

THE GAS
STATION



JACKSON SOLOIST SL4X £519

This prestige shred machine glows red hot in cool blue

As a child of the 80s, and a veritable moral retort to frumpy, *Kumbaya*-playing disciples of acoustic guitar, the Jackson Soloist is a celebration of technological excess that's purpose-built for seeking out new sonic frontiers. It was more of a weapon, an Excalibur-esque co-opting of the S-style electric blueprint, chiselling a little danger into the body shape, whittling away at the neck, deploying high-powered pickups, and a double-locking Floyd Rose vibrato to accommodate whammy-bar gymnastics. Its success coincided with the advancement of shred

the sharp-angled six-in-line Jackson headstock – for our money, a cooler option than the newer Jackson spearhead-style headstocks – and is available in three super-cool retro finishes: Daphne Blue, as reviewed here, Neon Orange and Bubblegum Pink. Forget subtlety, folks; sometimes you need a guitar that looks as loud as it sounds.

The SLX has three Duncan Designed HR-101 Hot Rail pickups in the neck, middle and bridge positions, and while they occupy a similar profile and routing to single coils, these are high-output stacked humbuckers, with a powerful ceramic magnet at their

NEVER PLAYED A JACKSON? THIS WILL BLOW YOUR MIND

guitar and, to a degree, it facilitated it. Alongside high-powered S-style electrics such as the Ibanez RG, 'Saber' S, and JEM series, not to mention various hot-trotted marques from Charvel, it armed a new generation of shredders with an aggressively spec'd instrument that was played fast and sounded huge. To this day, successive updates of the Jackson Soloist have stayed true to this ideal. The SL4X is no exception.

What is different is that the Indonesian-built SL4X retails in the shark-infested market for mid-priced electrics, and it makes the Soloist's premium vibe accessible to those of us who can't spend a couple of grand on a guitar. You'd be forgiven for checking the price tag twice. The SL4X is stunning. It has a traditional Soloist silhouette, with

core. The hardware is black and there's a double-locking Floyd Rose Special vibrato unit that's neatly tucked flush against the SL4X's basswood body. The dot fretboard inlay is a subtle alternative to the shark-fin inlay that's more commonly sported on similar Jacksons, and it's nice to see a bound rosewood fingerboard at this price. Likewise, a neck-through construction is a good guarantee of the on-tap sustain you'll get.

The neck, quarter-sawn from maple, is typically Jackson. With a compound radius fretboard that sees the neck flatten out towards the upper frets, it's comfortable for fretting chords and hectic riffs, whilst ergonomically boosting your playing past the 10th fret.

If you have never played a Jackson, the SL4X will blow

1 RETRO FINISH
The Daphne Blue has a super-cool 50s vibe, while the Neon Orange and Bubblegum Pink are visions of 80s excess

2 FLOYD ROSE
This double-locking vibrato is tucked away square in the recess of the guitar's body and is super-stable and built for abuse

3 NECK
The neck-through construction gives the Soloist a solid base for incredible sustain, while the neck itself, with its compound radius (304mm-406mm) fretboard, is lightning quick

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Basswood

NECK: Maple, neck-through

SCALE: 647mm (25.5")

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood

FRETS: 24, jumbo

PICKUPS: 3x Duncan Designed Hot Rails stacked humbuckers

CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone, 5-way pickup selector

HARDWARE: Floyd Rose Special double-locking vibrato – black

LEFT-HANDED: No

FINISH: Daphne Blue (reviewed), Neon Orange, Bubblegum Pink

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Raising the bar

Why the SL4X's Floyd Rose will revolutionise your playing

The Floyd Rose locking vibrato unit divides opinion. 'Isn't it a faff?' cry the naysayers. Anyone who plays in a band that frequently changes tunings might well agree. But we can all concur that it opens doors to techniques that can redefine your lead playing. The SL4X's double-locking vibrato is perfectly balanced and easily adjustable – seated flush in a recess, it's a comfortable seat for your picking hand to palm-mute riffs. With the Floyd Rose locking the string at both nut and bridge, it holds its tuning as well as any guitar. But most guitars won't let you fret harmonics and divebomb them until the strings go slack before returning to pitch, wobble or scoop while fretting notes, or make your guitar talk, or rev like a motor engine. Thanks to its vibrato, the SL4X can.

your mind. It's naturally balanced, and with its jumbo frets and easy action it flatters your playing. Even after all kinds of whammy-bar abuse – divebombing, wobbles, ascending pitch squeals – the SL4X holds its tune admirably.

If its engineering keeps the SL4X's tuning honest, the HR-101 Hot Rails bring out the devil inside. With a more scooped tone, the Hot Rails make a welcome option on an instrument that would ordinarily see pickup combos with more midrange bark. With the gain cranked full, there's an LA shred vibe to the bridge pickup;



harmonics are on tap, and while there's plenty of heat to help your solos cut through, its rhythm tone is perfect for hard rock with plenty of juice for ultra-gain metal scenarios. Selecting the neck pickup for leads dials back the harmonics a little, and it's perfect for those more intricate shred passages. If you can't nail a sweep-picked A minor arpeggio on this, you never will.

With a five-way pickup selector and a master tone pot with plenty of range, the SL4X is one versatile beast. With clean tones it's lively, dynamic and elastic; you can roll



the tone back and noodle on jazz, engage the neck and middle pickups for some syncopated funk, and there are plenty of chewy blues tones, too. But this is what the Soloist was designed for: shredders run the gamut from jazz fusion to cacophonous speed metal and need a guitar to handle all styles.

Jonathan Horsley

SUMMARY	FEATURES	★	★	★	★	★
	SOUND QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	VALUE FOR MONEY	★	★	★	★	★
	BUILD QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	PLAYABILITY	★	★	★	★	★
	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★

ALSO TRY...

IBANEZ S770PB-CNF

£649

Another update on an 80s classic. With its slimline mahogany body, Wizard III neck and Floyd Rose, this Ibanez is a lot of fun.



LTD MH-103QM

£547

Available heavily discounted online, this S-style plays as good as it looks, boasting a fast, satin-smooth maple neck offering a pro-quality ride for peanuts.



SCHecter BANSHEE-6 FR EXTREME

£649

We love the HSS pickup configuration, which makes the Banshee ideal for a number of styles; like the others here, it's built for speed.

