

HOFNER CONTEMPORARY SERIES CLUB SOLID & VERYTHIN BASS £420 & £665
ELECTRICS/BASS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOSEPH BRANSTON



Hofner Contemporary Series Club Solid & Verythin Bass **£420 & £665**

The latest Club in Hofner's Contemporary line updates the original model, while the Verythin bass makes a welcome return *by Paul Day & Roger Newell*

Hofner is one of Europe's most cherished heritage brands, and was an important part of many players' beginnings in the late fifties and early sixties. While many instruments are still made in Germany, we're now seeing affordable versions coming from its Chinese factory within the Contemporary Series, which as our two review models illustrate, tries to update the classic recipe for the more modern player. How successfully? Read on...

Club Solid

Introduced in 1957 and influenced by the Les Paul, the small-bodied, single-cutaway Club was Hofner's first purpose-built electric guitar, rather than an electrified equivalent of an existing acoustic. However, the name came courtesy of the company's UK importer, Selmer, who decided this would provide a better identity than Hofner's anonymous numbering system.

The original Club series comprised the 40, 50 and 60

models, which were produced into the early sixties. The design made a brief comeback late in the decade as the 70, which represented Hofner's response to the Les Paul's revived popularity. Latest in this line is the Chinese-made Club Solid, which accordingly lacks the internal airspace of the original design.

The headstock looks suitably vintage and features an equally old-style, flowery motif, but this is contrasted by modern, metal-buttoned tuners. Topped by a very nicely cut nut, the bound and lightly radiused rosewood fingerboard offers a sleek playing surface that's matched by the 22 smoothly topped and tailed medium

Unlike the airier Clubs, the Solid model handles increased gain without any aural complaints



The Solid's tune-o-matic-style bridge is married to a trapeze tailpiece

frets. The position markers hark back to Hofner's past, being full-width and formed by contrasting coloured strips of plastic to create a striped look. The glued-in maple neck further enhances easy playability via a chunky but nicely proportioned 'C'-profile that sits well in the hand.

Maintaining the compact measurements that characterise the Club concept, the Solid model's air-less construction obviously places it much more firmly in Les Paul land. That said, Club styling incorporates a broadly rounded horn that sets this Hofner apart from many other similarly sized, single-cuts.

Mahogany makes up most of the chassis, topped by a curving spruce laminate front that features a fair degree of figuring that can be seen under the high gloss, black cherry finish that's contrasted only by cream edge binding.

The Rivals

Club Solid

The **Classic Rock CR250** (£379) from **Cort** is obviously very biased towards Gibson's best-seller, but includes some stylistic twists. The **Vintage Advance AV1H** (£429) takes a few more liberties with the Les Paul approach, courtesy of UK designer Trevor Wilkinson. **Italia's Maranello Classic** (£529) combines late fifties' looks with modern performance in a colourful, plastic-clad single-cutaway.



Body depth and the shallow cutaway combine to restrict access to the upper end frets, but rear contouring adds some creature comforts. The latter also alleviates weight, although the Club Solid lives up to its name at a pretty meaty 4kg.

The absence of a pickguard is another update, but the twin Hofner Hi-Power pickups look very much part of the past. Complete with nickel-plated metal covers carrying the company's 'diamond' logo, these mini humbuckers sit in old-style small surrounds and, as before, they're secured by minuscule, side-mounted grub-screws. The controls employ metal-topped knobs that replicate the originals first seen in the sixties and their straight-line layout also echoes some early Hofners. The adjacent pickup selector switch is conveniently positioned and safe from over-enthusiastic strumming. We get a volume

for each and a master tone but each humbucker employs four-conductor cable, so coil-splitting is an easy mod.

The bridge is an obvious take on Gibson's tune-o-matic, but rather than the usual partner stud tailpiece, Hofner has opted for a trapeze-type, as on the original Club, that creates instant character in terms of looks and sound. In contrast, the output jack is located on a decidedly Les Paul-like plastic plate, but a metal equivalent would be more roadworthy.

Sounds

There is an urgent acoustic response, with the trapeze tailpiece contributing to an airy and resonant sustain. Matching their Hi-Power designation, these Hofner humbuckers are louder than they look, although output is far from super-hot. Both prove well balanced tonally, with a firm and woody low end partnering smooth

mid and an expressively clear treble. The neck position delivers some deep and snaky sounds, while the bridge offers extra focus via a more biting upper range and edgier bass.

Unlike the airier Clubs, the Solid handles increased gain without any aural complaints, retaining good definition, an even response and improved feedback resistance. This combination works well with rhythm work that spans grunty raunch to grungy thrash, while lead sounds are eminently suited to blues and rock. Versatility is increased via smoothly progressive pots that allow usefully subtle shifts in volume and tone.

Verythin Bass

There was a time when Hofner basses were extremely popular in the UK and it started way before Paul McCartney was seen wielding his Violin bass. Although that model came

along before the Verythin guitars, these twin-cutaway semis followed the popular guitar version with the first models appearing in 1963.

Particularly glorious looking in this three-tone sunburst finish, this new version's body is constructed with a solid core for stability and to reduce feedback. It's still short scale, fully bound with f-holes, a trapeze tailpiece and the classic free floating Hofner bridge. By today's standards this latter feature may seem somewhat crude and limited in adjustment, but it works fine and is partly responsible for the classic Hofner sound as well as being an iconic feature of its hollow guitars and basses.

With dual 'staple top' pickups, the controls are mounted near the lower f-hole, Gibson-style, while the jack is set in the body edge. As this new model comes sans pickguard, the overall aesthetic is blissfully simple.

It may be super light in weight and a welcome relief on the shoulders, but it is rather headstock heavy. But while the body is relatively wide, your forearm rests comfortably and naturally holds the bass in place. The second strap button is screwed through the pearlloid plate on the base of the neck heel rather than into the heel edge as on some earlier models.

Sounds

With the two pickups spread as far apart as possible the Verythin bass excels in super hollowed sounds and retains a warm robust sound. It's big on bottom end and the shorter scale also means a tighter, thumpier sound – what we'd

With the two pickups spread as far apart as possible the Verythin bass excels in super hollowed sounds



The striped position markers are created using contrasting strips of plastic

The Rivals

Verythin Bass

Hagstrom's Viking Bass

(£689) offers similar spec to the Verythin, while **Ibanez's AFB200 Artcore Bass** (£467) has a free floating bridge and tailpiece but with just two controls and a selector switch. The

Epiphone Allen Woody

Rumblekat (£299) is another short-scaled single-cut bass with a chambered mahogany body, a set neck and a rectangular control plate that smacks of Hofner design.



The Verythin Bass has more of a traditional Hofner vibe to its sound and looks

expect from Hofner basses in general and what makes them so distinctive. But there's also a curiously penetrating aspect to it that cuts neatly through the mix when used on stage.

With a tone and volume pot per pickup, blending options are just about as good as it gets. The passive tone circuit is limited by modern standards, but there's still a good degree of variation for old-school stuff. Feedback would doubtless creep in at mega volumes but we found no such issues at normal pub/club-type levels.

Verdict

Construction brings the Club Solid closer to Gibson's finest son, but a high quota of Hofner-specific features enhance character, keeping it well removed from being a mere Les Paul look-alike. However, this new Hofner is still obviously intended to contend in the highly competitive corner of the market occupied by cost-conscious Gibson copycats. It does so via impressive build quality and equally able performance, but commercial success will be largely decided by personal preference regarding this instrument's inherent individuality.

The Verythin bass is perhaps more, well, Hofner-like, with a feel and sound all its own. If you want a hard rock or heavy metal bass then look elsewhere – this doesn't have the means or the attitude to cut it in those

circumstances, obviously. If what you seek, however, is a good all rounder that's warm and distinctive in sound then the Verythin bass is well worth investigating.

All up, in these retro-obsessed times, Hofner's classic cool is still appealing. **G**

The Bottom Line

Hofner Contemporary Series Club Solid

We like: Build quality; character enhancing brand-specific features

We dislike: Limited upper fret access; plastic jackplate

Guitarist says: An affordable update that adds modern performance appeal to a distinctive, vintage-orientated image

Hofner Contemporary Series Verythin Bass

We like: Build quality; character; excellent sounds and playability

We dislike: Free floating bridges are not ideal on a bass and being semi-hollow it's not an all-rounder

Guitarist says: Despite its obvious style, the Verythin bass has been somewhat overshadowed by the iconic Violin bass. Nevertheless, if it's old-school tones you're after, plug one in



Hofner Contemporary Series Club Solid

PRICE: £420

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: Mahogany with spruce (laminated) top

NECK: Maple, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 628mm (24.7-inch)

NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic/44mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound rosewood, stripe position markers

FRETS: 22, medium

HARDWARE: Six-saddle bridge and Hofner trapeze tailpiece, contemporary-type tuners – all nickel-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm

ELECTRICS: Two Hofner Hi-Power humbuckers, three-way toggle pickup selector, two volumes and master tone control

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4/8.8

OPTIONS: No

RANGE OPTIONS: No

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Black cherry (as reviewed), honeyburst, black

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Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Hofner Contemporary Series Verythin Bass

PRICE: £665

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Double-cutaway, semi-solid electric bass

BODY: Spruce (laminated) top with laminate maple back and sides

NECK: Three-piece maple/beech/maple, glued in

SCALE LENGTH: 762mm (30-inch)

NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic/42mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound ebony, stripe position markers

FRETS: 22, medium, plus zero fret

HARDWARE: Nickel-plated tailpiece, ebony bridge with traditional fretwire saddles, pearloid button tuners

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 15mm average (centres)

ELECTRICS: Two Hofner 'Staple Top' mini-humbucker pickups, individual pickup volume and tone controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3/6.6

OPTIONS: No

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: Three-tone sunburst (as reviewed), two-tone sunburst

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★