



Group Test

Signature Axes under £800

Whether you **covet the wares of the biggest guitarists** out there or not, the four beauties TG's picked this month have the goods to show you what the signature market can offer

WORDS **ED MITCHELL**

Sterling by
Musicman John
Petrucci JP50SBK

PRS SE Mikael
Åkerfeldt

The concept of signature guitars is nothing new but it hasn't half grown arms and legs in the past few years. It all started innocently enough back in the 50s when Gibson applied (late genius inventor and original shredder) Les Paul's signature to its newfangled solid body guitars.

The thing is, you didn't have to be a Les Paul fan, or even know who he was, to enjoy those guitars. The Les Paul Standard became more associated with massive

**"YOU COULD MISS OUT ON
SOMETHING GREAT BY
AVOIDING SIGNATURES"**

guitarists like Jimmy Page, Eric Clapton and Slash than the actual man behind it, sweet old Les.

These days there are bloomin' loads of bespoke signature models and not all of us see why we should fork out for someone else's idea of the perfect guitar. Did you scoff at the Squier Avril Lavigne Telecaster, or even Dimebag Darrell's Dean Razorbacks? You could be missing out on something great just because of a squiggly line on the headstock. That's why we've assembled four of the hottest new signature models: the G&L Tribute Rampage Jerry Cantrell Signature (£699), Herman Li's Ibanez Egen 8 (£649), the PRS SE Mikael Åkerfeldt (£749) and the Sterling by Musicman JP50 John Petrucci (£595). They should help convert all you unbelievers. ■

G&L Tribute Rampage
Jerry Cantrell Signature

Ibanez
Herman Li
EGEN8

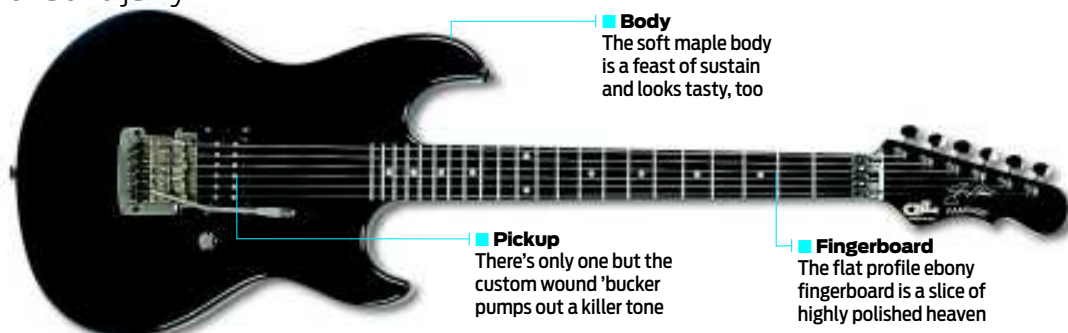


Flip the page to
find out which one
won our Group Test
head-to-head



G&L Tribute Rampage Jerry Cantrell Signature £699

Tone and Jerry



Body
The soft maple body is a feast of sustain and looks tasty, too

Pickup
There's only one but the custom wound 'bucker pumps out a killer tone

Fingerboard
The flat profile ebony fingerboard is a slice of highly polished heaven

The G&L Rampage may have been consigned to the dusty racks of a hundred pawn shops if it hadn't been for Jerry Cantrell of Alice In Chains. He made his bones on an original 80s Rampage. This Tribute version is an affordable take on the man's megabucks US signature Rampage, but don't think that it's just for Jerry fans.

Thanks to its flat fingerboard profile, the G&L Tribute Rampage Jerry Cantrell Signature (try saying that with a gob full of



Coco Pops) is a shredder's delight. In place of Jerry's preferred Seymour Duncan JB humbucker a custom wound job keeps costs down while providing decent clean tones and enough power to satisfy anyone

with a jones for the dirty stuff. The only sticking point on our guitar, literally, was the Kahler 4300 X-Trem vibrato which didn't always return to pitch at first. Look out for that before you part with your lolly. That aside, this Rampage is a killer 80s throwback with big price tag tone, sustain and playability.

Conclusion: Getting hold of an original 80s Rampage at a reasonable price would be the Devil's own task. That's why this Tribute model has been causing

such excitement among Cantrell fans and G&L aficionados. Aside from the fact that it's not a particularly versatile guitar, we love its tone and playability. It's also not a million miles away from the spec and build quality of Jerry's US signature. Upgrade to a Seymour Duncan JB 'bucker and you'll get even closer.

SUMMARY

For: Awesome shredder, bags of tone
Against: Lacks versatility

★★★★☆

TG says: Jerry! Jerry! Jerry!

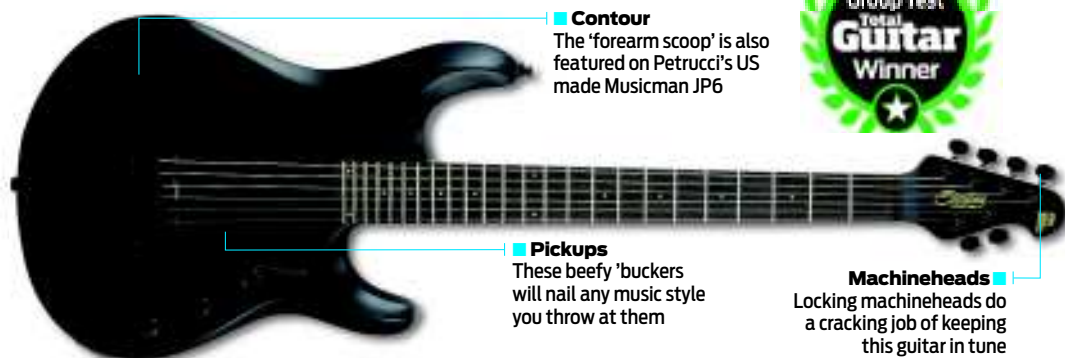
At a glance

G&L Tribute Jerry Cantrell Rampage

BODY: Soft maple
NECK: Hard rock maple, with dot inlays
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, with dot inlays
FRETS: 22 medium
SCALE: 25½"
PICKUPS: Custom Alnico V humbucker
CONTROLS: 1x volume
HARDWARE: Black
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Black (pictured) and Ivory
CONTACT: Go To Guitars 01925 444696
WEB: www.glguitars.com

Sterling by Musicman JP50SBK £595

Another Sterling effort?



Contour
The 'forearm scoop' is also featured on Petrucci's US made Musicman JP6

Pickups
These beefy 'buckers will nail any music style you throw at them

Machineheads
Locking machineheads do a cracking job of keeping this guitar in tune



The Sterling by Musicman guitars and basses are the successors to the budget OLP (Officially Licensed Product) range of Musicman-a-likes launched a few years ago. Build quality and attention to detail have apparently been pimped in these new guitars. Oh, and the 'JP' in this model's name stands for Dream Theater's John Petrucci.

The JP50 is everything a great modern electric should be. Its lightweight basswood body



is thoughtfully designed and features the comfort enhancing 'forearm scoop' from Petrucci's US Musicman JP6 signature. The slim maple neck is a revelation; we felt like we'd been playing it

for years – pretty amazing for a mass-produced axe. The tuning stability also blew our socks off with those locking machineheads earning their keep big-time.

Tonally, the JP50 delivers everything you ask of it, from punk to blues to squealing pinched harmonics. If you play a bunch of different styles you'll love this guitar's versatile body mounted humbuckers.

Conclusion: The JP50's combo of first-class playability and

versatile pickups wins it this test. Tuning stability is incredible and you don't have to worship Mr Petrucci to look the part here. There is some wild talk that the Stealth Black JP50 is a limited-run guitar so you might need to get a wriggle on if you want that finish. See you in the queue.

SUMMARY

For: Versatile, tuning stability rules
Against: Move along please!

★★★★★

TG says: OLP who?

At a glance

Sterling by Musicman JP50SBK

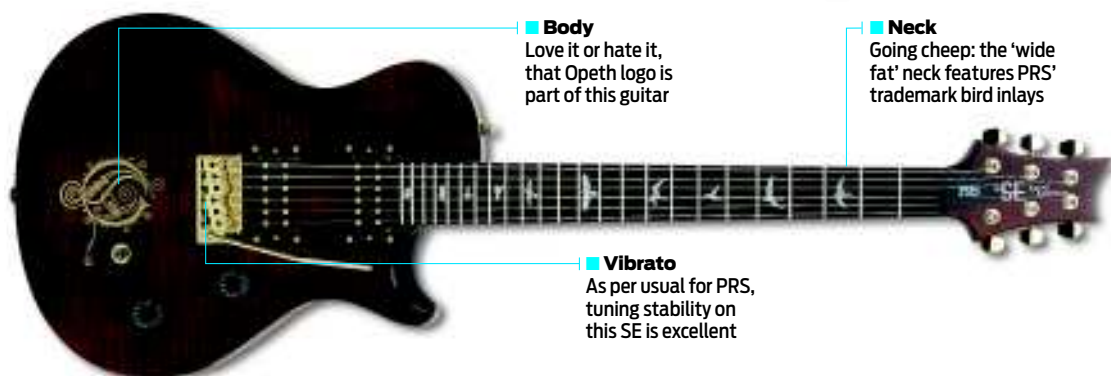
BODY: Basswood
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 24 medium jumbo
SCALE: 25½"
PICKUPS: 2x Sterling HB
CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Satin black
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Stealth Black (pictured), Pearl Red Burst
CONTACT: String & Things 01273 440442
WEB: www.sterlingbymusicman.com

"IF YOU PLAY A BUNCH OF STYLES, YOU'LL LOVE THE JP50SBK'S VERSATILE HUMBUCKERS"

SIGNATURE AXES UNDER £800 **★ GROUP TEST**

PRS SE Mikael Åkerfeldt £749

For Opeth fans only?



■ Body

Love it or hate it, that Opeth logo is part of this guitar

■ Neck

Going cheep: the 'wide fat' neck features PRS' trademark bird inlays

■ Vibrato

As per usual for PRS, tuning stability on this SE is excellent

At a glance

PRS SE Mikael Åkerfeldt

BODY: Mahogany with flamed maple veneer
NECK: Maple, set
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, with 'Bird' inlays
FRETS: 24 jumbo
SCALE: 25"
PICKUPS: PRS SE HFS Treble (B), SE Vintage Bass (N) humbuckers
CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Gold
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Tortoise Shell
CONTACT: Headline Music 01223 874301
WEB: www.prsguitars.com

While both the Sterling JP50 and Ibanez EGEN8 (shown below) look like guitars that were designed from the ground up, the PRS SE Mikael Åkerfeldt is a variation on a familiar theme. The Opeth man's guitar is basically a PRS SE Singlecut with a few custom touches that include a pretty Tortoise Shell finish, gold hardware and a flock of beautiful fingerboard inlays.

One of the greatest features of this SE model is the way that the



glossy finish has been sanded flat from the neck heel to the top nut area. This is a brilliantly simple idea that prevents your hand from sticking to the neck when it gets a bit sweaty. From there, if you've ever played an

SE model you'll know what to expect. This guitar will suit most players. The wide fat neck profile will work for jazzers, blues hounds and shredders alike, and the tuning stability means this guitar is unlikely to let you down at a gig or rehearsal. The only thing that might put people off is that gold 'doodle'.

Conclusion: It's a shame that PRS and Mikael have limited this guitar's appeal with that Opeth logo. As we said in our recent review of the PRS SE Nick

Catanese, would it not make better sense to supply the logo as a sticker? Then it's left up to you to decide whether you can live with the design or not. If you can live with it, though, you're gonna get the classic PRS recipe of great tone and playability and, in this case, a silky smooth 'wide fat' neck to boot.

SUMMARY

For: Pickups, the sanded neck
Against: That bleedin' logo!

★★★★☆

TG says: Do an 'unbranded' version!

Ibanez Herman Li EGEN8 £649

Herman's monster



■ Hand grip

You have to love Herman's cool update of Steve Vai's famous 'monkey grip'

■ Vibrato

The gold finish Edge III locking vibrato is only available on the EGEN8

■ Volume

The push/pull volume control offers ten pickup switching options from a five-way switch

At a glance

Ibanez Herman Li EGEN8

BODY: Mahogany with flame maple top
NECK: Maple Wizard II
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, with oval inlays
FRETS: 24 jumbo
SCALE: 25½"
PICKUPS: Ibanez V8 (B), S1 (M) and V7 (N)
CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone with push/pull, 5-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Gold
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Platinum Blonde
CONTACT: Headstock Distribution 01215 086666
WEB: www.ibanez.com

While the other guitars here come over like hot rods (a basic chassis with enough poke in the engine department to keep any player happy), the EGEN8 is more like a top-of-the-line Mercedes: it's modern, sleek and loaded with all mod cons, including a shed-load of pickup switching options.

Calling this guitar the budget version of DragonForce guitarist Herman's two grand plus EGEN18 signature is a bit unfair.



The slim-bodied EGEN8 is a pro-quality instrument in every way. OK, you don't get the DiMarzio pickups, partially scalloped fingerboard or top spec Edge-Zero vibrato from the more

expensive version. What you do get is a cracking set of Ibanez pickups and the rock solid tuning of the Edge III locking vibrato. Playability is everything you'd expect, and its range of tones is staggering. Thanks to the push/pull volume control, the pickup selector's five switching options have been expanded to 10.

Conclusion: You could play *Wonderwall* on this guitar, but the EGEN8 will be most at home with dedicated shredders.

It's designed to provide serious playability and a huge range of tones – and does its job brilliantly. We also love quirky touches like the hand grip on the upper horn. It was only the potential wider appeal and killer neck of the JP50 that prevented the EGEN8 from winning.

SUMMARY

For: Beautifully made, range of tones
Against: For shredders only

★★★★☆

TG says: It's a sonic firestorm