

Bass Quarterly Magazine Review - Elrick Gold Series 5-string bolt-on by Gregor Fris / translation by Ed DeGenero

Forceful Flyweight

Elrick Gold Series Bolt-on Swamp Ash

Rob Elrick's basses are, unfortunately, hard to find in this country (Germany). Luckily, in 2010 Rob decided to exhibit at Musik Messe in Frankfurt. As one can see, this has paid off as the guys at Session Music have added his brand to their line-up and sent a beautiful specimen for us to test drive.

As I saw first hand during Musik Messe 2010, Rob Elrick's booth was, according to various experienced bassists, the secret "winner" of the entire trade show. He came, saw and conquered, apparently without noticing himself. This buzz is not without reason. One of the basses in his booth impressed me so much that, even now, one year later, I can still feel it in my fingers. It takes all the restraint I can muster to not send an e-mail across the big pong saying in the subject line, "now gimme this fucking bass!". I know he still has this bass...very dangerous!

The test instruments construction and options are luckily different enough, otherwise I'd would have had a hard time being objective.

Immediately after unpacking, one notices the considerably low weight. 8 lbs. for a 5 string bass is not a given, especially not living on the "Lead" Ash continent. American swamp ash is, as a rule, lighter than what is found in our forests, that can quickly add another 2 lbs or more. Both types of wood also differ a lot sonically; heavy ash is good when you want a big ruckus, light ash sounds "nicer" and more "airy". That said, "nice" is here the wrong adjective. Ash is never really "nice", but rather has a fast response and good percussiveness. Most musicians associate ash with the classic Fender bass sound, the bolt-on maple neck and single coils don't contradict this either.

Detail oriented

Rob Elrick crafts boutique basses with lots of love for detail by hand, far from mass produced mainstream production. The body design is not only elegant but also ergonomically refined. The two piece walnut top gives a harder tone. By now it's clear this bass is made for slapping. The 3-piece maple neck has a wenge fretboard, sonically it's like rosewood with some extra bite. The headstock is the Elrick typical 3 strips of maple laminated to the end of the neck. His headstock design is, in the "bass world", often a source of arguments. In my opinion the basses would not look better with a different design, simply look at it often enough and get used to it. The entire woodwork is without parallel, it's quite clear Rob Elrick knows his craft. The bass is oiled and hand polished, which is a guarantee for many sonic nuances. Two things jump out when looking at the back of the body; one, the neck is attached with hex heads, and the huge electronics cover, which takes up a third of the bass. The cover was sawed out of the body and then screwed in. The question of the huge cover doesn't get answered when looking under the hood. The routing is no bigger than on other company's instruments. It must have something to do with the build process.

Electronics and Hardware

Classic American hardware and electronics are used here. Hipshot Ultra-Light tuning machines let the instrument balance, avoiding becoming neck heavy. The B-Style bridge, also from Hipshot, addresses issues with this typical design that the originals didn't. All electronics are Bartolini. The single coils are mounted relatively close together, resulting in a fatter sound with more mid-range. The more you move single coils apart, the less mids you get, the sound becoming more scooped, or so goes the rule of thumb. The five pots control volume, pick-up blend and the active bass, mid and treble. In addition, there are two mini switches; one switches the active eq on/off, the other is a 3 position switch for the center mid-band frequency. This function improves the real world usage of the electronics.

Hands On

Elrick's have always been instruments that are very comfortable and easy to play, the Gold Series here is no exception, and its low weight is just the icing on the cake. The slight offset in the neck shape is very comfortable to play and you'll forget the longer scale length pretty quick. The shape of the lower cutaway allows easy access up to the 24th fret. Everything is so effortless that a few times during the test I got lost above the 12th fret, since I'm not used to instruments that have no resistance in the upper register, but that is just a matter of getting used to and will be second nature in a few days. Anyone who likes to move around in the upper register will just love this bass! I cannot think of any other company that lets you access this area with no road blocks.

No power, no fun!

Not a typical for Bartolini loaded basses, the first test was sobering. As a rule, I test new basses in their passive mode to get used to the instruments basic sound. Passive in the Gold Series is a utility function, it makes sense to have this feature, sonically it's one more reason to have a spare battery in the gig bag. Turn on the active mode and its a entirely different world, volume, and the tester's smile, take a noticeable jump. There are basses whose character is that of the electronics, in those cases it seems the bass was built around the electronics, making them the heart of the instrument. In this case, however, the pick-ups and tone controls offer a good cross section of of very useable sounds, which makes you forget the passive "fly in the ointment" immediately.

Bottom-line

Stylistically the Gold Series covers the gamut, it rules crispy slap sounds just as much as wooly warm sub-bass lines. In a band situation you'll notice the defined top end. The light ash and single coils give the bass a good amount of attack, dynamics and clarity. For me, this is a very interesting bass, especially for projects where "normal" solid bass playing is required and the bassist is part of the rhythm section, as opposed

to delivering "tapping duels" with the lead guitarist at the edge of the stage. The bass is elegant, and the price, in my opinion, is what it should be.