

# ROBERTS

## Savage & Tezuka Guitars

### Introducing two cool hand finished custom guitars that won't dent your pocket

**Korea** has dropped off the radar as one of the major hubs of the Far Eastern guitar manufacturing industry since China inherited the mantel but an increasing handful of smaller British-based companies are taking advantage of Korea's deep and currently underused pool of guitar-manufacturing experience to

**Words:** Tim Slater

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### Savage Guitar

SRP £620.00

All prices incl VAT

#### CONTACT:

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#### WHAT IS IT?

A Korean-made solid body electric with a powerfully evocative retro style.

#### WHY SHOULD I WANT ONE?

The Savage is a bit quirky and off-the-wall but its individuality lies at the heart of its appeal. Considering the amount of labour put into its construction and the quality components, and not forgetting that this guitar also includes a quality hard case, the Savage appears to meet one of its primary objectives of being very good value for money.

develop their own brands. Roberts Guitars claim to offer hand-built 'boutique' electric guitars at extraordinarily competitive prices; a bold claim perhaps, but Roberts' want to convey the message to their potential customers that a hand-built Korean guitar is something to aspire to. It may seem like a lot to ask but Roberts seem to have thought things through fairly thoroughly, especially in terms of pricing and creating a unique appeal to attract guitar players in these highly budget conscious times.

#### Body of Evidence

The two Roberts guitars supplied for review consist of the apparently Gibson Firebird VII inspired Savage and the ash-bodied twin humbucker equipped Tezuka. You've got to hand it to Roberts for having the courage to step outside the box and come up with a couple of instruments that certainly have such a distinctive look when it would have been all too easy to go down the path of least resistance and bosh out copies based on other manufacturer's designs. OK, a few outside influences might be evident here and there but any similarities to other guitars are superficial enough so as not to really matter, besides which the Savage does benefit from a certain kitsch retro appeal.

The Tezuka's more streamlined body styling tips a nod to the universally popular dual cutaway design but it doesn't take a rocket scientist to work out that the Tezuka is about as close to a Fender Stratocaster as my Auntie Doreen is to Claudia Schiffer (which isn't meant as a slur on the Tezuka, or even my Auntie Doreen, but you get

my drift). Instead, Roberts insist that their guitars are more inspired by some of the off-the-wall Japanese electric guitars from the early 1970s than anything emanating from the US, something which is definitely more obvious in the case of the primitive-looking Savage. Both guitars' high-gloss poly lacquer definitely feels Oriental but to be fair, so does the high build quality. The Tezuka's light sunburst finish is skillfully applied, everything generally looks and feels very well put together and the gold-plated hardware includes kidney button tuners and that amazing looking gold-plated solid steel bridge-plate with its distinctive flame pattern.

On first picking up the Tezuka, the first thing that strikes you is its impressive weight. The glued-in maple neck is mated to a three-piece ash body, which conspires to lend the guitar enough mass to eventually tip the scales at a fairly hefty 5 kilos (that's close enough to a shoulder-straining 11Lbs in old money). When you consider that the average weight of a Gibson Les Paul is around 4.08 kilos, or 9Lbs (the Les Paul always a good benchmark as far as physically heavy guitars are concerned), then the Tezuka feels like a bit of a bloater. It is probably best teamed up with a very wide and strong guitar strap to dispel as much weight as possible from the player's shoulder.

Still, if you can live with the extra weight one of the more positive things about ash is that it usually lends a guitar a certain tonal gravitas, particularly in the low-end frequencies. A quick unplugged strum duly demonstrates a strong ringing resonance with plenty of body and sustain. Fair enough, but you can't help thinking that a couple of small acoustic chambers would relieve some of the weight.

By contrast, the Savage feels considerably lighter at around 4 kilos and while its large off-set body looks a tad ungainly, in use it actually feels well balanced and rather more



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comfortable than the Tezuka. Like its stable-mate, the Savage features a string-through design but instead of the Tezuka's Telecaster-meets-hotrod bridge, the Savage has a traditional chrome-plated Tune-O-Matic bridge mounted on threaded ferules. The Savage's sprightly acoustic tone is down to its hand-finished alder body, which is topped-off with a rather striking walnut cap and again you can't fault the quality of the workmanship; the Savage feels as comfy as your favourite pair of jeans whilst also managing to look refreshingly different from most of the standard electric guitar shapes.

### Getting a Grip

Both guitars feature glued-in necks with a distinctive 'D' shaped profile that, while not being quite so chunky as a typical Gibson 50s-style neck shape still feels like a good chunky

piece of timber that you can really get a good solid grip on. The Tezuka's three-piece hard rock maple neck comprises the neck heel, the main neck shaft and the final upper quarter including the headstock, which joins the main section of the neck via a tidy scarf joint. The unbound ebony fingerboard is fitted with 24 jumbo frets and the guitar also features a bone nut that, apart from a slightly untidy slot for the low E string, nevertheless reveals a reasonable level of skill.

The Savage's neck appears to be fashioned from a single piece of mahogany and the 22 fret edge-bound ebony fingerboard is topped off with those distinctive 'flying dart' inlays. In fact, the inlay work on both guitars deserves a mention; the finishing is excellent, with no obvious filler marks or other dispiriting signs of sloppy workmanship. Only a few traces of polish around the edges of some of the frets remain but otherwise everything feels and looks pretty good.

### Switching Hour

Both guitars sport passive electronics that includes Korean-made pickups made to Roberts' own specs. The high-output twin humbuckers featured on the Tezuka use dual blades instead of traditional pole pieces and while ours are wired for standard humbucking operation, their four-way wiring can be configured for coil-tapped sounds if the customer requires that option.

The controls consist of a master volume control and two rotary tone pots, with a traditional three-way selector switch taking care of pickup selection. Fired up, the Tezuka soon proves itself to be a more than capable rock monster with an appropriately fiery voice that rattles your chest like a right hook from Ricky Hatton. Overdriven sounds have a gutsy thump and purely as an out-and-out rocker the Tezuka impresses, the ebony 'board adds a nice biting top-end sizzle and there seems to be bags of natural sustain. Clean tones, however, aren't quite as convincing; both pickups have a solid and warm sounding centre to their tone but there is also a curious hollow 'quack' that almost sounds like the pickups are wired out of phase, even

though they aren't. You can't put your finger on it but I can only put it down to the combination of very powerful pickups, the treble-enhancing effect of the ebony fingerboard and the ash body providing the meaty thump in the middle. Versatility may not be the Tezuka's strongest suit but if you like plenty of power and a 'does-what-it-says-on-the-tin' directness, then the Tezuka might just be your ideal partner.

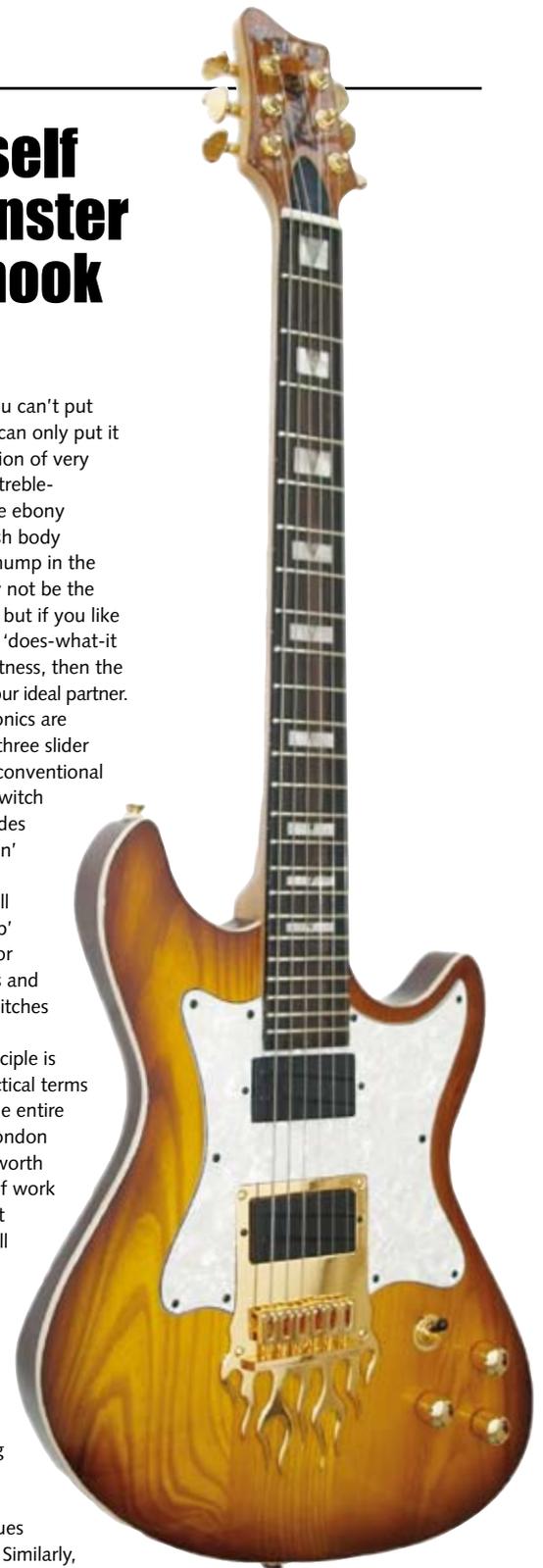
The Savage's electronics are more complex due to three slider switches in place of a conventional pickup selector. Each switch has three separate modes of operation: the 'down' position maintains the mini-humbuckers in full humbucking mode, 'up' coil-taps the pickups for single coil-type sounds and the middle position switches off each pickup.

While the basic principle is simple enough, in practical terms it's more fiddly than the entire string section of the London Philharmonic but it is worth sticking with it. A bit of work memorising the correct switching sequence will reward you with some impressive tones.

As a rough guide, here are some settings we found useful: the neck pickup in isolation and in full humbucking mode sounds fat and fruity with bags of sustain, spot-on for blues and classic rock tones. Similarly, the bridge pickup in single coil mode suggests a Telecaster bridge pickup mixed with a rasp-file; the spiky attack has agreeably rough edges and is just the ticket for grinding out punchy Keef-style riffs. Combine the tapped bridge pickup and the full neck humbucker and the resulting blend of treble bite and fulsome rounded sustain forms an unusual but entirely workable base for rock and blues; to these ears it's maybe a bit too coarse for modern pop styles like funk but while its natural home seems to be the blues/rock vein, there is nothing to dictate why the Savage can't be used for a wide

variety of music.

To sum up our first impressions of both Roberts guitars; the Tezuka is a very good rock guitar that would benefit massively from having some of its weight issues addressed. The Savage is also a very likeable guitar that would similarly benefit from a bit more attention to detail in some very small areas to make it feel a little more sophisticated. Still, both guitars represent a very solid start from a new company that has proved that Korean manufacturing is still a force to be reckoned with. **PU**



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SRP £495.00

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### WHAT IS IT?

A hand-made Korean take on an affordable 'boutique' guitar. The price also includes a good quality hard case.

### WHY SHOULD I WANT ONE?

Although the ash body makes this guitar feel quite heavy, the Tezuka is still potentially a great stage guitar. It plays well and looks amazing. Good value for money too, especially considering that it is made using more labour intensive methods than the majority of mid-priced mass produced guitars originating from the Far East.