

Soundroom equipment review, September 2001

G&L JB-2, a passive 4-string with custom hardware

By E.E. Bradman

TECH SPECS

Weight: 9 lbs

Scale length: 34" scale

Nut: 12" wide plastic

Neck width: 2 f" at 21st fret

Hardware: Patented G&L Ultra-Lite tuners, Saddle-Lock bridge

Options: G&L offers a long list of natural, red, blue, green, metallic, gold, black, burst, orange, and white finishes in addition to various neck profiles, neck finishes, binding, and body contouring options, all for under \$300 each. Other choices include lined and unlined fretless (no charge), fretless with inlays (\$100), highly figured maple top (\$250), and matching painted headstock (\$120 for solid colors, \$150 for burst colors).

Made in: USA

List price: \$1,450; as tested, with Natural Swamp Ash finish: \$1,550

Hardshell case: Included

Warranty: Ten years

www.glguitars.com

As most readers know, G&L was the last stop on the long, pioneering journey of Leo Fender. There, he continued to refine the earlier innovations he'd made at the company that bore his name and at Music Man. Out of respect for Mr. Fender and his accomplishments, G&L—named for partner George Fullerton and Leo—has left his Fullerton, California office and workspace untouched since the day he died in 1991. More important, the company has been similarly vigilant about its Old School methods of building the instruments that bear his initial, including the ASAT line, the L-2000 and 2500, and the new JB-2.

Looking, Sounding & Feeling Good

As its name implies, the JB-2 is an update of one of Leo's most enduring designs: the early-'60s Jazz Bass. Built for G&L diehards who wanted a classic Jazz vibe, the JB-2 retains many of Fender's vintage J-Bass specs—from the string spacing (3 inches at the bridge) to the highly sought-after rosewood slab board and 12-inch width at the nut.

Our test bass sported a natural gloss finish over a beautiful chunk of swamp ash. The control knobs were smooth and secure, and the bass's 21 jumbo frets were well dressed, imparting a sense of expert craftsmanship confirmed by the handmade maple neck. Leo considered his metal alloy Saddle Lock bridge the last word on the subject, and G&L has added sustain by switching from cast alloy saddles to machined billet brass units. The slightly flared aluminum string posts keep the string windings lower to the headstock, increasing downward pressure past the nut and ultimately helping open strings sound clearer. The six bolts that secure the neck offer more stability than four. Overall, the JB-2 is simple, straightforward, and clean.

The JB-2's guts are similarly unfussy, wired just like a passive J-Bass, with enough room for a small preamp if that's your thing. Unfortunately, the old Fender vibe extends to the directional hum: There's no shielding foil or conductive paint in the G&L's cavity, and the buzz could be subtle or annoying depending on the proximity of your amp. G&L's Dave McLaren, who notes that Leo Fender never shielded his original Jazz Basses, says the company may or may not offer shielding in the future. For thousands of vintage bass owners, of course, the buzz is nothing new.

Still, that doesn't affect the JB-2's easygoing vibe. Right out of the box, the test bass was easily playable and instantly familiar. Setup was average—not too high, not too low—and players immediately appreciated the lightweight, smaller-than-average body and the slim, smooth-action neck.

Something New, Something Old

Comparing anything new to the hallowed early-'60s J is heresy to some, but the JB-2 definitely held its own next to a stock '62 Jazz. In fact, its swamp ash body and G&L patented Saddle-Lock bridge bestowed better high midrange and sustain than the original. The JB-2's pickups are placed similarly to those of our '62, yet the body and bridge are reminiscent of a '70s swamp ash hunk with a Badass II bridge, an instrument better suited for rock and funk than premium Jaco fingerstyle tone. Amplified through a Demeter/Hafler setup with an Aguilar GS210 2x10 and an Aguilar GS112 1x12, the JB-2 was variously described as “spanky,” “growly,” and “focused”; opening up both pickups and tone even brought to mind the classic Louis Johnson/Music Man sound. The instrument's versatile fingerstyle and pick tones make it an easy recommendation for rock players who need to cut through aggressive guitars.

Although the JB-2 faces stiff competition in its price range, its solid construction, many attractive options, and successful mix of vintage Jazz and G&L flavor put it high on the list of modern classics.

G&L JB-2

List price: \$1,450

Construction: 8

Electronics: 7

Playability: 8

Sound: 8

Value: 8

Pros: Some of Leo's greatest hits—in one affordable package.

Cons: That hum!