



Dingwall Voodoo Prima 5
By Roger Newell
Bassist magazine
Christmas 1998

One particular instrument at the USA's NAMM show earlier this year made a big impact on me, and thanks to the Bass Centre, it's become available in the UK. The bass in question is the mysterious Voodoo Prima 5-string by Dingwall, immediately noticeable by its "Novax" fanned-fret system.

The logic behind "fan fretting" is simple enough, and tackles a basic problem. Tuning a stringed instrument, where each string is the same length is actually something of a compromise. Individual length adjustment at the bridge certainly helps, but is far from a solution in itself. So in order to allow string lengths to be at their optimum, having a nut and frets going straight across the fingerboard obviously becomes invalid. With a fanned-fret system, the spaces between the frets are greater for the lower strings than they are for the higher strings – only the seventh fret is anything close to "straight" across. Putting the theory into practice to produce a playable bass when the speaking length of the



bottom B string is 3" longer than the G in no easy feat, though Dingwall have managed to do precisely that. And made a cool looking bass, to boot.

Sporting a body with sensuously rounded edges, single body scoop and an outline reminiscent of the classic Rickenbacker shape, the Voodoo Prima 5 scores high visual points even without the fanned fretboard. The two pickups also "fan" towards the bridge: this is an impressive unit in its own right; a heavily-staggered assembly consisting of five individual Kahler units fixed to a common base plate and made of aircraft grade aluminum. Interestingly, the string ends are located on individual pins before passing over a curious height adjustment design, where each string sits between two stainless steel posts.

The body has a core of black American walnut with book-matched quilted maple used for both top and back. This Voodoo is a bolt-on neck construction, secured by four large, fully-recessed hex bolts and another four further back locking the bridge block. The neck itself is a strong laminate of rock maple sections, further reinforced with carbon fibre. A pau ferro fingerboard wears a two octave fret compliment, with adjustable nut and simple edge markers. The angled-back, dark-faced headstock carries Gotoh tuners, and is hand-signed by designer Sheldon Dingwall as evidence that all quality tests have been passed. An easily-accessed neck truss rod sits at the body end for adjustment. Prima models wear an oiled finish to feature the impressive woods at their best.

The sounds are produced by active circuitry featuring a Bartolini NTBT preamp system that sits beneath a pair of custom designed Bartolini pickups. This can be reverted to passive if desired via the push / pull option on the Volume control. Sound shaping comes in the form of concentric bass and treble with boost / cut and an individual mid control. The three way micro-switch also offers extra cut or boost to the mid range, with fine blending of the Bartolinis accomplished by the panning control. All rotaries are centre-notched except for the master volume with its continuous sweep action. This bass has a richly full bodied range of sounds that remain warm and throaty even at higher frequencies. For safety, the edge-mounted jack socket is Neutrik's locking version.

In Use

Like a couple of kids, Gibson and I played this bass a great deal in the office when it arrived. Being light and comfortable to wear, the Voodoo is also beautifully balanced, unexpectedly easy to play and great for rapid riffing, cool chording and heavenly harmonics that sang out due to the greater tuning accuracy afforded by this design. What did take a bit of getting used to, however, was the varied angles of the pickups and bridge assembly. Not uncomfortable, just very unusual when deciding where to put your right hand.



Once that's done, you're greeted with a wide and powerful array of soundscapes, spanning a range from round and woody to superb punch and twang, with a variety of depths and hollows in between. Clarity is consistent, even when getting a bit aggressive.

Trying this bass will be an experience you'll remember. Don't be afraid to play this in a music store: you won't make a prat of yourself because it's so well-designed and easy to play. I suspect that this is one bass that will be instantly loved or hated, but it's genuinely exciting to play – we loved it.

