



Words Jonathan Horsley / Photography Adam Gasson

AFFORDABLE EIGHT-STRINGS

These extended-range electrics promise sphincter-troubling low-end for the financially compromised musician



When it comes to getting to grips with an eight-string guitar, the biggest difficulty has typically been found far from the fretboard. How your fretting hand will familiarise itself with this expanded territory, or how your picking hand will adapt, is secondary to the business of affording one. Built to facilitate the metal v2.0 player's excursions into the bassist's registers, these extended-range instruments arrived out the box exotically scented of the custom shop, and with a price to match. This has changed, and for those who found the production-line eight-strings

in the £700 bracket too pricey, we have four entry-level models that offer those with sufficient frontier spirit a cost-efficient entry into their world. The Jackson Dinky JS32-8Q DKA HT, LTD H-208, and Schecter C-8 Deluxe are familiar riffs on some of our favourite S-style super-electrics. With their built-for-metal body shapes and sharp headstocks, shredders love 'em. Then there's the newcomer, the SubZero Generation 8; built for and distributed by online retail giant Gear4Music, it takes the template further with a bolder double-cut, contoured body and asymmetric six-and-two headstock configuration. It looks the part. They all do. The question is whether a convincing low-end depth charge is achievable at this price.



SCHECTER C-8 DELUXE

£415

Dark knight in white satin

That's a lot of guitar there. What's the body made of and will my back survive?

Sure, the C-8, like all its eight-string kin here, feels like there's a lot of neck, and that takes a bit of getting used to. But the basswood body is contoured in all the right places; it's not as brutally heavy as a mahogany slab and it sits well when playing seated or standing.

Why does the neck feel so long?

With a scale length of a whopping 711 mm [28"] (if you bear in mind that a Les Paul is billed at 628mm [24.75"] from nut to 12th fret) the



C-8 certainly has a lot of neck going on, and it's carrying all that length in order to keep the tuning and intonation of those seventh and eight strings nice and stable.

Are there any hidden features on the Schecter C-8 Deluxe, coil-taps or suchlike?

Not particularly, aside from a neat sculpted heel that'll please those looking to noodle up the top-end as well as jockeying the lower strings. But at this pocket-friendly price, a sense of minimalism is to be expected, and the C-8 is certainly nicely finished and well put-together.



AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Basswood body, maple neck, 24 narrow extra-jumbo frets, 711mm [28"] scale, rosewood fretboard, 2x Schecter Diamond Plus humbuckers, hardtail bridge

FINISH: Satin White [as reviewed], Satin Black

CONTACT: Westside Distribution
SchecterGuitars.com

JACKSON DINKY JS32-8Q DKA HT

£375

Shoulda called it chunky

Haven't we seen this before?

No, but the Dinky S-style is one of Jackson's most popular shapes. Featuring the very 21st century spear headstock (which, while we're here, we still prefer the old-school inline headstock – you can't improve upon perfection), this Dinky is a super-sized take on a favourite.

It looks pretty smart. Are we reading the price correctly?

It does, and we love the quilted maple top and white binding. They offer a welcome touch of luxury on a guitar that's a bit like all of us



in that it aspires to pass itself off as a pricier model. As you'd expect, there are some concessions to fiscal reality; you won't find the kill switch and active DiMarzio humbuckers as you do on the Pro Series.

What makes this so playable?

All four of these make welcome concessions to the player, but there's something about that Jackson neck, and the 304mm–406mm (12"–16") compound radius fretboard that makes it as comfortable zipping about above the 12th fret as it is fretting chords for your rhythms. That playability is Jackson all over.



AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Poplar body with quilted maple top, maple neck, 24 jumbo frets, 673mm [26.5"] scale, rosewood fretboard w/Piranha Tooth inlay, 2x Jackson High-Output Eight-String humbuckers, Jackson HTB hardtail bridge

FINISH: Trans Black [as reviewed], Trans Red

CONTACT: Fender EMEA
JacksonGuitars.com

LTD H-208

£429

Built for deft tones

Is this a Stephen Carpenter model?

No, it's not but it does take LTD's much-loved Horizon body profile and scale it up for eight-string action. Deftones fans will still love it because there's plenty of shared DNA with the Carpenter model and the sort of build quality that we've grown well accustomed to from LTD.

What type of pickups have we got?

The H-208 comes equipped with two direct-mounted ESP LH-308 humbuckers in the neck and bridge positions. These are high-



output passive pickups and are fine but, on balance, if we were to mod this guitar (we know you are thinking this), these would be the first to go – fitting the H-208 with a set of active EMG808 humbuckers would be an obvious choice because it would sound incredible. These are impressive nonetheless.

Wait, this is 2018 – impressive sounds indifferent.

Not at all. It's already a minor miracle that you can pick up an eight-string from LTD at this price, and impressive is impressive; these pickups are fit for purpose; they can handle plenty of gain and will facilitate all your pinch harmonic needs.

SUBZERO GENERATION 8

£180

It's almost free

I've never heard of SubZero before. What's so special about this guitar then?

For an entry-level eight-string, you won't find better value than this. Here, we've got a solid alder body – a fine choice of tonewood – with a svelte bolt-on maple neck that is both satin-smooth and super-playable, and we love the bevelling and contouring on the body shape. It's a nice twist on the S-style double-cut.

Is that a rosewood fretboard?

No, but it looks it from a distance. SubZero use a thermally-treated



maple laminate for the fingerboard. It doesn't exactly roll off the tongue, but it responds well and, crucially, is ethically sourced.

These pickups look active. Are they?

There's no question that's the look they are going for but, as with the LTD model (as with all of these models) active pickups are too pricey for a guitar retailing at this price. That said, we were very impressed by the output on these passive humbuckers. They sure do kill the hum well enough and those powerful ceramic magnets make for a hot pickup, providing some much-needed treble bite.



AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Basswood body, maple neck, 24 jumbo frets, 647mm (25.5") scale, rosewood fretboard, 2x ESP designed LH-308 humbuckers, hardtail bridge

FINISH: Black [as reviewed]

CONTACT: Sound Service
ESPGuitars.com



AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Alder body, maple neck, 24 extra-jumbo frets, 711mm (28") scale, thermally treated maple laminate fretboard, 2x SubZero passive humbuckers, hardtail bridge

FINISH: High-gloss Jet Black [as reviewed]

CONTACT: Gear4Music
Gear4Music.com



HEAD TO HEAD

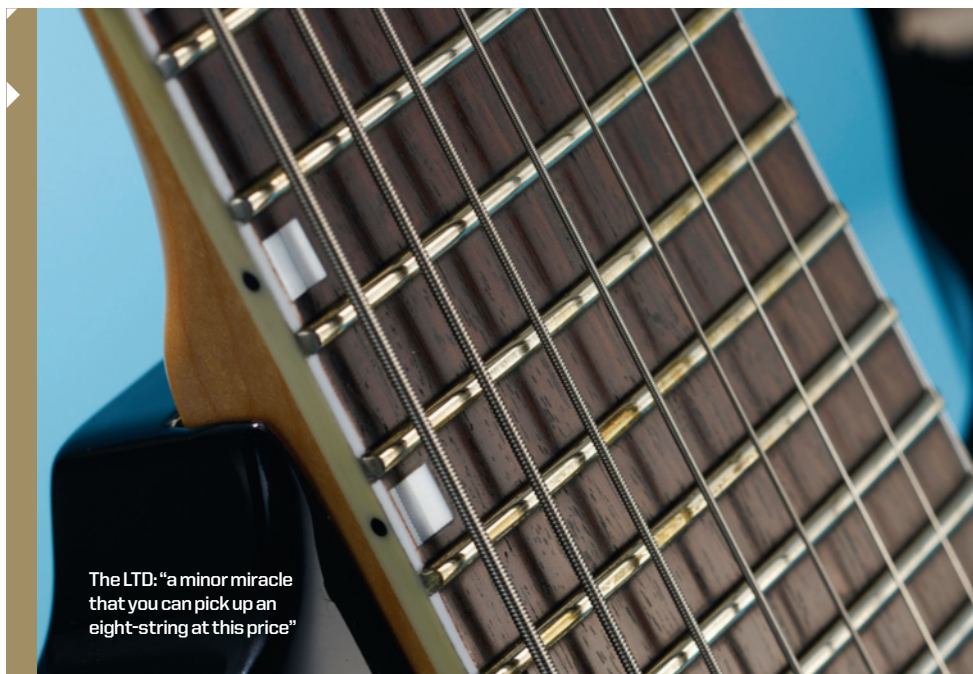
Who's hitting the low notes and who's a winner?

This is one of those occasions in which each of our guitars is not only competing for a similar playing experience, but squabbling for supremacy over the same frequencies and, indeed, the same demographic. There is little variance over the electrics and their setup; each guitar is equipped with two high-output passive humbuckers in the neck and bridge positions, with a three-way selector and master volume and tone pots to get the best out of them. Tonally, the first test is how the guitar handles the lower register strings, and here the Jackson and SubZero both come out ahead, if only slightly, with the eighth and seventh strings showcasing a thick industrial tone. You naturally lose definition when playing chords down there, but the separation of notes is a little clearer than on the LTD or Schecter.

The SubZero, by far the cheapest option here, had a few finish issues, but it was more than convincing in teasing out the sort of progressive

THE SUBZERO'S RHYTHM SOUNDS ARE BEST DESCRIBED USING ONOMATOPOEIA

metal chug and rhythm sounds that are better described using onomatopoeia and referencing sounds from the animal kingdom. Those stock pickups are not bad. So, too, the Jackson humbuckers; there's plenty of squeal in those, and, sonically, when playing in the more conventional register, the Jackson Dinky excels as a reliable budget shredder. Where we found some of the Schecter's low-end a bit unruly, there was no quarrel with its handling of the upper registers, with a natural classic rock tone that is powerful and authoritative. The LTD, likewise, is more comfortable in strings six through to one, and it's easy to get to grips with its thin U neck, a profile that's comfortably rounded in the right places. Might a longer scale have given it a bit more solidity in the bottom-end? Well, that's a question you would be reluctant to ask Aunt Vera over lunch. But we rather suspect that she would answer in the affirmative.



The LTD: "a minor miracle that you can pick up an eight-string at this price"



The Jackson: featuring high-output eight-string humbuckers

FINAL VERDICT

Which travel electro-acoustic is the right one for you?

It's a sign of the times that these extended-range guitars are affordable enough for beginners. If they struggled with the sort of über-gain metal tones that inspired the eight-string's popularity in the first place, certainly while playing chords (a 12" speaker in your practice amp is a must), we were encouraged by the sonic potential. Playing single-note rhythms, trying new techniques and slapping the eighth string a la Les Claypool all sounded cool.

There's not a lot of difference between them. If the SubZero and Jackson sounded a little more solid in the low-end, the Schecter and LTD were still resonant, playable and fun. If you intended on gigging these, then perhaps you'd still be looking to spend around £700 or thereabouts on a Jackson Pro Series or an Ibanez Iron Label multi-scale; or you would definitely consider upgrading your humbuckers to a set of active pickups at least. With an onboard preamp, that simple mod

would render those low frequencies with more conviction. But to learn on and practise your eight-string chops, these are largely fuss-free and inspiring.

Whether it's the Schecter's tidy finish and typically solid construction, or the Stephen Carpenter vibe of the LTD, there's no lack of ambition here. The finish and shredability of the Jackson makes a case for it as the all-star pick, but then, if it's affordable you're looking for, then the SubZero is hard to argue with.

SCHECTER
C-8 DELUXE



TOTAL
Guitar
BEST
ALL-ROUNDER

JACKSON DINKY
JS32-8Q DKA HT



TOTAL
Guitar
BEST FOR
SHRED

LTD
H-208



TOTAL
Guitar
BEST FOR
NU-METAL

SUBZERO
GENERATION 8



TOTAL
Guitar
BEST
VALUE

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

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