



HARLEY BENTON SC-550

£222

A great-sounding budget electric that's a single-cut above

Whoever Harley Benton is, he certainly keeps himself busy. The elusive figure behind German über-retailer Thomann's own-brand gear has lent his name to over 1,500 products at the time of writing, ranging from capos to pedalboard power supplies and double-neck electrics. In recent years, Herr Benton has stepped up his game with the company's electric guitars, offering the kind of spec you'd expect to see on models at double or even triple the price – and that's certainly the case with the SC-550 that's winged its way across Europe for review.

There are no prizes for guessing the inspiration behind this made-in-Vietnam single-cut, but there's no denying it's a looker.

“ THE PICKUPS ARE A DIRECT ROUTE TO CLASSIC ROCK CITY ”

There are some important distinctions between the SC-550 and its muse, however: that cutaway is more Florentine than Venetian, and there's an angled neck heel to provide better upper-fret access – oh, and enough aesthetic tweaks to the headstock and inlay designs to keep Gibson's lawyers at bay. Our only quibble with the build is that the alignment of the D and G-string machineheads is slightly off, but that's only visible on the rear of the headstock – and it's not like we haven't seen that from other manufacturers at all price points.

If someone taped up the headstock logo and handed you the SC-550, you would have no idea it was a budget guitar.

The jatoba fingerboard, while almost black in appearance, possesses that familiar soft rosewood feel, and when combined with the comfortable D-shape neck, puts you firmly in classic single-cut playing territory. The factory-fitted 0.010 D'Addario XL strings give a more robust playing response that make the guitar feel more expensive, too – particularly compared with 24.75"-scale single-cuts strung up with a little-too-slinky 0.009s.

That price tag-busting performance translates to the Roswell pickups, too. They offer a mid-to-high output that's teamed with plenty of presence and touch sensitivity, which means they handle overdrive with gusto. That high-end sparkle means the neck humbucker isn't overly dark, while still possessing plenty of muscle.

The bridge, meanwhile, is a direct route to Classic Rock City, offering enough punch for all the Page/Perry/Slash riffage you can handle. There are some seriously funky middle-position tones, too.

The budget-guitar market is awash with accomplished electrics these days, but this single-cut has the distinct advantage of Thomann's keen attention to detail, as well as some stellar tones. You're guaranteed a good time with this Harley.

Michael Astley-Brown

SUMMARY	FEATURES	SOUND QUALITY	VALUE FOR MONEY	BUILD QUALITY	PLAYABILITY	OVERALL RATING
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1 HEADSTOCK
Vintage-style tuners are present and correct, and that diamond is just about different enough to keep things distinct

2 NECK HEEL
This angled take on the classic LP join improves what would already be excellent upper-fret access

3 TOP
Look at the flame on that! This has to rank among the best-looking guitars at this price point

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Mahogany with arched AAAA maple top

NECK: Mahogany

SCALE: 628mm (24.72")

FINGERBOARD: Jatoba

FRETS: 22

PICKUPS: 2x Roswell LAF Alnico-5 humbuckers

CONTROLS: 2x volume, 2x tone, 3-way pickup selector

HARDWARE: DLX tune-o-matic bridge, Wilkinson tuners

LEFT-HANDED: Yes

FINISH: Faded Tobacco Flame, Paradise Amber Flame, Black Cherry Flame, Desert Flame Burst (reviewed)

CASE: Not included

CONTACT: Thomann thomannmusic.com

