

almost sombre abalone inlays, makes for an elegant, more purposeful look to the guitar. The only thing I miss, from an aesthetic point of view, is the normal white nut which would visually separate the neck from the peghead. Of course, in its place now sits a black-chrome lock-nut which is no more obtrusive than usual and which operates in the time-honoured fashion. Machineheads are Yamaha's answer to Schallers and I wish they were either slightly smaller or nickel plated – or both – because they do cosmetically intrude a little, in my view.

### In Use

Pick up the MSG and it's light. Strap it on and it's comfortable. Top 'E' is where you'd expect it and your left hand falls naturally into position on an action which is familiar and accommodating. Unamplified, the guitar sounds like no other I can remember. It's not banjoey, like a 335, nor dull and subdued like a Les Paul – there's a brightness there which you don't expect, but which is not at all reminiscent of Fender.

Plug in and the brightness is still there – again, not really Fenderish but that's as near as I can get descriptively – or maybe it's more like a 335 with the treble control set

on 15. The pickups are the company's alnico 5 humbuckers, open-topped and looking for all the world like they've just dropped off a '58 Standard... apart from the extra height adjustment screw on the bass side, which acts as an angle adjustment and also stabilises the assembly.

So! Clean we have the archetypal rhythm sound, begging for chorus and a touch of delay. But how does the MSG sound in a gutsy situation? Well, 'it's the same but only gutsy' might be the obvious answer, and again it's difficult to put a finger on – not so sharp as a Strat or Tele, yet there's more presence than you'd expect from a Gibson. With the tone control wide open it's a 'modern' sound, but notch it back a touch and it mellows down to those warmer, vintage tones.

Tremolo – that prerequisite for today's musical styles, and the curse of the guitar designer – has been dealt with by fitting Yamaha's tried and trusted RM Pro system. I've seen this demonstrated to distraction – almost to destruction in fact – and it simply refused to go out of tune. It's hardly the most elegant piece of engineering, and you'd expect it to seem out of place in such classy surroundings, but strangely the RM Pro seems quite at home here. Again,

though, I'd have preferred to see it in the slightly less brash, nickel plate.

### Conclusion

As with all good tools of the trade, the MSG springs no awkward surprises – it's a bit like slipping on a pair of old shoes, really, and that's the way it should be. Being honest of course, this guitar should really have been made ten years ago, in Nashville, but fortunately for Yamaha, Gibson had problems back then with some particularly opaque company blinkers, so insisted instead on putting their efforts into the RD series and its contemporaries.

So Yamaha have done it! And why not? They are to be congratulated – Martyn Booth especially – on coming up with the MSG. It's a stupendous guitar, certainly one of the very best around today, and one which deserves to join Paul Reed Smith's on a small, and very select pedestal of modern-day classics. I suppose you guessed it... an unreserved 'thumbs up' from me.

RRP: £649

(No left-handers at the moment)

For more information, contact Yamaha-Kemble Ltd, Mount Avenue, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Bucks MK1 1JE. Tel: (0908) 640202 ●

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