



Words: Henry Yates

# MODERN METAL SINGLECUTS

Just because you play metal doesn't mean you have to do so on a toasting fork with strings. Here are four psychotic axes that don't look it...



**NO** genre in rock 'n' roll has to put up with more stereotypes than metal. As we know, the metallor of popular perception wakes at noon in a crypt. He pulls on studded leather wristbands, sacrifices a crow beneath a pentagram, straps on an electric that resembles the love child of a shuriken and a starfish, and then starts death grunting like a satanic wild boar snuffling for truffles in Hades.

If that's your vibe, then good luck to you, but it's not the only option. For this month's Group Test, we've lined up four electrics that make one important point: just as cover stars Trivium have traded their Dean Razorbacks for more 'classic'

models while retaining their slamming tone on *In Waves*, so it's possible for you to perforate eardrums without resorting to cosmetic cliché.

At a glance, you'll notice three common things about Schecter's Hellraiser (£599), Dean's Deceiver FM Blue (£799), Ibanez's ARZ700 (£623) and LTD's EC-401 (£739): they have no spikes, prongs or barbs; they all feature twin active EMG humbuckers; and, yeah, they're all pretty pricey. Ultimately, though, we're not looking for baby-scaring gimmicks or guitars that will be too embarrassing to play when you hit your thirties, but investments that let the tone do the talking.



### SCHECTER HELLRAISER SPECIAL SOLO-6 £599

**IF THE** aim of this test is to grow up without growing old, the Hellraiser hits the bullseye. You'll clock the luxurious maple grain through the smoky finish of the contoured body and think 'mature'. Then you'll spot the occult inlays and active EMGs and think 'mental'. This model is dignified, statesmanlike and fiendishly metal – a bit like Tony Iommi. And it's only £599. Result.

The sticking point is that Schecter appears to have taken the term 'heavy metal' literally. The Hellraiser is a serious spine-bender. That 'more is more' philosophy extends to the maple neck. The jumbo frets and unobtrusive heel are great for hard, soulful, Zep-speed riffing, yet the 22nd-fret cut-off point and palm-filling profile means it doesn't feel as acrobatic as some of the other contenders.

Physically, it's divisive, but when it comes to tone, this guitar was born to tear it up. The by-product of all that timber is bags of sustain and character, and while the 85 has a fat, wide grind, the biggest thrill comes when you push that EMG 81 bridge unit hard and unlock a scything high-gain lead tone. We're not sure the Hellraiser qualifies as a shredder's choice, but if you're after a singlecut with rocket fuel, it demands attention.

#### AT A GLANCE

**BODY:** Mahogany with quilted maple  
**NECK:** Maple, set  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood  
**FRETS:** 22  
**SCALE:** 24 3/4"  
**PICKUPS:** EMG active 81 (bridge) and 85 (neck) humbuckers  
**CONTROLS:** 2x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector switch  
**HARDWARE:** Black chrome  
**LEFT-HANDED:** Yes  
**FINISH:** Black Cherry (pictured), Dark Vintage Sunburst  
**CONTACT:** Westside 01412 484812  
[schecterguitars.com](http://schecterguitars.com)

| FEATURES              |   |   |   |   |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|---|
| SOUND QUALITY         |   |   |   |   |
| VALUE FOR MONEY       |   |   |   |   |
| BUILD QUALITY         |   |   |   |   |
| PLAYABILITY           |   |   |   |   |
| <b>OVERALL RATING</b> | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |



### DEAN DECEIVER FM BLUE £799

**HAS** Dean grown up? The busty babes and hairy endorsers are still present and correct, but the launch of models such as the Deceiver suggests they're now targeting hard-rock players who don't consider themselves the emissaries of Satan.

The Deceiver doesn't look particularly metal. On the shelf, this is the anti-Razorback, with a wholesome aquatic finish (other options are available, but you'll trade the active EMGs for Dean's passive Time Capsules). To play, it's comfortable but hardly shred-tastic, with a body that's the most contoured of the bunch and a chubby C-shaped neck that eats up bends and vibrato. You can play fast, but it's no Jackson – more like a Les Paul with bigger balls.

Physically, it's comfortable and familiar, but not particularly memorable, and we'd be moving on if it weren't for the tone. Not every model in our test has a maple top,

#### AT A GLANCE

**BODY:** Mahogany with flame maple top  
**NECK:** Mahogany, set  
**FINGERBOARD:** Ebony  
**FRETS:** 24  
**SCALE:** 24 3/4"  
**PICKUPS:** EMG active 81 (bridge) and 85 (neck) humbuckers  
**CONTROLS:** 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector  
**HARDWARE:** Black nickel  
**LEFT-HANDED:** No  
**FINISH:** Trans Blue (pictured – other options don't have EMGs)  
**CONTACT:** Bill Lewington  
 01268 413366 [deanguitars.com](http://deanguitars.com)

and it does make a subtle difference. When you play clean, there's a bit of class and brightness. Then, when you hit it, the combination of the 81 and 85 'buckers, maple and mahogany adds up to a stinging brick-wall-like tone.

So the Deceiver rocks, but it's also pricier than its rivals and doesn't always make a convincing case as to why. That price tag probably rules out hard-up metallers and it's battling with the big boys to attract the metal aficionados.

| FEATURES              |   |   |   |   |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|---|
| SOUND QUALITY         |   |   |   |   |
| VALUE FOR MONEY       |   |   |   |   |
| BUILD QUALITY         |   |   |   |   |
| PLAYABILITY           |   |   |   |   |
| <b>OVERALL RATING</b> | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |

**LTD**  
**EC-401** £739

**FROM** our trucker caps to our facial fuzz, TG Towers is a haven for frustrated James Hetfield wannabes. His vibe doesn't come cheap, though. The ESP catalogue lists the big man's Truckster at £1,985, and even the LTD version will sting fans for £1,099.

Officially, the EC-401 has nothing to do with Metallica, but if you've been priced out of the Truckster market, this model could be your back door into that arena. There's no maple top, and that derivative mahogany singlecut doesn't do anything we haven't seen before, but the neck is our second-favourite in the group. It has a skinny U profile that nails the lot, from heavy down-picked thrash through wah-tastic doublestop bends to Hammett histrionics at the top frets. It even has the same fret inlays as the Truckster, although the fretboard isn't the most comfortable.

Refreshingly, like the Truckster and unlike the previous contenders, this model features EMG 60 and 81s. While the bridge deserves props for its searing lead, it's the neck 60 that's the star turn, supplying a kill 'em all crunch whose body, bark and brightness remind you why active pickups own this genre.

Despite its modest looks the EC-401 is a monster. In a lesser Group Test, it would have stormed home, but it narrowly misses the gold today.

**AT A GLANCE**

- BODY:** Mahogany
- NECK:** Mahogany, set
- FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood
- FRETS:** 24
- SCALE:** 24 3/4"
- PICKUPS:** EMG active 81 (bridge) and 60 (neck) humbuckers
- CONTROLS:** 2x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector
- HARDWARE:** Black nickel
- LEFT-HANDED:** No
- FINISH:** Black (pictured), Olympic White, Vintage Black
- CONTACT:** Selectron 01795 419460 esp guitars.com

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| <b>SUMMARY</b>        | FEATURES        | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
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|                       | VALUE FOR MONEY | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|                       | BUILD QUALITY   | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|                       | PLAYABILITY     | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| <b>OVERALL RATING</b> | ★★★★★           |   |   |   |   |   |   |



**IBANEZ**  
**ARZ700** £623

**WHEN** Mick Thomson ditched BC Rich for Ibanez, it was another reminder that for all the latter's monkey grips and flouncy pickup switching systems, the firm can still get down, dirty and hellishly heavy. On paper, the ARZ700 has heavyweight artillery, with a straight mahogany body and a fusion of EMG 60/81 active humbuckers.

The ARZ700 also comes in second cheapest and has arguably the most iconic logo on its headstock. You might say it looks identikit, but this is the sleekest, most comfortable model we've tested, with a gorgeous heel, fast-riffing profile, slippery board with well-finished medium fretwire and a slightly 'firmer' feel to the 25-inch scale.

Tone differences between these four axes were always going to be subtle, but the hard, edgy, characterful roar of the Ibanez swung it. EMGs can be less convincing when played clean, but we love the rich, woody, slightly angry twang in that context, and that's nothing compared to the mayhem when you push those units over the edge.

Any of these axes would do the business, but there's just something about the go-faster, play-harder, rock-louder ARZ700 that knocks the mature-metal vibe out of the park. It's the sound we heard in our heads and suits the number of sheets we have in our wallet.

**AT A GLANCE**

- BODY:** Mahogany
- NECK:** Mahogany, set
- FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood
- FRETS:** 24
- SCALE:** 25"
- PICKUPS:** EMG active 60 (neck) and 81 (bridge) humbuckers
- CONTROLS:** 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector
- HARDWARE:** Chrome
- LEFT-HANDED:** No
- FINISH:** Black (pictured)
- CONTACT:** Headstock 01215 086666 ibanez.com

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| <b>SUMMARY</b>        | FEATURES        | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
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|                       | VALUE FOR MONEY | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|                       | BUILD QUALITY   | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|                       | PLAYABILITY     | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| <b>OVERALL RATING</b> | ★★★★★           |   |   |   |   |   |   |