



H.J. WILLIAMS EVO PRO

Alun Lower tries out this sleek and stylish offering from British luthier Haydn Williams

When you get to check out expensive guitars every day for a living, it's generally considered a really good day at the office when you get a guitar from a builder you've never tried before. Sometimes you get an instrument that is every bit a blank canvas, that individual customers would then customise when commissioning the build, and other times you get an instrument that throws caution to the wind and goes for pure extravagance. Sometimes, though, you get something that sits in the middle of those two extremes and provides the perfect balance. So which will it be this time?

Body & Neck

First impressions out of the case are impressive to say the least. Superstrat fans will find a lot to like in the very modern, Suhr-like outline and contours. The Evo is far from a copy, though, and looking at the guitar in more detail reveals a number of interesting touches that show just how much attention has been poured into this guitar.

The body is a solid and generous slab of mahogany topped with a gorgeous quilted maple cap, which is finished in 'Scotch mist' and

looks deep enough to dive into. Normally with a Superstrat we would have expected an alder body, so the mahogany is a nice change here and should make for a great tonal combination together with the maple.

Arguably the most interesting feature for us, though, is the somewhat unusual choice of a wenge neck. We've tried these on basses before but this is the first time we've been able to try one out on a 6-string. It's been given a simple oil finish to keep the natural feel of the wood intact, and we've got to say, it's pretty spectacular. If you've never tried out a guitar with an unfinished neck before you really are missing out. The playing experience is as smooth as any guitar we've ever played and, combined with the slim (but not flat) profile and clever three-bolt neck joint, makes for an immensely playable instrument. The neck is topped with a 24-fret rosewood fingerboard, and we're hoping this partnership will make for an interesting ingredient on the overall tonal character.

As you'd expect with a custom-built guitar, the level of detail and finishing on the Evo is superb. The frets are perfectly polished and

there isn't a single mistake or flaw to be found in the construction. Naturally, some aspects will be down to personal taste, and from the moment we open the case there are some people in the office that are instantly turned off by the lavish maple top, but this is a custom guitar and there are practically limitless options available.

Hardware & Parts

The Evo comes equipped with a Gotoh/Wilkinson VS100 tremolo and Sperzel locking tuners. The bridge is recognised as one of the best in the business and works perfectly with the tuners to provide rock solid tuning stability through all but the most ridiculous of whammy antics. Both the tremolo and the tuners have a satin finish rather than chrome, which keeps the hardware on the right side of subtle – a good choice, in our opinion, when sitting against that quilted top.

The pickups are another interesting choice and come from boutique British pickup builders Sidwynder, another new brand to us here at Guitar Buyer. In this particular guitar we've got a Lancehead in the bridge position, a Hognose at the neck and a



The Sidwynder pickups are a superb choice for this guitar



custom-wound single-coil sat in the middle. The Lancehead is designed to be the quintessential bridge pickup – powerful enough to drive high-gain amps into a frenzy but controlled and focused enough to stop the tones ever becoming muddy, perfect for those precise and exacting lead lines. The Hognose, on the other hand, is more of a PAF-style pickup but is designed to offer more attack than you would expect, to give the sound more definition and presence.

Sounds

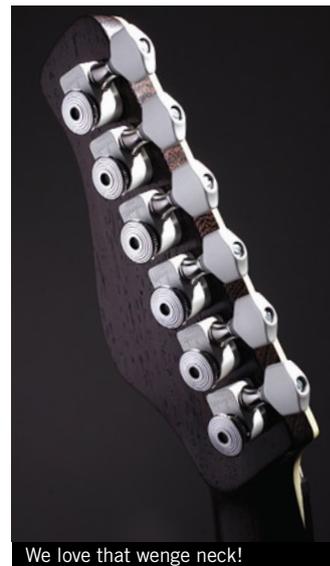
Upon dialling in a clean sound on a valve head, it's immediately clear that we're dealing with a very versatile instrument. The neck humbucker is powerful and clear, but still very warm and usable, responding well to the volume and tone controls to provide an excellent range of tones that will happily cover mellow musical styles all the way up to those crystal-clear cleans that metal fans adore. Flipping the five-way selector to the next position mixes the neck coil tap and middle pickup and immediately gives those humbucker tones a distinctly single-coil flavour, a particularly



Elegant headstock design

expressive sound that reacts wonderfully to changes in playing style and just sings when introduced to a touch of sizzle from the amplifier.

Switching to the middle pickup then takes you to purely Strat territory, providing you with a classic-sounding middle single-coil tone without sounding weak or thin compared to the other pickup positions. Flipping to the fourth position ups the ante just a little further and we start to get some pronounced but well-balanced high end and a pretty substantial step-up in output. All these elements combine to make for a guitar that can flip between a huge range of sounds without making any changes to the EQ. Indeed, when we set up the amp to our liking we are able to go from a purely clean sound all the way through to a generous crunch. Thankfully the bridge pickup isn't too harsh, though, and it can be cleaned up very easily or,



We love that wenge neck!

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alternatively, can be coil-split with the push-push control on the volume pot. Speaking of which, the volume pot also hides a treble bleed, which keeps the EQ of the pickups clean and usable in just about every setting.

Introducing some distortion, though, really takes this guitar to another level, and it becomes even more obvious why the Sidewynder pickups were chosen. Distorted tones are incredibly clear and almost surgically precise, especially where the Lancehead is concerned. It's impressive that the pickup can make such a substantial jump in

output without upsetting the balance, and the pickup is equally well suited to classic rock as it is to the more brutal end of the scale. The mahogany and maple combination on the body makes for a fantastic foundation for the lead tones and really cuts through the mix, with plenty of that mahogany mid-range on offer. The guitar still has a very distinct presence and we're wondering if perhaps the wenge neck is contributing to that, but either way it's still a fantastic playing experience and we think the Evo is a veritable Swiss army knife of tone.

Conclusion

The Evo Pro is undoubtedly a top-drawer custom instrument, with all the playability and luxurious appointments a player could possibly want. One look at the Williams Guitars website will show you that Haydn is a creative and passionate luthier who obviously loves what he does and strives to create instruments that look great, sound great, and have a certain X-factor and personal touch that only a custom instrument can provide.

Everything with this guitar has been perfectly considered – the wenge neck and excellent choice of pickups absolutely 100% seal the deal in this instance and make us not want to put the guitar down, much less send it back! The obvious drawback here is cost, but compared to many of its rivals the Williams is actually great value for money. If you're in the market for a top-of-the-line Superstrat-style guitar in the vein of Ibanez or Suhr, then you owe it to yourself to consider an Evo Pro.

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The Guitar Tech

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Technical Specification

- Price:** £2,350
- Built in:** England
- Scale length:** 25.5"
- Body:** Mahogany w/quilted maple top
- Neck:** Wenge
- Fingerboard:** Indian rosewood
- Frets:** 24 medium
- Pickups:** Sidewynder Hognose (neck), custom-wound single-coil (middle) & Lancehead (bridge)
- Controls:** 1 x volume w/push-push coil tap and treble-bleed filter, 1 x tone
- Hardware:** Gotoh/Wilkinson VS100 tremolo, Sperzel locking tuners
- Finishes:** Scotch mist (as reviewed), many other custom options available
- Left-handers:** Yes, no charge

Contact Details

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What We Think

What did our test results reveal?

Pros: Immaculate construction. The guitar feels unique and personal. Effortlessly playable and very versatile.

Cons: None.

Ideal For: Superstrat lovers that can afford the best and want all those custom appointments.

GB Rating

Rating out of five stars

H.J. Williams Evo Pro ★★★★★