



Henman-Bevilacqua S1

TESTED BY BARRY CLEVELAND

ACCORDING TO LUTHIER SCOTTY BEVILACQUA and designers Graham and Paris Henman, Henman-Bevilacqua's handcrafted instruments seek

SPECS	Henman-Bevilacqua (310) 430-2795; henbev.com
MODEL	S1
PRICE	\$5,900 retail/street price N/A; additional \$500 for high-gloss solid finish
NUT WIDTH	1.7"
NECK	African sapelle, bolt-on
FRETBOARD	25.5"-scale figured Philippine ebony with aluminum dots
FRETS	24 nickel silver
BODY	One-piece swamp ash with 1/4" two-piece North American maple cap and Lamora finish
PICKUPS	WCR Crossroads (neck) and Fillmore (bridge) humbuckers
CONTROLS	Master Volume and Tone controls (push/pull coil split on Tone control), 3-way pickup selector
BRIDGE	TonePros T3BP-STC
HARDWARE	Custom Sperzel locking tuners
FACTORY STRINGS	D'Addario XL .010-.046
WEIGHT	7.85 lbs
KUDOS	Exceptional pickups. Superb workmanship. Stylish design.
CONCERNS	Intonation and buzzing issues in a few spots. Awkward tuning mechanisms.

to "fuse minimalism, craftsmanship, art, and old-school quality to create the ultimate masterpiece." In the case of the S1, the result is sort of like what a Jazzmaster designed by Frank Stella might look like. Sleek and smooth to the touch, with ergonomically pleasing body contours, the S1 is both satisfying to hold and to behold. The guitar comes in a custom aluminum case with a form-fitted interior that holds the instrument snugly in place. A stylish black leather strap with pre-installed Dunlop Straploks, and a set of three wrenches, are also included.

Nearly every aspect of the guitar was handcrafted by either H-B or one of its suppliers. For example, the WCR humbucking pickups are handwound and fitted with vintage-style nickel-silver covers, the Sperzel locking tuners are custom built with engraved buttons, the Volume and Tone pots, switches, and output jack plate are hand assembled, and the compensated Earvana graphite nut is handcut. All of the aluminum hardware is clear coat anodized and purportedly "tuned" to various pitches to enhance sustain and other performance factors.

The S1's unorthodox trussrod mechanism is also designed to enhance tone and overall

performance. Rather than employing a traditional circular trussrod, the S1 features a 3/8" x 3/8" square steel bar that is glued to the headstock, and then slid through the brass nut mount into a chamber running the length of the neck. A tiny pin inserted into the side of the neck at the 17th fret extends through the truss bar channel and into the wood on the other side, creating a fulcrum. Adjustments to the truss bar are made via a 5/32" Allen head concealed beneath a plug posing as a fifth neck bolt. This arrangement is designed to reduce string tension on the fretboard by 80 percent, allowing it to vibrate more freely for tonal purposes, while simultaneously inhibiting warping.

Although tuned hardware and a fulcrum-

energized truss bar may possibly contribute to the S1's tone and sustain, there can be no doubt as to the contribution made by the WCR pickups. The Crossroads pickup in the neck slot was designed to cop Clapton's tone from the song of the same name, whereas the Fillmore pickup is intended to deliver Duane Allman's sound circa early '71. Despite their "PAF" heritage, however, these pickups have a DC resistance of between 10kΩ and 13.5kΩ, making them considerably higher output than their historic forebears—though they nonetheless maintain that vintage vibe.

On clean amp settings both pickups are wonderfully clear sounding and full bodied, and on crunchier settings they exhibit classic



Note the small hole in the neck where the fulcrum pin is inserted. Wrench access for adjusting the truss bar is via the center neck "bolt."

PAF edge and bite. Engaging the pull-on coil-tap switch in the Tone control with either or both pickups selected reduces low frequencies and adds spaciousness to the sounds—though it doesn't result in typical single-coil tones. The pickups are also well matched level-wise, and blend beautifully. I was easily able to get great rock and blues sounds, and even some convincing jazz and semi-brutal metal tones.

Workmanship is generally excellent throughout, with great attention to detail, be it the exquisite fretwork, the perfect dot inlays, or the mounting of the hardware. The neck is relatively thin with a somewhat rounded profile, and the body cutaways allow easy access to even the highest frets. The Volume control is well positioned for pinky swells, though it is also somewhat stiff, which, combined with the smooth sides of the knob, makes it resist quick twists. The 500k Ω Tone control is quite effective, smoothly tapering off the highs with no sudden jumps. Although the non-linear placement of the tuners looks cool, the third string tuner is at an odd angle—and given the



The S1's Sperzels sport special "H-B" engravings.

length of the 24-fret neck, it can be a stretch to reach (I kept grabbing the second string tuner by mistake).

The S1 plays easily and the setup was good except for a few peculiar issues. The B string has a slight sitar-like buzz when played open, and there are a few minor buzzes on other strings when fretted. Intonation is perfect on most strings in most positions—including on the very highest frets—though notes on the first five frets, particularly on the second and third strings, are a bit sharp.

There are many things to like about the S1—great pickups, versatile tones, quality craftsmanship, stylish looks, and good playability—though I would like to have been able to have it play perfectly in tune with no buzzes or other setup issues given the boutique price. That may or may not be an issue with a custom-ordered instrument, of course, so in the end it will really be a matter of whether you feel form and function have been successfully harmonized to meet your personal aesthetic and playing needs. ■

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