







Sterling by Music Man
StingRay Baritone

The iconic StingRay shape makes its debut in the new world of baritone guitar with some seriously impressive results

BY MATT MCCRACKEN

THE BARITONE GUITAR is one that appears to be increasing in popularity over the last few years, likely due to the crazy dropped tunings of the new wave of nu metal bands. Giving you a way to achieve lower guitar tones without having to deal with an additional string, the Sterling by Music Man StingRay Baritone is the company's first-ever long-scale instrument.

It's a 27.5" scale with a roasted maple neck and a rosewood fretboard lined with 24, medium-sized frets. It's got that classic 4x2 headstock you find on Sterling and Music Man guitars, which features a set of locking tuners to go with the vintage-style tremolo bridge at the other end.

The body is comprised of poplar, with that distinctive, rounded StingRay shape and a very fetching Taluca Lake Blue and black, 3-ply pickguard. It's got a decent weight to it in my hands, coming in at 4.9kg when I placed it on my scales.

The electronics feature two of Sterling's own ceramic humbuckers, with knurled master volume and tone controls mounted to a chrome plate. The pickup selector switch is located on the top horn, a fairly common location for Sterling by Music Man guitars. It's a three-way selector, and there are no push-pull knobs for unlocking additional sounds.

Build quality

Taking the Stingray Baritone out of the box, I'm immediately taken by that Taluca Lake Blue finish. It drew the appreciation of my partner, which is always a good sign, and the metallic blue tinge of the finish is very nicely applied to the whole guitar. A deeper inspection revealed a barely perceptible crack in the finish paintwork at the upper side of the neck join, but you'd only see it with your phone torch on it, as I did.

The neck feels nice and solid in its pocket, anchored with a 5-bolt system in a slightly asymmetric format with three bolts on one side and two on the other. There's no movement here, giving it a very solid feel overall. Strumming the guitar unplugged, every string resonated really nicely, a sure sign that all of the components are working in harmony.

The one thing that lets the build down is the pickup selector switch, which is really flimsy-feeling. The switch itself is very small, and the lack of resistance means it's very easy to flick straight from the bridge pickup position to the neck position whilst skipping the middle. It's not a deal breaker by any means, but it is more noticeable because the quality of the build is so good elsewhere.

Playability

Plugging it into my audio interface to play through some Neural DSP plugins, I notice straight away that the neck profile is fairly chunky. I don't mind a bit of heft in a guitar neck, but it's a little different from other baritones I've tried, which were admittedly more metal orientated. It doesn't feel uncomfortable, though, and I find myself quickly getting up to speed with the larger scale length.

"It does those Spaghetti Western sounds just as well as it does the crushingly heavy stuff"

My regular baritone is a 28" scale, but despite being just half an inch shorter, the Stingray Baritone feels much more comfortable than my Chapman. It's quite surprising how much of a difference that half an inch makes, giving it a feel that's closer to my regular Telecaster than I expected. I don't feel as though I need to warm up as I do on my regular baritone, and those multi-fret stretches feel way more achievable here. It also means it comfortably fits into a regular-sized Fender soft case I have, which is a huge bonus for taking it to practice, more on which later.

The setup is fantastic out of the box, and I don't feel I need to make any adjustments to make it more playable. The action is very comfortable, measuring 1.5mm at the 12th fret with a set of Ernie Ball 6-String Baritone Slinky electric guitar strings coming factory fitted. I check the guitar for choking frets by bending up each string all the way up to the 24th fret, but everything rings out nicely.

The 42mm nut means that, despite the thicker gauge strings, it doesn't feel as though the string spacing is massive. There's a slight adjustment when playing arpeggiated chords versus my regular scale guitar, but I quickly get up to speed picking open note drones with octaves and pedal tone licks, and with a few minutes of adjustment, it's easy enough to forget I'm playing a baritone.

Sounds

Taking the Stingray Baritone to my local recording haunt, Spirit Studios, I put it through its paces playing some progressive metal tuned to drop A. Going into the clean channel of a Mesa/Boogie Mark VII 1x12 combo amp with the gain ladled out via a couple of stacked overdrive pedals, my first thoughts are that it's incredible how articulate the pickups sound.

The ceramic humbuckers are really nicely voiced for this scale length, so even when I'm playing open chords at the low end of the neck, the articulation of each note is fantastic. I've definitely encountered some mud in this department with some other low-tuned guitars, but the Stringray Baritone does a great job of providing plenty of low-end oomph without being overpowering.

Moving to some clean and mid-gain sounds, it really starts to show its versatility. It does those Spaghetti Western sounds just as well as it does the crushingly heavy stuff, and remains articulate even with plenty of added drip via my spring reverb pedal and a healthy dose of tremolo added. Helped by the comparatively shorter scale length, I can eke out some nice twang with a little adjustment of the amp controls, and the vibrato allows for some gentle accentuation of those drawn-out chords and notes.

GUITAR WORLD VERDICT

★★★★½

With baritones becoming more popular these days, the choice on offer today is a different world compared to just a few short years ago, and the Sterling by Music Man StingRay Baritone gives lovers of low-tuned guitars another headache when deciding what to buy. Outstanding build, surprisingly slinky playability despite the scale length, and articulate pickups make this a great choice whether you're aping Ennio Morricone or looking to play pulverizing metal breakdowns.

PROS

+ Very playable despite the longer scale length.
+ Pickup articulation is fantastic even with low chords.
+ Exceptional build quality means it feels more expensive than it is.
+ Tremolo bridge and locking tuner combo is remarkably stable.

CONS

- Pickup selector switch feels a bit flimsy.

SPECS

MADE: Indonesia
TYPE: Six-string baritone guitar
BODY: Poplar
NECK: Roasted maple
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
SCALE LENGTH: 27.5" (69.85cm)
NUT/WIDTH: Plastic, 42mm
FRETS: 24, medium
HARDWARE: Locking tuners, vintage tremolo
STRING SPACING AT BRIDGE: 53.5mm
ELECTRICS: 2x ceramic humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector, 1x volume, 1x tone
WEIGHT: 4.9kg / 10.8lbs
LEFT-HANDED OPTIONS: No
FINISHES: Toluca Lake Blue,
CASES: Not included

Verdict

For below a grand, the Sterling by Music Man Stingray Baritone is a lot of guitar. I'm seriously impressed by the build quality, playability, and the versatility of tones offered by the dual humbuckers. Despite being initially disappointed by the lack of a push-pull switch for single coil sounds, I found myself not particularly longing for that once I had some time with it.

The only real negative I can find is the flimsiness of the pickup selector switch. It works, it just feels a little flaccid when changing position, whereas I prefer a solid switch so I know when it's in place. The out-of-the-box setup is fantastic, and nothing out of place in terms of the build or aesthetic of the guitar, other than that very small crack in the finish.

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