

Rapier 33

Alan Entwistle's original Rapier 33 played a major role in shaping the landscape of the British guitar industry. The legendary guitar was the go-to instrument for many up and coming '60s British Beat groups and helped launch the careers of many guitarists in the 60s and 70s. Today, the Rapier 33 has been given a bit of a facelift whilst remaining true to its roots, ready to serve the next generation of young guitarists. Here's **Nick Jennison** to tell us more.

FUN FACT: I started playing guitar because I got in trouble in school. I was sat in detention after a French lesson with my friend Karl when he asked me "do you wanna be in my band?". We were ten years old, and it was 1994—the dark days between grunge and Britpop, when 2 Unlimited ruled the airwaves in the UK. NOBODY was in a "band", let alone a 10-year-old scallywag from just outside Newcastle, but I went with it anyway, and that night I went to Karl's house to "have a go on his Dad's guitar." That guitar was a Watkins Rapier.

Imagine my delight when I unboxed this new offering from JHS and UK designer Alan Entwistle to find a loving re-working of the first guitar I'd ever laid hands-on, right down to the gaudy three-tone sunburst finish. I was thrilled, but then I remembered just how crap those original Rapiers were.

The Watkins Rapier was one of the guitars that sprung up to fill the gap in the market created by young musicians craving the Amer-

ican guitars that the likes of Hank Marvin and Buddy Holly were playing. American guitars were like hen's teeth in the UK back then, so home-grown companies like Watkins, Burns and Dallas flooded the market with cheap and cheerful offerings that - if you squinted - looked like the real deal. Unfortunately, they played and sounded terrible.

And so, it was with trepidation that I plugged in the new Rapier 33. Was it going to join the legions of "bad" gear that we refuse to review and send back to the manufacturers? Well, clearly not, or you wouldn't be reading this now. I was absolutely thrilled to find out that this guitar is nothing short of excellent. All of the flaws of the originals - the frets that would cut you to ribbons, the dreadful pickups, the tremolo that operated basically as an "out of tune" lever - all of these have been thoroughly remedied.

The neck is a super comfy "slim C" design made of Canadian hard rock maple and capped with a 12" radius rosewood board. It's eminently playable, but it doesn't feel like a »



Rapier 33

MSRP: (UK) £429 / (US) \$599

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“modern” guitar. Rather, it has a feel similar to the vintage American instruments that the original Rapiers were aping. Thanks to a well-cut nut and 6 Wilkinson machine heads, tuning stability is very good too. Interestingly, the new Rapier 33 retains the zero fret that the originals sported. These older guitars are partly responsible for the

zero fret developing a bad reputation, because it was used to avoid having to cut the guitar’s nut properly. It’s totally unjustified though, because a well-implemented zero fret will make the guitar’s open strings sound more like fretted notes, making for a much more consistent tone note-to-note.





Electronics come courtesy of three Entwistle low noise mini-humbuckers, including the signature angled middle pickup seen on the original Rapier 33s. The switching has been updated, with a three-way toggle to select between bridge pickup, neck pickup and both pickups, paired with a slide switch to bring the middle pickup into the circuit. As if that wasn't enough tonal versatility, the second slide switch engages a very tastefully tuned bass cut.

The sonics here are very “mid-20th century” - less Van Halen, more The Kinks, if that makes sense. But within that umbrella, there's an absolute ton of variety to be had, from squawky out-of-phase tones to fat and clear clean sounds. I could go over them all here, but you're better off watching the video.

Perhaps the most pleasant surprise of all is the tremolo. On the original guitars, the term didn't really DO anything... »

apart from put the guitar out of tune. On the new Rapier 33, the trem works beautifully, with a really smooth action and great string-to-string symmetry for chord shimmerers and dips - and somehow, JHS and Entwistle have managed to retain the same look as the original!

If you're a fan of the aesthetic of the "catalogue" guitars of the 50s and 60s, but you've always been put off by the fact that they're barely functional as instruments, then JHS and Alan Entwistle have you covered. The new Rapier 33 is a really well-made guitar with a ton of usable tones under the hood, but with all of the charm of the vintage instruments it shares its name with.

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