



Burns Marvin Shadows Custom £995

BURNS MARVIN SHADOWS CUSTOM

PRICE: £995

ORIGIN: Far East

TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: Alder

NECK: Maple, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5-inches)

NUT/WIDTH: Graphite/44.5mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound maple, black position dots

FRETS: 21, medium-thin

HARDWARE: Burns Rezo-Tube vibrato unit, Sperzel locking tuners, gold-plated

STRING SPACING,

BRIDGE: 50.5mm

ELECTRICS: Three single-coil pickups, five-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume & two tones (second with push/pull neck pickup switch)

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 3/6.6

OPTIONS: No

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, limited numbers £TBC

FINISHES: Fiesta red only

Burns Guitars

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Following on from last year's 40th Anniversary Marvin, the Shadows Custom version offers an alternative, updated approach in an even more limited edition package by Paul Day

Last year saw Shadows guitarist Hank Marvin renew his association with UK maker Burns via the 40th Anniversary Marvin, which commemorated the introduction of his original signature six-string back in 1964. Now comes a variation that incorporates some modernised features approved by both Hank and his fellow Shadow Bruce Welch. It's appropriately called the Marvin Shadows Custom, with production restricted to a mere 500 instruments, and will be employed by the group for

the European dates of their ongoing farewell tour.

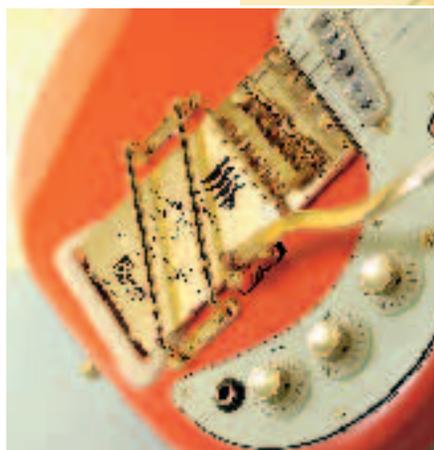
Like the 40th Anniversary model, this Marvin is of Chinese origin, but the most discernible difference concerns cosmetics. Rather than white, the Shadows Custom body is finished in fiesta red, this Fender flavouring contrasted by a three-section scratchplate executed in vintage tint plastic laminate, not traditional tortoiseshell. This colour combination echoes a popular custom option offered on the more recent UK-built

Burns Marvins. The company's classic, scroll-topped headstock remains present and correct, but locking Sperzel machineheads replace the vintage Van Gent repro tuners.

There's little deviation from straight string travel and a graphite nut maintains minimum friction, although it's purely a string guide, being preceded by a zero fret governing overall string height up at this end. This is a typical Burns partnership, but it's not popular with every player.

Another obvious change is the fingerboard, with the usual rosewood replaced by flamed maple, again faithful to a custom alternative offered in the UK range. Like the underlying maple neck, this topping looks good under lightly tinted lacquer, enhanced by neatly applied white plastic binding. The latter adds a slightly harder edge, but the shallow cambered, compound radius fingerboard and a neck profile with a familiar feel ensure a high comfort quota. At the same time consistently well-finished, slim frets contribute to impressive playability.

The neck sits snug and secure in an amended body pocket, the treble shoulder of which is now eradicated to create a Strat-style fit that allows easier upper end access. Although the body heel block has been left square-sided, a broader edge on production examples will make this seem less intrusive. This same area also accommodates access to the truss-rod adjuster, which is hidden, along with four neck-fixing screws, under a plastic neckplate. Fender's famous finish colour certainly suits the Marvin's smoothly contoured alder body, while scratchplates that sport a greenish tint carry the Burns company logo and



The Marvin's metal parts are gold plated and the baseplate is signed by Hank and Bruce



PHOTOGRAPHY NEIL GODWIN

control legends, now accurately engraved over in China.

The Shadows Custom carries the Marvin's regulation three Rez-O-Matik single-coil pickups; all angled as usual, but slightly hotter than those on the 40th Anniversary. Magnets are quite high and sharp edged, but these will now be bevelled to make them fingertip friendly. Gold engraved white covers continue the lighter look, as do the control knobs and switch tip, but the latter is to be toned down to match the other plastic parts.

The review guitar employs standard Marvin circuitry, comprising Strat-style master volume plus tone controls for the neck and centre pickups, but on production instruments these will both be governed by the first tone pot, with the second allocated to where it's most needed: the bridge single coil. The selector provides the usual five pickup permutations, while a pull switch on the second tone pot introduces the extra two combinations of neck-plus-bridge or all three together.

Sporting a cream-tipped arm, the Burns Rezo-Tube vibrato unit is gold-plated to match all other metalwork. This emphasises the new Marvin's custom status, as does the baseplate, which is engraved with the classic four-figure Shadows silhouette, as well as the autographs of Hank Marvin and Bruce Welch. This is the first time the latter's name has appeared on a guitar and such recognition is long overdue. The updating process extends all the way to the strap buttons, with

MARVIN SHADOWS CUSTOM TEST RESULTS

Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** Updates improve playability and performance

■ **WE DISLIKED** Zero fret authentic but could cause problems, otherwise very little

Schaller's locking-type numbers replacing the standard Burns design.

The Marvin Shadows Custom comes with an excellent hard case, while an impressive array of accompanying case candy includes a certificate hand signed by Hank and Bruce, spare strings and assorted accessories, many adorned with The Shadows' logo. All that seems to be missing is a pair of Hank's trademark glasses!

SOUNDS: The lacquered maple fingerboard adds a slightly brighter edge to the Marvin's typical airy acoustic tonality, and this is reinforced by the revised pickups. These deliver additional output along with a more aggressive attack that takes the Shadows Custom further into Fender territory. This is apparent in all pickup positions, with extra muscle endowing a character that is decidedly more contemporary than vintage, albeit achieved without losing the Marvin's innate, overall open tone. It does mean that this update is better suited to less clean conditions, although it's still doubtful if most owners will ever get too down and dirty!

Tuning is impressively stable and, although the heavy gauge strings fitted make for pretty stiff operation, the vibrato is usefully responsive. It's no dive-bomber of course, but does the musical shimmer stuff very well.

Verdict

The Burns Marvin Shadows Custom more than maintains the impressive standard set by the 40th Anniversary model. Criticisms of the latter were comparatively meagre and most have been successfully answered on this new 'modernised' version. The updates incorporated should appeal to players who fancied this flagship English electric, but were deterred by its 'trapped in time' character. It's still a highly individual instrument, but now packs a more modern punch to partner its superb playability.

With the Marvin now available in much more affordable vintage or modern form, choice is down to personal preference, although time is fast running out on both limited editions. One thing is certain, these new interpretations make mincemeat of most UK-made oldie original Marvins. This statement may seem almost sacrilegious, but guitar making has undoubtedly improved over the past 40 years, and these new Far Eastern origin Burns guitars are among the best ever to bear this famous British brandname. **G**

Burns Marvin Shadows Custom

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

The rivals

Musicman Albert Lee	
Tremolo	£1,350
G&L George Fullerton Signature	£1,289
Fender Mark Knopfler Stratocaster	£1,499

Albert Lee's signature Musicman features a familiar triple single-coil configuration and simple, but effective, vibrato on a quirkily shaped chassis. The Fender Mark Knopfler Stratocaster plays it predictably safe, but unusually employs a red-finished ash body. Named after one of the G&L company's founders, the George Fullerton Signature also stays pretty true to the Strat stereotype, but with more rounded body styling plus the company's neat and nifty vibrato unit