

# Interactive Guitarist

ISSUE  
**14**

## Richie Kotzen

Exclusive interview  
+ style analysis

### Steve Hackett

Interviewed +  
world exclusive  
live performance!

### Andy Fraser

Free's Bassist  
speaks out

### Jason Becker

Not Dead Yet!  
The movie

### Bass

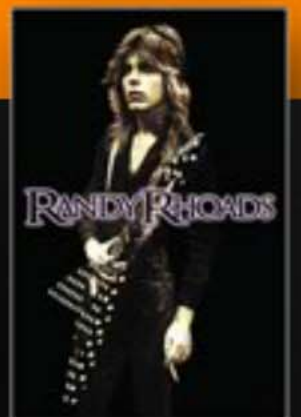
TC BH and BG250  
head and combo,  
Aria SB1000 re-issue,  
Danelectro  
Longhorn

### Quietroom

Breedlove  
Cascade 000,  
Stonebridge GS  
& OM 24-SFs  
+ Aria AF15

## WIN!

Wampler pedals!  
+  
Randy Rhoads  
coffee table book



## REVIEWS

EXCLUSIVE - Ibanez Roadcore, Laney Iommi head, YouRock MIDI guitar, Wampler FX, Brian May guitar, PRS Navarro SE, Hiwatt 50, Rickenbacker 650, Washburn HB36,

# Brian May Special

The Brian May Special is a signature guitar with a difference. Instead of applying his name to the products of a big brand maker, the former Queen guitarist has licensed a smaller company to make faithful replicas of his homebuilt icon.

**Michael Casswell**, who has played the original, checks out the latest version of this classic.

There are two ways of looking at this guitar. You could look at it as a fan of Brian, who wants something that looks, sounds and feels like his home-made iconic Red Special and isn't too bothered about the finer details that most serious guitar players obsess over, as long as it looks like Brian's own guitar. Or you could approach this guitar as a serious playable instrument that can offer many tones and versatility other guitars can't, all at an affordable price. Which camp do you fall into? As a professional guitarist, I approach any signature product on its merits rather than the name associated with it, so no surprises which camp I'm pitching my tent in.

I actually own one of these guitars. Mine is from around 2006/7 and was purchased when I was regularly playing in the London show, We Will Rock You. Around that time, I was also asked to film some tutorial Queen/Brian May DVDs for Lick Library, so it made sense for me to own one.

I had the luxury of being sent a number of them and choosing my favourite. I looked

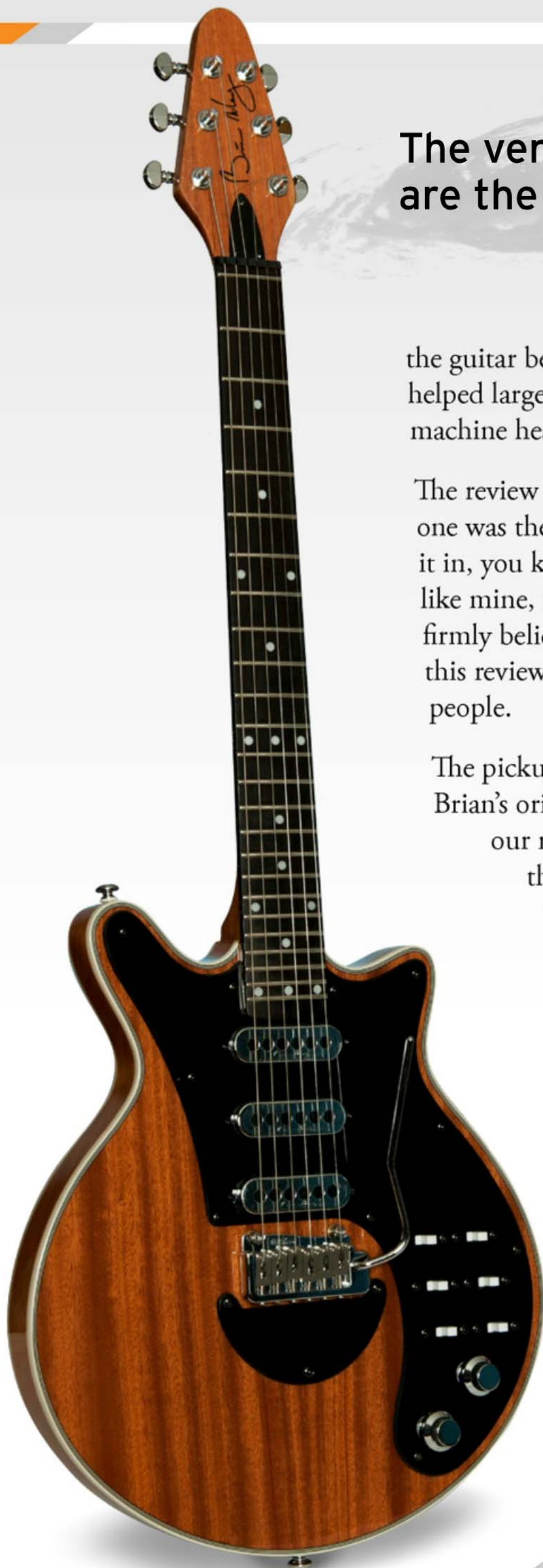
for tuning stability, resonance, neck size and the quality of how the nut was cut, which did vary, as it does with most brands. I went for the one that had the biggest baseball bat neck, was acoustically the loudest and had the most responsive tremolo system. I have been lucky enough to play Brian's own Red Special, which does have a big fat neck, is very resonant and has a very responsive tremolo made from a bicycle saddle (!), so that puts me among the select few that know what the original is actually like and what these guitars are derived from.

Since the purchase of my example, the quality of these guitars has obviously gone up. In fact, as the review went on, I became aware of a number of quite significant improvements. For example, they now come as standard with a Wilkinson derived tremolo system which is really superb (and I am very picky when it comes to tremos), which works with such a nice feel that any experienced trem user will not be disappointed. Once the brand new strings on our review guitar had been stretched and bedded-in, the tuning of



STAR RATING ★★★★★





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the guitar became nicely stable, even with heavy trem use, helped largely no doubt by the excellent locking Grover machine heads.

The review guitar is more resonant than mine too, and my one was the pick of a bunch, so even before you've plugged it in, you know it is going to sing. The neck is not silly-big like mine, more like a modern '50s style Les Paul neck. I firmly believe the bigger the neck, the bigger the sound and this review guitar neck is big, but not big enough to shock people.

The pickups have changed since my one, too. Based on Brian's original Burns Tri-Sonic pickups, the version on our review guitar now has Brian's name pressed into the covers, but they still give that fat tone that works so well with treble boosters and valve amps. I don't know if these are just cosmetic changes because they sound exactly the same as the gold Tri-Sonics on my guitar. New or older versions, they will all obviously be wound as close to Brian's originals as financial constraints allow, and if you have never tried a 'Tri-Sonic' style single coil, you will be very pleasantly surprised. Think organic, fat, vintage Strat!

The very cool thing about these guitars are the pick up switching options. Series, parallel, in phase, out of phase, on or off. All the Brian tones are there,



but more importantly to me, there are tones that none of my other guitars can produce, making it great for the studio. And to me that seems important because, as a product, it's a guitar that has merit even if you take the Brian May name out of the equation.

In fact I have often employed the services of my own Brian May guitar in the studio over the years of ownership, because of the many tones it can produce. It stands up as a guitar

on its own without needing a 'big name' to justify its existence.

These guitars are made in Korea which means two things. It means they are affordable but also of extremely high quality (Korea is where all the best makers have their top line non-US or European guitars made). Moreover, the brand is overseen and distributed by Barry Moorhouse of House Music in London, which has always given

**I am not an endorser and if this was a sub-standard product, trust me, I would tell you.**

myself and Jamie Humphries superb back up for any parts or requirements that may arise - and Jamie is another regular user, recently touring with Brian May and a regular in We Will Rock You. Things do break or wear out on any guitar and it's nice to know that salvation is just a phone call away - unlike with some guitar companies. Not that your one will break, with normal use - just don't lend it to Jamie!

I was interviewed about these guitars and the use of my own one, which you can find on the Brian May's Guitars website. I am not an endorser and if this was a sub-standard product, trust me, I would tell you. What I will say is they really are very good, excellent value for money and offer great versatility for a beginner, a Brian fan or a pro that wants to accurately recreate some of those iconic treble boosted tones, pioneered by Brian and Rory Gallagher before him.

Oh, and they come in some far better colours than wine red too!

