

GEAR

ROUND-UP
YAMAHA REVSTAR



Words: Dave Burruck Photography: Adam Gasson

YAMAHA REVSTAR ROUND-UP

Over three years in development, Revstar is Yamaha's first new design for years. But are they any good? Let's rev 'em up...



>>>

THINK Yamaha, and most of us think of the Pacifica, the company's highly successful start-up electric guitar, which has been a staple of music stores for longer than many of us would care to remember. But wasn't the Pacifica just a rehash of Fender's Stratocaster? Er, yes. New designs from the Japanese giant have been strangely absent for over a decade. Until now.

Launched at the tail end of 2015, the new seven-strong Revstar range aims to put Yamaha back in the electric guitar market. The guitars are made in Indonesia, hence the affordable start with the RS320, but even the top-line model, the RS820, isn't exactly out of reach.

Key design elements include a celebration of 'Yamaha-ness' – and don't forget, Yamaha has been making electric guitars for 50 years come 2016 – and 'Japanese-ness'. In short, the extensive design team simply didn't think the world needed just another electric guitar. If you know your guitar history, you might see a bit – quite a bit, actually – of Yamaha's SG2000, which originally appeared in the late 70s, designed in conjunction with Carlos Santana: a guitar that certainly put Yamaha on the map and proved that Japan could fashion an electric that was every bit as good as those made in the USA. Can Revstar follow in those footsteps? Let's find out...

The Revstars aim to put Yamaha back in the guitar market



YAMAHA RS320 £323

The start-up Revstar recalls a Les Paul Special... but with some added firepower!

MANY lower-end electrics seem to pile on features to make their spec sheets sound that bit more impressive, but the entry-level Revstar keeps things beautifully simple, concentrating on quality. Along with the following model, the 420, but unlike the upper 500, 600, 700 and 800 guitars, it's made entirely from nato, a pretty close cousin of mahogany, found in Indonesia. The slab body doesn't have any 'comfort' contours and there's no fingerboard or headstock binding, either.

Like all the Revstars, it's a Gibson-esque set-neck design; those offset SG-inspired horns and a rounded heel make access to the top 22nd fret a doddle, while the dark rosewood 'board features

a slightly flatter-than-Gibson 350mm (13.75-inch) radius and medium-gauge, finely honed frets. Like the 420, the 320 features a slightly thinner-depted neck, which fills out as you get up the classic feel as opposed to an ultra-thin 'speed' design.

Hardware is fairly generic but certainly functional, while the pickups, designed by Yamaha and made by Korean giant G&B, aim for a high, but not daft, output with powerful ceramic magnets. Consequently, the 320 excels at balls-to-the-wall rock 'n' roll. It feels meaty and sounds it, too, from the mid-focused crunch of the bridge to a high-octane saturated neck lead voice. It's not the most versatile guitar out there, but it's a lot of fun.





YAMAHA 502T £565

The most retro-looking Revstar features dual single coils and a Dry Switch. A what?

THE 502T was pretty much the original design that kick-started the Revstar range. With the same shape as the 320, it swaps to all-mahogany construction (with a thin 5mm maple cap), adds belly and ribcage contours, a crisply bound top edge, a subtly deeper profile neck with bound dot-inlaid fingerboard, bigger frets and matching binding.

Most visually different, however, is the aluminium tailpiece, part of design theme that draws on a different part of Yamaha's massive corporate output – the old-school cool of its Café Racer motorbikes. Placed behind a satin nickel tune-o-matic bridge, the tailpiece is height adjustable, and even works as a pretty stiff pitch-rising vibrato. Oh, and it looks pretty cool, right? Well, that dark Bowden Green colour – named

after the address of the original-concept design team in south London – might be a bit Marmite, but on stage (and in our photos) it looks virtually black.

The 502T and its sibling, the 502 (without the tailpiece and with a hand-rubbed satin top and headface), both use Yamaha-designed soapbar single coils with a medium-hot output, and like all the models, have a simple three-way selector switch, master volume and tone. Pull up the tone control, however, and you voice that Dry Switch – basically a passive high-pass filter that thins out the sound a little. It adds surprising versatility to the biting-hot single-coil sound of the soapbars and easily kicks out a classic, punkier rock tonality or just-as-cool, old-school jazzy, bluesy soulful pop tones. All in all, it's a very classy act.

YAMAHA RS820CR £807

The top-of-the-line satin-topped Revstar complete with go-faster stripes

RIGHT, so the construction stays the same as the 502, but the difference is the colour choice and the satin-look top and headface, which Yamaha tells us is achieved by using fine steel wool to cut back the gloss. It certainly lends a custom-shop slant, but on closer inspection, you can see two gloss stripes running down its centre. It's another Café Racer motorbike emblem – evidenced by the CR suffix in the name – like the copper-coloured cut-off scratchplate, which is actually anodised aluminium, and the satin-nickel Tone Pros adjustable wrapover bridge.

This textured metal vibe continues to the old-looking nickel covers on the YGD V5 humbuckers, which feature heavy Formvar-coated wire and Alnico V magnets under the hood. Like the 502T, we have the same control functions, but

it all comes together to create what is one seriously good-looking guitar. Even the aforementioned control knobs, with their easy-grip knurled industrial-look tops, have been specially created. They look like locking nuts off a motorbike, but function perfectly.

So far, each Revstar has had its own sonic signature, and the 820CR is no different. It's very Les Paul-like, with thickness and balance; it's powerful but not over-hot, and an easy drive to capture some fruity classic rock, or more contemporary gained voices. The Dry Switch here produces some single coil-like percussion without any additional hum as they are still hum-cancelling – almost like a Les Paul meets a Telecaster.

There's a meaty feel here from the chunky body – and associated weight – from that quite big neck to its sounds. Girthsome, indeed!

>>>



VERDICT

LEANING HEAVILY on that Yamaha SG2000, the Revstars certainly have more Gibson than Fender in their DNA. But features like that Dry Switch, not to mention the 502T's tailpiece and soapbar single coils, expand that voice. 'Just different enough' is one of Yamaha's marketing slogans, and

we'd have to agree. The 320 is a great start-up rock guitar, the 502T's more retro take has a much broader sonic palette and the 820CR certainly stands up to the competition for classic-rock grunt and more. Both the 502T and 820CR come with tough gigbags, too. Pick your fave and try it, urgently!

YAMAHA RS320 £323

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Nato
NECK: Nato
SCALE: 629mm (24.75")
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 22, medium
PICKUPS: 1x YGD H3 (neck), 1x YGD H3 (bridge)
CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way lever pickup selector
HARDWARE: Nickel plated tune-o-matic and stud tailpiece, enclosed tuners
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Stock Yellow (shown), Black Steel, Red Copper
CONTACT: Yamaha
 01908 366700 uk.yamaha.com



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

YAMAHA 502T £565

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Mahogany w/ maple cap
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE: 629mm (24.75")
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 22, jumbo
PICKUPS: 1x YGB V5 soapbar single coil (neck), 1x YGB V5 soapbar single coil (bridge)
CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone w/ Dry Switch, 3-way lever pickup selector
HARDWARE: Satin nickel tune-o-matic bridge, aluminium tailpiece, enclosed tuners
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Bowden Green only



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

YAMAHA RS820CR £807

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE: 629mm (24.75")
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 22, jumbo
PICKUPS: 1x YGD V5 humbucker (neck), 1x YGD V5 humbucker (bridge)
CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone w/ Dry Switch, 3-way lever pickup selector
HARDWARE: Satin nickel Tone Pros AVT-II wrapover bridge, enclosed tuners
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Steel Rust (shown), Rusty Rat



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

NB: Prices confirmed at time of press, but may be subject to change. Please check in-store.