



Soundroom

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Dingwall Afterburner

To Paraphrase a proverb: "Build a better B string and the world will beat a path to your door." Since the dawn of the 5, bass builders have been striving to build instruments with better-sounding B strings. In the beginning, some experimented with taperwound strings and various bridge designs, While others focused on the tuners, string trees, and nut. More mass here, less mass there-it seems almost as if no experimental stone was left unturned in the quest for a better B. Eventually builders decided to increase the string's tension by extending the scale length from 34" to 35" and beyond. This improved the B's focus and punch, but it also affected the sound and feel of the other strings, which became stiffer and lost some of their lively resilience. What to do?

The fanned-fret concept solves the problem of imbalanced string tension by extending the lower strings' scale lengths, as in a grand piano. More consistent string tension improves tonal consistency from string to string. Dingwall's G string retains the standard 34" scale length, so it feels "right" when slapping, but the B's extra length and tension enables it to speak with a clearer, more consistent voice.

Dingwall has built fanned-fret instruments since 1993; the Afterburner is the company's "entry-level" fanned-fret 5. Think of it as the stripped-down essence of Dingwall's fanned-fret concept.

Fan The Flame

While Dingwall's fancier basses feature five-piece graphite-reinforced necks and angled headstocks with lavish veneers, the Afterburner has a more traditional one-piece maple neck, wenge fingerboard, and flat headstock. Dig the tasteful headstock shape; it blends with the look of the fanned frets and complements the body's shape. Interesting: Even though the B is 3" longer than on a "standard" 34"-scale 5-string, the Afterburner is shorter overall, thanks to the compact





headstock design.

Dingwall's concern for detail became increasingly evident as we began to inspect the Afterburner more closely. The neck is fitted with four threaded inserts, and it's attached to the body with large countersunk Allen-head bolts. Our test bass's neck/body fit was nice and snug, and the finish was flawless. The fretwork was tight, with the ends carefully rounded. The neck's oil finish imparted a satiny-smooth feel; we couldn't feel any protruding fret ends when we ran our hands along the fingerboard edge. Our Afterburner arrived with a medium-high setup that remained stable for the duration of its stay. It's refreshing to find the highest level of boutique-builder workmanship in this more affordable price range.

Dingwall designed the Hipshot-made bridge especially for the Afterburner. Its aluminum base sits flush atop the body, and its saddles are brass. Each string rides on top of two stainless-steel bolts. The rounded edges of the two bolt heads touch; the string nestles into the "V" formed by this juncture. Clever.

So if this is supposed to be a "budget" bass, where did Dingwall skimp? Not in the pickups--they're the same custom Bartolinis Dingwall installs in its more expensive basses. The Afterburner even uses the same locking Neutrik jack and Dunlop strap pins. The big difference is in the electronics; the Afterburner has a simple passive circuit, while Dingwall's more expensive basses come with Bartolini preamps. Installing a complex preamp can be time consuming; simpler electronics means significant savings.

Showtime

My first test gig was with a jazz quartet. I used a Merlin 550 head and an Accugroove El Whappo Jr. cabinet. I immediately noticed the Afterburner's precise, articulate voice; it exposed me to a new level of low-note detail and definition, and it sounded amazingly balanced throughout its range. I realized the extra scale length is more about clarity and focus than just sounding huge. Pitch definition was precise, and the entire range sounded open and transparent, with a clear and resonant, well-mannered growl.

The fanned frets may look intimidating at first, but it's remarkable how quickly you can get used to them. The 7th fret is the only one that's perpendicular to the neck. I had to consciously stretch a little more than usual to hit a low C, but other than that, the fanned frets felt pretty familiar. The fret angle starts to get a bit steep above the 17th fret, so I found myself peeking at the G and D strings more when playing in the upper register.

Having cut my teeth on a Fender Jazz Bass, I missed not being able to blend the two pickups and hit the "sweet spots" where either the neck or bridge pickup is backed off slightly with the other pickup wide open. Toying with the rotary pickup selector I found myself gravitating toward the bridge pickup for punchy fingerstyle tone; I favored both pickups in parallel for slapping.

Speaking of slapping: The Afterburner's G string is a little crowded between the fingerboard and the neck pickup. There's enough room for you to



get in there and do what you have to do, but not a lot of room to move around when you're in there. Once you've become comfortable in the tight confines, though, you'll be rewarded with sweet, bell-like chime and extended and refined top-end sparkle. Down low it's all about resonance, detail, and articulation.

The Dingwall Afterburner is an exceptional bass. The extra scale length clearly improves low-note focus and pitch definition, and Dingwall's uncompromising workmanship is world-class. Few basses in this price range can hold a candle to the Dingwall Afterburner, and few flaunt their innovations as boldly. Fortune favors the bold. How bold are you?

**Dingwall
Afterburner
5-String**
List price: \$1,700 (as tested)

Score	1	2	3	4	5
Construction:	●	●	●	●	●
Electronics:	●	●	●	●	●
Playability:	●	●	●	●	●
Sound:	●	●	●	●	●
Value:	●	●	●	●	●

Pros: Great clarity, detail, and focus.
Cons: Slappers may feel a bit cramped; can't blend pickups.