style bridge – chrome  
**LEFT-HANDED:** No  
**FINISH:** Vintage Sunburst (shown), Gray Black  
**CONTACT:** PRS Guitars  
 Europe 01223 874301  
[www.prsguitars.com](http://www.prsguitars.com)



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