



With 25 years of experience, Rob Williams is one of the best electric makers in the UK – and he still makes each guitar one at a time, all alone. Review by Martyn Casserly

Rob Williams

Set Neck Carved Top Deluxe

On a recent episode of *Top Gear* Jeremy Clarkson and company travelled the country in classic British sports cars visiting the defunct factories in which they were built. The show ended with the revelation that less than 10 per cent of people are employed in manufacturing jobs in the UK and that 'we don't build anything' any more. You'd be forgiven for thinking that the same is true of the British guitar industry: apart from a few big hitters like Marshall and Laney, the industrial scale production of amps and guitars is now mainly carried out in the Far East. But the UK has always been home to skilled luthiers who quietly graft away in sheds and workshops to produce exquisite instruments that rival any in the rest of the world.

Rob Williams set out on his career in the early '80s at Jaydee guitars in Birmingham, then moved to the USA to work with Hideo Kamimoto as a repair technician. Returning home, he joined Patrick Eggle where he rose to the role of Technical Director before settling down in Wales to build his own instruments, first under the Woodworm name, then his own. Rob has served his apprenticeship, paid his dues, and honed his craft.

This guitar, the newest in the Williams stable, goes under the name of the Set Neck Carved Top Deluxe. Opening the Hiscox case reveals an attractive, solid Brazilian mahogany body topped with a sumptuously flamed, bookmatched carved maple top. The smoky tobacco



Williams uses a lightly kicked-back headstock – very elegant, and it does away with the need for string trees



The neck is made from laminated lengths of mahogany and walnut. Posh Gotoh 510 tuners seal the deal

Plenty of finger room and a medium low action results in big, clean chords that ring out with purpose and authority

burst is faultlessly finished, with the contrast perfectly illustrating the tiger stripes in the maple grain. The neck is made of mahogany and walnut with a very sexy stripe effect on the back which emerges from the darkness of the set-neck joint's black finish and runs right up to the headstock. The effect is unusually pretty and only increases the impression that lots of time and thought has gone into the design process.

With a rosewood headstock cap matching the fingerboard the neck is reminiscent of an old Fender Rosewood Telecaster, although the body on this Deluxe creates a far more exotic look. Everywhere you inspect the wood you find wonderful patterns in the grain, which almost looks to have been chosen for dramatic flair as much as sonic properties. The body shape owes much to the Californian school of design, ➤

FACTFILE

FACTFILE NAME

Description:

Solidbody electric guitar. Handmade in the UK

Price: £3336

Build: Brazilian mahogany body, carved maple top, laminated mahogany and walnut neck, rosewood fingerboard, Gotoh 510 series Magnum lock tuners, Hipshot bridge

Electrics: Two RW Alnico 5 humbuckers, master volume and tone controls, five-way blade pickup selector switch

Left-Handers: Yes, at no extra cost

Finish: Tobacco sunburst. Many other colours available on request

Scale length: 648mm/25.5"

Neck width:

Nut 43mm
12th fret 51mm

Depth of neck:

First fret 22mm
12th fret 25mm

String spacing:

Nut 37mm
Bridge 52mm

Action as supplied:

12th fret treble 2mm
12th fret bass 2mm

Weight: 8lb/3.6kg

Contact: Rob Williams
01686 689120
robwilliams guitars.co.uk

THE COMPETITION

PRS

McCarty

Top class model from the US giants. Twin humbuckers, mahogany body, maple top, and oodles of class

PRICE: £2495

MARTYN BOOTH

Classic

One of the finest UK luthiers with a track record of exemplary guitars. The Classic is a twin humbucker work of art

PRICE: £2895

GIBSON

Slash Appetite Les Paul

A signature model for the GN'R legend that features top quality components and a hatful of cool

PRICE: £2099

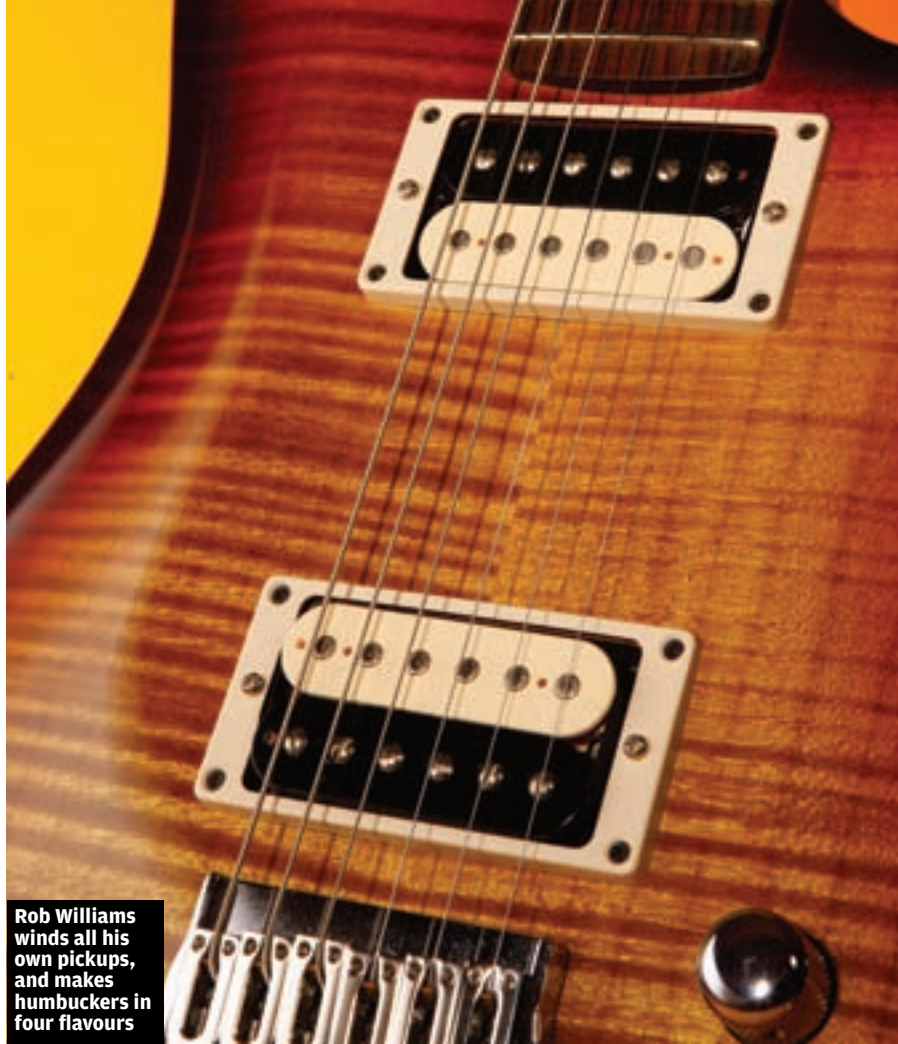
but the subtle addition of high-quality components gives the Deluxe enough of its own personality to set it apart from the other S-type guitars that dominate the current marketplace.

A quick strum releases a vibrant tone that should transfer very nicely through an amp. The pickups are Williams-made Alnico 5 humbuckers; a five-way blade selector offers either pickup solo, inner coils in parallel, or the outer coils in series or parallel. Playing-wise the Deluxe is a supremely comfortable guitar that will feel very familiar to Strat users thanks to the 25.5" scale. Bends are easily controlled, fingerpicking in a Jeff Beck style feels natural, and the combination of finger room and a medium low action results in big, clean chords that ring out with purpose and authority. It rewards good technique and dynamic playing with a variety of subtle tones.

Gotoh 510 Magnum locking tuners and a six-saddle Hipshot bridge keep everything tuneful, and the tone and volume controls match their chrome finish. Strapped on the Deluxe feels chunky and powerful, with a certain heft. It may look like a Strat, but it feels more as if you're wearing a Les Paul.

SOUNDS

On a clean setting the Deluxe's neck pickup is resonant and classy, with a singing voice that will keep jazzers and wily bluesmen playing into the small hours. Switching to the between settings brings up tighter, more Strat-like sounds, and there's a drop in volume as the coils are split. No classic quack here, but some very usable rhythm voices that offer




Rob Williams winds all his own pickups, and makes humbuckers in four flavours

Even with a large dollop of gain the Deluxe keeps singing and dares you to push harder. It's a fantastic all-rounder

a bit more percussive edge. Moving to the bridge reveals a big, sharp tone that can lend itself nicely to chicken-picking fingers with a surprising amount of spank.

It's obvious that this pickup is really going to shine when you throw some dirt on it. With a light to medium gain setting the bridge pickup sounds wonderful, a real bar-room stomper for rocky blues numbers that require definition and power. Add a few effects, like a delay, and you're in U2 land with a balanced sound that keeps the bass in its place on those big chiming chords. As you move through the selections the tones remain composed and never descend into mush. Even with a large dollop of gain the Deluxe just keeps singing and dares you to push it harder. It really is a fantastic all-rounder.

find excellence: tone, build, finish. The Deluxe is great to play, looks smart and will cover pretty much anything with the right tweak of the tone and volume controls. Of course, at £3000 this will be a long-considered purchase. Yes, Fender Custom Shop, Gibson VOS and PRS might be a safer bet due to resale and desirability, but since when did safety ever come into playing the guitar? If you're looking for something that will stand out from the crowd, give years of professional level service and was built on these golden shores, then eschew the bigger names and give Rob Williams a call. You may have to wait three months while he builds it, but that's just part of the experience. Resale value? Why would you want to know? This one's a keeper. 



Deep-carved neck joint includes a lovely treatment of the maple top

VERDICT

When you get to the prestige end of the market every little detail is important. Companies like PRS have shown that high-scale production of premium guitars is possible when the right components are put together with skill and fanatical attention to quality control. To place a guitar into that company requires it to be of the highest standard - and the Deluxe is exactly that. Everywhere you look you

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	20/20
Playability	20/20
Sound	18/20
Value for money	16/20
Vibe	18/20

TOTAL **92%**

Good for... professional level quality

Look elsewhere... if you're hung up on more familiar names or you've got buttons for money