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Fender Elite Precision Bass 1

by [Max Kay \(/search/a/Max+Kay\)](#)

Article from *Electronics & Music Maker*, October 1983 ([/mags/EMM/83/10/619](#))

In an attempt to prove to the world that although the names get longer, the product gets better, and at the same time explain why they'd dropped their ordinary standby lines ie. the Stratocaster, Telecaster and Precision, Fender invited me along to their recent Hilton Hotel launch to find out what the fuss was all about.

Aside from myself, other luminaries seen checking out the goods included Andy Summers, John Entwistle and none other than Jimmy Page himself. As Pagey is not exactly noted for visiting Trade Events, I assumed something was up.

My suspicions were confirmed when I learned that some weeks later a gold Rolls Royce belonging to John Entwistle, who incidentally does not drive, turned up at Fender's Enfield HQ to borrow a clutch of their new Elite series basses for further inspection.

It seems that in a moment of madness, all of the standard models I've mentioned, have been replaced by the more expensive active EQ Elite series along with an improved passive range, called the Standard series, that cost less than the models they've replaced. In the Elite Precision alone, there are no less than 10 models which include variations in maple, rosewood and walnut necks, gold parts, fancy finishes, fancy cases, one or two pickups etc.

The bad news is that it's no longer possible to buy a Precision bass with a rosewood neck unless you're prepared to fork out for an Elite.

Innovations

Elite Stratocasters incorporate many innovations along with active electronics, such as 4 bolt microtilt neck adjustment, a 2 way concave-convex truss rod system Fender call the Biflex, TBX and MDX tone

controls and a new Freflyte tremolo system that works on a knife edge principle. Their new Torq Master tremolo arm snaps in and out so you no longer have to unscrew the arm or put pressure on it when you close the case. Further items include the top loading of strings, straplocks, and a carrying case Fender call the 'Voyagair' which looks a lot more comfortable to sleep in than the bath ever did.

And everything but everything bearing a fancy name has 'patent pending' slapped after it. Remember Fender have been caught out in the past. This time they're taking no chances.

The Elite Telecaster has many improvements and one major fault. It no longer sounds like a Telecaster even though it looks like one. Single body edge binding has been added, and the pickups on the Elite are a pair of Fender's own new humbuckers. The guitar plays and sounds like a bitch and if I ran the show I'd have changed the body shape and launched what I believe could have been a totally brand new model for the catalogue. I have a slight reservation here, I'm not too sure if I like the optional stick-on adhesive scratchplate. Do be sure to call Fender for their advice on what to do when you've removed large chunks of finish after trying out this piece of new technology.

Broadly speaking, I've covered the range above and now I'd like to select the Fender Gold Elite Precision Bass 1 (pause for breath) and review it for you.

Elite Precision

With a 34" scale it's exactly the same length as a standard 'P' bass. It has one split pickup in the regular position, although Fender do offer another version with an extra pickup situated near the bridge, called the II, for the sake of brevity.

The maple neck with black dot inlays is extremely cambered, though the width of it has been returned to the same size as was used on vintage 'P' basses. It's a very thin comfortable neck, without the sharp edges that plagued their Bullet range.

Now the real focal point of interest with this neck is a new truss rod, called the Biflex system. This offers not only convex neck adjustment but concave too, should you require very light gauge strings on the instrument, and a very close action, which incidentally on this instrument is rather good. A central pivot on the Biflex truss rod is the piece of technology that allows you to bend the neck in either direction. This is achieved by inserting an Allen key into the headstock, directly above the unit.

Micro tilt adjustment is there to offer adjustment to the angle of the neck without the need to add shims (slivers of wood). The difference between this new 4 bolt and the older 3 bolt system, is added stability, an extremely sore point with owners of the infamous 3 bolt action.

The neck sports 20 medium size, conical frets and the neck fit is good - not always the case I'm afraid. Machine heads are of a new type produced for Fender by Schaller, finished in gold, and very responsive if my test sample was anything to go by. The headstock is topped off by a single gold circular string guide and a serial number, which I'd prefer to see on the neck plate, but only because I'm a traditionalist.

Features

When it comes to finishes on the Elite range, it's Xmas. There are just so many choices. For example try Natural, Arctic White, Black, Sienna Sunburst, Brown Sunburst and Pewter. More expensive custom colours include Candy Apple Red (which is the colour of my Precision 1 here), Lake Placid Blue, Candy Apple Green which is a genuinely successful attempt at a new colour and Aztec Gold - not forgetting transparent Emerald Green and Wild Cherry. If that's not enough for you, how about an Elite Precision 1 in American black walnut, or one of the exciting (according to Fender) new Stratoburst finishes in Black, Blue and Bronze. These latter hand airbrushed colours fade from black or blue to metallic silver, or from bronze to gold. Fender are obviously trying to please and I'd suggest there must be something there for everyone.

Body weight of the Elite Precision 1 is about medium for a 'P' bass, helping it balance perfectly. The contours are in the usual places and access to the uppermost frets is as good as it used to be ie. very good.

A new feature here is a different type of recessed jack socket that basically look a little smarter than the older type. Strap-buttons have been replaced with straplocks mainly because **£774.92** is a lot of bass to drop on the floor. The battery plate at the rear of the Elite Precision 1 is recessed, making it in one breath a visual treat, and a pain for overworked roadies who may have to waste valuable seconds trying to dislodge the thing, in order to replace a dead battery (9 volt of course) that should last you six months.

The scratchplate is triple laminate white/black/white, and it's affixed by 13 gold, Phillips head screws. Like an ordinary Precision, this one owns single volume and tone controls, the difference being that the Elite Precision has a central detent position between treble boost and bass boost. By the way, if you're into rubber, and some of us definitely are, each of these knobs carries a black (very important that) knurled rubber edge to it.

The bridge on this bass is an extremely chunky-looking affair, gold in colour, and actually holds the six separate bridge saddles offering two-way adjustment for action and intonation between its jaws, therefore preventing the saddles swaying from side to side. Each saddle carries a fine tuner now which permits slight alteration to the pitch of the string without removing your left hand from the neck. Just like the Steinberger tuning system, this one is affected by using the right hand.

Sounds

The pickup on the Elite Precision 1 is shielded in white plastic and described as the "new, noise cancelling, split single coil pickup" with "less hum and noise interference": a claim that needs substantiating.



On plugging in and playing this Fender Bass 1, the previous claim proves to be partially true, and it's a very difficult claim to verify in the circumstances, since active electronics have never been renowned for their quietness.

With the tone control in the centre detent or flat position, there is a small amount of hum and hiss. With the tone control in the full bass boost position there's none whatsoever, and very little of anything else I might add. However, on rotating the pot a fraction back towards the central position we have a very attenuable sound that continues past the flat position towards the full treble boost mark. I say 'towards' because the usable tone spectrum finishes some time before the full treble boost position, due to an inordinate amount of hiss and hum caused by lack of earthing, and active electronics.

Conclusions

What the bass lacks from my point of view is hardness at the bottom end. Instead we're greeted by wooliness which won't do. Also, I'd like to hear a little more warmth in the whole of the tone spectrum, something that is available on the ordinary 'P' bass. Although it's very difficult to provide on a bass with active electronics, it's not an impossible feat to accomplish either.

Don't get me wrong, I do like the tone on offer, I only wish it could be expanded upon to encompass a little more sound which I've come to expect from a bass that costs **£774.92** including VAT.

Test amplifier: Fender Sidekick Bass 50.

Distributors: CBS Fender, [\(Contact Details\)](#).

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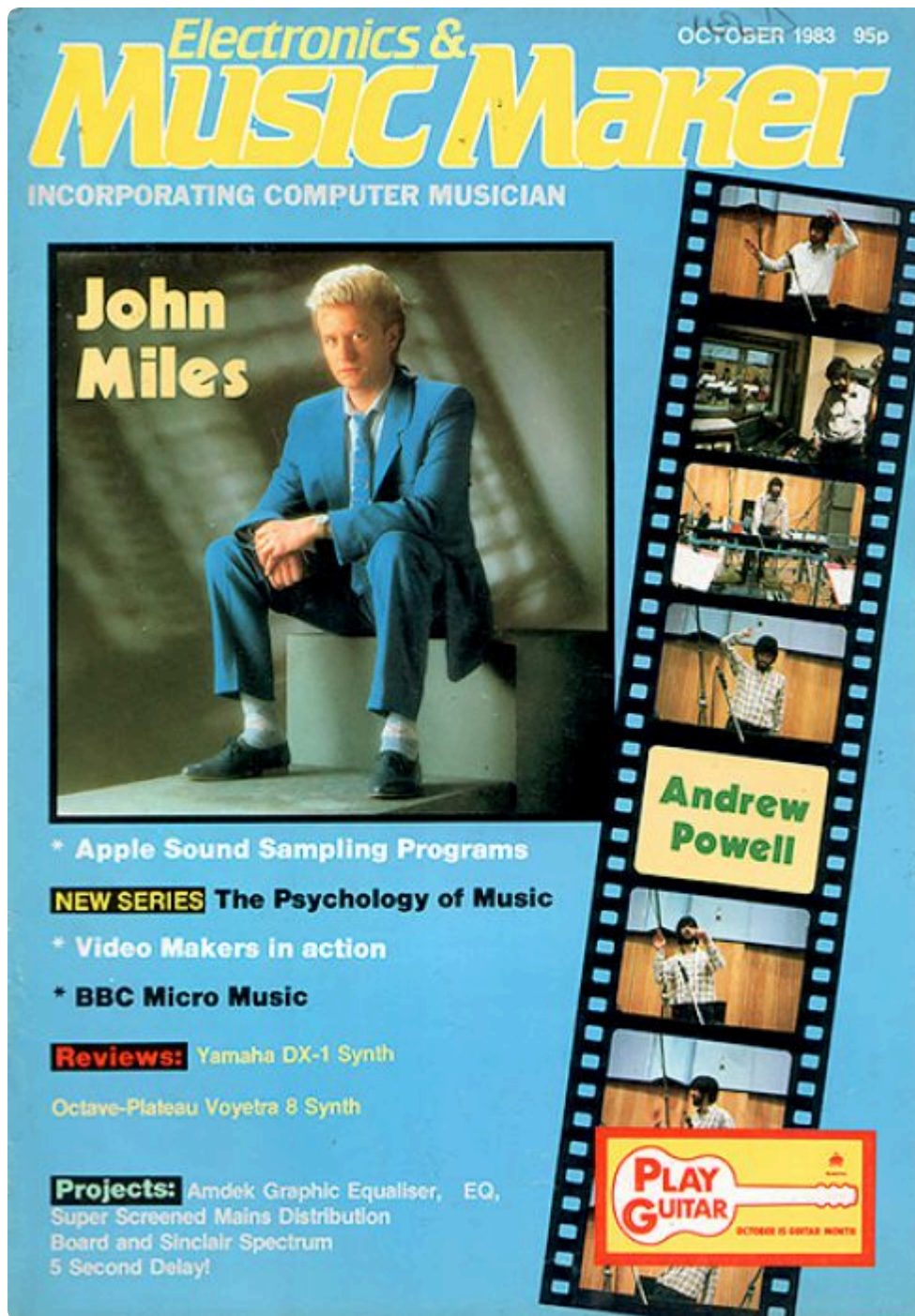
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