



HENMAN-BEVILACQUA B4

BY BILL LEIGH

THIS IS HOW GRAHAM HENMAN BREAKS IT down: If they can redesign the Volkswagen Beetle and the Mini Cooper for a new era, why not approach basses and guitars anew? A designer, photographer, and TV commercial director, Henman sees promise in reviving an aspect of the early period of electric basses and guitars—namely, that the designs we now take for granted once were bold, new artistic statements. That idea, infused with a healthy dose of Modernist minimalism, is the vision Graham and his stylist wife, Paris, bring to Henman-Bevilacqua Guitars. Their partner, luthier Scotty Bevilacqua, has clear and complementary ideas about how instruments can be built. Together, the three-year-old company is aiming for an ideal blend of style, craftsmanship, materials, and tone. Henman-Bevilacqua cur-

rently offers two guitars and a bass, the B4.

Like all B4s, our test bass arrived in a sparkling aluminum case, which is like a long, glittery version of the case handcuffed to a slim-suited man in a heist film. The bass itself is more fitted black turtleneck; unlike many of its lofty-price peers, it doesn't scream fancy. Instead, its beauty seeps in gradually as you absorb its more unusual qualities. Every physical detail seems loaded with meticulous forethought. The rounded corners and gentle asymmetry of the "ashtray" bridge cover accent the body's shape, smoothly slanted and petite, with a tapering treble-side horn. The headstock silhouette is like a carefully cavalier brushstroke, set off by the stark geometry of its rakishly positioned tuners. The test bass's body and neck were dressed in a deep ebony

stain, selected from a palette largely populated by whites, blacks, and greys. Anodized aluminum hardware completes the artfully austere look, while hinting at the sturdy components within: Beneath the plain cylindrical knobs are bell-brass pots; demilune HB-logo keys turn Sperzel locking tuners made with an exclusive matching finish; and even the dots are anodized aluminum set into an ebony fingerboard.

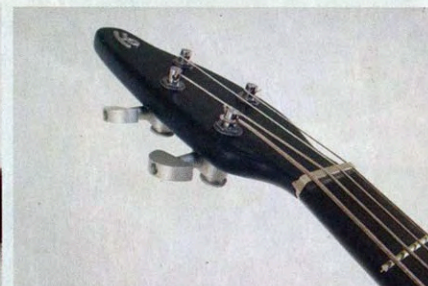
TONE BONES

The B4's intriguing traits are more than skin-deep, though. All HenBev instruments incorporate the stress-free neck system, licensed from builder-inventor Dave Bunker, who employed it for years on PBC, Bunker, and Treker basses and guitars, as well as U.S. ATK basses he built

for Ibanez. During the 15 years he worked as Bunker's apprentice, Scotty Bevilacqua became a true believer in this "floating neck" design, which largely liberates the neck from its load-bearing role. In theory, this allows the neck to resonate more, for increased sustain. Inside the B4's five-piece neck is a 3/8"-by-3/8" floating steel bar, epoxied to the headstock and anchored in the body but completely detached from the neck wood itself. According to Bevilacqua, this removes 80 percent of the string tension from the neck. At the 17th fret, a threaded steel pin passes freely through a hole in the tension bar, serving as a fulcrum point for neck-bow adjustments. (The pinhole there on the neck's treble side has no user-serviceable function.) To add a bit of neck relief, I removed a



Locking tuners like these Sperzels are more common on tremolo-equipped guitars. The knob on the back of the tuning machines locks the string in place on the post, eliminating the need for multiple winds around the post.



The headstock is epoxied to a plate at the end of the tension bar, which runs through the neck but remains detached from it. This significantly reduces string tension on the neck. The nut sits on top of this plate.

Henman-Bevilacqua fabricates its own anodized aluminum hardware.



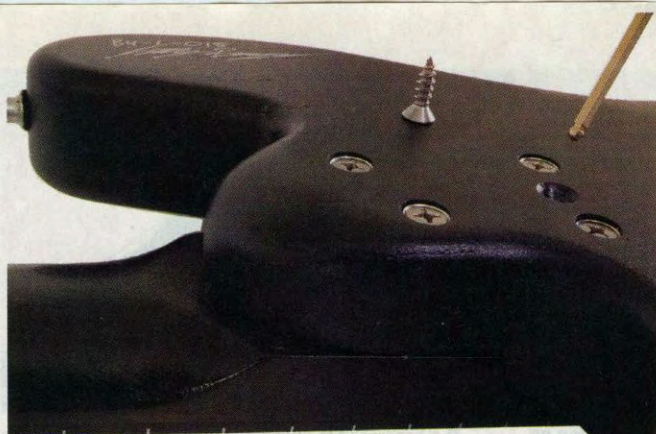
TECH SPECS

HENMAN-BEVILACQUA B4

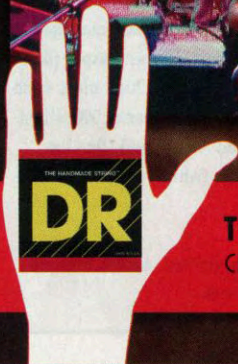
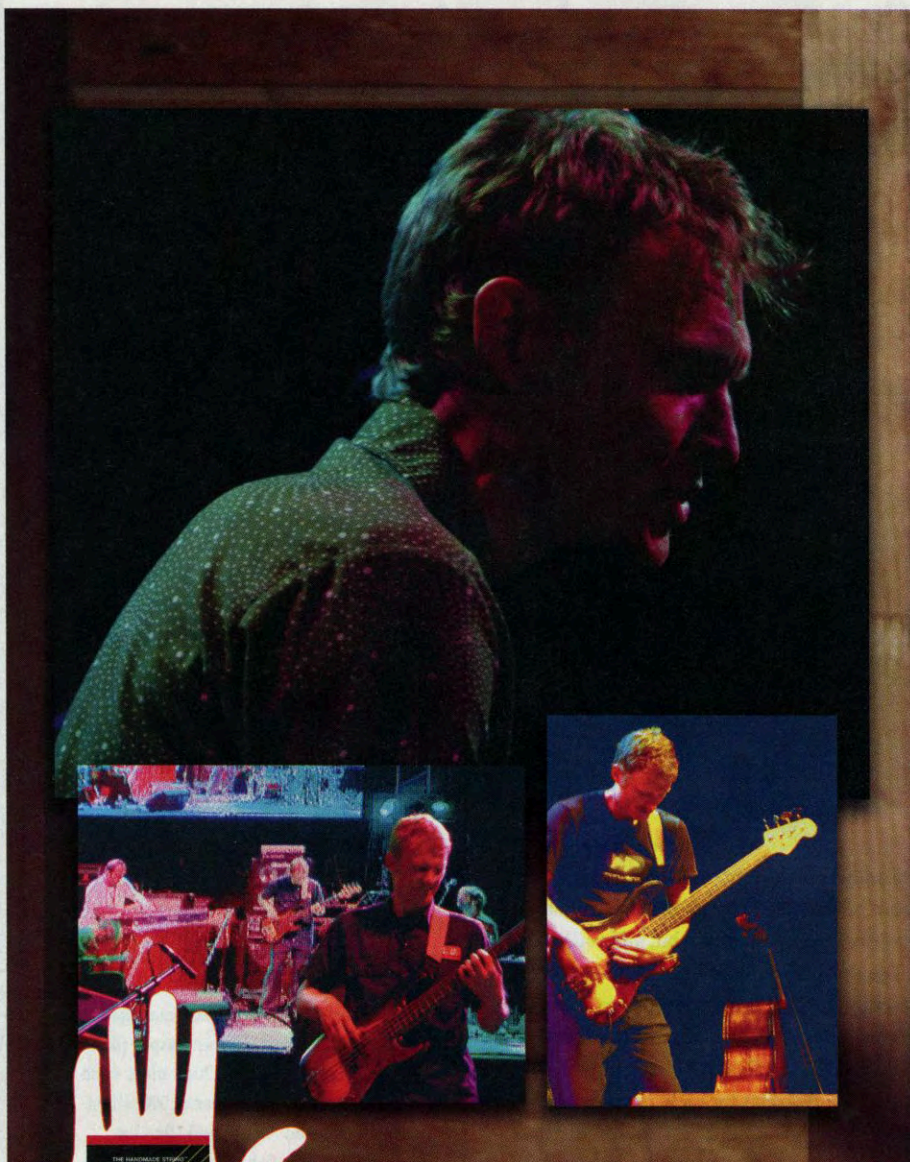
- Weight** 9 lbs
- Scale length** 34"
- Body** Swamp ash with flame-maple top
- Neck** Five-piece African sapele
- Fingerboard** Ebony with aluminum position markers
- Bridge** Henman-Bevilacqua through-body bridge system
- Hardware** Custom anodized aluminum, with removable pickup and bridge covers and Sperzel locking tuners with custom anodized-aluminum keys
- Pickups** EMG-HZ
- Nut** Nickel-plated brass
- Neck width at nut** 1 1/16"
- Neck width at 24th fret** 2 3/8"
- Color** Lamora (ebony satin stain)
- Included** Custom aluminum case and black leather strap
- Options** Swamp ash or Honduran mahogany body; additional satin stains: Vesper (dark green), Zora (dark brown); high-gloss solid colors (\$500): Thumper (black), XXX (light green), Goodhead (light grey), Domino (dark grey), Ryder (white)

Made in USA

Warranty One year limited, except lifetime limited on the neck



The Tension bar in the neck is not the same as a truss rod, but you can still tweak it to adjust neck bow. Simply remove the middle screw on the neck heel, insert a hex driver, and turn slightly.



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bridges are tuned to G, while the tension bar is tuned to F#, a note that felt particularly resonant in all octaves. A healthy half-inch of figured maple on the top contributes to the instrument's voice, and the reduced neck tension means Bevilacqua was able to choose a neck wood, African sapele, known for its ringing tone rather than for its strength.

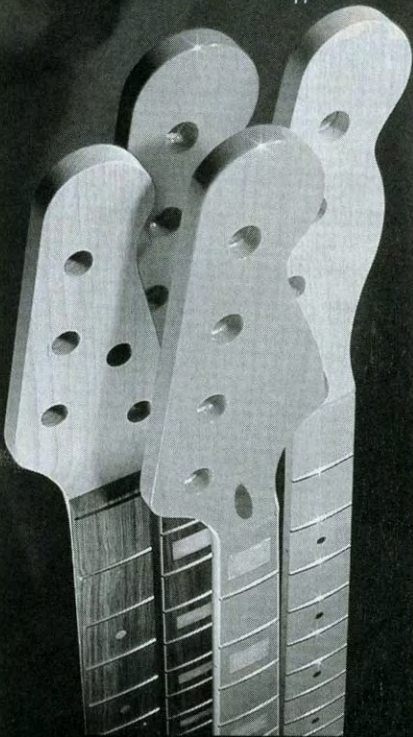
HANDS ON

In my hands, the B4 felt dense but not heavy. To me, the body's open-grain satin finish felt sugary to the touch, a feel that seemed somehow simultaneously organic and synthetic. Others had different first impressions: Noting the body's strange feel, both a bandmate and a colleague were surprised to learn that the bass was made of wood at all. Throughout its 24-fret span, the neck, narrow and comfortably rounded, felt remarkably resonant and lively. I could feel a subtle ringing in my fretting hand with each note I plucked or slapped. The bass was responsive and dynamic, and the sustain was intense, yet natural. Even the typical dead-spot notes—like the G string's 6th-fret C#—rang out for a respectably long time. I loved the physical experience of playing this bass. This is one of those instruments that simply makes you want to play more.

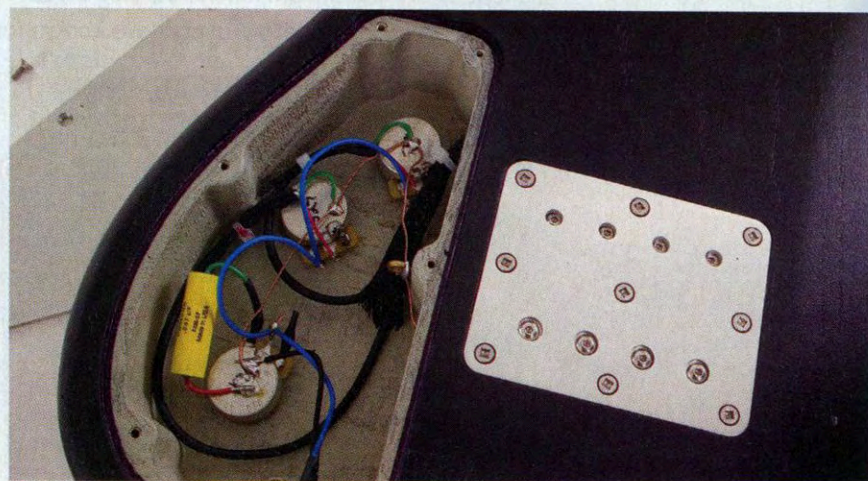
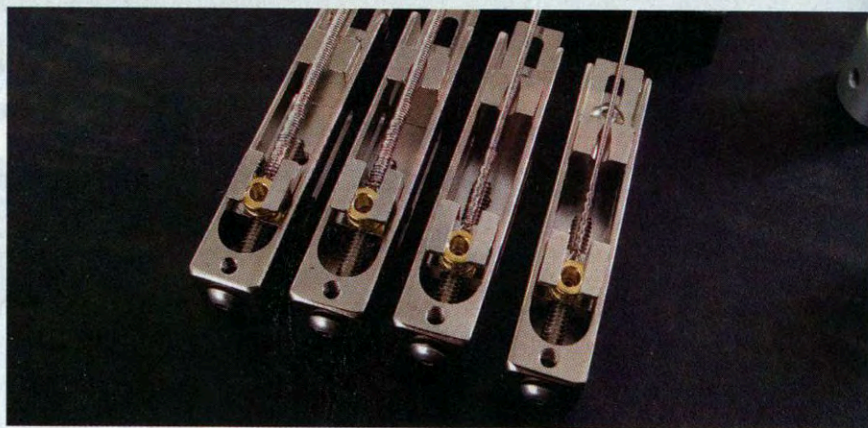
The B4's passive electronics include dual-coil passive EMG-HZ pickups connected with custom Audience wire. HZ's aren't common on ultra-high-end instruments, but on the B4, their bold, rich voice was tempered by a mellow warmth, though only with the aluminum pickup covers on. Without the pickup covers—and removing them is a must to avoid microphonic click-clacks when playing with a pick—they still sound punchy, but a bit more hollow and harsh. HenBev says the first question to prospective B4 buyers is whether they play with a pick, so that HenBev can

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Each string's isolated bridge is anchored to this rear plate. The sunken screws adjust the front and rear bridge height. In the control cavity, the tone pot's capacitor is a high-end Hovland MusiCap, and the connections are made with custom Audience wire, which is polished to remove microscopic pits.

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recommend a setup with the pickup covers or without them. I'm no big pick guy, but I'm loath to limit my technical options. Without the pickup covers, I found the B4's tone clear, bright, and cutting, but I missed the exceptional warmth and punch of picking with the covers on, less the click-clacking. The B4 comes with a slightly shorter set of pickup mounting screws to accommodate the sans-cover setup. A pet peeve: Removing the pickup covers, bridge cover, or control cavity plate requires using one of three included hex tools, as do bridge and neck adjustments. As a guy who constantly misplaces things, I hate the idea of an instrument that requires multiple special tools. My imaginary kingdom for a Phillips head!

With the back pickup soloed, the B4 was clear and articulate, but with more meatiness than typical J-style bridge-pup honk. The neck pickup soloed sounded big and round, but not woofy or dubby. With both pickups on and the tone knob full up, the B4's voice was rich and forward, but never biting. At every setting, the bass was deliciously responsive to my playing techniques and

dynamics. This bass was a pleasure to play.

Intriguing as it is for an instrument to be as stylized as the B4, the question must be asked: Is a work of art like the Henman-Bevilacqua B4 more focused on form than function? I don't think so. The B4 feels and responds like a real player's axe. Still, at this price, anyone considering a HenBev would have to be as inspired by its daring design as they are attracted to its playability and tone. With the B4, that's not too tall an order.

BP

HENMAN-BEVILACQUA B4

Direct \$5,900

Street \$5,400

Pros Striking looks, top-notch components, and an incredibly lively feel

Cons Pick players will want to remove the microphonic pickup covers, but the bass sounds better with them on

Bottom Line A dynamic bass with a daring new design.

CONTACT

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www.henbev.com