

Rapier Saffire Ultra

A BIT STRANGE BUT TASTY

Lorem Ipsum

This year, Rapier releases the Saffire Ultra, featuring unconventional electronics that promise plenty of sonic options. text **Steven Faber**

Watkins Rapier Guitars were a hit in England in the 1960s as an affordable alternative to the very expensive American instruments. A few years ago, the guitar leg of the brand (Watkins also made amplifiers and effects) was revived under the name Rapier by guitar and element maker Alan Entwistle

in collaboration with UK distributor JHS. The new Saffire Ultra is packed with Alan's electronic ingenuity.

Designed

The retro styling is bursting from this model with the large two-piece pickguard with the model name on it (which reminiscent of Burns guitars),

mod emblem on the headstock, chrome-plated controls, vintage-style vibrato and unusual-looking pickup covers, but let's start with the basics. The body is made of okoume, a close relative of mahogany, with binding on the front and back and a greenburst finish through which you can clearly see the grain of the wood. The high-gloss lacquered neck is made of Canadian maple and has a profile that sits between a C and U. The rosewood

fingerboard with binding has a radius of 12 inches and twenty-three frets including the 0-fret. The headstock is black on the front with the Rapier logo between the Wilkinson tuning machines with an inlaid mother-of-pearl crown above it.

On the body, everything you see is different from the rest. The vibrato is by Rapier itself and consists of a large plate on the back of which a string holder hinges, which keeps the string tension in balance on the back of the body, just like a Stratocaster with springs.

The adjustable bridge has a roller saddle for each string. You can already see from the pickups that they consist of two coils: one for strings one, two and three and one for strings four, five and six. The low and high strings also have their own pickup switch, so that you can, for example, let the bass strings be heard with the bridge pickup, while the high strings are picked up by the neck pickup. There is also a volume control and a 'mid tone' and 'warm tone' control. On the upper horn is an arrow button. This is the five-way switch for the ATN system.

that in combination with the slightly flattened profile ensures that big chords, riffs and solos come out of your hands perfectly. Only if you play a lot with your thumb over the neck, a narrow round neck might be more comfortable. All parts of the bridge are smooth and rounded so that you don't feel any sharp edges when you rest your hand there. The tremolo is intended to give a light vibrato to a note or chord, and if you use it like that, it works fine. If you want to give more extreme results, the guitar wants to go out of tune. A little bit to the opposite side usually works wonders and brings you back into the right area.

The separated elements offer possibilities that I have never encountered on a guitar before. Suppose you are playing a riff like Sweet Home Alabama and you find the low notes a bit too woolly, then you can easily make them clearer by selecting one of the sounds towards the bridge. Or you do the opposite with the high strings if you find them a bit too shrill for a solo. The 'warm' control corresponds to a tone control as we are used to, while the 'mid tone' seems to amplify the

Such a switch is also ideal when you are recording and you are looking for a sound that is just a little different in the mix to complement other parts. I can imagine that all these possibilities can be a bit too much of a good thing in the beginning. In such a case, it is best to leave the ATN for what it is and keep the pickup switches in the same position. Then you have the possibilities that you also have on another guitar and from there you can always search for sounds that are just a little different.

Conclusion

Search the internet for photos of Rapiers from the sixties and you will see that the vibe of those guitars is captured very well with the Saffire Ultra. It not only looks 'different than usual', its possibilities also fall into that category. And that makes it a very nice guitar for everything from surf music to indie pop and rock.

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Solid electric guitar with double cutaway
BODY: Okoume
NECK: Canadian maple
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 12-inch radius
FRETS: 23 medium jumbo (including 0-fret)
SCALE: 629 mm (24.75 inches)
TOP NUT: Graph Tech NuBone
FRET: 43/53 mm
ELECTRONICS: 3 x Entwistle EWR64 Astra Split pickup, 2x 5-way pickup switch, ATN 5 Variator switch, volume control, mid tone control, warm tone control
HARDWARE: Rapier Hi Lo E-Z-Lok tuners
WEIGHT: Approx. 3.7 kg
FINISH: Greenburst
LEFT HANDED: Not available
OPTIONS: Also available in Ocean Blue and Shoreline Gold
RANGE: There is also a standard Saffire with simpler electronics

ATN stands for Alan's Tone Network and is in fact a filter consisting of a coil, resistor and capacitor with which you can adjust the sound of your elements.

In use

The Saffire Ultra plays nicely. The neck is a bit on the wide side and

middle when you turn it back. Even when both are fully open, you have the standard sound.

The ATN switch is off in the lower position and changes the sound in the other positions. This way you can get a nice mellow jazz sound (great for octave pieces) or a sound that is nice for strumming parts with open chords.

RAPIER SAFFIRE ULTRA JUDGEMENT

➤ **Guitarist says:** a guitar that is pleasantly strange, but therefore no less usable.

DISTRIBUTION:
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www.jhs.co.uk/collections/rapier

