

FIRST PLAY



GUILD SURFLINER DELUXE
£699

WHAT IS IT? Latest version of Guild's new-design Surfliner, which finally features a vibrato and sensible pickup switching

Vibrato Vibes

Announced much earlier in 2023, this new Surfliner Deluxe has been a long time coming. Worth the wait or has it gone off the boil? Let's take a look...

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis

Guild's Surfliner popped onto our radar early in 2022, an original hardtail design for a brand that – up to that point – dealt in repros of its past glories. It was originally offered in HSS configuration, with Guild's LB-1 mini-humbucker at the bridge, while another HH variant was added later that year, this time using a pair of the standard humbucking-sized Guild HB-2s. With the same name as the train service that runs down the West Coast of California and with 'surf' in its title, surely there should have been a vibrato, we argued? And instead of a conventional pickup selector switch, we were treated to small on/off switches on those first guitars, the sort of thing you'd find on a table lamp.

However, back in April Guild took the wraps off this new Deluxe version, which is still HSS but replaces the original's LB-1



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1. Unlike the original Surfliner, we get a five-way lever switch, which is wired Strat-style here, to voice the three pickups. While it's much faster in use, you can't combine the bridge and neck, voice all three together, or indeed totally mute the output as you could on the earlier Surfliner

with an HB-2, adds a traditional five-way lever pickup selector switch and adds an offset-style vibrato. Hurrah! Offered in three colours (and without a gigbag), the Deluxe comes in at £699, adding £300 to the original HSS and HH models, which currently list at £399.

That's one pretty expensive vibrato, you might think. But, as its name suggests, this new model is more deluxe. For example, along with that vibrato we get modern-style rear-locking tuners. Then we get a bound block-inlaid rosewood fingerboard on a two-piece roasted maple neck as opposed to the plain, untinted unroasted maple of those original models, which had a dot-



The Guild team has taken the perfectly credible Surfliner design and kicked it up a notch or two in style, vibe and sound

inlaid maple fingerboard. The back-angled and pretty large headstock is now colour-matched to the body and features a slightly raised silver Guild logo.

The poplar body of the original is retained with light chamfering to the top's treble-side waist and in the usual forearm contour position, while on the back there's a rib-cut – but, again, it's pretty shallow. And although

we have additional hardware, this sample is noticeably heavier than the 3.06kg (6.73lb) of the original we evaluated, weighing in at 3.85kg (8.47lb). That large headstock is spliced to the main neck shaft under the 2nd fret and the caramel colouration isn't particularly well matched. That said, those block inlays on the mid-chocolate colour rosewood 'board are nicely done, as is the bright white plastic binding.

Feel & Sounds

Unlike many offsets or offset-inspired designs, the Surfliner doesn't feel like such a giant, more like an offset 'melted' Stratocaster or Guild Jetstar. It balances

2. Yes, it's big, but the headstock is now colour-matched to the body finish and the classic Guild logo looks pretty smart, too. One upgrade to this Deluxe model is the rear-lock tuners

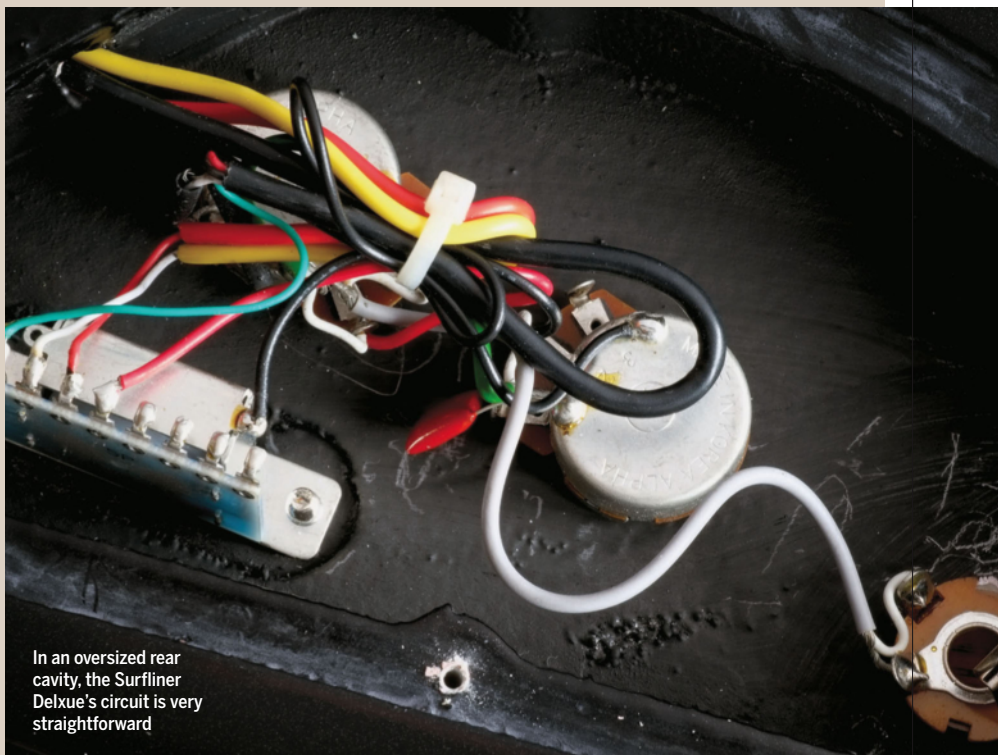
3. The Deluxe retains the DeArmond Aerosonic single coils of the original Surfliner, using partial covers and Alnico V rod magnets

UNDER THE HOOD

No surprises in the Deluxe's control cavity

The sizable rear cavity here means there's plenty of room for the basic circuit, which is wired modern style with no treble bleed. Both volume and tone pots are 500kohms 'Made In Korea' Alpha pots, and the tone capacitor is rated at .033µf; both the output jack and block-style five-way lever switch do look a little bargain basement. However, the HB-2 humbucker uses four-conductor wiring, so you could easily add a coil-split on a pull-switch pot, and if you installed another you could add the very simple 'seven-sound' mod, which would allow bridge and neck pickups to be voiced and all three pickups on together.

Guild's HB-2 standard-sized humbucker uses an Alnico II magnet and is designed to sound similar to the oversized original Guild HB-1 humbucker. Ours has a DCR of 7.29kohms, which, assuming it's pretty regular in terms of wire gauge, puts it in the classic low-output 'bucker territory. The single coils use Alnico V rods, while the partial covers should help to reduce hum pick-up. DCRs here are 6.41k (middle) and 6.24k (neck). All three pickups are made by BHK (Booheung Precision Co Ltd, Korea).



In an oversized rear cavity, the Surfliner Deluxe's circuit is very straightforward



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very well strapped on and feels pretty comfortable seated. The neck back has a slightly papery satin feel that will no doubt burnish up with playing, rather like the frets, which could do with a final polish.

As with the previous Surfliner, the 'narrow jumbo' fret description is a bit of a misnomer: they're actually quite wide and low, approximately 2.7mm wide and just over 1mm high. The setup is good, though, and after string stretching the tuning stability is pretty good, too. Nevertheless, you can't help thinking that a roller saddle tune-o-matic might have been better than the rather unnecessary locking tuners – because the actual light-waggle travel of the vibrato means the strings barely move over the nut (which is nicely cut, by the way). The vibrato looks good quality with an arm that pushes into a nylon collar, and a small grub screw allows tension adjustment, plus there's the standard spring tension screw above the 'G' cut-out. There's certainly some appealing offset resonance caused by the 'dead' string length behind the bridge, but the bridge height is pretty much spot on.

Few will have any problem with the very mainstream C profile of the neck, which measures 21.1mm at the 1st fret and 23mm by the 12th, with quite full shoulders that actually make it feel a little bigger than it is.

Although standard humbucking in size, this HB-2 humbucker has the same distinct cover and is modelled after the larger HB-1 humbuckers, which replaced the smaller LB-1s in the early 70s



There are no issues with the sounds. The five-way switch is much faster in use than the three on/off switches of the standard model, although, as it's just wired like a Strat, we get fewer sounds without the Tele-like neck and bridge, or all three on. As with any HSS, there's good contrast with the relatively low-output, slightly generic-sounding bridge humbucker that's a little

There's a bit more grunge and garage-y attitude here. Things can get quite nasty in a very good way

thicker in the midrange perhaps, with slightly smoother highs compared with our reference 1976 S-90 with original HB-1s.

That said, it's a pretty versatile voicing both for classic rock and some big cleans. The sparkle from the mid-scooped single coils does provide considerable contrast, but they are quite forward and a little brash-sounding and certainly not overshadowed by the bridge humbucker. The neck-and-middle mix is good, as is the full bridge humbucker and middle single-coil mix, which produces a very characterful, vocal sound that works well with crunch and gain. Overall, there's a bit more of a grunge and garage-y attitude here, rather than 'pretty' 60s surf. Things can get quite nasty – in a very good way indeed.

Verdict

Fair play to the Guild team for taking the perfectly credible design of that original Surfliner and kicking it up a notch or two in style, vibe and sound. Maybe it's the moody and subtly metallic black finish that's influencing our hands and ears, not to mention the vibrato, but this Surfliner feels much more like a good offset with quite mean intent, and frankly something Guild actually could have come up with back in the day. A little TLC to polish up those frets and perhaps burnish up the neck back would elevate it further, but, as is, we'd put this to work right away, despite it being a costlier proposition. This is good craft with some retro character and sounds to match. **G**



GUILD SURFLINER DELUXE

PRICE: £699

ORIGIN: Indonesia

TYPE: Offset double-cutaway solidbody

BODY: Poplar

NECK: Roasted maple, 'C' profile, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Composite/43.1mm

FINGERBOARD: Indian rosewood, pearloid block inlays, 254mm (10") radius

FRETS: 23, narrow jumbo

HARDWARE: Guild tune-o-matic bridge with Guild Floating Vibrato, and enclosed modern-style rear-lock tuners – nickel plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm

ELECTRICS: Guild HB-2 humbucker (bridge), 2x DeArmond Aerosonic single coils (middle/neck), 5-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume and tone controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.85/8.47

OPTIONS: No

RANGE OPTIONS: The original HSS Surfliner and HH Surfliner both cost £399

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Black Metallic (as reviewed), Evergreen Metallic, Rose Quartz Metallic – gloss body, satin neck

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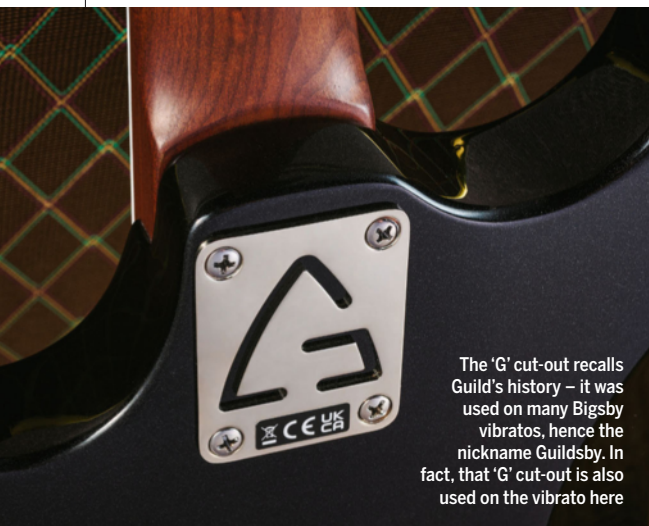
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9/10

PROS Good build; more suited vibrato and locking tuners; roasted maple neck and block inlaid 'board add style; sounds are well balanced with a retro flavour

CONS Little heavier than previous Surfliner; five-way switch is faster, but we only have five sounds (as opposed to seven); a roller-saddle tune-o-matic would be nice



The 'G' cut-out recalls Guild's history – it was used on many Bigsby vibratos, hence the nickname Guildsby. In fact, that 'G' cut-out is also used on the vibrato here