



# GEAR

## REVIEW

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# DOMESTIC BLISS

## St. Blues Juke Joint Series

**W**ith the elimination of its Korean-made Pro Series and the introduction of the Juke Joint Series, Memphis-based St. Blues can boast an entire lineup made in the good ol' U.S. of A. St. Blues' initial offerings in the Juke Joint Series include the Bluesmaster and Mississippi Bluesmaster guitars, along with the Legendary Bass. With their stripped-down layouts – i.e., no pickguards, no bindings, ultra-thin satin finishes, earthy color palettes, and minimal chrome hardware – all three Juke Joint instruments exude a vibe that's cool and natural while also being visually appealing and comfortable to play.

The Tele-inspired Bluesmaster features St. Blues' proprietary bell-shaped alder body, a 25½"-scale bolt-on maple neck with a classic C profile, Wilkinson vintage-style tuners, a Wilkinson box-style Tele bridge with compensated brass saddles, a rear-mounted three-way lever switch, rear-mounted push/pull Volume and Tone knobs, and a pair of individually tapped Ken Armstrong single-coil pickups.

The Bluesmaster was tested with a '65 reissue Fender Twin Reverb combo with an Ibanez TS9 overdrive pedal. Coming through the Twin, the Bluesmaster sports an old-school Tele sound with a nice and punchy bottom end, crisp snappy highs, and, with the pickups in tapped mode, pulled-back mids. The Bluesmaster's untapped mode yields a hotter, rounded sound with thicker and more aggressive mids. The Kent Armstrong pickups are well-balanced, too. A throaty and relatively hot neck pickup keeps up with the bridge pickup, resulting in thicker sound in the middle position.

After many requests, St. Blues has returned to a more substantial tap percentage: about 40 percent, compared with the 30 percent found on their Pro Series and more in line with their 1980s models. The

ability to individually tap the pickups allows the middle position to be tailored by tapping only one of the pickups or using them as a bit of a solo boost by going from the more laid-back tapped sound to the hotter untapped sound.

As versatile as the Bluesmaster is, the

Juke Joint Series isn't all about single-coils. At first glance, the Mississippi Bluesmaster looks like a humbucker version of

Price: \$1,798 (list, Bluesmaster/  
Mississippi Bluesmaster);  
\$1,898 (list, Legendary Bass)  
Info: [www.saintblues.com](http://www.saintblues.com)



the Bluesmaster, but closer inspection reveals a different creature more akin to a Les Paul Special. The Mississippi Bluesmaster features a mahogany body, a shorter 24¾"-scale mahogany neck with a Pau Ferro fretboard, dual Kent Armstrong humbuckers that can be individually split (P-90s that can be tapped are also available), a Wilkinson hardtail bridge, and Wilkinson vintage-style tuners. Played through the same setup as the Bluesmaster, the Kent Armstrong humbuckers produce a thick and crunchy overdrive with a moderately hot output and good note separation. The mahogany components, shorter scale length, and moderate-output humbuckers really focus the midrange for an articulate sound, whether played clean or dirty. The ability to split the pickups independently gives the guitar a wider tone range, adding a bit of bite in the bridge and neck positions and even some jangle in the middle position.

Far from jangly, the Juke Joint Series Legendary Bass features a P-style solid alder body, a 34"-scale bolt-on maple neck with maple fingerboard, open vintage-style tuners, body-mounted Kent Armstrong pickups, rear-mounted controls, and a nice and heavy cast tailpiece. The pickup layout is a standard PJ setup with a humbucking P-style unit toward the neck and a single-coil J-style pickup at the bridge. Each pickup has its own Volume control while sharing a passive master Tone control. The neck's substantial U profile is comfortable and balanced with a vintage '50s feel. Through an Ampeg B200R 1x15, the P-style pickup produces that classic round thumpy, throaty P-bass sound, while the J-style pickup can be dialed in for single-coil definition and attack.

The St. Blues Juke Joint Series' super-thin satin finishes and super-tight "neck notch" neck joints produce a ton of natural resonance that is felt and heard in all three instruments. Although the series has a "back to the basics" feel, attention to detail is clearly not stripped down—all three instruments sport nicely finished, polished, and leveled frets, meticulous finishes, neatly cut and finished bone nuts, and pro setups. In short, the St. Blues Juke Joint Series offers American-made custom-shop quality; classy, no-frills design; excellent playability; and great versatility at reasonable prices. — *Phil Feser VG*