

# Encore Blaster E6 & E2

## Electric guitars

These electrics from John Hornby Skewes' Encore range may be entry-level guitars at an entry-level price, but you might be surprised by the quality.

### Paul White

**E**ncore guitars have long been a good-value mainstay for the budding guitar player, but John Hornby Skewes have recently revised the range with help from their 'guitar specialist in residence', Trevor Wilkinson, the designer behind the current Vintage, Vintage Advance and Fret-King guitars. Not surprisingly, the general shape and feature sets of these instruments follow those of popular classic models from the major American makers, but with the Encore headstock shape and the Guitar Tech logo printed on the pickups adding a little visual distinction. I got hold of the E6 and E2 models, but have also spent some time with the other models in the series, so I can confirm that the build quality and attention to detail carries through the range, although all the models have bolt-on necks, even where the originals that inspired them have fixed necks.

### Fender familiarity

The Encore E6 owes much to Leo Fender's original three-pickup classic in terms of shape and layout, and comes with a full-thickness, reasonably light body made from one of the popular Far Eastern tonewoods such as agathis or wuton, as opposed to the US choice of alder or swamp ash. The arm and body contours are present, albeit not quite as generously deep as on the most sought-after US classics, and the paint job is a high-gloss polyester finish in a colour not too far removed from Fender's Olympic White.

Unlike some of the budget guitars I've met in the past, the E6 comes with a comfortable C-profile, 25.5-inch scale, bolt-on maple neck with a 10-inch radius



## Tech Spec

### E6

- Maple neck with 10-inch radius rosewood overhanging fingerboard.
- 650mm scale length, 22 frets, graphite top nut.
- Three single-coil Guitar Tech pickups with exposed pole pieces.
- Volume, two tone controls, five-way pickup selector switch.

rosewood fingerboard, which overhangs the neck slightly to support a 22nd fret. This is a hint flatter than the 9.5-inch radius used on most modern Fender instruments, and is a good compromise between ease of playing and choke-free string bending. The frets are

pressed-steel, vintage-style adjustable saddles and a screw-in arm. If there's a compromise, it is that the tremolo block is less massive than those on the best instruments, but it still gives adequate sustain. A three-ply white pickguard supports the pickups and controls, which comprise the now familiar 'one volume, two tone, plus five-way selector' layout of the original classic. All three pickups are single-coil types with exposed pole pieces and bear the Guitar Tech logo, showing they were designed for JHS by Trevor Wilkinson.

Tonally, the sound is close to what you'd expect from a guitar of this style, with the distinctive 'hollow' tones in the midway switch positions, though the neck pickup is perhaps just slightly warmer and darker than you'd expect on a US original. Played unplugged, the E6 has a lively tone with good sustain,

tone control via a three-way selector switch, and the jack exits the edge of the body in the traditional way for this type of instrument. As you can see, the chrome control panel and knurled metal knobs give this instrument a very solid and traditional look.

The metal-encased neck pickup delivers the warm jazz/blues tones associated with this design, while the larger open-pole bridge pickup is suitably brash and bright, but with an underlying sweetness that makes it well suited to both pop and country styles. In the middle position, both pickups work together to provide a warm yet jangly blend. I did a comparison with my US Telecaster and found the general tonality to be roughly similar, though the real thing was somehow smoother and more resonant. While the E6's strings sat optimally across the neck, I felt the high E was just a hint too close to the edge for comfort on the E2, but that may have been a quirk of this particular sample. Overall, it's a very worthwhile budget guitar that would again benefit from a professional setup to improve the action at the nut end.

**"...when you take into account the build quality and sound, these new Encores have a great deal to offer..."**

nickel silver medium-jumbo types, and the neck is fitted with decent sealed tuners with period-correct metal buttons. There's a single string tree on the headstock and plastic pearloid markers inset into the fingerboard, with matching white dots set into the upper edge. A low-friction top nut is installed and the action is reasonable right out of the box, though a little work on the nut slots would further improve this. I was most impressed by the neck profile, which felt comfortable right away, and though the fingerboard edges are a little sharp, a luthier could round these off for you in a few minutes to give more of a rolled or 'played-in' feel. The fret ends are nicely rounded and polished on the review sample, with no obvious buzzes or other problems.

The body is fitted with a conventional six-screw fulcrum vibrato unit, complete with

but lacks some of the resonant warmth you'd expect of a more costly guitar. Nevertheless, it is a gratifyingly playable instrument capable of a good range of classic tones.

### Solid and traditional

The E2 is also based on a very familiar shape with its correctly dimensioned slab body, but again this isn't too heavy, and the three-tone sunburst finish on the review sample is very attractive. The neck and tuner specification is pretty much identical to that of the E6, while the body features a single-ply, bevelled pickguard and the familiar metal bridge/pickup mount design pioneered for Leo Fender's first commercial instrument, complete with through-body stringing and three round bar bridge saddles, adjustable for height and intonation (per pair of strings). Two Guitar Tech pickups feed a single volume and

### Conclusion

I only wish there had been guitars this good available when I started learning to play. These are great-value beginner instruments, but with a pro setup they'd also be good enough to satisfy many gigging players who might just get a kick out of the inverted snobbery value of strolling onto the stage with an Encore and sounding amazing! The weakest point on most cheap guitars is the neck, but here the intervention of Trevor Wilkinson has clearly paid off. There are many other worthwhile entry-level guitars, not to mention Fender's own Affinity Squier range, but when you take into account the build quality and sound, these new Encores have a great deal to offer and deserve a place on the 'must try' list of anyone looking for a good-value instrument that they won't grow out of in a hurry. Definitely a step up from the Encores of old. ■ PM

## Performing Musician

E6 (Vintage White) £125  
E2 (Sunburst) £125

All the classic shapes are available in the Encore Blaster range, and all offer a good combination of sound and playability. At the price, there's little not to like, but if you can get your guitar store to dress the nut for you at a reasonable price (and this also applies to many of the more expensive guitars we've looked at), they'll play even better.

JHS +44 (0)1132 865381  
www.jhs.co.uk



## Tech Spec

### E2

- Fully radiused body.
- Medium-depth maple neck.
- 648mm scale length, 22 frets, graphite nut.
- Two Guitar Tech single-coil pickups.
- One volume, one tone, three-way lever pickup selector switch.