



PAST PERFECTED

Henman-Bevilacqua S1 and S2 electric guitars

BY ERIC KIRKLAND

ONE OF THE newest and most talked about of the specialty luthiers that offer such instruments is Henman-Bevilacqua LLC, or “Henbev” for short. The company founders encapsulated in the name are Graham and Paris Henman and Scotty Bevilacqua. Graham and his wife are the professional designers who contributed heavily to the guitars’ signature aesthetic and unerring function. Their partner, Scotty Bevilacqua, is a master luthier with an obsession for tone and an unquestionable talent for instrument manufacture. Their united goal is to build guitars that consistently achieve the performance standards of elite vintage instruments through traditional components.

FEATURES

THE S1 AND S2 HENBEVS I tested arrived in shiny textured aluminum cases, which are apparently custom-built for Henbev guitars by an English case specialist. Upon cracking the seal on these beaming examples of guitar luggage, I saw deep French-fit forms cradling each guitar’s exact outline and heavy padding offering almost flight-quality protection. The striking contrast of natural wood and brushed aluminum appointments on both guitars certainly makes a statement of quality even while still lying in their respective cases.

It’s easy to initially draw some comparison of the bodies’ outlines to guitar shapes of the past, but I feel that manufacturers, no matter how advanced, have reached a point in time where there just may not be any more functional shapes left to design, leaving most new guitars to share some visual elements with past or current offerings. The important thing about these typically mahogany bodies—my S1 was actually built from rare swamp ash—is that they are sculpted and contoured for extreme comfort. Although humbly hidden beneath the rich and dark stain, a quilted or flamed maple cap delivers clarity and punch.

The African sapele neck appears to be standard in most ways, with a five-bolt attachment system and 24 tall-and-wide frets. But Bevilacqua’s neck is actually an ingenious three-piece modular design that resonates and translates tone through the body unlike any other neck seen in production guitars. Inside the neck is a 3/8-inch by 3/8-inch cold-rolled steel bar rather than a round rod,



LIST PRICES: \$5,900.00 irrespective of options

MANUFACTURER: Henman-Bevilacqua LLC, henbev.com

BODY: One- and two-piece mahogany (other woods available), quilted or flamed-maple cap

NECK: Three-piece modular African sapele, bolt-on, unique 3/8-inch square cold-rolled steel truss bar

FINGERBOARD: Philippine ebony with 12-inch-radius

SCALE LENGTH: 25 1/2 inches

FRETS: 24 tall jumbo

HARDWARE: Custom-milled aluminum; bell-brass nut; TonePros Tune-O-Matic bridge on S1; Bigsby tremolo on S2; custom Sperzel tuners

CONTROLS: Volume, tone with pickup tap, three-way pickup selector

PICKUPS: Two WCR Crossroads humbuckers (S1), two WCR Fillmore humbuckers (S2); custom-aged nickel-silver covers

Although there’s nothing particularly complicated about the incorporation of this bar, its positioning provides superior support and allows the neck’s wood to ring for incredibly long periods. As compared to a neck with a traditional truss rod design, the Henbev’s truss bar reduces tension on the ebony fretboard by a whopping 80 percent and thereby virtually eliminates any possibility of twisting or warping over the instrument’s considerable lifetime. The neck’s general profile is thin and round, not unlike many of the sticks found on guitars of the Sixties.

Graham Henman’s modern British sensibilities and flare for artful pragmatism are evident in the guitar’s industrial-chic hardware. The knobs, pickup switch cap, back plates, recessed input cup, signature barrel tuning keys, pickup rings and aluminum neck dots are all custom milled and etched from solid aluminum, while the bell brass nut and bridges are burnished to match the futuristic metallic vibe. Even the locking Sperzel tuners are featured in a matte silver finish that is exclusive to Henbev guitars. These gorgeous parts aren’t just a joy to touch and muse over—they are all either naturally or intentionally tuned to specific pitches, successfully supporting the argument that even the most seemingly insignificant hardware choices have an effect on an instrument’s ultimate sound.

WCR’s unparalleled hand-wound P.A.F. pickups are featured on both guitars under true nickel-silver covers: the S1 features a set of Crossroads, while the S2 has a pair of Fillmores. Custom-made pots with brass liners, Hovland audio caps, pure silver solder

and prepolished copper wire from Audience Audio help the signal from these phenomenal pickups achieve tones that almost defy description. A pull pot on the tone control taps the pickups into single-coil mode.

PERFORMANCE

THE EXPLOSIVE ACOUSTIC response from both Henbev guitars is exactly what we expect from a hand-made instrument. It’s almost inappropriate to compare these instruments with other electric guitars because their materials and fine-tuning create performance qualities in the realm of fine classical instruments. WCR’s singing humbuckers electrify the magic of these instruments with the highest order of complexity and unequaled passive design-derived sustain.

The S1 and its Crossroads set rolled out notes with a loose-and-wide grind when the strings were caressed, while digging in prompted the WCRs to bark and bite like an aggravated Doberman. On the S2, a Bigsby tremolo, longer body and WCR’s legendary Fillmore pickups create the deepest tones of the two guitars. In particular, the S2’s Fillmores were capable of delivering delicate emotion or powerful roars and always cast a warm glow over the instrument’s divine tone.

THE BOTTOM LINE

HENMAN-BEVLACQUA’S HIGH-END creations combine vintage tone ideals with the understated beauty of ultramodern materials, resulting in guitars that are both infinitely graceful and boundless in performance.

I have yet to play another manufacturer’s guitar that is so equally capable of creating heavenly clean tones as it is wickedly omnipotent in the presence of high gain. “Masterpiece” is a description that isn’t often used, but it’s certainly deserved here. ✨



S2



S1

PRO	CON
CUSTOM-MADE COMPONENTS, WCR PICKUPS, AWESOME TONE AND FEEL	SQUARED NECK HEEL SHOULD BE CONTOURED TO MATCH THE BODY’S ROUNDED HEEL