



Harley Benton ST-80FR MN

Harley Benton pays homage to the golden age of shred with this single-pickup and Floyd Rose-equipped firecracker

BY AMIT SHARMA

▶ **IT'S ALMOST CRAZY** to think that German retail giants Thomann launched Harley Benton as its own budget brand all the way back in 1998, given how the last decade or so has seen its affordable guitars become a major player for beginners across Europe.

But it's also started making electric guitars aimed at more developed musicians looking to spend less and this ST-80FR MN is emblematic of precisely that - a shredder's axe that undercuts all the usual go-to brands for guitars of its ilk while promising not to have compromised too much on quality or features.

On its website, Harley Benton states. "this is your portal to the guitars that powered the soundtrack of the 80s" and as I dive a little deeper, it certainly seems there's a palpable sense of truth to such bold claims.

Build quality

So let's cut to the chase here. You would be lucky to find a brand new Floyd Rose-equipped Superstrat for this kind of money anywhere else. The price, however, doesn't really mean anything if the guitar is poorly made and doesn't hold its tuning.

The instrument Harley Benton given to test is robust and well-built - the kind of weapon that I think could get you through an entire set no matter how much abuse you send its way. The licensed Floyd Rose 1000 system is notable for being one of the company's most reliable designs, bearing much similarity to the Original in terms of spec and feel, though manufactured in Korea to keep costs down.

While the none-more-metal black finish certainly lives on the more minimalist side, many might agree there's also a sense of classy elegance to its all-noir simplicity. Myself included.

Playability

Naturally, an '80s-inspired instrument aimed at audacious alternate pickers, slippery sweep lovers and adventurous arpeggio enthusiasts will need to place performance at the very forefront of its design.

This ST-80FR MN test model does not disappoint in that regard, especially once the neck relief is tweaked with the supplied hex key.

Weighing in at slightly over eight pounds, it would be fair to say this guitar feels heavier than it looks for the shape - and undermines any assumption that basswood is always on the lighter side. But, as I find out, there's a major plus with this guitar's build.



"Some might say a guitar at this kind of price point has no business resonating so well"

The asymmetrical C neck profile is a joy to fret on: admittedly, it's a fair bit thicker than some of the Wizard-style necks out there, but the rounder profile makes it feel more rewarding to hold - even more so on stage, thanks to the glow-in-the-dark side dots.

More importantly, the body is incredibly reactive, producing long-sustaining notes that ring out loud and clear. Some might say a guitar at this kind of price point has no business resonating so well.

Sounds

For this test, I plug the guitar into a Blackstar St James 50 6L6 half stack, with a Dawner Prince Red Rox distortion in front and the same company's David Gilmour-approved Boonar echo in the loop.

Tonally, this is not a versatile instrument, nor is it trying to be. You get one Tesla Plasma-X1b Alnico V humbucker in the bridge and one volume control, that's it.

There's no neck pickup, there's no tone control and no coil splitting. Everything is captured through the lone humbucker - which packs a D.C. resistance of around 14.6k and is more than capable of providing unholy metallic thunder at full throttle, as well as less extreme sounds with the volume backed off.

It's worth noting that players as revered as Eddie Van Halen, Jim Root and Gary Moore were not afraid of using guitars with only one bridge pickup at various points of their careers - there's an appeal to this design that, despite not being for everyone, has a dedicated following.

I'm pleased to say, then, that while the ST-80FR MN doesn't offer a great deal in features, what it does have works well.

Verdict

There is a lot this instrument excels at and, truth be told, it somehow manages to compete with guitars that cost twice, even thrice, as much.

The American basswood body and roasted Canadian flamed maple neck pair very well together and the single humbucker manages to capture this without any fuss.

There are just a couple of minor downsides.



musicradar VERDICT



If you're looking to riff, shred and dive-bomb your way into metal stardom, it will very hard to find something that will compete with the Harley Benton ST-80FR MN for under £400.

PROS

- + Incredibly responsive.
- + Roasted flame maple neck with compound radius fretboard.
- + Floyd Rose 1000 tremolo system for this price is impressive.

CONS

- Some players will miss having a neck pickup - or coil-split.
- Heavier than it looks.

SPECS

WHERE IS IT MADE: China

TYPE: Six-string electric guitar

BODY: American basswood

NECK: Roasted Canadian flamed maple bolt-on

FINGERBOARD/RADIUS: Roasted Canadian maple with rounded edges, 12"-16" compound

SCALE LENGTH: 648 mm (25.50")

NUT/WIDTH: 43 mm (1.65")

FRETS: 22 medium-jumbo 2.9 mm stainless steel frets with rounded ends

HARDWARE: Floyd Rose 1000 Tremolo, Jinho

J-02 15:1 gear ratio machine heads with HB logo

ELECTRICS: One Tesla Plasma-X1b Alnico V humbucker (bridge), one volume control

WEIGHT OF REVIEW MODEL: 8lb 2oz / 3.68kg

OPTIONS: Dual humbucker ST80FR MN HH (£389)

available in left-handed option too

FINISHES: Black (as reviewed), Lime Sparkle,

Radiant Red

CASE: No

Firstly, the weight and neck profile might not suit smaller-handed and bodied players. And while it does one sound well, there's not much else on offer in order to broaden your tonal horizons - something a coil-split could have helped address. At this price, however, it's strong showing all round.

