



BC Rich Kerry
King Beast V

Jackson
Mark Morton
Dominion D2

Group Test

Signature models under £500


With TG still wearing black armbands in memory of Les Paul, we've decided to check out the signature market. Tonight, Matthew, we're going to be John 5, Kerry King, Mark Morton and Nuno Bettencourt

WORDS **HENRY YATES**



Washburn
N1 Relic

Squier J5
Telecaster



Flip the page to
find out which one
won our Group Test
head-to-head

When a young Les Paul approached Gibson in the late 40s with a prototype known as 'The Log', he unwittingly invented the concept of the signature model. Les is gone now, but the market for celebrity axes is booming with the world's custom shops working overtime to satisfy their hairy taskmasters, and the more obsessed end of the fanbase snapping up these guitars to go with their tattooed kneecaps. For cynics, the signature model is a bone of contention. While TG has seen some bespoke designs that push the envelope – Steve Vai's JEM, say, or Wes Borland's Yamaha CV820 WB – we've seen far more that fleece the hardcore fans with novelty fret inlays, before the luthier wraps up production and moves onto the next hot young gunslinger.

With a bit of luck, the four brand-new electrics we've lined up here aren't just for

the stalkers. For one thing, the Squier J5 (£379), BC Rich Kerry King Beast V (£279), Washburn N1 Relic (£229) and Jackson Mark Morton Dominion D2 (£429) all clock in under £500, putting them within reach of most breadline rockers. For another, each is manufactured by a highly respected luthier, raising hopes that they'll offer substance along with the style. Finally, and just as important, they're endorsed by some of metal's most credible players.

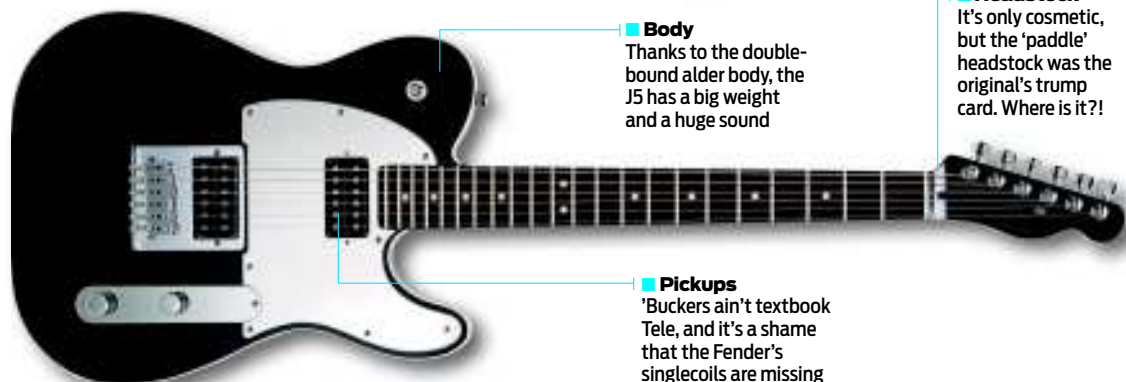
When signature models are done right, they can imbue us mere mortals with a little of the vision, tone, technique and sex appeal of our heroes. Let's get into character. ■

**"THE MARKET FOR
CELEBRITY AXES IS
NOW BOOMING"**



Squier J5 Telecaster £379

Here's Johnny!



Body
Thanks to the double-bound alder body, the J5 has a big weight and a huge sound

Headstock
It's only cosmetic, but the 'paddle' headstock was the original's trump card. Where is it?!

Pickups
'Buckers ain't textbook Tele, and it's a shame that the Fender's singlecoils are missing

Holy cow! That was the reaction to the cover of TG111, wherein John 5 unveiled his Tele, complete with Bigsby, bespoke pickups and a headstock you could paddle a canoe with.

Six years later, the Squier J5 seems good value compared to the £849 original. But with a standard headstock, no vibrato and stock pickups, TG can't help but notice our crestfallen face in the mirrored pickguard.

OK, maybe we're being unfair: plenty of good stuff has made



it onto the J5, from the monster sustain of the heavy alder body to the flowing 'C' profile of the meaty maple neck. But it's ironic that 5's most idiosyncratic feature is one we could live without. Sure, the twin volume

controls let you perform 5's trademark 'kill' effect, but no tone dial means it's impossible to tweak the humbuckers, which can sound a bit woolly for his trademark 'shred-grass' (tellingly, his own Fender has a singlecoil at the neck), and rely on you solving the problem with your amp's EQ settings.

Conclusion: "This is just like my main Telecaster, exactly," says 5 – but that's not exactly true. If we hadn't had our heads turned by the original, we'd probably be

giving an unreserved thumbs-up to the watertight playability and meaty, unorthodox Telecaster sounds of the Squier J5, especially in light of the ultra-competitive price tag. But in reality we have, and so we give this axe a respectful tip of the hat, bid it farewell and move on to our next A-listener.

SUMMARY

For: Big sounds and solid feel
Against: It's lost its original spark



TG says: Not quite a 5 for Mr 5

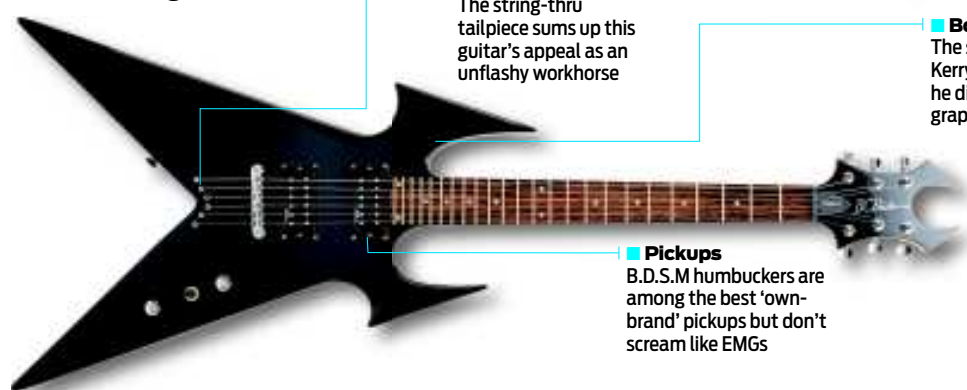
At a glance

Squier J5 Tele

BODY: Solid alder
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 22
SCALE: 25.5"
PICKUPS: 2x custom humbuckers
CONTROLS: 2x volume control, 3-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Chrome/stainless steel
FINISH: Black [pictured]
LEFT-HANDERS: No
CONTACT: Fender GBI 01342 331700
WEB: www.squierguitars.com

BC Rich Kerry King Beast V £279

Fit for a King?



Tailpiece
The string-thru tailpiece sums up this guitar's appeal as an unflashy workhorse

Body
The shape was Kerry's idea – shame he didn't specify a graphic finish

Pickups
B.D.S.M humbuckers are among the best 'own-brand' pickups but don't scream like EMGs

As the only luthier with balls big enough to work with Mr King, BC Rich was unphased by his plan to splice the Beast body with the barbs of his Speed V. The resulting Beast V has taken mere months to prototype, but that's probably because it's quite derivative, featuring the kind of bolt neck, B.D.S.M units and string-thru tail that BC Rich can knock out in its sleep.

King's bone-snapping sound is built on active EMG pickups, a



thru neck and a Kahler vibrato, so if you want to sound like the big man, you'll need to save for the pricier Beast V NT. Inevitably, this minimalist version suffers by comparison, but it's a pro

package for £279 and one that gets you in the Slayer ballpark with an unfussy two-octave neck capable of thrash chugs and squealies, and a set of 'buckers that (while not desperately memorable) fuse with the natural sustain of the basswood body for a useful, dark grind.

Conclusion: We'd love to say, 'Hell, yeah!', but the Beast V is more a case of 'Hmm, not bad'. With that price, you have to agree this represents one hell of

a bargain, offering performance that aspirant metal gods couldn't have dreamt of back in the bad old days, and marking itself out as a solid choice for semi-pro gigs. All the same, there's a sense of déjà vu, meaning that this model must be filed under 'watertight', not 'life-changing'.

SUMMARY

For: Solid and unfussy metal tones
Against: We've seen it all before



TG says: Spiky but unspectacular

At a glance

BC Rich Kerry King Beast V

BODY: Solid basswood
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 24
SCALE: 25.5"
PICKUPS: 2x B.D.S.M humbuckers
CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Chrome
FINISH: Onyx
LEFT-HANDERS: No
CONTACT: Rosetti 01376 550033
WEB: www.bcrich.com

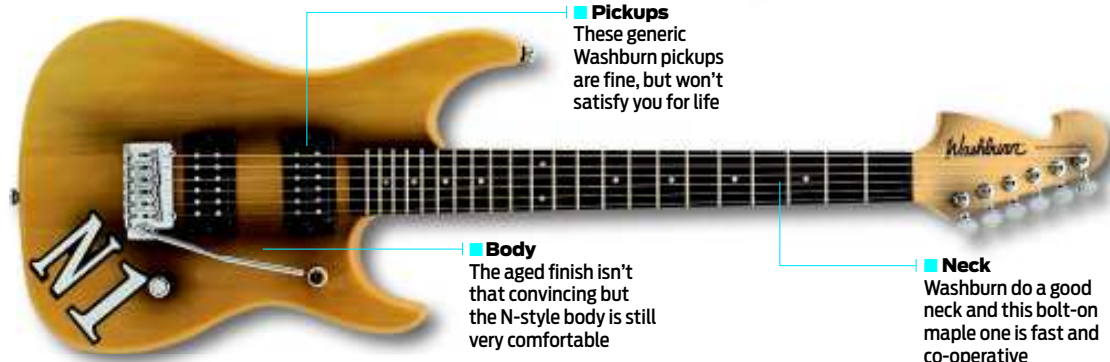
"THE D2'S BODY IS FUNCTIONAL AND NOT SO 'METAL' THAT IT WILL POLARISE THE AUDIENCE"

SIGNATURE MODELS UNDER £500 ★ **GROUP TEST**

Washburn N1 Relic

Is the Nuno a no-no?

£229



Pickups
These generic Washburn pickups are fine, but won't satisfy you for life

Body
The aged finish isn't that convincing but the N-style body is still very comfortable

Neck
Washburn do a good neck and this bolt-on maple one is fast and co-operative

At a glance

Washburn N1 Relic

BODY: Solid wood
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 22
SCALE: 25.5"
PICKUPS: 2x Washburn humbuckers (with coil tap)
CONTROLS: Master volume, 3-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Chrome/diecast
FINISH: Aged finish [pictured]
LEFT-HANDERS: No
CONTACT: Sound Technology 01462 480000
WEB: www.washburn.com

Extrême hottie Nuno has barely aged a day since he became Washburn's highest-profile poster-boy in 1990. Not so his trademark Washburn N4 – a grizzled old warhorse that provides the visual inspiration for this aged version, if not the spec. Alder is swapped for the disconcertingly vague 'solid wood', Bill Lawrence and Seymour Duncan pickups are downsized for Washburn items, and the Floyd Rose goes MIA.

Nobody is going to be fooled by the aged 'relic' finish, but



physically the N1 is right on the money, equipped with the kind of fast, unfussy neck that Washburn does so well, and a body that manages to do a decent impression of a Strat, even if it doesn't have as much

meat behind it. It's hard to get as enthusiastic about the sounds though. Thanks to a coil tap there's good versatility here, but the output feels slightly uneven, and when you strip away the distortion, the tone is sometimes a little flat and lacking in character (a byproduct of the undistinguished timbers).

Conclusion: At this point, we should stress that any criticism of the N1 Relic must be taken in context. It's only £229, for God's sake, but it's still plenty

good enough for first riffs, solos, bands and gigs, not to mention a lifelong post as a reserve live guitar. If that's what you're looking for in an axe, then dive right in. Equally, though, if you want to record or gig extensively, then we'd urge you to find the cash and push a little further up Washburn's N Series.

SUMMARY

For: Great feel and price

Against: Forgettable tone, iffy finish

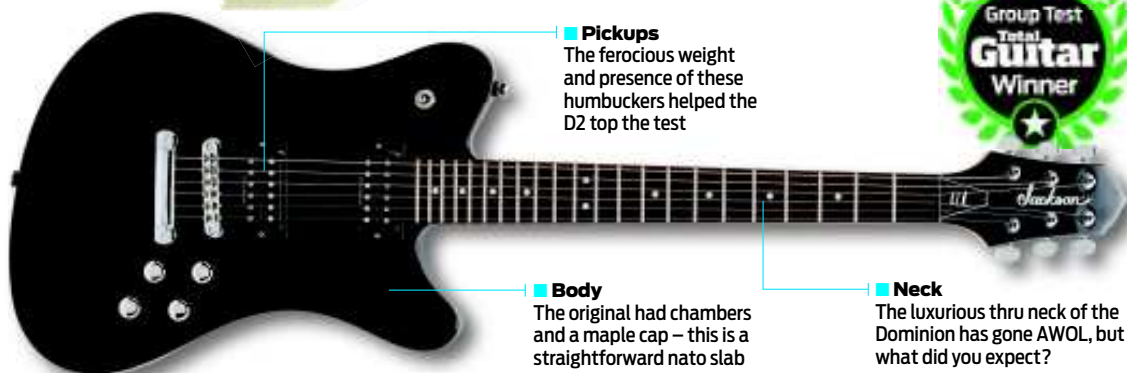
★★★★☆

TG says: Great for the price

Jackson Mark Morton Dominion D2

Slam the Lamb

£429



Pickups
The ferocious weight and presence of these humbuckers helped the D2 top the test

Body
The original had chambers and a maple cap – this is a straightforward nato slab

Neck
The luxurious thru neck of the Dominion has gone AWOL, but what did you expect?

At a glance

Jackson Mark Morton Dominion D2

BODY: Solid nato
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 22
SCALE: 24.75"
PICKUPS: 2x Duncan-Designed HB-101
CONTROLS: 2x volume, 2x tone, 3-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Chrome
FINISH: Transparent Black [pictured], Black
LEFT-HANDERS: No
CONTACT: Fender GBI 01342 331700
WEB: www.jacksonguitars.com

Two years ago, this reviewer performed critical fellatio on the Dominion, but voiced concerns about the £1,169 price tag. Seems someone was listening. The D2 claws back cash with more modest timbers and pickups, no coil taps, a bolted neck and a non-chambered, non-maple-topped body. Whoa, fellas! We didn't ask you to cut off all the sexy stuff!

OK, so the spec has taken a battering, but the D2 was our



favourite from the moment we struck our first riff. While perhaps a little boring on the shelf, the body is brilliantly functional and not so overtly 'metal' that it will polarise the audience, and

the chunky, expressive neck is testament to Morton's penchant for bluesy riffs and rhythm work alongside the shred.

Tone-wise, the sonic weight of those Duncan humbuckers is the trump card; their punch and presence is simply unparalleled in this test and they justify the outlay of every extra penny.

Conclusion: It is the most expensive, and looks a little minimalist next to its older brother, but we feel the D2 is a

worthy winner. From the thrilling physical feel to the powerful raw tone, this just feels like a more heavyweight instrument than its rivals. Its sense of class suggests you won't be rushing to trade it in, and its universal appeal means anyone could take it off the shelf and fall in love.

SUMMARY

For: Classy tone and versatile feel

Against: Not up to Dominion's spec

★★★★★

TG says: It's baa-rrilliant