

ROB WILLIAMS SET NECK DELUXE

PRICE
£2,999

This top-of-the-range offering from celebrated UK guitar maker Rob Williams has David Greeves turning from a mellow yellow to green with envy...

Rob Williams has been around on the UK guitar scene for over 25 years, first with Jaydee Custom Guitars and later Patrick Eggle, before launching his own range of guitars under the Woodworm brand and, more recently, under his own name. Still essentially a one-man operation building guitars without recourse to automated CNC machinery, Williams should be at the top of the list for anyone seeking a top-quality, British-made guitar, especially if their tastes lean towards Fender Strat-derived designs. But with belts being tightened all around and several American brands making aggressive inroads into the high-end market of late, can these home grown guitars still hold their own?

Body & Neck

Launched a couple of years ago, the Set Neck series brought something new to the 'drop top' formula in the shape of a tenon-jointed, glued-in neck with a low-profile heel for improved top-fret access. It might, in fact, be more correct to say 'no-profile' – the neck flows smoothly into the body in the manner of a through-neck design.

Rob Williams offers various different wood combinations, but on this model has opted for a swamp ash body and a maple neck. Vintage Fender fans will prick up there ears at this combination, though the addition of a bookmatched flame maple top, not to mention a stunning bright yellow transparent finish, take this guitar in a whole different direction. The top is folded down over the forearm contouring on top of the guitar in standard 'drop top'



The Wilkinson vibrato tailpiece is fully adjustable and returns to pitch brilliantly

fashion, while the edge of the top has been kept clear of the yellow finish, creating a PRS-style faux binding effect. This is particularly effective around the twin offset cutaways, where some additional contouring adds a welcome extra splash of individuality.

The yellow finish continues around at the rear, turning the handsomely figured swamp ash a lovely golden colour, though stops rather abruptly at the neck-body joint, with the maple neck left natural. As these guitars are essentially custom made, a huge range of other colours is available, so don't be put off if this guitar's finish is a little too rich for your blood.

The finishing and faux binding are to a very high standard and a further neat detail comes in the form of an inlaid rosewood jack



Upper-fret access is unhampered

socket, replacing the regular metal socket used on the Set Neck Standard and Pro models. It's a beautifully figured piece of wood and a playful riff on this model's

merging of some traditional features with exotic woods and other custom-built flourishes.

The one-piece maple neck uses a dual-action truss rod (which is installed from the front leaving no 'skunk stripe' at the rear) with a separate maple fingerboard with abalone dot fret markers and small but highly visible black side dots. The neck profile is rather interesting, with the gentlest hint of a V in the lower positions, flattening out into a slim C as you ascend the neck. It's exceptionally comfortable to play, suiting both chord work lower down and thumb-behind-the-neck shredding higher up. Fitted with 10 to 46 gauge strings, the review model is expertly set up for a low, buzz-free playing action, made possible by the high standard finishing to the 22 medium frets.

Hardware & Parts

This Set Neck Deluxe is fitted with a Wilkinson VS400 vibrato bridge, with six fully adjustable saddles and a knife-edge pivot resting on two adjustable posts. To aid tuning stability when using the whammy bar, the guitar is fitted with a neatly cut graphite nut and a set of Gotoh 510 Series locking tuners, with discreet, low-profile capstans that screw down to lock the string in place. The back-angled headstock means that no string trees are required, removing another potential source of tuning problems.

While this hardware is third-party, the pickups used here are Rob Williams' own. Using Alnico-V rod magnets and 42 gauge plain enamel wire, the pair



ROB WILLIAMS SET NECK DELUXE

Price: £2,999
Built in: UK
Scale length: 648mm (25.5 inches)
Nut width: 43mm (1.69 inches)
Body: Swamp ash with flame maple top
Neck: Rock maple, glued-in
Fingerboard: Maple, 254mm radius (10 inches)
Frets: 22 medium
Pickups: 2 x RW single-coils, 1 x RW humbucker
Controls: 1 x volume, 1 x tone, 5-way selector
Hardware: Wilkinson VS400 vibrato, Gotoh 510 locking tuners; chrome
Weight: 3.4kg (7.5lb)
Finishes: Yellow (shown), many other options available
Case: Hiscox hard case included
Left-handers: Yes, no extra charge
Options: Rosewood or ebony fingerboard; Hipshot hardtail bridge; HH, HSH, SSS or P-90 pickup configuration

CONTACT DETAILS

Rob Williams Guitars
Tel: 01686 689120
www.robwilliamsguitars.co.uk

GB VERDICT

GOLD STARS

- ★ Very high standard of build
- ★ Unique set neck design
- ★ Great neck profile and excellent playability
- ★ Superb, versatile tones

BLACK MARKS

- None

IDEAL FOR...

Anyone looking for a truly high-end guitar, with Strat-style tones a speciality

GB RATING

★★★★★

of single-coils are wound for a low, vintage-style output, with a DC resistance of 5.8k ohms. The bridge humbucker takes a similar tack, with an Alnico-V bar magnet and a DC resistance of 8.1k ohms. Needless to say, this is very much up to the customer and lots of other options are available, including P-90s. The guitar is equipped with master volume and tone controls with knurled metal knobs, and a five-way selector switch that automatically splits the bridge humbucker in position 2 for bridge-and-middle Strat-style in-between tones.

Sounds

It's very difficult to talk about the range of tones offered up by the Set Neck Deluxe without making further reference to the Fender Stratocaster; and it's fair to say that, if this is the tonal palette you like to work with, you will be fully satisfied. What we will also say, however, is that this guitar combines the familiar bite and clarity of the archetypal Strat with a fullness of tone and length of sustain that few double-cutaway guitars we have played can match.



The jack socket is made of rosewood



The headstock is back-angled

If the combination of an ash body, maple top and glued-in maple neck seems like a real winner, we're no less impressed by these Rob Williams pickups. Through a clean amp, the single-coils are full and open but have enough definition to handle plenty of gain. The humbucker, meanwhile, has a similarly sweet and versatile PAF-type tone and seems ideally voiced to work alongside the single-coils without the nasal mid-range and abrupt jump in volume that comes with

the high-output pickups so often chosen in this situation.

All in all, the Set Neck Deluxe performs exceptionally and we can see it comfortably navigating a wide range of genres. The combination of the sensitive and broad-ranging response of the pickups with a fine core tone and abundant sustain mean that the only obstacle to the player's self-expression is his or her own ability.

Conclusion

We find it very difficult to fault any aspect of this guitar, which combines a very high standard of build with truly professional performance. The price is obviously considerable, but not unreasonable considering the amount of work that has gone into creating this instrument. Factor in the kudos of owning an essentially custom made, hand-built British guitar and you may agree that it's well worth it. **GB**

ALTERNATIVES OTHER TO CHECK OUT

SUHR CUSTOM STANDARD

from around £2,000

Reliably excellent electrics, through with a more factory-made feel than the Rob Williams. Figured tops and other options add to price.

TOM ANDERSON DROP TOP

from around £2,499

Another American maker with a deservedly high reputation and a huge range of custom options.

MUSIC MAN ALBERT LEE BFR

£3,160

High performance and Strat-style tones from this Ball Family Reserve signature model, with a quilt maple top and shocking pink finish!



The faux binding is a nice touch