



You want a Jazz. No, a Precision. No, a Gibson. No - you just want to be different. Relax and breathe in: there is an answer to your desperate quandary. Review by Gareth Morgan

Fret-King

Blue Label Ventura Super 80 Bass

We've encountered basses designed by Trevor Wilkinson before - some Italias, some Vintages. Aside from spangly finishes on the Italia Mondial and Maranello (instruments that Wilkinson himself describes as 'video basses') they've always exuded an air of workmanlike practicality with sensible upgrades applied to traditional designs and materials. Wilkinson continues in this vein with his Korean-made Fret-King guitars and basses. If you're sitting comfortably, we'll begin to take a serious look at the Ventura Super 80, part of Fret-King's affordable Blue Label series.

The front half of the Ventura's body is a strangely satisfying mixture of Gibson Thunderbird and Fender Jaguar; the substantial waist leads to a chubby dorsal fin upper horn and a lower horn that's little more than a slight bulge. At the body's rear it's a different story: it's almost as if someone's taken a large chunk out of the lower bout and grafted it on to the corner of the upper bout. Symmetrical it certainly isn't, but this slightly ramshackle feel actually works. It's nostalgic, if weird, in a California-meets-'60s Italy kind of way.

This body is made from two pieces of American alder, finished in an attractive and expertly applied candy apple red outer coat and further decorated by a sweeping off-white scratchplate of vast proportions. The weak of shoulder will be interested to learn that at 4.55kg/10lbs



The body is alder coated in a delicious candy apple red finish. The other option is a vintage sunburst



The Ventura's headstock covers a fair amount of acreage. Tuners are old-fashioned elephant ear types

The three pickups are chosen to deliver a selection of practical old-school sounds to match the Ventura's evocative looks

the Ventura is fairly heavy, a factor that can be partly explained by the depth of the body which, at 45mm, is 3mm deeper than a Fender Jazz. Still, Fret-King offers substantial ribcage and more subtle forearm chamfers by way of comfort-inducing recompense, and, all things considered, these aren't a bad trade-off.

For the neck, Fret-King uses a single piece of Canadian rock maple, secured to the body with four bolts through a

chrome plate. It's a comfortable 'C' profile as opposed to ultra slim and fast, but the end result is in many ways equally as playable and, most importantly, very comfortable in the hand.

The Ventura's recessed headstock is Fender-derived, with a distinctive wave-like pattern along the bottom edge being the main differentiating factor. Four chrome Wilkinson WJ200 tuners with elephant ear buttons line the top edge, >

FACTFILE

BLUE LABEL VENTURA SUPER 80

Description: Solidbody bass. Made in Korea

Price: £669 inc. gig bag

Build: Two-piece American alder body, bolt-on Canadian rock maple neck with 20 medium jumbo nickel frets on a rosewood fingerboard. Wilkinson WJ200 Tuners and Wilkinson WBB4 Bridge. Chrome hardware

Electrics: Passive with one Wilkinson EBO, one Wilkinson WPB split P-type humbucker and one Wilkinson WJBR J-type single coil. Three volume controls and one five-way pickup selector switch

Left handers: No

Finishes: Candy apple red, original vintage burst

Range Options: None

Scale length: 864mm/34"

Width of neck:

Nut 42mm

12th fret 57mm

Depth of neck:

First fret 20mm

12th fret 23mm

String spacing:

Nut 12mm

Bridge 19mm

Action as supplied:

12th fret treble 2.5mm

2th fret bass 3mm

Weight: 4.55kg/10lbs

Contact: JHS

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www.fret-king.com

THE COMPETITION

SQUIER

Classic Vibe Jazz Bass

An excellent Chinese-made Jazz Bass with all the sonic elements we know and love at a really competitive price

RRP: £309

PEAVEY

Zodiac BXP Ellefson Signature

A high-quality, low-cost passive bass with a shiny scratchplate that some think is cool

RRP: £399

FLEABASS

Model 32

A distinctively-styled passive bass with an excellent selection of sounds. Really good

RRP: £449

and there's a chrome string tree and an expansive logo on the face. Beyond the white plastic nut, a rosewood fingerboard is fitted with the traditional 20 frets - always slightly illogical, since the lowest note is E and the highest note Eb. Made of medium jumbo nickel fretwire, they're neatly seated and blemish-free. There are position markers on both the face and top edge, and the bridge is a chrome Wilkinson WBB4 with brass saddles for improved sustain.

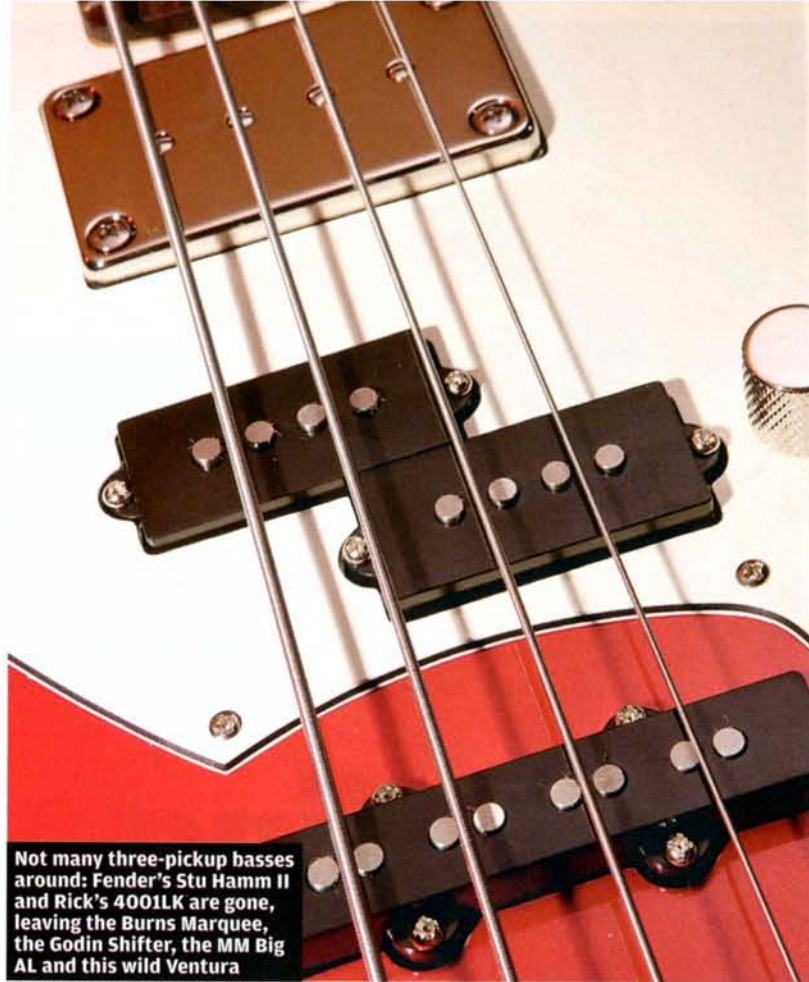
So back-to-basics is the passive Ventura in terms of electronics that it doesn't even offer any tone knobs, just individual pickup volume controls - but there's nothing basic about the highly unusual array of three pickups. In the neck position sits a fat chrome-covered humbucker of the type you'd find on a Gibson EB-0; in the middle there's a WPB split P-type; and by the bridge there's a WJBR J-type double-polepiece single-coil. There's also a five-position selector switch on the lower horn which offers various pickup combinations.

Those who like to sit and play may not find the Ventura's unusual shape and headstock-heavy nature all that comfortable. It's best to strap it on.

SOUNDS

By choosing passive electronics for the Ventura, Fret-King is choosing not to offer radically differing sounds at every switch selection. Instead, the three pickups have all been chosen to deliver a selection of highly practical old-school sounds to match the Ventura's evocative looks.

The pickup selector's first position (nearest the neck) solos the neck pickup; the second offers neck and middle; the third solos middle; fourth is middle and bridge; and fifth gives the bridge pickup - so all that's missing is the EB-0



Not many three-pickup basses around: Fender's Stu Hamm II and Rick's 4001LK are gone, leaving the Burns Marquee, the Godin Shifter, the MM Big AL and this wild Ventura

The neck pickup is perfect for jazz and soul and the middle pickup hints at pop, nasty funk and rocky confrontation

and bridge pickup together. Alone, that chunky chrome neck pickup gives plenty of width with a pleasing snarl and a soft, rubbery core. It's a thuddy, basic sound, perfect for jazz, rock'n'roll and soul, especially early Motown.

The split pickup amidships gets close to the P-Bass character with a more militant growl, more treble and a clear, more full-range voice. It's a much tighter-sounding selection, and the increased low mids give a reasonably satisfying punch with plenty of crisp, snappy attack across the spectrum. It's a sound that hints at pop and nasty funk but is also good for rocky confrontation.

There's just enough high mids in the bridge pickup's sound for a suggestion of the barking J-style tone we know and love. This, combined with a minor dose of high mids for a snappy, funky attack, is as close as the Ventura gets to being contemporary. Output level is pleasingly well-balanced here, although you might feel the need to dial in some extra bottom on your amp for true practicality.

To get a real blend of neck and middle pickups you'll need to back off the neck volume a touch. This gives a fatter version of the split pickup, less zingy and more polite, representing another good, solid option. Combining middle and neck

pickups adds much needed weight to the burpy bridge sound, although there seems to be more in the way of honky high mids. This sounds a bit bizarre (although it just means the bridge pickup has a juicier output than the middle) but it works pretty well and provides another interesting and fairly usable variation.

VERDICT

If you're looking for a quality passive bass with stand-out looks and a retro leaning, the Ventura is an option you must check out. It is, however, fairly weighty. It's also on the pricey side, but the three-pickup adaptability coupled to excellent build quality make this a worthwhile addition to our range of choices when it comes to basses with real stage noticeability. ↻

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	19	20
Playability	18	20
Sound	16	20
Value for money	15	20
Vibe	16	20

TOTAL **84%**

Good for... A good selection of practical, passive sounds in a distinctive package

Look elsewhere... For a cheaper workhorse or something to give contemporary active sounds



The bridge has brass saddles while the output jack is a secure Electrosocket type