

Soundroom equipment review, July 2002

Gould B220 Rebel, an active 5-string with soapbar pickups

By E.E. Bradman

TECH SPECS

Scale length: 34"

Nut: Bone, 1" wide

Locking nut: Aluminum

Fingerboard: Ebony w/24 medium frets

Neck width: 3" at 24nd fret

Color: Hotshot red

Weight: 9 lbs, 5 oz

Bridge: Custom-designed aluminum reversed-end, geared bridge/tuners

Electronics: Bartolini NTBT 9-volt system with two Bartolini dual-coil humbuckers, push/pull volume for active or passive EQ selection, pickup blend, stacked EQ

Other models: Fretted and fretless 4- and 6-strings; four Bartolini electronics options (Rebel B110, B220, B330, and B440) that range from active 2-band EQ to active/passive 3-band EQ with optional push/pull volume and push/pull selectable mid controls

Options: Ash, alder, or lacewood body; ebony, rosewood, or pau ferro fingerboard; silver pearl, black pearl, or gold hardware. Gould also offers a numerous solid finishes (pearl white, pearl black, silver, metal gray, orient blue, dolphin blue), transparent finishes (ruby red, sapphire blue, teal green, lime green, honey gold, tropical orange, transparent yellow), and transparent burst finishes (ruby red, sapphire blue, teal green, lime green, vintage tobacco, honey gold light edge, and honey gold dark edge).

Made in: USA

List price (sold direct): \$2,350; as tested, \$2,540

Hardshell case: Included

Warranty: One year limited

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My personal bass-tone requirements are fully satisfied by vintage Fender Jazz Basses, so with some hesitation I took the Gould Rebel B220 out for a spin. In many respects, the Rebel is the antithesis of Old School flavor—kind of the way the first Fenders must have been to '50s upright players. Its lines are sleek and rounded, every detail lovingly addressed; that shiny red body speaks of three-alarm emergencies and broken speed limits; and the bridge itself is something to behold. The Gould's most obvious departure from tradition is its lack of a proper headstock, resulting in a sleek, futuristic look—and automatically associating it with other headless basses such as Steinbergers and Kubickis.

Tradition

Given my vintage predilections, it was a pleasant surprise to learn that luthier Mark Gould is a fan of vintage basses, too. In addition to being a gigging bassist and studio player, Mark (no relation to Modulus founder and G. Gould Music owner Geoff) has worked as a bass and guitar repairman in the San Diego area, and he boasts an

impressive collection of rare instruments. (That's his paisley '68 Telecaster Bass pictured in J.W. Black and Albert Molinaro's Hal Leonard book *The Fender Bass: An Illustrated History*.) Far from being just a Fender fanatic, however, Gould is also an admirer of modern basses. The Rebel's rounded headstock and distinctive body contour recall the Kubicki Factor, made famous by Stu Hamm in the '80s. The stiff, slightly wide neck is modern, too, as is the fingerboard—which at first glance seems like graphite, not ebony.

Look no further than the intimidating bridge to see Mark Gould's original touches. The reversed-gear tuning knobs have a lower pull ratio, so you have to turn less than traditional tuners to get the bass in tune. Somehow, though, it seems more precise. Though the massive aluminum contraption prompted jokes about lost fingers, changing strings was no sweat. Unlike other headless instruments, the Gould doesn't need double-ball-end strings. Just put the ball end into the wheels and turn the crank. At the nut, you cut your strings just as you would on any other bass, slide them into their slots, and lock them down. One staffer noted the neck's ergonomic "airfoil" design: It's thicker on the bass side and tapered toward the *G* string to fit the hand's natural curve. And although the neck is a full 3" wide at the bridge, the Rebel's distinctive cutaway offers easy access to the 24th fret. The bass also scores points for the striking laminates on the back of the neck, the oblong fret markers, and the deep-set, allen-bolt-attached neck joint. On my lap, the bass was more balanced than I expected; strapped on, I found it contoured and comfortable.

The controls are basic and intuitive: volume, blend, and a stacked treble/bass knob. The treble and bass knobs have snap-to-center detents, but the blend control confused several staffers. Though you turn the knob toward the pickup you want to select, the

knob's white line points to the opposite pickup. (Gould says no one else has raised this issue.) Some staffers thought the knobs felt flimsy, and the plastic, pop-up battery compartment might fail after many battery changes. On the plus side, the cavity is clean and shielded, and the unusually placed, deep-set jack makes perfect sense for those who loop their cord through the strap before plugging in. Gould doesn't use straplocks, but his extra-large washers are big enough to hold straps in place. You'll need the supplied tools and owner's manual if you ever plan to adjust anything on your bass, especially intonation and string height. Fortunately, the instructions are decently written and illustrated. After a quick trussrod tweak to remove some relief, we plugged into a Demeter VTBP-201 preamp, Crown K2 power amp, and Hartke 4200 4x10.

Today's Tone

The Gould offers quintessential modern sound: tons of booty, crisp highs, and notes that are even and clear everywhere on the board. The 34" *B* string is surprisingly authoritative, letting *C*, *C#*, and *D* growl clearly. The regular D'Addario strings—.045, .065, .080, and .100 with a .130 *B*—are a great match for the Gould. The bass has substantial lows and mids; staffers agreed it sounded tight and compressed. Pulling the volume knob gave me respectable passive tones, but without the preamp to add meat to the *B*—and without the Bartolini's tone control—I went back to active mode. Switching cabinets, I found that an AccuGroove El Whappo's 15", 12", and 6" speakers and dual 1" tweeters warmed up the Rebel considerably, a result I was unable to achieve when I brought the Gould to a jazz-funk recording session. The producer's miked Mesa/Boogie Bass 400+ head and vintage 2x18 Sunn cab were not a good match for the Rebel's smooth and quiet Bartolini NTBT; his reference axe, a '77 maple-neck Fender Precision,

sounded livelier and more organic in comparison. (Gould says our test bass's ash body was somewhat responsible for the instrument's tighter, stiffer sound. He says his alder bodies breathe a bit more, but the warmer *B* isn't as bright.)

I had better luck at an outdoor birthday party with a seven-piece disco band. I traveled light: an Aguilar GS112 1x12, a 300-watt Walter Woods amp, and the Rebel in a double gig bag with a '62 Jazz. I pulled out the Gould for the second set, and the differences with the Fender were immediate: The Rebel had no fret noise, no audible dead spots, and greater overall clarity, with thicker lows and cleaner highs. By slightly boosting the treble and turning the blend and bass knobs to center, my slap tone on Cheryl Lynn's "Got to Be Real" was clear and balanced, if slightly compressed, and the Gould delivered a perfect growly low *C* under the chorus of "Stayin' Alive." Three songs later, the sound engineer sat in on the '62; afterward he commented that the Gould sounded much cleaner, though it didn't have the "character" of the Jazz. The drummer and keyboardist agreed.

Hitting The Mark

Mark Gould says he wants his instruments to meet several criteria: Besides being visually arresting and well crafted, they should sound great and be at home in most situations. In many ways, he has succeeded. Gould says he'll unveil a new model sometime next year, with most of the same features and a less radical (and less expensive) body design. In the mean time, if you're in the market for a solid, modern \$2,500 instrument, the Rebel is worth exploring.

Gould B220 Rebel 5-string

List price: \$2,545 as tested

Construction: 4

Electronics: 4

Playability: 4

Sound: 4

Value: 4

Pros: Unique looks, impressive tone.

Cons: Sound could be warmer.