



<http://bit.ly/guitarist388>

CRAFTY BRIT

British builder for various UK brands breaks out under his own name. About time, too!

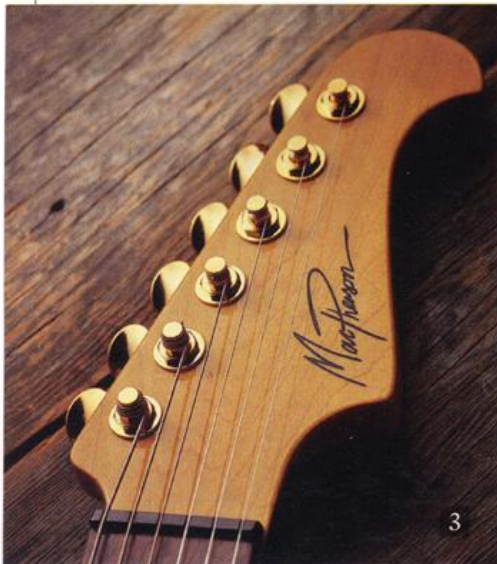
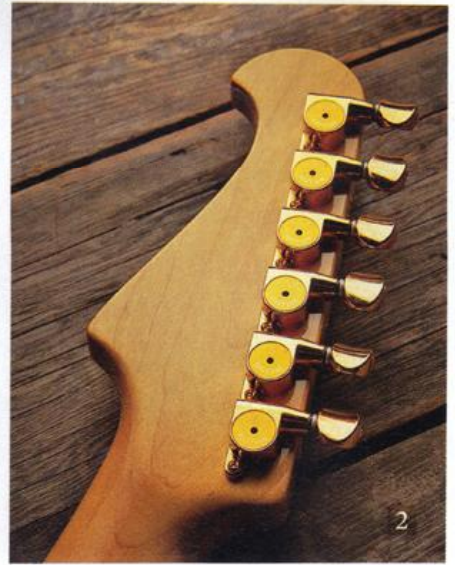
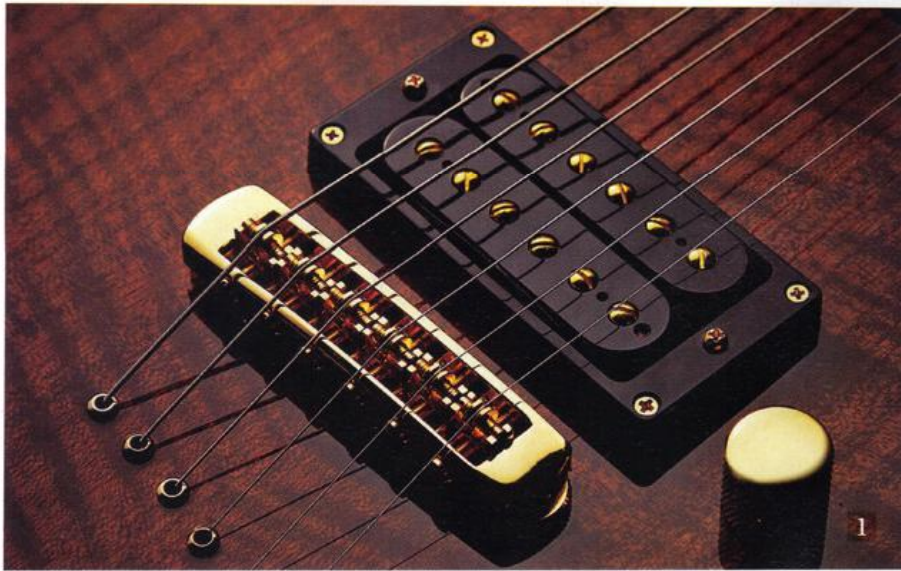
WORDS **DAVE BURRLUCK**

PHOTOGRAPHY **JOBY SESSIONS**

Based in Southend, Dan MacPherson is one of the most experienced UK guitar makers you, quite possibly, won't have heard of. Without knowing it, you might well have read about his work, played or even owned one of his guitars. Dan MacPherson, as DM Guitars, has been the 'ghost' builder for numerous small UK brands, supplying parts, finishing and even entire instruments since 1990, along with creating numerous custom guitars. In 2010, Dan changed focus to launch his eponymous brand with standard models – all with copious options, of course – as well as one-off custom dream machines. He's an old-school builder, too: pin routers, not CNC machines. He classes our review instrument, the Nomad, as "the first of the new MacPherson range of guitars... a versatile go-anywhere instrument."

As befits his reputation, the Nomad is impeccably crafted. It's an elegant, paired-down design, based, of course, on the Stratocaster, with subtly different cutaway geometry and numerous nods to modern makers such as PRS, with its natural edge 'binding'. The body is centre-jointed swamp ash faced with a figured tola veneer (an African wood used commonly as a furniture veneer), that aside from its deep brown colouration looks like a 'dirty' figured maple compared to the stronger, simpler waved grain of the swamp ash. It gives the instrument a restrained 'poshness' that's offset perfectly by the gold-plated Schaller roller-saddle bridge, Gotoh HAP tuners, control knobs, mounting screws and Schaller strap buttons.

The maple neck, joined to the body on the round-nosed heel by four recessed screws, has a lovely shallow C-style profile (20.6mm deep at the 1st fret, 22.4mm at the 12th) and is



topped with an Indian rosewood 'board that features immaculately fitted and fettled Jescar stainless steel frets – the only markers are on the side. As reflects the modernist vibe, the fingerboard radius is conical, starting with a modern Fender 9.5 inches and gradually flattening out to 16 inches by the 22nd fret. “The fingerboard is bound,” says MacPherson, “the fingerboard blank has two strips cut from it, which are then glued back on [after the fret slots are cut] prior to fretting. This not only looks neat, but it prevents ‘lacquer pop’ and makes refretting a lot cleaner.”

Finishing, too, is superb: “the neck is finished in polyurethane with a light vintage tint and the finish to the body is polyester, but as you’ll see, it’s not a yard thick, as most people believe polyester is. The top colour is the natural colour of the tola veneer with a light burst added; the rear of the body is a light tint burst to harmonise the contrast of the front.”

The dual Gemini pickups are also UK-made, the Mountain King “offers rich, creamy (almost vintage-like) humbucker sounds,”

according to Gemini, “but with more girth and a bit less presence. Even amps with limited gain will saturate much more quickly.”

Feel & Sounds

The supplied setup is light and low and the flatter fingerboard and relatively thin but high frets ensure fast and really in-tune playability. There’s little doubt this is designed for the more virtuoso player. There’s a crisp ring acoustically, with a little more ‘Gibson’, in terms of a honkier midrange to the character – all part of its hybrid design. Plugged in, moving from both vintage and modern-spec single-coil Strats to this is really quite a leap. The clean Fender twang and crispness of our reference guitars is dramatically revoiced: darker and thicker... and that’s in single-coil mode; full humbucker voices sound like a power-Les Paul with the tone knocked back. With some amp adjustment, while we miss some more classic single-coil bite, there are some rich sounds here that certainly suit extended jazzier chord voicings and arpeggios, though where we’d

- 1** The tasteful gold-plated Schaller roller-saddle bridge and controls give the Nomad a refined look
- 2** Gotoh’s height-adjustable post (HAP) tuners do what they say and ensure perfectly balanced behind-the-nut string angles
- 3** The headstock is back-angled 3.5 degrees, so in combination with those tuners there’s no need for string trees. Truss rod access is vintage-style at the body end of the neck
- 4** The C-shape profile maple neck is joined to the body by these four recessed screws

<http://bit.ly/guitarist388>

usually go for the volume to thin things out a little we lose more clarity, and the tone stays fully up all through our tests. There are certainly some power-Gibson sounds here, with crunchier classic-rock gain, and where most of our guitars would be uncontrollable at extreme gain, this one loves those scenarios.

Verdict

This is a fabulously made guitar that is near-impossible to fault. To our ears, however, the pickup choice is a little polarising: in heavier-gained settings it might well be your ultimate sound, but for its more journeyman intention, we'd be spec'ing some hot-vintage 'buckers, which would suit the style a little more. Of course, that's the beauty of the custom maker: your favourite pickup is just an email or phone call away, and MacPherson offers the cream of UK-made pickup brands.

And that is the whole *raison d'être* of makers such as Dan MacPherson: £2,000 will buy you a very good off-the-shelf bolt-on, but if you want your own features you'll more often than not be disappointed or find you're shown into a steeply rising 'custom shop' scenario. Not here – even the basic option list is expansive – and we've rarely played a better UK custom guitar. If you know what you want, this is world class. **G**

Even the basic option list is expansive – and we've rarely played a better UK custom guitar

MacPherson Nomad

PRICE: £1,995 (inc case)

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Solidbody electric

BODY: Two-piece swamp ash with figured tola veneer top

NECK: Maple, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Graphite/43.2mm

FINGERBOARD: Indian rosewood, abalone side dots, 241-406mm (9.5-16") radius

FRETS: 22, medium/high stainless steel

HARDWARE: Gold-plated Schaller STM roller saddle bridge with through-body strings; Grover enclosed HAP tuners

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm

ELECTRICS: Two Gemini Mountain King open-coil humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume (with pull/push coil-tap for bridge pickup) and master tone (with pull/push coil-tap for neck pickup)

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 3.5/7.72

OPTIONS: The base price of the Nomad is £1,649 with satin finish and chrome hardware. Numerous options, inc body and fingerboard wood, inlays, neck shape, and pickups and hardware. £POA

RANGE OPTIONS: MacPherson standard models include the Tele-inspired Outlaw (from £1,749), the classic-rock Rogue (from £999), the set-neck Preacher (£POA) and the posher-rock Pagan (from £1,649)

LEFT-HANDERS: To order

FINISHES: Semi-natural high gloss Tola 'Burst

MacPherson Guitars

01702 465930

www.macphersonguitars.com



GUITARIST RATING	★★★★★
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: Beautifully made and finished with a very clean modern aesthetic. The supplied pickups are aimed at gain-laden tones but, of course, you can choose your own