





BURNS

Club Series King Cobra

How do you make a good thing even better? If you're Burns London, then you simply add a sweet upmarket version of your recently-launched Cobra to the roster. Review by **Marcus Leadley**

At just £249, the Burns Cobra got a big thumbs-up for both sound and value for money in July's *G&B* (issue 25/10). However, the materials, build quality and the finish were appropriate for its lower-market price tag. Now, hot off the boat from China, we have the King Cobra, a guitar that pushes that model's specifications significantly further. For just £40 more, you get a bound Indian rosewood fingerboard with block inlays, a hard-rock maple neck (with a scarf joint only as part of the headstock), locking tuners, and a proper alder body... and if you fancy splashing out a further £20, you can have a tasty Canadian maple flame top just like the one on our review guitar.

The Cobra is based on the '90s Drifter Custom. The double-cut body shape has a full and rounded form reminiscent of the '70s (and in another connection to that decade, the King Cobra is not a lightweight instrument). At the same time the richness of the two-tone vintage sunburst and the mint green separated scratchplate seems to echo more of a '50s or '60s aesthetic - a little bit like a Hofner, or a Framus.

The neck's gloss polyurethane finish also feels quite '70s, but it's wider and flatter than the Fender equivalent of that era and there's a definite 'Burns' feel to it. The medium-gauge fretting is excellent and the white edge binding and the block markers add a touch



Alder body with an all-over sunburst



Original peghead and locking tuners

For just £40 more than the Cobra you get a bound, block inlaid fingerboard, locking tuners and a proper alder body

of class which is a little reminiscent of Gibson. While many contemporary Burns fingerboards are buffed to a shine, this one exhibits the even dryness you'd expect from quality Indian rosewood; it feels very good under the fingers. The zero fret we encountered on the basic Cobra model (a spec that may be changed in time) is absent here, so the first-position feel will be more familiar to the majority of today's players. Guitars without a zero fret require a much more precise set up, and

the result here is very good, with the intonation between fretted and open strings being spot-on.

One of the uniquely Burns features of the King Cobra is the trio of Mini Tri-Sonic pickups. Created by Adrian Turner, these are designed to emulate the classic, larger-format vintage pickup's sound but in a smaller footprint, and this offers advantages in manufacturing as they can fit into a standard S-type rout. It also makes them ideal as replacement

FACTFILE

BURNS CLUB SERIES KING COBRA

DESCRIPTION

Solidbody electric guitar. Made in China.

PRICE £299.99, or £319.99 with flamed maple top

BUILD Hard rock maple bolt-on neck with 22-fret Indian rosewood fingerboard, three-piece alder bod, knife-edge vibrato, unbranded locking machineheads

ELECTRICS Three Mini Tri-Sonic pickups, master volume and independent tone controls (with push/pull action for two extra pickup settings), five-way selector switch

LEFT-HANDERS Yes

FINISH Honeyburst, fiesta red, redburst, green sunburst

SCALE LENGTH

647mm/25.5"

NECK WIDTH

Nut 42.8mm

12th fret 53.2mm

DEPTH OF NECK

First fret 20.5mm

12th fret 23mm

STRING SPACING

Nut 35.8mm

Bridge 53mm

ACTION AS SUPPLIED

12th fret treble 1.8mm

12th fret bass 2mm

WEIGHT 3.7kg/8.2lbs

CONTACT Burns London

+ 44 (0) 208 7833 638

www.burnsguitars.com

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Squier

Vintage Modified Stratocaster
Very '70s inspired Stratty action with a rosewood fingerboard, vibrato bridge and a tasty two-tone sunburst option, plus Duncan Designed pickups for those classic sounds
RRP **£298**

ESP

LTD ST-213R
Close tribute to the famous three-pickupper with a bolt-on maple neck, choice of maple or rosewood board, a tremolo, three single coils and lots of suitable colours available
RRP **£325**

Vintage

V6 Icon
Value-packed triple single-coil guitar in the familiar double-cut style, and pre-aged too
RRP **£299**



The regular-size Tri-Sonics give this a guitar a very different flavour

pickups for players wanting to add Burns character to another brand of instrument without having to modify the body. In order to retain the same character the design continues to use a pair of ceramic magnets and a loose wire coil, and as they retail at £120 a set, you can begin to see what good value the King Cobra represents.

The controls include a master volume and individual tones for the neck and middle pickups. A five-way switch gives the usual selections, but there's an extra: if you pull up on the lowermost tone control, the neck pickup is added to whichever switch selection you happen to have chosen (unless it's already on, of course). This gives you two additional voices: neck/bridge, and neck/middle/bridge. Both the standard Cobra and Marquee are wired like this.

Sounds

The Cobra has a bright, clear acoustic signature, and our initial impression is that the tone is a little warmer and less

brash than the standard Cobra. Once plugged in, the difference between the two instruments is even greater than expected - perhaps illustrating the difference body timber can make. Whereas the Cobra's bridge pickup sounded a little flat in the midrange, the King Cobra rings like a bell, making it ideal for clear, bright chords and intricate picking.

All the basic pickup voices are very good, with each offering a slightly different version of this richly detailed clarity. The 'out of phase' positions deliver plenty of pick edge click and a funky quack that's at least as pronounced as on the Fender equivalent. The neck pickup is smooth and rich with a broad-spectrum sound that delivers clear mids and a polished low-end. Things get even better when you pull up the tone pot; singer-songwriters and lovers of jazzy and melodic playing will appreciate the neck/bridge sound, and the ability to dial in all three pickups at the same

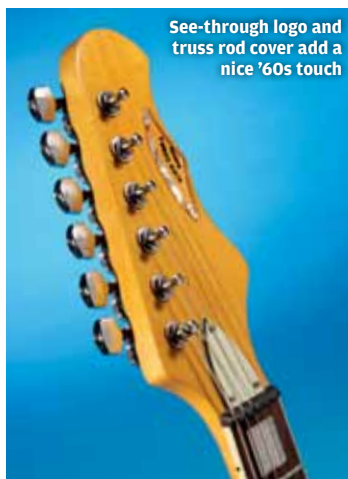
time is excellent as this gives the most accurate approximation of the King Cobra's natural acoustic tone.

Gradually increasing amp gain brings on a range of gnarly, edgy blues and rock rhythm sounds that are uniquely Burns-esque in flavour. It's a character that's hard to pin down, but the pickups are slightly microphonic in a way that emphasises the dynamics of each note, ensuring good separation and clarity, but with a slightly brash, choppy feel. This makes for a pleasingly rough amp distortion and a unique rhythm sound... it's the classic Tri-Sonic flavour.

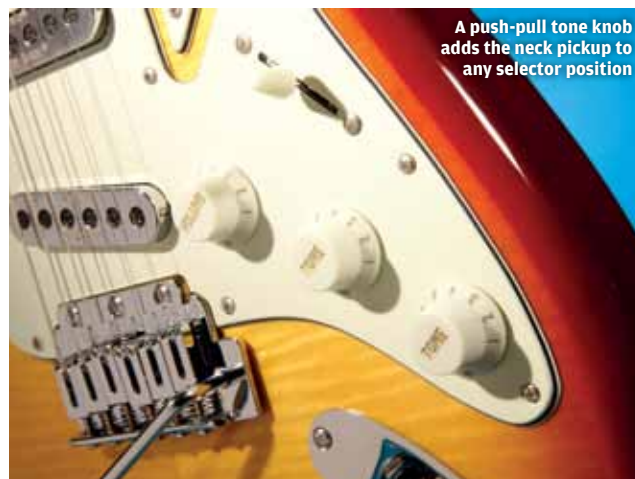
Driving an amp harder brings on massive rock chords and scorching leads. The standard Cobra seemed a little better at the wailing Brian May-style sound, but this impression changes when you start to fiddle with the tone controls. Designer Alan Entwistle has voiced each of the two circuits slightly differently, giving good potential for smoothing and filtering to create all manner of classic lead sounds. The King Cobra also performs well with pedal distortion, and it works fine with very processed lead sounds.

Verdict

The King Cobra is pretty superb; the regular Cobra is a solid performer, but this King version offers some of the nuances and refinements of an instrument from a much higher price bracket. It also sounds distinctly like a Burns, so it's a great way to add a unique character to your guitar stash without busting the bank. The mini Tri-Sonics really do nail the character of the larger-format original versions, and the result is great fun to work with. If you're a player who likes to use an infinite array of clean and slightly distorted voices, this guitar will continue to surprise you; punky, thrashy players will love its rhythm style, but it also delivers more traditional lead sounds, and it gives good Brian May - a sound that you can't really nail without Tri-Sonics. At this price it's excellent value, so if you're in the market for an instrument under £350, you need to check one out. 🎸



See-through logo and truss rod cover add a nice '60s touch



A push-pull tone knob adds the neck pickup to any selector position

FINAL SCORE

BURNS CLUB SERIES KING COBRA	
Build Quality	18/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	18/20
Value for money	18/20
Looks	18/20
TOTAL	90%