



GEAR

REVIEW

BITE AND BARK

Retro Guitar MelodyBurner

In the realm of hot-rodded cars, there's a cool genre known as rat rods – old, relic'd automobiles that sport a lowdown vintage vibe.

Meet the rat axe. Retro Guitar's MelodyBurner is a similarly cool guitar that also bites as loud as it barks.

This Junior-styled double-cut starts with a body made of ash salvaged from a 100-year-old Midwestern barn. As the moniker suggests, the wood is scorched rather than conventionally finished. Jack Baruth and Chris O'Dee at Retro claim that the cool is much more than skin deep: The lack of nitro or poly paint and clearcoat means the finish doesn't deaden vibrations. The hardware complements the look. The pickguard is cut from sheet steel and aged along with the TonePros hardware. The headstock logo is machined from solid brass and stylishly recessed. It's sure got a style all its own.

Retro Guitar offers a choice of necks cut from maple, mahogany, or rosewood. The test guitar sported a neck duplicated from a '58 Junior and mounted with beefy jumbo frets, though a more modern, slim cut with fast frets is also available. Rosewood fretboards come standard; maple is an option.

The guitar was powered by a single bridge Sheptone P-90, but the guitar can be ordered with double P-90s, a single humbucker,

double humbuckers, or even a P-90/humbucker combo.

The test guitar was plugged straight into a Fender Vibro-King and, for an appetizer, run with a simple, dry signal. The P-90 boasted a clear and ringing tone without any mud or crud to it; maybe the lack of paint and that age-dried, century-old barn wood really does the trick, after all.

With a bit of reverb and then echo added to the signal, the MelodyBurner proved it's got a sound befitting that ratted look – that is to say, a fine grind and growl that's pure old-school Junior or Esquire. Think of a hot-rodded Flathead Ford



Price: \$999 (options available)
Info: www.melodyburner.com

saying its piece through wide-open pipes.

Retro Guitar offers a plentiful menu of options, but that working-man's single bridge P-90 is perfect for the guitar's patina. Up in the cowboy-

chord zone, the fretboard is a mite narrow for larger mitts, but that also makes it ideal for chunking out rhythm power chops up and down the neck. Heavy strings – perhaps even meaty flatwounds – would enhance that glorious tone even more.

If you have to ask *why*, then the MelodyBurner probably ain't for you. But if you get it after just one look, this is indeed one disturbingly cool guitar. – *Michael Dregni*

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