

STONEFIELD

1-5S Slimline

When something a little different comes along, we sit up and take notice. Mike Brooks gets up close and personal with this bad boy from the southern hemisphere

Stonefield Musical Instrument Company
www.stonefieldmusic.com

Stonefield instruments are the brainchild of Tom Stanley and are handcrafted in New Zealand using many indigenous timbers of the region and some interesting design concepts. One look at these basses and your attention is instantly drawn to the fact that Stanley has developed a radically different take on the well-worn features we have come to expect on an electric bass guitar. Let's see how it translates to everyday use.

Build Quality

If you like the look and feel of an organically timber-laden instrument, don't be surprised if you fall head over heels for this bass. Picking the



bass up, you're struck by the care and attention to detail that Stanley has instilled into this instrument. The body shape looks familiarly curvaceous, but any similarities stop there. The natural colouring and figuring of the timbers gives the bass an earthy, rustic look, accentuated by the multi-laminated through-neck core which is made up of aircraft-grade laminates to give the bass rigidity and strength.

Although the body is deep, it balances extremely well due to the headstock design, the lack of conventional machine heads and the use of stainless steel, anodised aluminium and brass in the hardware and bridge system, designed and trademarked by Stanley himself. The metals in the design have been chosen so that no rusting will occur over the life of the instrument, as well as to limit any excess weight.

The bridge works effortlessly, with very little resistance as the string is tightened: the tuning stability is impressive.

The south-pointing jack socket is an interesting choice: perhaps an angled jack plug would be beneficial. The controls for volume, bass roll-off and treble roll-off are located on the lower half of the body, while the all-important midrange settings are accessed, along with a bypass (silent) setting, through the control on the upper bout. A real mixture of tones is accessible using this control, with 10 available settings – five via the pushed control, five via the pulled control.

The carved Stonefield logo on the front is replicated on the back along with the upper strap button on the rear of the top horn. Individual cavity plates exist for each control pot and the subtle burst colouring on the through-neck adds a touch of class, as does the zebrano and Australian blackwood binding to the edge of the fingerboard and the ebony bridge and nut. The neck profile is full, but the nut width keeps the dimensions in check – and although the neck depth may not appeal to those of a Jazz persuasion, it'll suit those who prefer a neck they can dig into. The set-up is excellent, with a slinky action, and the water-based lacquers applied to the neck give it a sleek feel: the body, on the other hand, has had two coats of Danish oil and a single coat of teak oil applied to it.

Sounds and Playability

Straight away, you can feel how resonant it is. Attempt to play anything you like and the timbers vibrate against your body. Plug this beauty in and the humbucking pickup brings everything you play to life. The passive controls offer a broad palette of tones: I was surprised by just how powerful and forthright the signal was, with plenty of punch. No matter how you set the controls, it never lacks a rounded, full sound.



“UNDERPINNING IT ALL IS A FABULOUSLY WARM WOODEN TONE THAT I DEFY YOU NOT TO FALL IN LOVE WITH”

Bringing the mid control into play opens up your tonal options considerably, which also benefits the performance of the low B string. If you require a throaty upper-mid boost, you'll find it: if you seek an aggressive, biting tone, you can have that too. For a passive bass, the sonic performance is impressive: the volume across all five strings is consistent and the notes ring out no matter which playing style you choose to throw at it. Underpinning it all is a fabulously warm wooden tone that I defy you not to fall in love with.

Conclusion

A state of the art custom lite-flite case is included in the price (valued at \$350) and should you wish to opt for a titanium bridge unit, for an additional cost of \$250 you can shave 28g of weight from the bass per string – which is worth noting if you suffer from back or shoulder pain. Instruments bought from the Stonefield website in the 'Off The Shelf' section of the store will receive an additional 5 per cent discount until the end of July 2016.

As a new company with a new product, this bass certainly grabs the attention – and judging by the numbers visiting the Stonefield stand at the recent LBGS, Stanley may well be onto something. The question is whether this bass, and its brothers and sisters, have enough about them to set them apart from more established names in the £3000 bracket. Only time will tell, but early signs are promising indeed. ■