

White Wonder

THIS SOLID-BODIED BARGAIN HAS A TOUCH OF CLASS THAT GOES DEEPER THAN THOSE FAMILIAR CURVES. **PAUL SALTER** MEETS UP WITH A NEW OLD FRIEND

GBINFO



VINTAGE VRS100

PRICE:	£239
BUILT IN:	Vietnam
SCALE LENGTH:	629mm (24.75 inches)
NUT WIDTH:	43mm (1.69 inches)
BODY:	Solid poplar, maple top
NECK:	Set, maple
FINGERBOARD:	Rosewood, 305mm radius (12-inches)
FRETS:	24 medium
PICKUPS:	2 x Wilkinson humbuckers
CONTROLS:	1 x volume, 1 x tone, 3-way selector
BRIDGE:	Wilkinson WVP gold-plated vibrato
MACHINEHEADS:	Wilkinson gold-plated WJ807 E-2-LOK
WEIGHT:	4kg (9lb)
CASE:	No
FINISHES:	Alpine white (as shown), flame maple green, gloss black, flame maple blue (£229) and satin tobacco sunburst (VRS 110STS hard tail version only at £229)
LEFT-HANDERS:	No

CONTACT:

John Hornby Skewes & Co Ltd
 PHONE: 0113 286 5381
 WEB: www.jhs.co.uk

Vintage is the brand that was created in the mid-90s by Garforth's John Hornby Skewes & Co Ltd, the musical equipment distributor that has set about raising the bar for the standard of entry-level, low-priced instruments. Since then, Vintage has steadily increased its presence in the UK, thanks to an ever increasing number of good quality/good value models that appeal to an ever widening group of aspiring musicians. The aesthetics are undeniably derivative, lest we forget of course that imitation is the biggest form of flattery, and indeed a fact of life for any successful manufacturer of pretty much anything – guitars or otherwise.

Guitar Buyer first took a look at the VRS100 back in the September 2002 issue – a very impressive instrument for its modest price tag. Since then, however – and despite a slight price reduction – Vintage has drafted in the considerable skills of guitar/hardware guru Trevor Wilkinson to improve the whole range even further. We've seen the results of Trev's influence before, but we've been itching to see what he can do to improve the charming Vietnamese-built VRS100: here we have it in stunning white, with gold hardware.

BODY & NECK

Just in case you missed the not-so-subtle hint in the name of the Vintage VRS100, that familiar body shape and tell-tale con touring leave little doubt that the inspiration for this handsome guitar hails directly from Maryland, USA. Just like the entire Vintage range, however, the original influence isn't merely an aesthetic template on to which to chuck a collection of rubbish parts. There's a much greater sense of character here than that, and while the changes to that well-known outline might be subtle, they result in a chunkier-looking guitar. Of the whole Vintage range, this design tweaking proves to be perhaps most successful here, and speaking personally for a second, I'm worryingly close to preferring this shape and contouring to that of, say, a USA PRS Standard 24 [full frontal lobotomy notwithstanding, presumably? – Psychiatric Ed].

The maple 'arch' of the VRS100 is a reasonably shallow affair, with an almost flat



HEAD HERE

PRETTY, BUT PRACTICAL TOO

Ungainly headstocks seem to have the ability to upset people's sense of aesthetics more than almost any other detail of guitar design.

Fortunately for the Vintage VRS100, the headstock here is a real peach. It's firmly within the PRS/Eggle influence, with a small size and modern lines that really work with the body shape. It's functional too, as the shape enables the machineheads to be positioned in such a way that the strings pass over the nut in an almost straight line, in order to reduce friction.



From here, you could almost believe it was the real McCoy

top, sloping gradually down to a wide band around the base of the body, sweeping on to the softly sculpted contours around the asymmetrical horns. This is all fronting a substantial chunk of poplar that makes up the bulk of the body, giving a thicker and altogether more bulky guitar than a Paul Reed Smith.

Comparing this instrument to a vastly more expensive one can only be taken so far, and closer inspection of the build and finish quality reveals the cost-effective construction methods, and it would be foolish to expect super-tight tolerances and ultra-thin flawless finishes in a sub-£300 guitar. Having said that, there's plenty to be happy about, with this new finish option of 'alpine white', although this review sample looks like it has done the rounds, and been tidied up with a touch-up pen in places.

Aside from a build-up of excess finish where the neck joins the body, the joint itself is a fine – if utilitarian – glued-in example, that enables good access to the very last of the neck's 24 frets. It's not clear due to the finishing if the neck extends beneath the neck pickup as you'd expect with this style of guitar, but it does have a sturdy feel.

The neck profile is definitely not one for those of you brought up on Ibanez-style 'speed' necks. It's a real meaty chunk of maple, that's close in dimensions to a PRS wide-fat carve, and then some. I personally think it's a cracker, but then I like big necks and all the extra resonance and solid feel they bring. Necks like this may take a

"THIS SAMPLE'S ROSEWOOD FINGERBOARD IS WELL FRETTED AND PLAYS VERY WELL INDEED"

little adjustment, but don't inhibit your technique as much as you might think. Making it all the more palatable, the rosewood 'board is well fretted and finished, and plays very well indeed.

HARDWARE & PARTS

If the general build isn't enough to put the VRS100 ahead of its competition, then surely having the hand of the highly-respected Trevor Wilkinson working his own brand of common-sense magic on the design surely will. Trev's input is most obvious in the

are wired to single volume and tone controls, with a three-way selector switch for a simple-yet-effective batch of tones. It's also worth mentioning that the quality of pots used for the controls are more than adequate, and feel pretty good in use too.

The vibrato system design has also had the Wilkinson touch, specifically with Trev's 'stagger drilled' approach to the sustain block that holds the ball-ends of the strings. This has the positions of the holes moved to keep the pressure of the strings even across all the points of contact, the theory being that this should ensure the strings' return to pitch accurately. In use, it seems that the theory bears out, as the performance far outclasses the numerous other non-locking systems in this kind of price-range.

At the other end, the strings have the benefit of another of Trev's designs: E-Z-Lok tuners. These are good quality machineheads that have two holes drilled into the capstan, the main hole of which has its position calculated on each tuner to ensure that all of the strings have the same angle across the nut. The other hole takes the end of the string, where, along with the extra security of an extra 'Z' bend to lock it into place, the extra length can be wrapped beneath the normal windings as the string is brought up to pitch. Although this admittedly sounds complicated, in practise it works effortlessly.



The 12th fret remains stylish without treading on any design toes

hardware department, where his logo is a reassuring sight indeed. What it means for the pickups, for example, is that as well as knowing that the two covered humbuckers are designed by someone who really knows their stuff, each unit is tested and calibrated to ensure a consistent output and tone – a trait that's commendable in mass production. These gold-plated pickups

DETAILS

A CHEEKY NOD TO A MORE FAMOUS STABLE, THE VRS100 IS NONETHELESS A CREDIBLE SIX-STRING



■ The thick poly finish is one tell-tale sign of the VRS's budget origins



■ Derivative it may be, but this vibrato bridge works very well indeed



■ Wilkinson is also responsible for the good-quality machineheads



GBOPINION

VINTAGE VRS100

GOLD STARS

- ★ Great chunky neck
- ★ Wilkinson hardware
- ★ Credible bridge pickup tone

BLACK MARKS

- Sloppy finish

IDEAL FOR...

Modern rockers after grown up tones on a budget

SOUNDS

As these Wilkinson humbuckers are simply wired to a three-way selector switch and conventional volume and tone controls, there aren't any fancy coil-tapped options available. This may sound limiting if you like your tones clean, but these humbuckers have a sweet character with plenty of clarity. The bridge pickup has a rounded top-end and lightly peaked mid-range that's enjoyably strummable with some softening reverb or delay. Bring in the neck pickup to join it, and the robust 'in-between' sound adds a '60s-flavoured rhythm tone to the VRS100's capabilities. The neck humbucker alone has a loose bottom-end that may be a problem with overly-warm amps, but still produces a satisfying, plump, pseudo-jazz tone.

It seems that the VRS100 is voiced to give its best with generous helpings of overdrive or distortion, however, as mild applications of gain suffer slightly due to the soft nature of the bass frequencies. This doesn't affect higher-gained sounds one bit though, as far as the bridge pickup is

concerned. That peaky mid-range and smooth treble really take-off with metal-like levels of drive for huge-sounding riffs and lead tones that sing admirably with a smooth cut.

It's a collection of credible tones, but let's not get carried away. We should point out that compared to its expensive American inspiration, the VRS is clearly the inferior sounding guitar. Playing acoustically against one of Maryland's finest, for example, immediately highlights a significant difference in tonal quality between the two; the Vintage having a weaker fundamental tone and resonance. However, plugged in, the bridge pickup in particular is impressive for such a bargain-priced instrument, if not as grown up as the real deal.

GBRATINGS

VINTAGE VRS100

BODY & NECK	●●●●●●●●●●
HARDWARE & PARTS	●●●●●●●●●●
PLAYABILITY	●●●●●●●●●●
SOUNDS	●●●●●●●●●●
VALUE FOR MONEY	●●●●●●●●●●
GBVERDICT	●●●●●●●●●●

GBCONCLUSION

GREAT FOR BEGINNING AND BEYOND

■ The VRS100 is one of those guitars that you'll buy as a first guitar to learn on, and end up keeping for your backup – rather than trade it in – if and when you feel the need to upgrade it to a more professional instrument.

It has a genuinely likable nature to play – indeed, many far more expensive instruments would do well to play as amiably as this – and has its strengths and weaknesses portioned out to those areas that can handle them best. The finish may admittedly be a bit basic, but the construction is certainly sturdy and the neck and hardware are top notch.

So, while it's definitely not in the same league as a Dave Navarro signature PRS – lest we kid ourselves that's what it's aspiring towards – if you ever progress to the real McCoy you could find yourself pulling out the old Vintage VRS100 for the odd number now and again and still turn in a worthy performance. **GB**