



FISHMAN

RARE EARTH ACTIVE HUMBUCKER

PRICE: £195 GB RATING ★★★★★

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RARE EARTH ACTIVE SINGLE-COIL

PRICE: £159 GB RATING ★★★★★

Fishman has a very fine reputation throughout the world of acoustic amplification and the number of high-end guitar manufacturers offering pre-installed Fishman pickups is evidence of this. Both the single-coil and humbucking pickups from the Rare Earth series – which look practically identical – are thinner than their competitors, and they look both stylish and discreet.

Both pickups are hard-wired to a 1.8-metre cable fitted with a jack socket. As with the Shadow pickup, this gives the user the option of either installing the socket permanently at the endpin, or alternatively running the cable out of the soundhole for attachment to an instrument cable. Both models are easy to install, and we particularly liked the thoughtful addition of cork inserts, which prevent any marking to the surface of the guitar's soundboard as well as providing grip and preventing the unit from moving.

Both units are powered by two small LR44 batteries, which we found to be a little tricky to extricate from their housing at the base of the pickups. However, Fishman claims that the battery life is an impressive 300 hours, so you shouldn't have to do this too often. The humbucking version has an additional volume control, though as this is mounted on the underside of the pickup, using it will involve reaching a finger right into the soundhole.

IN USE

Fishman's cutting-edge neodymium magnets and active re-voiced

electronics produce a highly impressive sound. Pure, clean and articulate, the humbucking pickup is a fantastic bit of kit. The tone is pitched brighter than the Shadow and more surefooted than the Seymour Duncan. We're both surprised and impressed at how well this pickup handles a whole range of disciplines. Be it heavy strumming, speedy flatpicking or delicate fingerpicking, the humbucker delivers on every count: balance, output, clarity and warmth. The humbucking pickup is the most expensive of our selection, but for those who can stretch to it, it's well worth some serious consideration.

The single-coil version of this pickup comes in nearly £40 cheaper. Yes, without the second stacked coil, there is a little more hum, but not enough to cause distraction. When strummed the sound is fairly similar to its humbucking sibling, but it's on fingerpicking duty, and on single-note runs and fills, that the single-coil comes into its own. The tone is sweeter and has more character than any other pickup tested here. As to whether the delicate nuances of this single-coil's tone would remain apparent in a band setting is questionable, but if amplification is for the purpose of recording, then this unit offers a very interesting tonal alternative.

