

ASHTON FIDELITY \$249
ELECTRICS



Guitarist
CHOICE

Ashton Fidelity \$249

An Aussie made, sub-\$300 guitar that rocks our cotton socks? You'd better believe it. *By Steve Henderson*

Ashton just seem to keep coming up with great stuff – Australian designed, built in China and distributed worldwide – and, in spite of the our isolation from the rest of the world, seem to be winning. Its products have often been viewed with skepticism by those who don't see the value in entry level products – an attitude that has more to do with pride than an honest evaluation of the gear. To be fair, some of Ashton's earlier products were very "budget" and it's easy to tar the whole catalogue with that brush – when you build to a price, choices need to be made.

But lately, their products have exhibited a quality that belies their price tag and only be great for the user.

This guitar, the Ashton Fidelity, is a perfect example of this value-for-money approach. It's basically a Telecaster-style guitar with a twist. The electronics and general facilities are pure Tele but the body is a variation on the theme. If you had to find the middle ground between a Tele, a LP and a Music Man Axis, this is probably how it would look. The body is light and resonant, and the off-white body binding (front and back – cool!) on the black paint job gives it a dose of

rock and roll cool to go with the elegant shape.

The neck is slim and surprisingly comfortable for a guitar in this price range. Without a doubt, the designers have come up with a neck that is a accommodating compromise, not quite Gibson but not quite Fender: a 25.5" scale with a 12" radius, a separate maple fingerboard with a on a shallow D-shaped maple neck. It has a very solid, stable feel with a nice satin finish that slicks up the more it's played. The back of the neck, behind the nut, where the neck becomes the headstock, is reminiscent of the old Peavey T-

60 guitars...very strong and reliable. It's comfortable all along its length and especially behind the nut, which is usually a problem with cheaper guitars.

The scratch plate has a '69 Fender Thinline vibe, covering a lot more real estate than the usual Tele pick guard and incorporating the controls, rather than having a separate control plate. With the prevailing interest in the more obscure vintage guitars, this is a pretty cool choice and manages to avoid the bleeding obvious.

Sounds

So, getting right down to it, this is fun guitar to play. It's comfortable to hold on the knee or on a strap, and the body resonance can be felt through your ribs. The Fidelity has the same body contours as a Fender Tele – none. So, if you are looking for that rib-hugging Strat vibe, you won't find it hear. But this guitar has a great vibe all of its own, with a body that lets you feel



The classic Tele-feel



A nice, solid feel to the neck

the music as well as hear it. The Fidelity has no real surprises in its electronics. For the price, we weren't expecting the richness of a classic Tele but there's enough to satisfy most people. The bite and power of the bridge pickup is all there, enough to drive the front end of your amp in a solid way. It doesn't have the upper-mid honk that other brands might have but there's plenty of juice to make up for it. The neck pickup has that nice, almost hollow, sweetness that is as much at home with jazz as rock or pop. This pickup backs off nicely for clean sounds and rolled-off jazzy tones. Would you use this guitar for jazz? Absolutely and remember that its ancestor was created in the late '40s, before rock and roll, when jazz and country were the prevailing styles.

The body shape allows plenty upper fret access and the wide, flattish fingerboard makes for a very modern feel. Through the Traynor combo, this guitar has plenty of sonic options. The Vintage 30 loved both pickups, distorted or clean, although we had to roll the dirty channel's

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treble off a little. Through the Boogie and quad, the hollow front tone became more apparent, making us dial out the bass a little.


Through the old Vibrolux (12" Jensen) and the Boogie combo (12" EV), two completely different amps, the Ashton sounded big and strong without the "ring" that cheaper guitars often exhibit. We had to dial the Boogies treble down a touch but this was not to fix a problem as much as it was a personal choice to allow for the brightness of the EV. With the Vibrolux, it was like the guitar had come home to where it belonged. Maybe it was the lower power (there was a similar vibe with the Traynor) because the Ashton loved pushing the 30w power amp.

We expected the guitar to not fair too well with the various distortion devices but, again, there were no shrill tones to deal

with and the extra gain from the pickups slammed these effects a little harder than a similar guitar of "another brand". All the effects seemed to have their own relationship with the Ashton, and all responded kindly to the guitars tones.

Verdict

If there's a criticism to be found of the Ashton, then maybe the cap in the tone circuit could be changed to raise the roll off frequency – the tone tends to go a little too dull rather than shelving just some frequencies. But this is really picky.

The whole package works extremely well and, for the money, it's hard to beat. You could do a lot worse than the Ashton Fidelity and, if you wanted a richer sound, install some pro-quality pickups and you'd still have a great value instrument that won't break the bank. This is what young musos need and what seasoned musos shouldn't be scared to check out. 



Ashton Fidelity

PRICE: \$249
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Solid body, bolt-on neck
BODY: Basswood
NECK: Maple
SCALE LENGTH: 25.5"
FINISH: Black (with white binding) body, natural satin neck
FINGERBOARD: Maple, 12" radius
FRETS: 22 Slim Jumbo
WIDTH AT NUT: 1.69"
WIDTH AT THE 15TH FRET: 2.03"
TUNERS: Sealed Schaller-style 6-a-side
HARDWARE: Chrome
BRIDGE: Fixed
ELECTRONICS: Single coil (neck and bridge); 3-way switch, master volume and tone
Ashton Music 02 9698 4444
www.ashton.com.au

The bottom line

WE LIKE: The comfy neck and the semi-retro

WE DISLIKE: At this price, there's nothing worthy of any real criticism

GUITARIST SAYS: Solid feel and tones, great value

Test results

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★
PLAYABILITY ★★★★★
SOUND ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★