

THE GAS STATION



# RAPIER 33

A forgotten gem from the 60s returns



If you were into new-fangled rock 'n' roll back in the early 60s here in the UK, you'd probably have started plucking on a British or European-made guitar: Vox, Burns and Hofner, for example, were all satisfying the demand, and of course, Watkins – whose Rapier range looked the part. In short, the Rapier 33 was a Stratocaster copy but one that certainly had its own thing going on. Quite why the original guitar had a slanted middle pickup is anyone's guess; then, as now, it marks the Rapier 33 out as a bit of an oddball. But, hey, that's part of the appeal.

Today's sharp Chinese build quality gives this Rapier 33 much more credibility than the originals. We get a slab okoume body – a far eastern mahogany-alike used by some pretty big names like Eastman and Music Man – to which a quite Fender-y neck is screwed on. It's tidily fretted, the rosewood fingerboard has a more Gibson-like 12" radius and while the neck itself is a little bigger than, say, Fender's Player series we're not complaining.

Instead of the odd single coils of the original, here we get ceramic-loaded 'silver foil' mini-'buckers which certainly provide some single coil-like character, but they are hum-cancelling. They're pokey though far from high in output but we'd better explain the controls. In reality, the 33 works as a two-pickup guitar with the ability to add in the middle pickup – via that upper slide switch – to the usual three selections of the 3-way toggle pickup selector:

bridge, both and neck. The lower slide switch introduces a Jaguar-style bass-cut to enhance the jangle. The upper rotary control is a volume for both the bridge and neck pickups, the centre knob a volume for the middle pickup (which only works when it's switched into the circuit) and the lower knob is a master tone... Got that?

With the middle pickup switched out there's plenty to enjoy: appealing poke from the bridge pickup contrasted by the smoother neck pickup create an almost Jaguar-style palette that sits between a prettier sounding Stratocaster and the thickness of even a start-up Les Paul. Its retro style suits dirty garage rock but turn off the fuzz pedal and played clean you can comp jazz on that neck pickup or funk things up with both pickups on. Adding the middle pickup brings in more character, especially if you like your 'in-between' Strat-y tones; here you have the ability to subtly blend those with the dual volume set-up. It's a good player and although we hear a few pings from the zero fret unplugged, amp'd up there's no issue and that vibrato is smooth – unless you go mad it holds its tuning well.

A great slice of retro and there's more to come. Watch this space!

**Dave Burluck**

SUMMARY	FEATURES	SOUND QUALITY	VALUE FOR MONEY	BUILD QUALITY	PLAYABILITY	OVERALL RATING
	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★

**1 PICKUPS**  
These three 'silver foil' Alan Entwhistle-designed EWR64 mini-humbuckers offer single coil-like bite without any hum.

**2 CONTROLS**  
Along with the standard controls, there are two slide switches: one to switch the middle pickup in or out, the other is a bass-cut.

**3 VIBRATO**  
Based on the original design, this Hi Lo vibrato was re-engineered specifically for this guitar. The roller saddle bridge helps with tuning stability, which is rather good.

## AT A GLANCE

**BODY:** Okoume  
**NECK:** Maple  
**SCALE:** 25.5" (648mm)  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood  
**FRETS:** 22  
**PICKUPS:** 3x EWR64 mini-humbuckers  
**CONTROLS:** 3-way toggle pickup selector, 2x slide switch (middle pickup on/off; bass-cut), volume 1 (bridge and neck), volume 2 (middle), master tone  
**HARDWARE:** Hi Lo vibrato, roller saddle bridge, Wilkinson E-Z-Lok tuners  
**FINISH:** 3 Tone Sunburst, Arctic White, Daphne Blue, Fiesta Red (reviewed)  
**CONTACT:** [www.jhs.co.uk](http://www.jhs.co.uk)

