

Fret King Blue Label Esprit 3

Chris Vinnicombe

FINAL REPORT The man from Del-Newporté, he say YES!



After months of blood, sweat and beers with the Esprit 3 in hand, it's crunch time. Clearly, it's a very cool looking guitar indeed, and for some people this factor alone would quite rightly be reason enough for them to hand over their £569. However, there's much more to this guitar than simply aesthetics.

In studio recording and full band environments, the Esprit's trio of gutsy P-90s have covered a considerable amount of ground.

From Stonesy sixties R&B to heavy Queens Of The Stone Age-style riffing and blazing lead, there's always been a satisfying combination of chewy raunch and bright articulation. The sheer range from the three pickups and five-way switch means that the Esprit 3 is an exceedingly useful guitar to have lying around.

Admittedly it's never going to usurp the sunburst ES-335 that is my main, long-term six-string squeeze, but they are entirely different creatures both sonically and in terms of feel. It took me a

little while to get used to the way that the Esprit 3 hangs on a strap, but while it's pretty weighty, it balances well. Something about the way the guitar looks and feels when strapped on means that you just can't help throwing more shapes than usual. In short, it's really fun to play and pretty damn rock 'n' roll too.

If I was going to keep this instrument, I wouldn't make any radical modifications, but I would be tempted to get the wire wool out. The white finish has a nice vintage-looking, slightly nicotine-stained hue, but it's quite thick and glossy to the touch. I think that cutting away some of that polyester sheen with wire wool, leaving the instrument with more of a satin feel would let the guitar body breathe a bit more and also help it feel a touch more played-in.

In terms of less permanent modifications, the Esprit 3 also

proved to be a mean guitar for electric slide when I raised the action and upped the string gauge. The natural rooty voicing of the guitar's pickups has a real authenticity in this context, with a little amp spring reverb sweetening things further. The Esprit's pickup configuration really is incredibly versatile and if your sonic tastes are in any way old-school then you won't have many complaints.

Okay, so it doesn't do a big humbucker rock sound, but that's what my ES-335 is for. The best way to describe the Fret-King's tonal palette is to imagine a P-90-equipped Les Paul or SG Special with a pinch of Strat-like twang thrown into the mix – raunchy and raucous for rhythm, wonderful for lead.

So, with much hand-wringing and procrastination – this always accompanies any guitar purchase I make and is no reflection on this particular instrument – I suspect that I'm going to end up having to break open the piggy bank for this one. And that's when the wire wool comes out...



Chris is fond of the Esprit 3, but a little wire wool could persuade him to keep it

Spec Check

Fret King Blue Label Esprit 3



First reviewed: 301

Price: £569

Type: Solidbody electric

Body: Three-piece mahogany

Neck: One-piece mahogany, glued-in

Pickups: Three Fret-King P-90-style single-coils

Bridge: Gotoh tune-o-matic and stud tailpiece

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