

FIRST PLAY



EVH FRANKENSTEIN RELIC
£1,479

WHAT IS IT? A stripe-less 'civilian' version of Eddie Van Halen's most famous creation

Some Kind Of Monster

One of the most distinctive electric guitars is back as another replica, but this time it's missing its main visual identifier. Double-cut eruption or paint job disruption?

Words Stuart Williams **Photography** Phil Barker

Hands up if you've ever tinkered with guitar mods. We'd wager that at some point or other we've all singed our fingers trying to replace a scratchy pot, turned the air blue as the spring from a pickup screw flies across the room for the third time, or gingerly winced as we make a twist of the Allen key. The late Eddie Van Halen was one such tinkerer, except his 'bitsa' mongrel became his implement for dropping jaws and raising the bar, permanently.

As such, you're most likely already very familiar with the Frankenstein, a guitar that completed Eddie's jigsaw of mind-melting lead work, telepathic rhythm abilities and groundbreaking manipulation of the instrument itself. Plus, it looked damn cool. "It wasn't a tape finish, I used tape to paint it that way," Eddie told us when we had the pleasure of visiting his 5150 studio in 2016. "I have no idea what possessed me to do that! I wish I did, but it's just one of those things. I have no fucking idea... and now I have a registered trademark on it."

The finish was just one element of the S-style guitar that Eddie was toting. Loaded with a single humbucker in the bridge position, there's been plenty of speculation as to what the original pickup actually was.





1. Eddie Van Halen helped to develop the Floyd Rose. As such, his preference was to mount the unit flush. This 1000 Series example can be detuned to drop D thanks to the addition of a D-Tuna. No adjustments needed!
2. Is it really a Frankenstein without the famous trademarked Stripe design? Yes, we'd have to argue that it is. If you want the trimmings of the Frankenstein without it being so obviously a tribute to king Edward, it checks all the boxes
3. Fender's Mexican factory is a dab-hand when it comes to convincing ageing at non-Custom Shop price points. Here, the body has some light relicing, front and back, and the neck is stained with Heavy Relic satin lacquer



"It's from a [Gibson ES-] 335. I painted [the 335] white because, of course, I fucked with that, too. But yeah, I yanked it out of there. I took the rear pickup out and it was really hard. I mean, I pretty much destroyed that guitar because you had the f-holes to get to the electronics. Man! Talk about a pain in the ass!"

Following years of homebrew replications by fans to incorporate the Frankenstein's many design points ('dummy' pickup, cavity-mounted switch, Floyd Rose, D-Tuna and so on), in 2007 Eddie teamed up with Fender's Custom Shop to build the first EVH-branded guitar. This came in the form of a dead-on 300-piece limited-edition tribute replica of the Frankenstein.

After we'd recovered from the shock of its price tag (used examples of this replica are commanding asking prices of £35,000 today), along came the EVH Striped Series models. These import Eddie-style guitars came with a core of the Frankenstein's features – albeit in pristine condition – before the EVH brand brought out the Striped Series Frankie in 2020. This time, we got a heavy-relic addition of the Striped Series models, with greater attention to detail, bringing most of the Frankenstein's stand-out features to those of us on everyday budgets.

Feel & Sounds

So that's it covered, then, the Frankenstein models are complete. Nope! Because here we have the Frankenstein Relic – a 'civilian' version of the Frankenstein that sees the basswood Strat body stripped of its stripes. In their place, there's a more understated, solid finish (available in three colour options: Red, White and Black), and given the name, there's no surprise that it's undergone some light punishment.

Elsewhere, everything is familiar and faithful to the EVH instrument blueprint. There's a quarter-sawn, graphite-reinforced maple neck, 22 jumbo-fret maple fingerboard with a 305mm to 406mm (12- to 16-inch) compound radius, a single EVH Wolfgang humbucker, a Floyd Rose and a D-Tuna. Also added to the guitar is the 'dummy' neck pickup we saw previously in the Frankie, as well as the 'dummy' five-way switch and custom cut-off scratchplate.

Why are we referring to it as 'dummy'? Well, that's what EVH calls it. But there's a twist: that dummy pickup isn't just a mute shell. It has wires fitted and neatly coiled (its DCR measures 6.8k), but they aren't connected to anything. Instead, they sit under the selector switch, which is screwed in place in the middle-position pickup cavity, and is also not connected. With our interests

piqued a quick turn of the screwdriver reveals that the switch is, in fact, a Fender Pure Vintage model (which will set you back around £26 from Fender's website).

Under the scratchplate, there's a cavity tapering from 60mm at its widest point to 40mm at its narrowest, with around 33mm depth offering ample room for a full complement of controls. So, while we can't review it for 'what it could be', there is absolutely scope for adding to the format if you want to expand on the single humbucker and turn it into an HSS model.

We've experienced the EVH Wolfgang Humbucker on plenty of occasions before. It's punchy and obviously reacts well under higher gain settings, too, with harmonics sparking from the pick. The tinted neck looks the part (although our review model had some of the finish missing around the inside of the truss rod thumb-wheel recess), and compared with previous Frankensteins,

The Frankenstein Relic is a 'civilian' version that sees the basswood Strat body stripped of its stripes



EVH FRANKENSTEIN RELIC

PRICE: £1,479 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: Mexico

TYPE: Double-cut solidbody electric

BODY: Basswood

NECK: Graphite reinforced, quartersawn maple,

EVH modified C profile, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Floyd Rose locking/43mm

FINGERBOARD: Maple, black dot inlays, 305-406mm (12"-16") compound radius

FRETS: 22, jumbo

HARDWARE: Aged chrome Floyd Rose 1000

Series vibrato, EVH-branded Gotoh tuners

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm

ELECTRICS: EVH Wolfgang humbucker, 'dummy' (wired but not connected) Fender Strat vintage-style neck position single coil, Fender 5-way selector, volume control (labelled 'tone')

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.35/7.4

OPTIONS: No

RANGE OPTIONS: EVH Striped Series (£1,149), EVH Striped Series Frankie (£1,519), EVH Striped Series '78 Eruption (£1,299) and EVH Striped Series 1510 (£1,349)

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: Red (as reviewed), White, Black – all lacquer, relic finishes

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8/10

PROS An excellent playing and sounding 'classic' shred machine, bursting with plenty of useful features in Eddie's mould

CONS You'll need to make some additions to really get the most out of it, but at least the neck pickup and switch are included

we'd say that the finish adds a little friction, especially after you've been playing a while. It's darker than some of EVH's stock photos show, and at the same time the fingerboard looks less grubby-up in person than in the pictures, as much roasted effect as relic.

Talking of which, the neck profile is described as a 'modified C'. It's speedy but still has a slight chunk to it, and it's definitely not a super-modern shredder's neck. That's enhanced by the compound radius, which is noticeable but not overt, allowing for bigger bends without choking in the upper frets, even with our review model's fairly low action.

The Floyd Rose is installed flush, so you have the option to depress it until the strings are flapping like an optimistic emu. This is Eddie's preferred configuration; he insisted that the vibrato needs to be "all flush to the body. Everything needs to be connected... The more connection, the more sustain and resonance." The good news is that it returns to pitch and stays there effortlessly, and the addition of the D-Tuna is a handy one if you're regularly playing in drop D.

It's not often we give a shout-out to a volume pot, but if you're only going to equip a guitar with one (even if it is labelled 'tone'), then the EVH remains one of our favourites. It's fast, frictionless and allows

for speedy violining effects to boot. The only criticism could be that its sensitive spin combined with its placement here might make it a little too easy to knock it by mistake, especially when reaching for the Floyd or palm-muting. But, as we've already noted, you could make use of those additional drill holes to move it.

Verdict

Once again, EVH has delivered a clutch of well-thought-out features. This should come as no surprise because it is essentially the same formula as the Striped Frankie version. It's a slight shame that there's no facility to split the coil for a little extra versatility (given that the pickup is four-conductor). But sticking with the spirit of this guitar – if its Charvel cousins are named Pro Mods, this could be thought of as a Pre-Mod – that's something that could be added to the list of DIY weekend jobs.

We were sceptical of why anyone would plump for this guitar without its defining visual feature, but the more you consider it, the more it makes sense. It's an EVH-themed guitar that has the potential to whisper 'Eddie Van Halen', rather than scream it. Apparently, a leopard can't change its spots, but it seems Eddie's monster can lose its stripes. **G**