

Guitars from the star!

The South Louisiana-based guitar company Melancon, have once again sent two of their guitars to keep Music Mart's **Sean Bown** happy. He looks at the VT Artist and VT Artist Custom with the help of Frank Westworth, a life long Strat player.



The VT Artist Custom and VT Artist Standard.

One thing about receiving guitars from Melancon, is that I know I'm in for a right royal treat. As with the Pro Artist models, reviewed some time ago, these VT Artist models are in the classic Strat shape.

Both guitars are near on identical - for all but a few optional extras on the Custom model. This is a good chance to look at what difference these changes make - and if they warrant the extra dosh. For Strat users it'll all be like second nature - double cutaways, three single-coil pick-ups and that familiar layout. If you forget what it says on the headstock, the only major visual clue to the fact that these are not Fender Strats (albeit expensive ones, is the rounded body finish at the bottom of the neck. Although not a major difference, this little feature makes playing high notes a lot more comfortable than one with

the traditional squared finish.

The standard VT is finished in Boiled Crawfish Red which looks fantastic - add the wood beading around the edge and this guitar is almost irresistible. The custom version has the same beading around the edge with a Amber Burst finish, which looks just as tasty. Both have AAA Flame Maple for the top of the body, with the VT Artist Custom boasting Louisiana Swamp Ash for the back body as opposed to the standard's Alder. Both guitars come with the highest build quality you can imagine, nothing about the standard model is!

The 22-fret neck on both guitars is made from Maple and has truss-rod bolts at both ends - meaning no need to remove the neck to make adjustments. Indian Rosewood is the standard choice for the fingerboard, but the custom option uses Honduran Rosewood - a

beautiful wood that's lighter in colour and like velvet to the touch. This addition alone, though subtle on paper adds an not-immediately obvious touch of individuality to its appearance.

Both guitars sport the usual Strat electric package; 5-way pick-up selector switch, two tone controls and one volume control, operating three Melancon Custom Wound single coil pick-ups.

Standard VT hardware consists of Grover tuners and a Melancon Vintage Trem - all finished chrome. The Custom sports Melancon tuners and a very sturdy looking Trevor Wilkinson designed and badged Trem.

Comfortably Numb

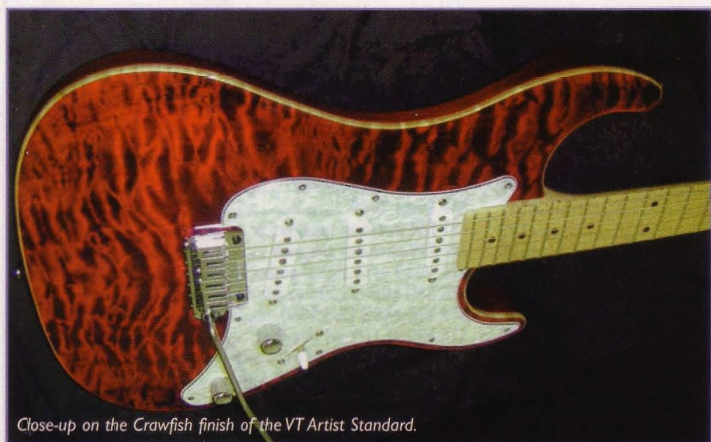
As the Standard VT Artist goes over my shoulder, the first impression is of how well balanced this axe is. Good balance fuels confidence, due to

how right this guitar feels in your hands. Selecting bridge pick-up instantly gets a classic Strat tone, although slightly warmer in comparison to an actual vintage model. Add some reverb and delay to this sound and whatever Pink Floyd track you play, it sounds right, even hitting those massive Gilmore bends doesn't seem quite as daunting on this guitar. Other pick-up configurations that I particularly liked, were the bridge/middle pick-up option - great for playing dirty guitar solo's with a big sound - and the neck only pick-up, which was spot on for big warm blues tones

Even after ringing the hell out of this guitar and giving the Melancon trem some stick, this axe stays in perfect tune. Always a good sign that you've got a quality piece of kit in your hands.

The actual feel of the neck is cracking, anything seems possible, but just when you think that it doesn't get any better, I swap guitars and give the custom beauty a blast. Confession time; the only other guitar that I've played that felt this good was a 1971 Gibson 335, which looked like it had been to hell and back. This baby, with the Honduran Rosewood fret-board (which makes a big difference, not least in looks), is a future classic - one can only imagine what it will be like in 20 years time.

I crack on with some heavy riffs, and surprisingly there's quite a difference in tone. The Custom VT has a slightly richer edge and a bit more natural sustain, which can only be due to the choice of Swamp Ash used for the back of



Close-up on the Crawfish finish of the VT Artist Standard.

this axe. Even if you just play one string on this guitar, you'll still sound like a rock god.

Conclusion


Once again I'm blown away with these guitars from Melancon. I've not found a fault with any of the four I've had in the last year, bar the price tags (investments)!

The build quality of the VT Artist and Custom Artist is outstanding, in car terms their the Rolls Royce of guitars, great finishes, fabulous tones and some cracking custom options,

which are definitely worth the extra cash.

The VT Artists possess a soul, that almost convinces you that these guitars aren't new. All of them feel like they've been played-in especially for you.

Now, onto that 'fault'; for the standard VT Artist you'll need to shell out £1827 and if you fancy the custom options as well, £. However, as with most things, you get what you pay for.

If you're in the market for a vintage Strat or other high end guitar, before you part with your gold, give one of these guitars a go, you won't be disappointed. 

VT Fax

Origin: USA

VT Artist

Colour: Boiled Crawfish Red

Top: AAA Flamed Maple

Back: Alder

Neck: Maple

Fingerboard:

Indian Rosewood

Pick-ups:

Melancon Custom Wound

Hardware:

Melancon Vintage Trem

Price: £1827 inc. VAT

VT Artist Custom

Colour: Amber Burst

Top: AAA Flamed Maple

Back: Louisiana Swamp Ash

Neck: Maple

Fingerboard:

Honduran Rosewood

Pick-ups:

Melancon Custom Wound

Hardware: Wilkinson Trem

Price: £POA

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Some instruments cry out to be played. They lie there in their cases with an eagerness which can make a player's fingers twitch. They should never be ignored.

Others can be about as appealing and as desirable as the traditional rat sandwich; lumpen, oddly balanced efforts which repay your efforts with sore fingers, and sounds which would disgrace the most pathetic garage rocker. I took one like that on tour once, wrestled with the be-poxed thing all across Europe for a month. It was vile.

Not so the VT Artist Custom - this beamed from its case, shouting 'play me!', just like a good guitar should. A set of Fender Rock&Roll .008 shiners fixes things on the string front (those provided were thick enough to tow a Cruise Liner), and it's time to explore the fretboard - and a fine thing it is. Easy, slick, smooth and accurate enough to allow an action low enough for serious full-tone string bending, or the vast action favoured by slide players.

A good solid electric guitar sings, even when unplugged, and a lazy half hour behind the Music Mart editorial desk proved it once again. There's no lying when a solid's played without amplification. What you hear is the voice of the instrument itself; the sustain is all from the body's resonances and the accuracy of the fretting; the harmonics sing like ethereal things, as I reel off chord inversions across the whole of the fretboard all the characteristics of this fine machine are on show. There are several top-price acoustics with standards of resonance and clarity well

below those displayed by this little singer.

The fretwire is clean stuff too, allowing heroic blues bending, tight jazz chording and even a few stunt arpeggios with a superb lack of fuss. It's so easy to play, it's fast, too - high-neck part-chords and finger trem (single note and chord) are as rewarding as they should be. I'm liking this, can you tell?

Plug in time. No hum. Well, it's more modern than my own Sixties Strat, and electrics have come a long way! Turn up the gain to '10', on both instrument and amplifier. Let the guitar hang from the shoulder, no hands, and let it start to sing to itself. It does too...

Hit a 12th fret G harmonic; play the peal of bells around that fret and the 5th and 7th - always a simple test of guitar purity. And it passes with flying colours, the final harmonic chord fading into a scream of feedback through the trusty Valvestate. The whole body is moving now, and everything is bouncing as we scream through some solos with no effects other than extreme pick-up sensitivity and an action which was designed for exactly this. Ease of play at its highest.

Club the strings quiet with the ball of the right hand on its bridge, crank the guitar's settings down to '5', switch to bass pick-up only, and clunk into the opening bars of Goodbye Pork Pie Hat, Jeff Beck-style. It plays jazz too. Like it should.

This is a grand instrument. It's able to play you anything you want. Who could ask for anything more?

Frank Westworth