



VINTAGE

VCB440WK Statesboro'

For the blues bassist on a budget, here's a new electro-acoustic from Vintage. Kev Sanders woke up this mornin' and plugged in

JHS
www.jhs.co.uk

£199

The most recent addition to Vintage's Statesboro' range of blues-inspired guitars is this dreadnought-bodied electro-acoustic bass, designed with the help of veteran bassist and long-term Vintage collaborator Paul Brett.

Sure, it's a pretty basic design: just about the only nod to decoration is the subtle herringbone pattern rosette around the sound hole. There are no fancy inlays or body binding here, but the looks of the bass are none the worse for that. Let's hope that the build resources have gone into design, materials and hardware rather than decoration and a glossy finish...

Build Quality

Quality timbers are obviously an important aspect of any bass, but perhaps especially so for one designed to be played acoustically as well as plugged in and amplified. The choice here is mahogany all round; laminate for the body and a higher-quality hand-selected mahogany for the top.

Often, an acoustic design such as this would have either a solid or laminated softwood top – usually spruce – but both the inherent strength and tonal warmth of mahogany make it a good choice for

a bass. Inside the body the traditional sitka spruce bracing and lining looks clean and tidy, with no excess glue or wood shavings to be seen.

The comfortable mahogany neck has a slim, round profile and is just a fraction wider than a standard Jazz bass over its entire length. The dark-stained fretboard has 20 well-fitted and polished narrow frets and tiny front and side pearloid dot markers – again, all finished to an impressively high standard. There's easy access to the truss rod for adjustment through the soundhole, not that it was needed; the action and intonation of the review model was perfectly set up straight from the box.

Despite the remarkably low price, there's little evidence of cost saving when it comes to hardware and electronics. The bridge piezo pickup system is driven by an inbuilt active preamp, conveniently flush-fitted to the upper bout and boasting a three-band EQ (Bass, Middle and Treble) plus a master volume, phase switch, low battery indicator and in-built tuner.

There's an ABS nut and saddle and a 'tech wood' bridge. The gold hardware consists of cast tuners and strap buttons which are a perfect match for the dark tobacco brown Whisky Sour satin finish.

Bearing in mind its price, the standards of quality control and manufacturing alone mark the Statesboro' bass out as a real gem



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Body | Laminate mahogany
Neck | Mahogany, 34" scale
Neck joint | Glued
Nut width | 1.5" / 41.5mm
Fingerboard | Mahogany, 20 frets
Pickups | Vintage piezo
Electronics | Vintage acoustic preamp
Controls | Volume, Phase switch, Treble, Mid, Bass, tuner
Weight | 5 lbs / 2.27kg
Left-hand option available? | No
Case/gig bag included? | No

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Build quality, price
Minus | None

Overall | A tempting proposition for those starting out, or as a second instrument

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
 ★★★★★★☆☆
SOUND QUALITY
 ★★★★★★☆☆
VALUE
 ★★★★★★☆☆



Sounds And Playability

The 34" scale and near Jazz-bass dimensions of the neck make this instrument immediately familiar and comfortable, although playing the Statesboro' does take a little adjustment if you've only ever played a regular electric bass, most obviously in regards to where you rest your right hand.

I found the best technique was to play with your right hand resting on the top edge of the fingerboard. Like this, you're playing the strings further away from the bridge and naturally enhancing the warmer, lower frequencies of the bass. The other option is to use the E string to anchor your thumb, moving up to the A and D strings as necessary. Many of us play like this normally, of course.

Now, Vintage are marketing the Statesboro' as a bass that's been conceived to play blues. Certainly, it's perfect for accompanying an acoustic guitarist playing slow, shuffling 12-bars and singing about railroads. However, it's much more versatile than that. Acoustically, there's just about enough volume here to play with a small folk band at an unplugged pub session, or perhaps with a jazz pianist and vocalist.

Unplugged, the Statesboro' sounds impressively earthy and warm. Even with the bright nickel roundwound strings it comes with, there's

a well-balanced tone with a slight bias to the rich and focused low mids, although there's obviously a limit to the amount of low end on offer without the reinforcement of an amp.

Once you do plug in, there are very few limits to what you could use this bass for. You would risk the onset of feedback at very high volumes, although that can often be fixed with the Phase switch on the preamp. The EQ provides plenty of versatility for cutting back on the higher frequencies and giving the low end a helping hand. The amplified sound is excellent – a testament to the quality of the pickup and preamp as much as to the high standards of construction and materials of the bass itself.

Conclusion

Bearing in mind its price, the standards of quality control and manufacturing alone mark the Statesboro' bass out as a real gem. The tonewoods and hardware are all of very high quality and this, allied to the great natural sound and the versatile pickup and EQ options, make this a tempting contender. If you often play with other acoustic musicians, or you want a second bass to cover unplugged sessions, gigs and rehearsals, investigate by all means. ■