



Harley Benton TE-62DB

Double-bound for glory?

By Rob Laing

▶ **THERE IS SOMETHING** about a bound body on a T-style electric guitar that can unite us guitarists in swooning over it. The only guitar I ever really regret selling was a Japanese Fender ‘62 Tele Custom reissue in sunburst when I was a student... I still grimace at the memory that I’ll never see it again. But can I get close to that ballpark for a surprisingly accessible price?

The TE line has served Harley Benton well for obvious reasons – it’s clearly reminiscent of one of the most iconic guitar designs ever, and the company delivers Telecaster-esque variations at very accessible prices – including the TE-52 model we tested.

This version hones in on the double-bound Custom take that emerged in 1959. Squier has also responded to demand for affordable bound beauties with its Tele Custom models in recent years, bringing in new players who were previously priced out of the mainly US-made reissues.

For around \$172 (including shipping from Germany), it’s unsurprising that this Harley Benton’s T-style take frequently sells out – indeed, we’ve been waiting for this affordable guitar to come back in stock ourselves to publish this review. But the price doesn’t necessarily equate to a good deal if the product is lacking. And that’s why I’m here – to find out more.

Build quality

This kind of shape doesn’t always equate to a lighter weight, or even much consistency anywhere on the scale in my experience (a look at the Squier Custom Telecaster stock over at Sweetwater at the time of writing finds examples ranging from 7.14 lbs all the way up to 9.11lbs!), but I wondered if the use of basswood for the body might skew that theory.

It’s typically regarded as one of the lighter guitar body tonewoods. At 8.2lbs, I can say that isn’t the case here. Proving wood will often resist such generalisations.

The Lake Placid Blue is a metallic finish polyurethane treatment here that really shimmers under the light, as our photoshoot attests – the ivory-hued binding around the top and bottom body edging (Harley Benton calling it white is a stretch) adding to the classy aesthetic, especially with no cosmetic flaws.

The dark laurel fretboard contrasts with it well on our test guitar, and it’s unsurprising that it could do with conditioning. That’s often the case with the temperature changes guitars go through in storage and transit for unspecified periods of time.



“This is a very impressive neck experience for a guitar at this price”

I’m a big fan of the ‘vintage’ caramelised neck look too, with a lovely satin finish to the back that feels quite a treat at this price point. Less so are the vintage-style button tuners, which look the part but feel very much budget in action; stiff to turn and the biggest candidates here for an upgrade.

Playability

The ‘modern D’ neck profile feels like a chunkier proposition here for smaller hands than Fender’s modern C, especially with Harley Benton going for a 12-inch radius over the expected 9.5 that helps to define this amongst a host of Tele-inspired models out there. It may take some adjustment if you’re used to Fender’s usual spec, less so if you’re a Gibson owner.

There’s no mention of a rolled ‘board in the spec, so I’m honestly surprised to feel rounded fretboard edges here, and after a small truss rod adjustment I can properly get to grips with the playability.

This is a very impressive neck experience for a guitar at this price – those edges and satin finish on the back go a long way on early impressions, but the fretwork is sound (with no sharp edges) too as I dig in further. It’s definitely one of the most positive Harley Benton neck experiences I’ve had so far, and on one of the cheapest models I’ve tested too.

Sounds

The neck pickup can go in the same category as the tuners when it comes to budget hardware that’s comparatively lacking on this test model. While the bridge Roswell single coil sounds solid enough (though a little underpowered and wiry for an Alnico 5), the neck is rather dull and muffled without the woody roundness required from a good T-style guitar.

Yes, this is an affordable guitar so some will factor in an upgrade to the investment, but for many – especially if you’re not doing the work yourself – that adds a considerable extra outlay of money and time that’s worth factoring in if your pickup expectations are higher than what is delivered here. And it impacts the middle position of this guitar, which is less jangly clean supreme and more the kind of perfunctory sound you’ll keep passing over.



musicradar. VERDICT



Some elements here (tuners and pickups) reflect the price point, but the neck and overall quality of the build here are above expectations. A classy-looking and playing deal for modding.

PROS

- + Great looking finish
- + Smooth, playable neck
- + A great value platform

CONS

- Stiff tuners
- Pickups are lacking

SPECS

MADE: China
TYPE: Six-string electric guitar
BODY: Basswood
NECK: Caramelized maple with Roseacer Skunkstripe/ Modern D profile
FINGERBOARD: Laurel / 12”
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (15.5 inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Material / width in mm
FRETS: 21, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Kluson-style button tuners, chrome hardtail ashtray bridge with compensated barrel saddles, 3-ply white pickguard
ELECTRICS: 2 x Roswell Alinco 5 TEA-F-CR/ TEA-B single-coil pickups, 1x volume, 1x tone control and three-way blade pickup selector
WEIGHT OF TEST GUITAR: 8.2lb/3.7kg
OPTIONS: TE range from \$81 for Standard Series
LEFT-HANDED OPTIONS: Yes (Lake Placid Blue finish only)
FINISHES: Lake Placid Blue (reviewed), Candy Apple Red, Black
CASE: No

And yet, the aesthetics and neck here hold their end up well, so the pickups feel more a reminder of the lower price reality than any kind of major fly in the ointment. Surely the neck here alone is worth a fair bit of anyone’s money!

Verdict

There are definitely ways you can invest to sweeten the experience of the TE-62DB further in addition to the pickups; a darker parchment pickguard to match the binding for more premium aesthetic flow, brass barrel saddles for sustain, the aforementioned tuner upgrade. There’s also a significant volume drop-off with the pot taper here. But that can come later. As it comes out of the box, I think this is still a sound double-bound deal for modders or perhaps adult beginner guitar buyers.