

Quicktest



Strandberg Boden 8 From \$3,350

Don't close your eyes... open your mind!

CONTACT: Strandberg Guitars WEB: www.strandbergguitars.com

Thanks to the rise of 'djent', seven, eight and even nine-string guitars are becoming more and more widespread. Often mistakenly perceived as a novelty, these guitars are fast becoming a mainstay in the realm of progressive metal.

A company that has catered to the prog-metal community for quite some time is Strandberg, based in Uppsala, Sweden, whose impressive user base includes Periphery's Misha Mansoor and Animals As Leaders' Tosin Abasi, and the Boden 8 reviewed here has its specs taken from the made-to-measure Strandbergs of those very two players.

Visually, the vast majority of us guitarists will be taken aback by the space-age appearance, including fanned frets, no headstock, and the strikingly unusual body shape. Yet perhaps the most unsettling feature aspect of all occurs

when flipping over the guitar to reveal the trademarked 'EndurNeck': a neck that has a back surface made up of three intertwining flat surfaces instead of a round profile.

This 'EndurNeck' system is no novelty, however: it has been borne out of extensive research into hand posture at various points on the neck, and the knowledge that your hand is much stronger when gripping something thick than when gripping something thin. So, when your fretting hand is in a position where the first finger needs support, such as the higher end of the neck, you'll find the appropriate girth underneath to provide it, and vice versa for the thumb at the lower end of the neck. After playing it, you'll soon realise it makes perfect sense, and enhances playability on an already challenging eight-string.

Sounds

Those who have dabbled in lower tunings will already appreciate that the greater the scale length, the better the tension and intonation of the lower strings. Because the scale length is increased from high to low, the frets fan out, too. There are numerous pickup options available when custom-ordering a Boden 8, and our review model has Lace Aluma X-Bars installed. We find them just a tad underpowered for immediately capturing that progressive metal sound that this type of guitar demands, but after a few amp tweaks, we've got a very well balanced sound, with enough power to project ultra-low riffs without overpowering higher strings.

Verdict

However unsettling the appearance of the guitar, rest assured that every seemingly

radical feature is a triumph for function over 'style', and none more so than the unique EndurNeck neck, which really is an ingenious feat of design. While the thought of a non-elliptical neck shape will be horrifying to most of us, it's precisely on such a wide neck that this system offers some serious benefits.

For players who creatively demand the sonic benefits of an eight-string instrument, but are perhaps still feeling apprehensive about swapping to a much wider neck, the radical, innovative Boden 8 may prove to be the ultimate platform to finally make the transition. [DC]

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: *If you're serious about eight-string instruments this is one of the most innovative and intuitive designs out there*



Guitarist
CHOICE

Red Witch Factotum Bass Suboctave Drive **£249**

Analogue bliss from Red Witch's first bass unit

CONTACT: Wunjo's PHONE: 0207 379 0737 WEB: www.redwitchpedals.com

Much loved by guitarists, Red Witch has at last released an effects pedal aimed at bass players. Continuing the company's blend of art and technology into its products, this analogue unit is presented in a bright chrome finish and, as the name suggests, the Factotum has the dual function of introducing a sub-octave note and distortion. Naturally, these can be used individually or together from independent switches, but of the five on-board rotary controls, four are concerned with the drive section and the other is used to blend the sub-octave into your regular note.

Sounds

Sonically, this is a joy from start to finish, as both functions are extremely effective in their own right. Analogue sub-octave is by no means an easy feat to achieve, yet this does the job with authority – and the single

control proves more than enough to achieve a good ratio of wet-to-dry signal.

The drive section is far more sophisticated: whether used in moderation or for full-on Armageddon, there's plenty of control and a natural valve-like warmth to the sound, that makes you want to use it more and more. With full blending abilities available, the combined sounds are high-quality and never seem thin.

Verdict

The Factotum is an extremely roadworthy unit with two great sounds that will appeal to most bass players. Red Witch has chosen a great way to start – let's hope more bass pedals are in the cauldron. **[RN]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: *If you want to add distortion and/or sub-octave effects, check this out*



Guitarist
CHOICE

Korg Sledgehammer & Sledgehammer Pro Clip-on Tuners

£23.99 & £35.99

Clip-on tuners are 10 a penny, but this pair stand out from the crowd

CONTACT: Korg UK PHONE: 01908 304600 WEB: www.korg.co.uk

These new lightweight Sledgehammers share a wide-jawed plastic clip and fully rotating tubular head. The Sledgehammer has a recessed flat screen with thumbwheel controls at each end. The left wheel, moved up, turns the power on; turned down, you select chromatic, guitar or bass modes. The right wheel, moved up, calibrates the tuning reference from 436-445Hz; moved down, you enter the flat (down five semitones) or capo (up seven semitones) modes.

On its rounded '3D' display, the all-black Pro has a choice of read-outs (regular, strobe and half strobe) but does away with the specific guitar and bass modes. It has improved accuracy (+/- 0.1 as opposed to +/- 1 cent) and increases battery life from eight to 14 hours.

In Use

Accuracy and quick response here are extremely good. The

standard Sledgehammer's more basic display is better for students; yet it's a little slower and seems very slightly less accurate. The Pro, however, especially in strobe mode, is on a par with a Peterson Virtual Strobe – we achieved excellent results with both a troublesome nylon string and gigging a bass.

Verdict

Accurate and lightweight they may be, but both are on the steeper side, price-wise, of the clip-on tuner market. The Pro, however, is the most accurate tuner of its type we've yet encountered, and the most visible, in terms of that '3D' display. **[DB]**

GUITARIST RATING

Sledgehammer ★★★★★
Sledgehammer Pro ★★★★★

Guitarist says: *Not the cheapest, but in terms of accuracy, the Pro is the way to go*

Cort CGC7 Electro nylon cutaway £389

Need a nylon-string 'crossover' guitar, but strapped for cash?

CONTACT: Proel **PHONE:** 0208 761 9911 **WEB:** www.cortguitars.com

Cort, like the majority of huge Asian brands, offers a diverse range of guitars. We last caught up with its collaboration with Manson guitars here in the UK and Muse's Matt Bellamy. This cutaway electro-nylon string couldn't be more different.

It has a few things in common, however, with that Bellamy signature in that it's very crisply made with an attractive price-point. Combine a narrower nut width (44.9mm), some 6mm thinner than a concert classical, but with a wide classical-style string spacing at the tie-block bridge of 60mm, not to mention a lightly cambered fingerboard and reduced depth, and you have an intentionally stage-friendly, 'crossover' guitar. It seems ideal for any player wanting to don nylons who doesn't want to go down the hardcore classical guitar route.

Construction-wise, it's classed by Cort as having an SFX outline, which falls into the grand-auditorium bracket and certainly isn't many millimetres away from Takamine's NEX outline, not least the upturned, round-nosed cutaway horn. The body is wider than a conventional classical at 402mm and, as we say, the depth is reduced from a more classical dimension of approx 100mm, to 85mm.

Typical of the modern electro-nylons, we have an adjustable truss-rod although the three piece mahogany neck has a noticeable slight V to its profile in lower positions – much more steel-string-like. However, the crisp, tidy bracing at least includes proper classical-style fan bracing. Typical of the modern Chinese-made style, the fingerboard is bound with black plastic and, again quite typical at this price, the small frets, though very nicely

installed, haven't been properly polished, giving a scratchy feel to any slight bend.

Powering comes from a simple Fishman setup: a Sonicore under-saddle married with a Presys preamp featuring volume, bass, mid and treble mini-rotary controls, plus a feedback-defeating phase switch and onboard tuner.

Sounds

Slackening off the strings and giving a good rub to the frets and fingerboard dramatically improves the feel of the guitar and takes all of 10 minutes. Acoustically, well, it's far from the loudest nylon-string we've ever played, and lacks some richness in the lower end and lower mids. But as an amplified stage guitar – not to mention a perfectly good at-home practice instrument – it justifies its cost. It really has quite a percussive 'Spanish' tonality: crisp highs, a quick attack and not a huge sustain. The D and A strings are a little underpowered, which might be the strings, or more likely a slight imbalance caused by the fitting of the under-saddle. Plus, the onboard tuner on our model doesn't work.

Verdict

A little fingerboard TLC goes a long way, and the non-functioning tuner would immediately be sorted by any dealer. For a student, or a player wanting to experiment with the nylon 'crossover' genre without breaking the bank, certainly for onstage use and at-home practice, it's a very valid instrument. **[DB]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Affordable and stage-friendly, a good starter for nylon-string wannabes



VIDEO DEMO



<http://bit.ly/guitarist394>



Guitarist
CHOICE

Electro-Harmonix Pitch Fork **£113**

Meet EHX's latest compact polyphony epiphany

CONTACT: Electro-Harmonix **WEB:** www.ehx.com

With Royal Blood's octave-doubling riff onslaughts dominating mainstream rock, it seems pitch-shifting is finally reaching widespread acceptance among guitar – and bass – players, especially since the development of polyphonic tracking. It's good timing, then, for the Pitch Fork, the latest evolution of EHX's own polyphonic pitch-shifting technology, which started with the POG back in 2005.

Where the POG deals primarily with octaves, the Pitch Fork gives you the full range of intervals from one octave down to one octave up, plus two and three octaves in either direction, via a toggle switch. EHX has also enabled two harmonics at once; set the toggle to dual, and as well as one up-shifted signal, you also get a preset 'musically useful' harmony alongside, including a POG-like octave-up and octave-down doubling.

The Pitch Fork encroaches on the territory of its pitch-shifting stablemate, the Slammi, by offering external expression pedal control. This is in addition to a non-latching mode, accessed via the latch button, which allows the footswitch to be used for momentary glitches and shifts. In momentary mode, you can also use an expression pedal to adjust the rise/drop time of the footswitch. Elsewhere, the Pitch Fork features a high-quality buffered bypass, and can run from its included nine-volt power supply or a nine-volt battery – the latter is a genuine option, too, given its relatively low current draw of 30mA.

Sounds

No matter what extended chords you throw at it, the Pitch Fork delivers spot-on tracking in every shift, even when tracking dual harmonies. Compared with, say, a DigiTech

Whammy (5th Gen), there's a fraction more latency, but it's barely noticeable, especially with some gain engaged, and it's a price worth paying for the sonic potential on offer.

As well as three variations on chorus, courtesy of the detune mode, the full complement of harmonies work a treat, while the upper octaves are well-voiced, doing away with the sometimes shrill quality of lesser shifters. The dual functions are awfully generous, too: we're big fans of the flute-y two-octaves up and one-octave down setting, and although not every combined harmony is musically practical, you can hardly complain with so many options on the table.

By cranking the blend to maximum, instant drop-tunings are also available, and although the treble content drops slightly the lower you go, a dash of dirt makes for seriously convincing baritone-style results. The plug-

and-play expression pedal control is a big plus, too: hooking up a Roland EV-5, we had no problems instantly conjuring classic pitch-shifting highlights, such as Tom Morello-type sweeps and Floyd Rose-esque divebombs.

Verdict

With street prices hovering around the £100 mark, the Pitch Fork packs a tremendous range of sounds for the money. While every pitch-shifter has its strengths, the flexibility, superb tracking and overall tonality of the shifts make the Pitch Fork a safe bet for just about any pitch-based application, and the Nano enclosure serves to seal the deal. **[MB]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: *With myriad shifts, formidable tracking and pedalboard-friendly dimensions, this is a handy do-all pitch-shifter*