

# MacPherson Guitars - The Pagan

Dan MacPherson is one of the 'backroom boys' of the pro guitar world. After years of working behind the scenes he has finally launched his new Pagan model - a no holds barred electric, combining great looks with top class hardware.

**Doug Cartwright** looks spellbound.

4.5

STAR RATING

## PROS:

Elite instruments for serious players and professionals

Handcrafted using traditional tools and techniques by a British luthier with decades of experience

Exquisite detail and flawless workmanship

Every instrument is unique by nature of design and construction

## CONS:

Probably won't retain resale value comparable to mainstream brands

**D**an MacPherson is one of the luthiers on the frontline of British guitar making, with a wealth of experience and industry knowledge under his belt. His previous company D.M. Guitars started trading in 1990, offering a full repair, refinishing and custom guitar service. D.M. teamed up with Burns London in 1993 for paint finishes and eventually made bodies and pre-Chinese Burns prototypes, as well as doing paint finishes for a host of other companies and carrying out the entire production for JJ Guitars from 2004-2010. In 2010 Dan started to phase-in MacPherson Guitars, before closing D.M. Guitars for good in 2013 to focus solely on his own brand of guitars and basses.

Dan brought three of his creations into the GI studio for me to test out, all variations of his Pagan model which is the modern Rock guitar in his new line. Dan offers three levels of

instrument for each design in his catalogue; the Standard (which all three of these instruments fall under), the Stock Custom (whereby he modifies designs with specs including exotic wood choices and tops) and the Private Order Custom where the customer can have a guitar built to their own exact specifications. Even though all three Pagans were from the Standard line, they all had different specifications to demonstrate the range of features available from MacPherson guitars; as Dan is building all these guitars himself he often changes up the details on each instrument, an advantage of being an independent luthier.

Standard across all three instruments were the S-style body shape, 24-fret Canadian rock maple neck, bolt-on construction and dual humbucker pickup configurations. All three guitars featured different neck profiles; a flat D that felt familiarly modern and what I expected to find on a

“ You might love or hate that look but whatever your thoughts on the aesthetics there was no denying that our sample was finished to an excellent standard throughout, and would certainly turn heads.

contemporary Rock instrument, a modern C profile which felt more traditional and should please the legion of players who feel uncomfortable on the thin neck profiles of most mainstream modern Rock axes, and a positively anorexic ultra thin D profile which Dan created to prove it could be done! Although the third profile proved too thin for my taste I have no doubt there's a shredder out there who would love it, while the modern C and flat D profiles both felt instantly familiar and comfortable in my hands.



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The three necks featured pau ferro, Indian rosewood and maple fretboards, all bound using wood cut from the fretboard blanks to ensure there are no rough fret edges to spoil the smoothness of the neck overall. The binding was finished immaculately on all three instruments and looked absolutely superb, a really nice touch and an indication of the time, skill and dedication that's gone into creating these instruments. They all featured a radius of 9.5 to 16 inches, a large compound radius that Dan has created that really feels unique under the hands; the fingerboard feels like a vintage instrument close to the nut and flattens out considerably towards the higher frets. I instantly liked this design, finding it supremely comfortable and intuitive under my fingers. The necks also featured a 3.5 degree angled headstock for ideal string tension and graphite or bone nuts.

The bodies of all review models were swamp ash, with comfort cuts and a recessed neck pocket for extra upper fret access and weight relief. As would be expected from a man with extensive paint experience, the finishes on all three were fantastic, with a transparent purple gloss finish, a transparent red matte finish and a natural matte lacquer which all looked absolutely brilliant. My favourite of the three was the transparent red, as the matte finish really looked contemporary and suited the stylings of the guitar overall.

The guitars all featured top quality hardware from Hipshot, Schaller and Gotoh, installed and set-up to perfection. Each instrument featured different pickups from three different UK based pickup manufacturers; Oil City, Gemini and renowned

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British luthier Steve Smith's own Johnson Buckers. I had no prior experience with any of these pickups but found all to be excellent, with great dynamic range and responsiveness. In the accompanying video I did my best to demonstrate the full variety of different guitar sounds that I felt could be accomplished with any of these guitars. Pickups are really a matter of taste and preference but I was genuinely impressed by all three of the brands I encountered here, all giving the more established pickup brands a run for their money and definitely worth thorough investigation from any serious tone hound.

It's important to remember that most MacPherson guitars are sold direct and therefore all of the options I'm mentioning here are selectable by the customer when placing an order.

In addition to all of the specifications that I've gone through, a really key feature of these guitars is that Dan builds them all by hand using traditional tools and methods, without the use of CNC machines. This is the mark of a true craftsman and really sets MacPherson guitars apart from the majority of the competition. The exquisite details of the instruments and the perfection of the work on all three guitars is truly outstanding,

and the handmade aesthetic ensures that each guitar is a unique, personal creation which should really appeal for those in the market for a custom guitar.

Of course, these guitars won't appeal to everyone. For many people looking to spend north of US \$2,500/£1,500 on a musical instrument, only a classic design by a world famous brand will do. The influence of established player endorsements and the legacy of some of the world's great guitars has as much influence on many prospective buyers as build quality, aesthetics and tone, and this is a tough problem to overcome for independent builders. In addition, the resale value of instruments such as these is unreliable at best so they can never be viewed (or justified to suspicious spouses!) as a safe investment.

On the other hand, serious players and professionals with experience of a variety of guitars and a solid knowledge of exactly what they want may prefer the personal touch offered by an independent luthier, and the quality and diversity of specifications on Dan's guitars suggest that anyone in the market for a top-of-the line electric guitar and looking to buy something a bit special and different from the norm would do well to check out the MacPherson line.

When you take away the question of brand snobbery, Dan MacPherson's Pagan guitars are actually exceptionally good value for money, costing a lot less than what are essentially mass produced guitars from the industry 'big names', while offering levels of quality and personality that you won't get in many cases, even from so called 'custom shop' models.

We liked these. A lot. •



## TECH SPEC

### MacPherson Guitars The Pagan (Standard)

Price as tested: Red and Natural  
£1,649. Purple: £1,749  
US and other prices on application.

Contact: [www.macphersonguitars.com](http://www.macphersonguitars.com)

Handmade in: UK

#### PURPLE:

Body; Swamp Ash 2 piece  
Neck; Rock Maple, 3.5 degree  
headstock pitch  
Truss rod; 2 piece 2 way  
Fingerboard; Indian Rosewood 9.5 to  
16 inch compound radius  
Frets; 24 Jescar medium high Stainless  
steel  
Nut; Bone  
Pickups; Johnson Buckers  
Machine heads; Gotoh H.A.P  
Bridge/Tremolo; Hipshot  
Controls; Vol & tone pushpull for coil  
split and 3 way toggle  
Finish; Colour wash purple

#### NATURAL

Body; Swamp Ash 2 piece  
Neck; Rock Maple, 3.5 degree

headstock pitch  
Truss rod; 2 piece 2 way  
Fingerboard; Pau Ferro 9.5 to 16 inch  
compound radius  
Frets; 24 Jescar medium high Stainless  
steel  
Nut; graphite  
Pickups; Oil City "Nightfighters"  
Machine heads; Gotoh H.A.P  
Bridge/Tremolo; Hipshot Contour  
Controls; Vol & tone pushpull for coil  
split and 3 way toggle  
Finish; Natural

#### RED

Body; Swamp Ash 2 piece  
Neck; Rock Maple, 3.5 degree  
headstock pitch  
Truss rod; 2 piece 2 way  
Fingerboard; Maple 9.5 to 16 inch  
compound radius  
Frets; 24 jumbo wide nickel steel  
Nut; Graphite  
Pickups; Gemini "Swamp Witch"  
Machine heads; Gotoh H.A.P  
Bridge/Tremolo; Schaller STM  
Controls; Vol & tone pushpull for coil  
split and 3 way toggle  
Finish; Blood red – matt