

# Strata cruiser

ROB GREEN STRATA  
bass probably around  
£950 inc case and VAT  
QQQ VVV

IF I told you that the constant process of reviewing bass after bass after bass made you a bit blasé I suppose you'd believe me.

Well, the Strata bass has woken me up with a vengeance, and to understand why, we have to take one step back to Steinberger.

There's no doubt that at least 90 per cent of the ideas behind the revolutionary Steinberger bass are correct. This headless instrument has a sustain and harmonic purity that no bass before has come anywhere near.

But the trouble with the Steinberger is that its looks don't justify the asking price and, furthermore, I don't personally think that it has quite the tonal range that a bass costing around £1,000 retail

should have.

Apparently I'm not alone in my opinion because a young Englishman by the name of Rob Green has just developed what *must* be the next logical stage on from the Steinberger – and he's called it the Strata Bass. Currently production models are being assembled and the distribution of this instrument (via bass dealers supreme Soundwave of Romford) should start very shortly.

The Strata, like the Steinberger, features a one-piece neck formed from a single moulding of carbon graphite. Unlike the Steinberger, however, the Strata features a really pleasant patterning effect on its moulding right down the back of the instrument.

Furthermore there's *real* wood in the Strata too! The Steinberger has this ultra-small body and, quaint though it may well be, it makes you feel ill at ease with it if you're more used to having a great lump of

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timber to thrash away at – and which of us bass players isn't? The Strata, on the other hand, features a superb epoxy resin joined side assembly of various carved woods, subject to what timbers Rob Green happens to have at the time.

Because the sound of the bass derives purely from the neck/body graphite unit, the choice of wood used for the side pieces doesn't effect the tone or sustain of the instrument in any way at all, which means that Rob can use any wood on earth and still have the bass sounding the same. Hence the sample I borrowed featured sides of, would you believe, London Plane, beautifully bookmatched on the front and mated to exotic quality mahogany backs which stand either side of the neck/body moulding. To add a touch of extra tradition, thin herringbone strips have been laid down the back, revealing a sense of taste in design which may be missing elsewhere (hrrumph!).

Mated to the graphite neck is a fingerboard of phenolic resin – not quite a new material, but one which many players (myself included) are quite happy to play on – in fact I have to admit that I even prefer this manmade substance to my previous traditional favourite – fingerboard material, ebony! The sample Strata I was loaned was immaculately fretted with a good medium/thick bass fretwire, and each fret had been polished and lapped to perfection for an almost astonishing degree of comfort.

On the hardware side, again like the Steinberger, tuning of the Strata is accomplished at the bridge end of this headless instrument – four large brass knobs accomplishing tuning with a superb gear ratio and perfect ability to hold the Strata tuned almost *regardless* of what one did to it.

Plain ends of the strings are fixed with screws into a beautifully cast brass fitting at the top of the neck and they then run down to terminate inside what must be one of the best brass bass bridge/tailpiece assemblies yet devised.

The bridge's saddles, for example, are massive cast jobs with excellent adjustment potential and massive side-frames which lock the saddles (possibly the heaviest quality I've seen) into a perfect tight setting. I have to say that this is possibly the best bass bridge I've yet seen.

Electronics on the Strata are by courtesy of Kent Armstrong who has provided two of his superlative pick-ups, each in black moulded housings with that distinctive Kent Armstrong wood-grain pattern effect on

the visible surfaces.

The pick-ups are connected to an active circuit (PP3 powered) inside the bass, and control of this arrangement is very simple. A small flick switch offers active or passive, the forward brass knurled heavy duty pot controls mixing between the front and back pick-ups; this is far better than a pick-up selector as it enables you to mix the sounds of the two together or operate either singly, depending on which way you set the pot.

The other three brass pots control master volume, treble and bass cut and boost and, believe me, that's all you're ever going to need!

My prototype, though superbly balanced, was too heavy, but Rob is aware of this and says production models would be made lighter to handle. Further, the neck might be slimmed down a little in its depth – although I certainly didn't find it objectionable.

So, down to the subjective bit. I *love* this bass, it is, quite without doubt, the finest bass guitar that I have yet played and one which really does show the way for the future. Getting used to it does, of course, cause a shade of effort as you tend to misjudge the fret positions initially due to the absence of a headstock. But, just pick up a Strata and play it. The neck profile feels perfect in the hands, the action almost impossibly low and the fretting as good as it can be made. Plug the bass in and play around with the four rotary pots

those Rainbow/Kent Armstrong pick-ups really do have the edge on the Steinberger's EMGs and the circuitry is quiet and capable of handling notes from low bass to high top with no fuss. Further, the bass sustains unlike anything else I've come across except the Steinberger, so that notes hold seemingly forever and you can play all sorts of fancy tricks, using high harmonics against bass string riffs etc. Just let those top notes keep on ringing (and they will!) while you damp down a note on the E string and you are immediately using a sound and an effect which virtually no other bass can even approach.

As I started off by saying, reviewing basses can make you a bit blasé about supposedly 'new' developments but this Strata bass takes the idea of the Steinberger bass forwards in terms of its sound while retaining the feel of real wood. Which means it's unquestionably the best bass guitar that I have ever played.

GARY COOPER

