



# FRET-KING ESPRIT 5

IT'S NAMED AFTER A SHAPELY SPORTS CAR AND SHAPED LIKE WHO KNOWS WHAT. **DAVID GREEVES** GETS TO THE POINT WITH THE FRET-KING ESPRIT 5

While we're running the rule over Fret-King's Country Squire and Super 60 guitars (reviewed this month on page 44), we thought we'd take a look at a rather different model altogether – the Esprit 5.

Unlike those Fender-flavoured axes, this is a mahogany-bodied, set-neck guitar fitted with twin humbuckers.

## BODY & NECK

The Fret-King Esprit 5 would appear to draw its inspiration from a couple of Gibson models – the Firebird and, to a lesser extent, the Explorer. However, the Esprit's body shape is quite different to that of either. While the longer points on the upper and lower bouts of the Firebird and Explorer point in opposite directions, the Esprit's pointiest bits are both on the same side. Meanwhile, a raised, V-shaped section extends upwards and outwards from the endpin to the upper horns. It's all most unusual.

The body shape makes a lot more sense to the eye when it's attached to a person, and if that person is you, you'll quickly appreciate how comfortable this guitar is to play. It's surprisingly well balanced on the strap and, especially when played sitting down, the elongated points on the bass side of the body wrap around you in a very pleasing fashion.

Like the body, the glued-in neck is made of mahogany. The rosewood

fretboard is neatly fitted with 22 medium jumbo frets, with a Gibson-style 24.75-inch scale length and 12-inch radius. The neck profile is a fairly slim rounded C shape, and the unobtrusive heel and deep treble-side cutaway means that access is completely unrestricted right up to the 22nd and final fret. The neck and body have been given a glossy black finish that's free of any imperfections.

## HARDWARE & PARTS

Tuning up using the reversed headstock takes a little getting used to, but the sealed Gotoh machineheads themselves work very well. The headstock is pitched back, ensuring adequate break angle over the precisely cut 'Wilkaloid' low-friction nut. A Gotoh Tune-o-matic-style bridge and stop-bar tailpiece provide similarly dependable service at the other end of the strings.

The Fret-King Esprit 5 is equipped with a pair of Trevor Wilkinson's own humbucking pickups. These are fitted with solid nickel covers and designed in the mould of the legendary PAF ('Patent Applied For') units that graced Gibson guitars of the 1950s and early 1960s. In other words, these pickups are low-output, vintage-voiced humbuckers. They're wired to volume and tone controls and a three-way selector switch. The Fret-King Esprit 5 has three P-90-style pickups and a five-way switch should you prefer.

## SOUNDS

Unplugged, the Esprit 5 has a lively sound with plenty of volume.

Through an amp, those PAF-style humbuckers parlay this natural ebullience into a stonking amplified tone that's sure to find favour with fans of classic blues and rock.

The sound is bright and focussed – these could almost be mini-humbuckers – combining a full humbucking tone with plenty of definition. These pickups seem to do a good job of emulating the hallowed PAF character, with a supple, airy quality and no sign of the exaggerated mid-range emphasis exhibited by some higher-output humbuckers.

Dial in an overdriven tone on your amp, and the Esprit 5 delivers crunchy classic rock power chords with aplomb. And fans of Gibson Firebird players like Johnny Winter and Lynryd Skynyrd's Allen Collins will have no problem firing out searing blues-rock licks in the style of their heroes. OK, so the Fret-King Esprit 5 might not quite reach the same heights of tone and sustain as the very best set-neck, mahogany-bodied axes, but for £549, this guitar sounds truly impressive.

## CONCLUSION

The Esprit 5's biggest stumbling block is bound to be its unconventional body shape. You either instantly love it or hate it, and smaller players may find the sheer size of the body a little daunting. However, with a little time spent playing this guitar, we can see many players in the traditional mould being won over by the Esprit 5's mature and sophisticated tone. **GB**

## GBINFO



### FRET-KING ESPRIT 5

PRICE:	£549
BUILT IN:	Korea
SCALE LENGTH:	629mm (24.75 inches)
NUT WIDTH:	42.5mm (1.67 inches)
STRING SPACING AT NUT:	34.5mm (1.36 inches)
BODY:	Mahogany
NECK:	Mahogany, set
FINGERBOARD:	Indian rosewood, 305mm radius (12 inches)
FRETS:	22 medium jumbo
PICKUPS:	2 x Fret-King PAF-style humbuckers
CONTROLS:	1 x volume, 1 x tone, 3-way selector
BRIDGE:	Gotoh Tune-o-matic-style bridge & stop-bar tailpiece
STRING SPACING AT BRIDGE:	51.5mm (2 inches)
MACHINEHEADS:	Gotoh sealed-gear
WEIGHT:	4.5kg (9.9lbs)
FINISHES:	Black (shown), trans amber
CASE:	Fret-King padded gigbag included
LEFT-HANDERS:	No

### CONTACT:

John Hornby Skewes & Co Ltd  
PHONE: 01132 865381  
WEB: www.fret-king.com

## GBOPINION

### FRET-KING ESPRIT 5

#### GOLD STARS

- ★ Good quality parts and build
- ★ Bold and bright rock and blues tones
- ★ Excellent value for money

#### BLACK MARKS

- None

#### GBRATING

