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Reverend Brad Houser 5, a passive 5-string with dual humbuckers

By E.E. Bradman

TECH SPECS

To understand the Houser's electronics, think of them as a twist on the familiar three-knob Jazz Bass controls. A volume knob and a voicing switch control each Houser humbucker, which is made up of two Jazz-style single-coils. The master tone knob affects both.

Let's examine one humbucker and voicing switch at a time. With the switch in the up position, both single-coil pickups are in parallel, producing the same voltage, side by side. In the middle position, you hear only one pickup—true single-coil, just like a Jazz Bass pickup. The third position, with both pickups in series, is like putting two batteries end-to-end in a flashlight, producing more voltage, thus more output. This setting is most similar to the humbucker in Music Man basses. With both neck and bridge humbuckers on single-coil setting, the Houser's outside pickups—closest to the neck and bridge—match Fender Jazz pickup positioning.

Brad uses the voicing switches like volume controls. "Single-coil's the quietest setting, and parallel is similar but just a tad louder. I play in single-coil or parallel most of the time, and when I need that extra 20–30%—if I click on an effect and my level drops, for example—I switch to series. It's like an afterburner."

Scale length: 35"

Nut: 1u" wide Graphite, rosewood with 22 jumbo frets

Neck width: 3" at 22nd fret

Weight: 9 lbs

Hardware: Hipshot Ultralite tuners, Hipshot bridge with adjustable spacing

Options: Various finishes, including dragonfly green, Lake Superior blue, space race silver, Moroccan gold, no charge; bug eye, lava swirl, and engine turn, \$100; fretless, \$150.

Made in: USA

List price: \$1,499

Hardshell case: \$139; gig bag, \$42

Warranty: One year limited

www.reverendmusical.com

(810) 775-1025

In 1996, Michigan's luthier and amp builder Joe Naylor sold his interest in Naylor Engineering, the speaker and amplifier company, to start Reverend Musical Instruments. His first bass, the Rumblefish XL 4-string, debuted in '98; its distinctive design and sound made the Rumblefish popular with bassists such as Kasim Sulton, Dave Pomeroy, Jeff Ament, and Jimmy Haslip. Brad Houser of New Bohemians and Critters Buggin was immediately attracted to the bass's new-retro qualities. Reverend was already working on its first 5 when Houser sent Naylor a detailed spec sheet on what he thought it should look like. Naylor reciprocated, sending Houser a prototype, and several compromises later, the Rumblefish 5L made its debut.

The Houser signature is more closely inspired by Brad's original specs, his arsenal of vintage, fretless, and hollowbody 4- and 5-strings, and the low sound of uprights and keyboard basses popular on electronica albums. "I really liked how the low end in trip-hop bands like Portishead sounded like Fender Rhodes keyboards and big hollow basses, so I started going for that sound."

What A Body!

Like the Rumblefish, the Houser is hollow except for a 6"-wide mahogany center block fitted with an internally mounted "steel sustain bar" to enhance attack and support the bridge. The top and back are made of a wood-based phenolic material laminated to the center block. The aluminum-reinforced maple neck is done in a vintage yellow satin finish; and like the original, the Houser's rosewood fingerboard has rolled edges for a broken-in feel. But the similarities stop there. Houser specified Hipshot Ultralite tuners for a classy look, and Brad says he chose the lighter, adjustable Hipshot bridge for its vintage tone. (For those who want a more compressed, heavier sound, Brad recommends switching it out with Hipshot's adjustable brass bridge.) The biggest differences, however, are the neck's wide spacing—1" wider at the bridge than the 5L—and the twin set of custom-designed Reverend humbuckers and controls that feature three knobs and two 3-position switches that offer parallel, single-coil, and series voicings.

Low-Down & Dirty

Our test Houser bass was very well set up. The frets were impressively polished, sanded and crowned. Overall, the Houser looks and feels solid—from the six tight bolts that join

the neck and body to the securely mounted right elbow rim. At first glance, the bass's small body seems to accentuate its wide neck, but most players had no trouble with the satin-finished, well-balanced board.

The Houser comes with a set of nickel NR45-125L (.045-.125) S.I.T. Powerwounds, and right out of the box, it sounded consistently full and meaty through a Hartke HA4000 head and HA4200 4x10. A Gallien-Krueger GK1001RB 2x10 combo kept the lows but hinted at the bass's semi-hollow side. Staffers were pleasantly surprised by the Houser's distinctly thick, "passive and ballsy" personality. The *B*, defined without being growly, sounded good down to the 1st position, and notes were even throughout the fingerboard. The knobs and switches offered several options that weren't wildly different, but every setting was hum-free. Though the bass's aluminum top and bridge contribute to the Houser's supple lows, the high end is pingy; if you're looking for a biting, Marcus tone, this probably isn't the bass for you. I preferred the bridge pickup all the way open, a touch of neck pickup, and both switches set to series for a pleasing mix of low end and definition. Reverend's 5L sounds passive in comparison—the Houser's high output may have you looking for the battery cavity.

A set of heavy Ernie Ball flatwounds brought out a different animal. Run through a Trace Elliot V-Type V4 all-tube 2x10 combo, the Houser assumed its true identity as an organic, resonant Old School axe with massive low end. At an R&B-based jamband's rehearsal, a stubborn Precision-and-groundwound player praised the Houser's tight, precise sound through his Fender BXR 300 head and Mesa/Boogie 1x15. The flats purred with ballsy fundamentals, and the *B* was deep and defined. Upper-register *B* and *E*-string notes were particularly clean and sustained—think Paul McCartney and "Penny Lane"—and plucking the same notes over a wide-open neck pickup in series approached

the grainy lows of a B-3's bottom registers, perfectly suitable for the electronica textures Brad favors.

Overall, the bass offered no stunning clarity or bright, modern tone, but thanks to the Reverend circuitry and semi-hollow design, it had a strong sound all its own. We recommend it to low-end lovers looking for a versatile 5 that evokes passive hollow- and semi-hollowbodies of the past. The Houser's looks will always stand out, but its sound and price will definitely turn heads—and with flats, it'll move a dance floor, too.

Reverend Brad Houser 5

List price: \$1,499

Construction: 4

Electronics: 4

Playability: 4

Sound: 4

Value: 4

Pros: Unique looks, singular tone, badass price.

Con: Slap tone isn't for everybody.

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