

Rapier Saffire Ultra Guitar

Channelling some vintage British style with modern upgrades, the Rapier Saffire Ultra features a Greenburst finish, gold hardware, and a trio of Entwistle EWR64 twin blade twin coil pickups for authentic sparkle and bite. It's a nod to the past, but with plenty of playability without breaking the bank.

BACK in the 1960s, electric guitar was quickly becoming culturally significant. There were no 'standards' yet for electric guitars, and if you lived in the UK, it was difficult for a budding musician to get their hands on an American-made instrument. That was until the mid-'60s, when Watkins Electric Music (WEM) came on the scene—a UK company that made guitars, speakers, and more! You can see WEM amps

and speakers on lots of British bands' backlines; they also made some very cool guitars under the 'Rapier' name. Rapier offered affordable British alternatives to expensive and elusive American guitars (such as Fender and Gibson). These instruments became a quiet icon in the British music scene; however, as time went on, so did Rapier and WEM. In 2010, Alan Entwistle—a respected UK guitar luthier and pickup designer—partnered ▶



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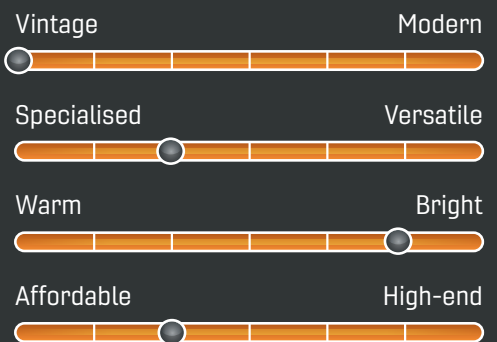


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Rapier **Saffire Ultra Guitar**

The Breakdown



For fans of

- » Iconic design
- » Value for money
- » Entwhistle Pickups

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jhs.co.uk/rapier



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with John Hornby Skewes (JHS) to resurrect the Rapier name, and since then, they have made modern versions of these classic Rapier designs, keeping to the classic 1960s aesthetic and sometimes quirky designs.

In this issue of GI, I am looking at the Saffire Ultra in Greenburst—an eye-popping and ear-tingling combination of classic design and tone. The body is made from okoume wood and is chambered, allowing warmth, sustain, and a unique mid-range EQ. The neck is a bolt-on, made from high-gloss Canadian maple, with a fully adjustable truss rod and a soft ‘C’ shape profile—great for chordal work.

The fingerboard is bound rosewood, featuring classic block inlays: 12” radius, 22 medium frets, and a zero fret for open string clarity. The scale length is 24.75”, allowing for a slinky feel, and in combination with the 12” radius and medium frets, makes this modern take on a classic much more contemporary in terms of playability and comfort.

When it comes to hardware, one of the standout features is the vibrato. The Rapier Hi-Lo resonance long plate vibrato with roller saddles is perfect for adding shimmer to dreamy surf chords and ghostly melodies.

The roller saddles help with tuning stability and also aid the smooth action of the vibrato arm and sound. The tuners are Wilkinson E-Z-Lok machine heads, which complement the vibrato system and roller bridge, offering stable tuning. However, this type of vibrato should be used subtly for maximum effect and stability.

Aside from the awesome retro design, the pickups and electronics are what make this guitar really stand out. The instrument features three Alan Entwistle Astrosonic-Split, low-noise single-coil pickups (Alnico V with 7mm rod magnets). These are controlled via two separate five-way switches: one activating the pickup poles near the low E, A, and D strings, the other controlling the poles near the upper G, B, and E strings, allowing a huge range of tonal options. While overwhelming for a simple Strat dude like me at first, this was really fun to play with—so many clean and crunch tones were available that I’d never had the pleasure of experimenting with before. These pickups are controlled by a single volume knob.

If that’s not enough, there are also two separate tone controls and an ATN-5 switch, which works as a filter, further shaping the tone. As for the tone controls, these work with differ-

ent aspects of EQ—the middle one could be seen as a mid-boost/cut, and the back tone control works with the top end, allowing you to open up the treble for sparkly, cutting cleans or roll it off for nice, punchy jazzy tones.

The guitar comes in several finishes; we were lucky to try out the Greenburst in this issue, which looks awesome. But it also comes in Ocean Blue and Shoreline Gold, with either faux tortoiseshell or black 3-ply scratch plates.

So, how much does it retail for? At the time of writing this review, it's £599, which, for what you get, isn't bad at all. The hardware is quality, the guitar is certainly unique, and it sounds awesome! If you're into retro 1960s sounds and aesthetics, this is a guitar well worth having in your arsenal!

