

YAMAHA PACIFICA 611HFM, 510V & 311H £579, £479 & £399
ELECTRICS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY PHILIP SOWELS & NEIL GODWIN

Budget boutique

Yamaha's most successful electric guitar line of all time gets three new variants. They meld a custom shop vibe with some boutique-style appointments, not least a brand-new Seymour Duncan pickup. Best of all, not one of them will break the bank... **by Simon Bradley**



Yamaha Pacifica 611HFM, 510V & 311H

£579, £479 & £399

What we want to know

1 Yamaha has a Custom Shop?

It sure has, and in 1989 it was this North Hollywood workshop that came up with the design for the original Pacifica. These three new models were conceived with help from the custom facilities in the Far East, notably the one at Yamaha's Hamamatsu HQ.

2 How do they stack up against the current Pacifica range?

The 112V remains a huge entry-level seller, but the idea here was to draw on a slightly higher build budget and step outside the usual 'safe', obvious conventions of many mid-price guitars.

3 Can they compare to a Strat or a Les Paul?

A Pacifica is a serious choice for anyone, even if several Fenders and Gibsons already nestle in their collection. The emphasis is on versatility and playability with a decent spec thrown in – Yamaha hopes this trio continue in that tradition.

According to Yamaha, total sales of the Pacifica are in excess of 1,000,000 since its launch in 1989, and it's arguably the only brand that can hold its own at the lower and mid reaches of the market against the massive names of Squier, Fender and Epiphone. These three new models are the result of more than a year's worth of planning,

refining and testing and are based on two Custom Shop prototypes, guitars that we take a first look at elsewhere in this issue (see p34).

Driving the concept of revisiting the range of mid-priced Pacificas were Yamaha's Mark Kirkland and Julian Ward, and the latter takes up the story. "We decided to base what was becoming the

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Pac1 F1 Ca? Ahem. The 1980s/1990s-style logo suits the modded ethos



A deep belly contour aids comfort

unofficial new Custom Shop Pacifica series on two models, ostensibly one each for the blues-rock player and the slightly heavier classic rock player. The two models eventually became three, so we could offer a more affordable version of one of them, but the concept was based around the two guitars that would become the 510V and 611HFM.

"The first thing we did was to spec some guitars that were very clearly targeted at specific players and that also filled a gap

The Rivals

The ultimate in West Coast Custom vibe, the **Charvel Pro Mod So-Cal** (£727), is a wonderful player with some great rock tones. **Blade's Dayton Standard** (£629) mixes P-90 and single-coil pickups in an attractive retro-flavoured package, while the **Fender Pawn Shop '51** (£755) is an eclectic mix between single-coil tang and humbucker-driven rock.



that we saw in the market,” continues Ward. “We determined a target player’s key style influences fairly easily – heavier blues-rock and crossing into some classic hard rock: Def Leppard, not Creed. It sounds like an obvious target of guitarist to go after, but there are surprisingly few choices if you’re that guy and you don’t want something ‘standard.’”

All three models have a solid alder body that’s the same dimensions as the bread-and-butter Pacifica 112, and the general spec also includes Grover locking tuners and Graph Tech Black Tusq nuts. First in the team’s sights was a no-nonsense rock guitar that bore an unashamed resemblance to classic custom-made LA rock machines...

Yamaha 510V

“We really wanted to make a single-pickup Pacifica,” states Ward. “When we started to think about why we were so drawn to this idea, all we could come up with was that single-pickup guitars were cool!”

He’s right, of course, and the 510 is the Pacifica’s first single-pickup design. However, there’s more to it than that, as the pickup in question is a new version of the Seymour Duncan P-Rails – which has impressed us in previous encounters – providing both humbucking, single-coil and P-90 tones in an individual package.

“The only problem [with the P-Rails] was that we needed a wider spacing to go with the

Wilkinson vibrato we’d selected, and that wasn’t available from Seymour Duncan. So we worked with them to develop a Trembucker version and, as a result, have exclusivity on the Trembucker-spaced P-Rails for OEM use.”

The three pickup modes are selected via a standard three-way lever switch and the expanse of barren scratchplate feels almost like it’s mocking the absence of a neck pickup, to prove a point. The choice of three-ply vintage mint green makes it so much easier on the eye than stark white.

One thing for which ‘boutique’ guitars are renowned is their playability. The 510’s maple neck feels the fattest of all three Pacificas, but none is in any way clubby. It’s finished using a gloss top coat over a vintage tint; Yamaha aimed specifically for a more modified vintage feel. It’s certainly comfortable to play, but perhaps a bare or lightly satin-finished neck would have suited the ‘custom tweaks’ ethos more effectively.

The vibrato tends to stick on occasion; it’s easy to sort out with a tweak, or you might prefer to set it up for downward movement only a-la Mr Van Halen. Whatever, this is a very enjoyable rocker to play.

Sounds

The P-Rails provides a wide array of tones and the humbucker, while too hot to be classified as ‘vintage’ in character, gives out plenty of grunt for full-sized rock chords.



The Wilky vibrato is the six-screw type

Forgive us, but as men of a certain age, the temptation to go all out on eighties-style riffs is just too great. We soon found ourselves bashing out Mötley Crüe’s Looks That Kill and plenty more besides – this guitar positively begs for that kind of playing as you grin like the naughty teenager who lurks (not so) deep within. Growing up again, the P-90 tone is not as fat as the genuine article fitted to both the 611 and 311, but it’s more than usable in rock and bluesy settings where you can use the volume and tone pots to eke out a wider variety of voices.

Yamaha 611HFM & 311H

A single-pickup guitar isn’t for everyone of course, hence the team’s decision to consider a second option. “We decided on a two-pickup design to suit bluesier players primarily, and we chose a P-90 for the neck



An 8.75-inch radius. Now that’s unique

position,” confirms Ward. “An under-used pickup, in our minds at least, the P-90 seems to be the one everyone loves, but almost nobody has... especially on a non-Les Paul-style guitar.”

Our example of the 611 is finished in a hue called ‘root beer’, a colour that’s attractively subtle and shows off the body’s maple veneer very nicely indeed. The headstock is treated in the same manner and

The P-Rails provides a wide array of tones and gives out plenty of grunt for full-sized rock chords



the vintage-tinted maple neck, which feels slightly shallower than the one present on the 510, isn't too far away from that of a fatter sixties reissue Strat.

The pickups are again Seymour Duncans: a Trembucker-spaced version of the full and powerful Custom V and the vintage-correct SP90-1 at the neck, selected by a three-way lever switch and augmented by a pull/push switch on the tone control to split the bridge humbucker.

"We originally planned to use the Duncan SP90-3, but when I tried the first prototype at a gig, the mid-range just seemed too closed and hard," offers Ward. "There was too much gain, the high-end seemed a little harsh and it just didn't sound right."

As we've stated, the 311 is a more affordable version of this design, with its unfinished neck and headstock mirroring the stage-ready vibe of the 112, and the spec includes Yamaha's own custom-wound versions of both a hot-yet-vintage-voiced humbucker, complete with coil-split, and a P-90.

The alder body is fashioned from a five-piece spread – the 510 and 611 are both three-pieces – and the vintage white finish of our example looks the business in tandem with the tortoiseshell pickguard.

The feel of the 311's neck is, to us, slightly different. It's certainly more rounded at the edges than either of the other two and, as we alluded to earlier, the unfinished version feels simply fantastic.

Sounds

Plugging the guitars in, it's immediately apparent just how versatile the Pacifica design is. The 611 is fuller and more articulate all-round, with the neck P-90 especially worthy of a mention. It's the perfect mix of vintage soupy low-end and modest treble cut, which is ideal at low gains for bluesy bends and smooth, almost jazzy chords. Splitting the humbucker and switching to the central position gives a lovely Strat-style, in-between flavour akin to a warmer version of Mark Knopfler's classic tone, and dropping the coil-split adds more depth and drive, which works well with full chords. The Custom 5 provides a full, yet sparkly rhythm tone with modest gain, and although it offers a certain level of vintage warmth, the more strident higher-end gives an increased modern feel.

In a direct comparison, the 311 isn't quite as tonally articulate – the humbucker is lower in power and the P-90 a little flat. However, as a standalone instrument it provides an equal level of versatility. In fact, its humbucker is, if anything, better suited to giving warm, Gibson-style tones and, with a moderate gain setting, the reduced amount of bite from the guitar allows for a reasonable impression of Warren Haynes's fat sound, albeit with a more transparent edge. We prefer the feel of the 311 to that of the 611, but that's

just our personal preference – all three of these guitars play very well indeed.

Verdict

We asked Yamaha if our controversial Pimp My Pacifica feature from issue 304 (in which the Guitarist team was let loose to 'customise' a number of Pacificas with varying degrees of subtlety), had been of any inspiration? "It didn't have a lot of influence on the final guitars," laughs Ward, remembering some of our workmanship (not least the barbecue aging technique of



The 311 puts a P-90 at the neck position

The vintage white finish of our example looks the business in tandem with the tortoiseshell pickguard



our esteemed editor). “But it had a big influence on the concept. It gave us inspiration in terms of the idea of a Pacifica kitted out with the hardware that an individual player might upgrade to.”

Let’s not pull punches. Fender and Gibson have the heritage in this market, but that doesn’t mean there aren’t plenty of us out there who fancy something that’s different, cool and great value for money. Yamaha’s Pacificas have always ticked the value box, but these guitars add an air of something more unique and desirable, whether it’s the LA hot-rod vibe of the 510V, or the classic rock and blues cool of the 611 and 311: three good ideas, well executed.

Our fave is the 611 for its depth of tone, but give them all a go and see if there’s a budget boutique choice here for you. 🎸

The Bottom Line

Yamaha 611HFM

We like: Great tones; shrewd pickup choice; excellent all-round performance

We dislike: Nothing

Guitarist says: Just what the range needed – a wholly versatile, mid-priced Pacifica with great style and tones to match

Yamaha 510V

We like: Palpable custom shop vibe; good choice of rock tones

We dislike: Occasionally sticking vibrato

Guitarist says: If your heart tends to beat to the sound of guilty pleasures such as Poison, Warrant, Van Halen et al, check this out

Yamaha 311H

We like: Great price; smooth neck

We dislike: A little under-powered in comparison to the 611

Guitarist says: Proof that you don’t need to spend a small fortune to own a guitar that plays like a dream and sounds pretty good too – the very essence of Yamaha’s Pacifica concept



Guitarist
CHOICE

Pacifica 611HFM

PRICE: £579
ORIGIN: Indonesia
BODY: Alder with flamed maple veneer
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5 inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Black Tusq XL/41.5mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 250mm (8.75-inch) radius
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: Hardtail bridge with Graph Tech String Saver saddles, Grover locking tuners, all chrome-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Seymour Duncan TB-14 Custom 5 Trembucker (bridge), SP90-1 Vintage Soapbar (neck), three-way lever pickup selector, volume, tone (with push/pull coil-split)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.13/6.9
RANGE OPTIONS: Pacifica 212VFM (£330), Pacifica 212VFM/VQM (£330), Pacifica 1511MS (£990)
FINISHES: Root beer (as reviewed), trans black, trans purple
Yamaha
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Test results

Build quality	★★★★☆
Playability	★★★★☆
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Pacifica 510V

PRICE: £479
ORIGIN: Indonesia
BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5 inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Black Tusq XL/41.5mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 250mm (8.75-inch) radius
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: Wilkinson VS50-6 vibrato, Grover locking tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 55mm
ELECTRICS: Seymour Duncan TBPR-1b P-Rails Trembucker, three-way lever pickup selector, volume and tone
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.45/7.6
RANGE OPTIONS: Pacifica 012 (£193), Pacifica 112V (£244), Pacifica 112VCX (£275)
FINISHES: Black (as reviewed), candy apple red, old violin sunburst

Test results

Build quality	★★★★☆
Playability	★★★★☆
Sound	★★★★☆
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Pacifica 311H

PRICE: £399
ORIGIN: Indonesia
BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5 inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Black Tusq XL/41.5mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 250mm (8.75-inch) radius
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: Yamaha hardtail bridge, Grover locking tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Yamaha nickel-covered humbucker (bridge), P-90-style single-coil (neck), three-way blade selector, volume and tone (with push/push coil-split)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.22/7.1
RANGE OPTIONS: Pacifica 120S (£230)
FINISHES: Vintage white (as reviewed), black, red metallic, yellow natural stain

Test results

Build quality	★★★★☆
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★☆
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★