





# Fret-King

## Perception 60 JJ & PJ

The visuals may be instantly familiar but these beauties have been crafted here in the UK, so how do they stand up against the myriad of offerings already out there based on similar specifications? Mike Brooks checks out their credentials.

The Fret-King brand has been building its Green and Blue Label ranges for almost four years now under the expert guidance of Trevor Wilkinson. *BGM* brought you the world-exclusive reviews of two models back in issue 36, so we thought it about time to take a renewed look at what the company has to offer. Under inspection here are two Perception 60 models with similar specifications, pickups aside, but the PJ model comes from the standard Green Label Series while the JJ model stems from the newly introduced Atelier Series of instruments which incorporate custom options regarding finish, construction and hardware. Hand-built and emanating from these very shores, naturally the price tags reflect these points, but do these instruments offer real quality and value for money, or will they struggle in a market that some may say already has enough variations on these already familiar themes?

### Body and Neck

Taking the basses out of their respective hard cases (included in the price), there's no doubting that both basses feel very familiar and comfortable to play. Neither instrument is breaking the mould or pushing the boundaries of instrument design, but being able to pick a bass up and feel at home with it is a positive point. The traditional offset Jazz Bass body shape has been used for both instruments (why change a winning formula?), with all the curves, contouring and cutaways in the right places. Both basses utilise two-piece swamp ash bodies to reduce the overall weight of the instruments, the grain showing through very nicely on the PJ model. Familiar finishes have been applied here, the PJ sporting a pleasingly warm classic burst finish whereas the JJ bass has been given a custom California green livery along with a matching headstock finish, which accounts for the

increased price in relation to the PJ bass. Both come fitted with a three-ply tortoiseshell scratchplate (red for the JJ, brown for the PJ) that includes an extra cut-out, adding an extra curve to the familiar scratchplate shape.

Both maple necks possess good grain figuring and certainly feel very solid.

The neck width at the nut is identical on both basses, and although not as narrow as many Jazz Basses out there, the 42mm width is perfectly playable. The depth and general dimensions of both necks mean that neither neck could be termed 'super-slinky' but, if anything, this means that both basses give the player something to dig into and, to put it bluntly, coax the player to get stuck in. Both basses sport rosewood fingerboards with front and side position markers, and we're pleased to report that there are no sharp fret edges along either neck. We did notice that the fret slots on both necks have been cut slightly deeper than they needed to be, but this is a minor point. The neck pockets on the other hand are very precise, with no noticeable gaps, and the necks feel exceptionally robust and sturdy. The level of finishing is also very good and consistent between both basses.

Holding both basses the JJ model feels slightly heavier, but putting them both on the scales





**“The open-gear, elephant ear machineheads are sturdily attached and operate very smoothly.”**

the weights are almost identical, so perhaps the distribution of weight on the JJ is geared more towards the body. Sitting with the PJ model, there are fairly obvious balance issues as the headstock dives for the floor, and even when placed on a strap the bass wants to sit horizontally, at best, although it can be manoeuvred to sit at an angle. It was noticeable that the top body horn was tipping the balance to the left. The JJ, on

the other hand, although similar in weight terms, sat very well on a strap, assuming a natural playing angle.

#### Hardware

Both basses come fitted with Trevor Wilkinson-designed hardware that is identical in virtually every respect. The open-gear, elephant ear machineheads are sturdily attached and operate very smoothly, which is reassuring, while the string tree and ‘Wilkaloid’ nut complete the headstock decoration. Both basses offer a three-control set-up, incorporating volume/volume/tone as one would expect, but we noticed that the



controls on the PJ operated more smoothly as they felt less tight and restrained when turned, compared to the JJ. Both basses have surface-mounted, recessed jack sockets to add to the vintage look and both feature the same bridge design, the Wilkinson WB2P, which sports two brass bridge saddles in an attempt to convey more natural resonance and energy from the strings. We’ll get onto the acoustic properties of these basses shortly, but you can’t help but feel that only having two saddles, set at an angle, diminishes the player’s power to set the string action and intonation to their liking in the set-up process. There was obviously a reason why bass bridges developed from two-piece bridges to four-piece bridges.

The major difference between these basses is the pickup configuration, and although a single-coil pickup can do a good job of imitating a split-coil pickup, there will be some tonal difference, although both have been designed with vintage tones in mind, and being passive, there are less tonal factors to play with.

#### Sounds

Acoustically, both of these basses sound particularly vibrant, although the fresh strings fitted on both instruments help to convey the harmonic character they possess. The unplugged tone is certainly sprightly, with a fair degree of bounce, which one



#### TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

##### FRET-KING PERCEPTION 60 JJ

**PRICE: £1,799**

- Colour:** California green
- Body:** Swamp ash
- Neck:** Maple
- Fingerboard:** Rosewood
- Pickups:** 2 x ‘vintage-voiced’ alnico V single-coil passive pickups
- Electronics:** Passive
- Controls:** 2 x volume, 1 x tone
- Made in:** UK
- Nut width:** 42mm
- Neck join:** Bolt-on, 4-screw attachment
- Scale length:** 863mm (34")
- Frets:** 20
- Weight:** 4.08kg (9lb)

#### WHAT WE THINK

- Plus:** Very retro visuals, familiar styling, comfortable and extremely playable. Highly recognisable tones and a solid performer.
- Minus:** So many similar alternatives out there and the price tag may push it out of many players’ reach.
- Overall:** A great ‘players’ bass that will appeal to many out there.

#### CONTACT DETAILS

Bass Direct  
John Hornby Skewes & Co. Ltd.  
Tel: 01132 865 381  
www.fret-king.com

#### BGM RATING OUT OF FIVE

BGM RATING ★★★★☆



The Wilkinson bridge sports two brass bridge saddles



Both basses sport rosewood fingerboards with front and side dot markers

**“And boy, does the Precision pickup do a good job: all the beef and power you would want to hear.”**

would expect from a bolt-on instrument, but the degree of resonance through the instruments bodes well.

Plugging both in, the difference in tone is definitely noticeable and the PJ bass has a ballsier tone than the JJ, but perhaps this should have been expected. And boy, does the Precision pickup do a good job: all the beef and power you would want to hear. Surprisingly, running the Precision pickup on its own and then soloing the Jazz pickup, there is a very apparent drop in overall level when switching to the Jazz pickup, even though



both pickups are at the same height. Doing the same thing with the JJ bass, both pickups sound relatively even in terms of output, the bridge pickup being more crisp and twangy compared to the neck pickup.

The consistency of tone across the whole neck on both instruments is very good indeed, and even the D and G strings sound pronounced and authoritative. Rolling off the tone control on both basses certainly brings the vintage tones into play, and there is something very pleasing about these tones that active circuitry certainly removes. Of the two basses, the JJ has an edge to its tone that helps to define its sound in a band mix slightly better than the PJ bass, but when it comes to all-round power, the PJ-equipped Perception just beats the JJ to the finish line. The fingerstyle



and pick tones on offer here are so familiar that neither bass is letting the side down. The slap tones are also very usable, the Jazz obviously providing more twang and attack and therefore being slightly more adept or suitable for slapping, but the PJ is no slouch either.

### Conclusions

As a pair of basses with vintage tones in mind, these instruments certainly cut the mustard. We could argue that there are so many variants on this theme out there that these Fret-King offerings could struggle in a market niche that is bloated with these bass styles. Yet these styles remain continually popular, so the market is obviously there. What these basses do, they do very well indeed, and we can't see anyone purchasing them being let down by their performance.

The only major flaw is the pricing, and at this price many players may opt to go for the obvious names in this field. At a snip under £1,800 for the JJ, you really are looking at custom territory, and this bass does fall into that category as it has been custom made by hand, here in the UK. Our fear would be that at this sort of price players may well look for a cheaper alternative – when it comes to buying a passive bass there are so many to choose from. But that said, these are highly playable and comfortable basses and will no doubt make many players happy.



### TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

#### FRET-KING PERCEPTION 60 PJ

**PRICE: £1,679**

- Colour:** Original classic burst
- Body:** Swamp ash
- Neck:** Maple
- Fingerboard:** Rosewood
- Pickups:** 1 x single coil, 1 x split coil 'vintage-voiced' alnico V passive pickups
- Electronics:** Passive
- Controls:** 2 x volume, 1 x tone
- Made in:** UK
- Nut width:** 42mm
- Neck join:** Bolt-on, 4-screw attachment
- Scale length:** 863mm (34")
- Frets:** 20
- Weight:** 4.08kg (9lb)

### WHAT WE THINK

**Plus:** Traditional finish and classic range of tones, a potentially great workhorse that could cover any situation.

**Minus:** The price is a stumbling block based on the sheer number of similar instruments out there that do the same thing.

**Overall:** A great-looking bass with a good range of classic tones on tap.

### CONTACT DETAILS

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### BGM RATING OUT OF FIVE

**BGM RATING** ★★★★☆