



Sterling By Music Man Intro Series StingRay Ray2

As a budget-friendly version of the US-made original, can this wallet-friendly StingRay really do the business?

By Nick Wells

THE MUSIC MAN StingRay is often touted as a must-have bass guitar sound for any professional studio. While the US-made models remain ever popular, there continues to be a section of the bass-playing public that requires a more affordable alternative to the company’s Californian output.

Fender addressed a similar situation by introducing Squier in the early ‘80s, and with such a lucrative sector of the market still open to them, the Ernie Ball Family Brand took the bull by the horns in 2008 and released the ‘Sterling by Music Man’ range of guitars and basses.

Intended for the beginner bassist on a budget, this latest StingRay variation is taken from the all-new Intro Series, and features a cool range of new colors alongside some retro-inspired features that hark back to the original ‘70s design.

Just like the original, it’s equipped with a single oversized humbucker, the iconic ‘teardrop’ scratchplate and Music Man’s ever popular ‘3 over 1’ machine head configuration. So where are the savings being made?

Well, the production costs in China are significantly less than the US, but a low price is only a good thing if the bass actually works well. A cheap but un-playable instrument is a false economy however you look at it.

At just under \$250, the Intro Series StingRay looks too good to miss. But what can it deliver in terms of tone and playability?

Build quality

Visually, the Intro Series StingRay Ray2 has all you would expect from such a revered design. The body, with its asymmetrical twin cutaways, has been made from a piece of poplar with a glossy high-polish finish that’s straightforward, smart and durable. The maple neck is attached via a square heel join consisting of a six-bolt plate, ensuring a rigid and stable connection point.

Poplar is a common choice for lower-cost electric guitar bodies and remains a reasonably cheap timber. It’s also fairly light in terms of weight, which means, along with some well-rounded body curves and a smooth rib-cage contour, you should get through a gig without too many physical complaints.

Should you wish to administer any relief to the neck, the truss rod can be tweaked via a rotary adjuster wheel at the base of the neck.

This is a simple single-pickup bass, equipped with an oversized ceramic humbucker with large exposed pole pieces. Unlike the original StingRay models, with their two-band active



“Any bass guitar for under \$250 with this sort of pedigree...how can you go wrong?”

EQ, the single pickup has just a pair of controls, namely volume and passive tone.

The chunky bridge unit is a reassuring sight on the Ray2, its rear lip concealing the ball ends of the strings (there’s no option for through-body stringing). Perhaps best thought of as an old-fashioned Fender-type bridge on steroids, this classic Music Man-style design offers each string its own saddle, allowing accurate adjustment of action and intonation.

A set of chunky, open-geared machine heads complete the hardware inventory with the G string tuner on the underside of the headstock in the trademark StingRay configuration.

Playability

It’s easy to see why the StingRay has remained the first port of call for so many players over the years, and this latest variation serves as an excellent reminder of just how good the original blueprint was.

The Intro Series StingRay Ray2 is properly designed to offer a comfortable and accessible playing experience – something absolutely essential in a beginners’ instrument. The overall setup is also of a surprisingly high standard for a bass at this price.

One of the greatest strengths of this bass is the playability of the neck – the slim C-shape profile with its satin finish is incredibly comfortable in use.

The single pickup provides a comfortable ledge to rest your thumb, should you wish to play finger-style directly over the pickup, and is height adjustable via three mounting screws. You can achieve rapid 16th notes playing down near the bridge and there is plenty of space for more aggressive slap techniques too.

Sounds

Plugging in, the core tone is punchy and clear, with a scooped low mid-range that’s ideal for driving rock or fingerstyle funk, à la Flea or Louis Johnson. There are also some excellent sweet spots to be found along the fingerboard – amaranth is a hardwood that lends the high-register sounds a subtle focus.

The single humbucker is no slouch and produces a healthy signal, and while the tones don’t compare with Music Man’s high-end output, the sounds on offer are good enough to



GUITAR WORLD VERDICT



If you’re on a tight budget, the Intro Series StingRay does a fine job. Any bass for under \$250 with this sort of pedigree... how can you go wrong?

PROS

- + Good setup and playability.
- + Solid construction.
- + Fantastic value for money.

CONS

- It could benefit from active circuitry, but at this beginner-friendly price, upgrading electronics later could be an option.
- A better deal for US customers Vs UK prices.

SPECS

MADE: China
TYPE: Four-string electric bass guitar
BODY: Poplar
NECK: Hard maple, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Amaranth (purple heart)
SCALE LENGTH: 34 inches / 864mm
NUT/WIDTH: Plastic / 40mm
FRETS: 21, medium
HARDWARE: Fixed bridge, open gear tuners
STRING SPACING AT BRIDGE: 18mm
ELECTRICS: 1 x ceramic humbucker
WEIGHT: 8.8lb/3.9kg
OPTIONS: Maple fingerboard on Black and Sunrise Orange models
LEFT-HANDED OPTIONS: No
FINISHES: Misty Green (as reviewed), Electric Blue, Black, Sunrise Orange
CASE: No

appeal to the first-time buyer – they may even catch the attention of frustrated guitarists looking to try something new.

I couldn’t help but feel that the acoustic sound was a little let down by the passive circuitry, though some players may well prefer the passive tone to an EQ-affected bass sound. There is scope to upgrade the electronics if you should wish. Either way, at this price it is difficult to expect more on the circuitry side.

Verdict

With the Intro Series occupying the entry-level position in the Sterling by Music Man range, our review model can be forgiven for not being quite as lavish as the company’s US-made basses, but the solid build quality and excellent playability will be invaluable to budding bassists – many a prospective player has been put off by a shoddy first instrument.

This a very playable bass that provides a welcome reminder of exactly why the StingRay has been and continues to be the weapon of choice for so many bass players. The range of sounds on offer is a little limited, but if the low price encourages new players to start, so much the better.