

Quicktest

Planet Waves NS Mini Headstock Tuner £20

Yup, it's a headstock tuner, and it's very small!

CONTACT: Various UK dealers PHONE: N/A WEB: www.daddario.com

This new chromatic headstock tuner from Planet Waves, designed in conjunction with guitar design legend Ned Steinberger, is really small – barely larger than the CR2032 3V supplied battery that powers it, in fact. It has a dinky but very bright display that shows the note in red (while tuning) and then green when it's in tune. But the neatest thing about it is that it's designed to fit on the back of the headstock; a small clip can be adjusted to suit headstock thickness of between approx 11-22mm; once fixed you rotate the head for maximum visibility. Aside from a small on/off switch (it turns itself off when no pitch is

detected too) you can calibrate its reference pitch between 430-450Hz.

In Use

The tuner clips easily onto the non-tuner side of a Fender-style headstock, just rotate to find the best viewing position. It also fits to an acoustic or electric's three-a-side head where you can place it behind the tip of the headstock, or on the treble side between the top E machinehead and the nut – it's small enough not to get in the way of first position chords. The piezo vibration-only sensing is fast (and ideal for noisy environments), accurate and bright enough for indoor venues, though it's harder to see in the bright outdoors.

Verdict

Very neat, very inconspicuous, very small – just take care you don't lose it! [DB]

The Bottom Line

We like: Micro size – your audience can't see it; clear display; fast note recognition
We dislike: Easily mislaid?

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Fender CF-140S steel-string acoustic £178

Fender's latest entry-level acoustic...

CONTACT: Fender GBI PHONE: 01342 331700 WEB: www.fender.com

Part of Fender's new Chinese-made Classic Design series, this 14-fret non-cutaway folk-sized acoustic is intended as an ideal starter steel-string or a small bodied 'at home' guitar for a more experienced player. At this price, the quality is excellent, with a solid spruce top and laminated mahogany back and sides. Fit and finish is all very commendable and the satin neck is very playable (although some better strings and a little TLC to the very dry rosewood fingerboard wouldn't go amiss). Nut width is 43mm, with a string spacing of 36mm, makes it a little tight for a classic fingerpicker, although the 56mm bridge spacing is airy enough and the saddle is nicely compensated. Set-up is good – the neck has a little too much relief (easily sorted), but out of the box it's nice enough.

Sounds

Bright and a little brash, it's a typical new guitar voice, lacking a little depth and warmth. That said the compact folk size makes for a very intimate but not over-small playing experience and after a few days playing, it already displays a slightly mellower, fuller and characterful voice.



Verdict

As an example of the range, the CF-140S is impressive. Well priced, tidily made and a pretty versatile player, it certainly meets its student intention. It's also an ideal at home or spare guitar for experienced players; maybe for alternate tunings and/or slide duties. [DB]

The Bottom Line

We like: Crisp construction; solid top; extra strap button
We dislike: It could do with a little fingerboard TLC and better strings – but that's about par at this price point

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★ >





Sugartone Starjet £699

A fine lap-steel, hand-crafted in Yorkshire

CONTACT: Sugartone PHONE: 07905 305280 WEB: www.sugartone.co.uk

The Starjet is our first lap of the Sugartone block, but it's a good one. It has a 571mm (22.5-inch) scale, one-piece cherry body and a walnut fingerboard, and of course, being a lap steel, the neck is huge and square. The bound fingerboard has no frets, just inlaid lines and mother-of-pearl dots. Tuners are Gotoh Sta-tite, the raised nut is Corian

and the slightly sharp-edged aluminium bridge, with through-body stringing, is Sugartone's own. A single Lace Alunitone pickup is fitted, with volume and tone, the latter with a 'paper-in-oil' capacitor.

Sounds

Lace's Alunitone single-coil has a pretty hot output with a

big bass end and steely highs. Combined with the thick but not over large body, it seems to focus the mids and make this quite an attacking lap. You'll certainly have no problem being heard in a mix. We'd prefer a better value cap on the tone control, this writer at least uses the tone extensively from fully open for clean pedal steel



tones, to a fair bit of roll-off for swampier, gained voices. The lap steel has no boundaries.

Verdict

A real level above the numerous import laps that are sometimes little more than toys, this is a serious piece – well-priced and well made. [DB]

The Bottom Line

We like: Quality build, design and sound

We dislike: Tone knob taper; slightly sharp-edged bridge

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Fishman Black Stack soundhole pickup £249

A retro-voiced custom shop pickup with some rather groovy packaging

CONTACT: JHS PHONE: 01132 865381 WEB: www.jhs.co.ukv

Designed by Mike Vanden (who conceived the Rare Earth), the Black Stack aims for an older 'retro' sound compared to the industry standard Rare Earth. "It was the early Rod Stewart albums that inspired me," he says

"Those recorded acoustics have a really thick sound: it might not be high fidelity, but it's easy to listen to, more forgiving."

It's a big and chunky stacked-coil humbucker, though not particularly weighty, and comes with a TA4-style

mini-XLR output (and supplied five-foot cable with connector and endpin jack socket). It mounts to the soundhole with neatly designed plastic brackets (a cork pad is supplied if you're worried about your finish). Unlike the other Fishman



soundhole pickups, it has height adjustable pole pieces.

Sounds

With a lower output than the Rare Earth, there's less 'active'-like high end in lower positions for a wonderfully organic and open acoustic-like tone. Aside from creating, as Vanden intended, an older tone, it's one that suits an electric amp for dirtier voices, and is possibly a new standard for acoustic slide.

Verdict

This is a great pickup for retro rockers, and slide players, who constantly battle the hi-fidelity of modern acoustic pickups. The cool 'poker case' packaging with Fishman playing cards and a stack of black poker chips is nice, and apparently doesn't add much to the price. Even so, it seems expensive. [DB]

The Bottom Line

We like: Design; retro 'magnetic' acoustic tone

We dislike: It's expensive

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Fender Blues Junior Mk III Ltd Edition £658

Greeny for the Blues - another facelift for a Fender favourite

CONTACT: Fender GBI PHONE: 01342 331700 WEB: www.fender.co.uk



Fender's latest limited edition of the 15-watt Blues Junior is the Mk III version, covered in emerald green Tolex with a wheat grille cloth. The Mk III offers several cosmetic and electronic upgrades, although the amp is still essentially the same as the Mk II. Firstly, there's something called a 'sparkle mod', a popular tweak that entails removing a couple of capacitors to give the amp a more 'Fendery' tone. Other important changes include a new easy-to-read control panel and a Fender 'Lightning Bolt' speaker, although this limited

edition features an Eminence Cannabis Rex driver. The livery won't be to everyone's taste, but the regular MkIII model is still decked out in black/silver.

Sounds

The combination of sparkle mod, EL84s and the Cannabis Rex speaker give this a polished and rounded tone that works great with humbuckers and single-coils; gone is most of the nasal mid-range honk that made earlier versions popular with blues harmonica players. Kick in the fat mode and you'll be rewarded with righteous

Fender tone at small gig levels. Your audience will love its sweet treble and ZZ Top-approved harmonic squeals - even if your harmonica player isn't so keen.

Verdict

Still one of the best small amps for gigs or in the studio. [NG]

The Bottom Line

We like: Proper Fender tone and good looks
We dislike: Build quality isn't Fender's best; the grille needs straightening; underneath the livery it's still got the same old single-sided circuit board

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

4Pockets Stompbox £13.99

A guitar effects rack for the iPad

CONTACT: 4Pockets PHONE: N/A WEB: www.4pockets.com

With the aid of an iOS audio interface and some headphones, Stompbox aims to provide a practice facility on your iPad by supplying you with up to 12 simultaneous effects in a virtual rack controlled by a virtual pedalboard, alongside a phrase-training-equipped media player for loading mp3s and playing along. You also get a tuner, metronome and a four-track loop recorder.

In Use

Easy to use with just one main scrollable page that shows the foot controller at the top and the rack below it, Stompbox has 12 available banks of six patches. Four banks are loaded with factory presets, some of which we found to be instantly usable, others just a wall of noise. Not to worry though -

the noisy presets just need the gain knobs on some of the components turned down, plus you can easily put your own rack together and create your

own patches, all quickly recalled with the virtual foot controller, which also lets you enable and disable individual effects. To accompany the single preamp you can choose from 17 effect modules covering all the popular guitar effects with many adjustable parameters, allowing the possibility of dialling in a wide range of playable tones.

Verdict

While the distortion sounds can get a wee bit fizzy at times,

there are some sounds here that work just fine in a practice situation. And, combined with the song playback, phrase-training and recording facilities, it provides a very useful guitar resource for iPad owners. [TC]



The Bottom Line

We like: Easy to use; nice set of facilities for practice
We dislike: Some factory presets need editing before they can be used

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★