

COPENHAGEN CUSTOMS

THOUGH BETTER KNOWN FOR BACON AND PASTRIES THAN ROCK'N'ROLL, DENMARK HAS A LUTHERIE TRADITION THAT DATES BACK TO THE 18TH CENTURY. **PAUL ALCANTARA** SAMPLES A DANISH TAKE ON EVERYBODY'S FAVOURITE BOLT-NECKS

GBINFO

RAHBK CLASSIC

PRICE: £1499 (as reviewed, £1700)

BUILT IN: Denmark

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.1/2 inches)

NUT WIDTH: 41.5mm (1.63 inches)

BODY: Solid alder

NECK: Maple, bolt on

FINGERBOARD: Brazilian rosewood, 241mm radius (9.5 inches)

FRETS: 22 medium stainless steel

PICKUPS: Custom-made DiMarzios – single-coils neck and middle positions, Virtual P-90 at the bridge

CONTROLS: Master tone and volume, plus five-way selector switch

BRIDGE: Gotoh non-locking vibrato

MACHINEHEADS: Gotoh locking tuners

WEIGHT: 3.2kg (7lbs)

CASE: SKB hardshell case included

FINISHES: You name it – see website for details. Aged Lake Placid blue shown (finish used is similar to nitrocellulose lacquer)

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes

CONTACT: Vale Consultants
PHONE: 01280 702354
WEB: www.rahbekguitars.com

Peter Rahbek has been building electric guitars for 11 years, his Copenhagen-based company currently offering three basic models – the S-style Standard and Classic and the T-style 'Cos-T'. Since Peter is primarily a custom builder, his guitars are tailor-made to suit individual purchasers' preferences. Top-notch materials and components are used throughout, with Peter himself involved in the entire process from wood selection to the final intonation adjustment.

Luthiers like Nik Huber (Germany), Johan Gustavsson (Sweden) and indeed our own Hugh Manson and Martyn Booth have shown that European-built instruments can equal – and in some instances surpass – the quality of their US-built counterparts, so if you're in the market for a modern, custom-built bolt-neck guitar, check out Rahbek's website. You won't be disappointed. Here are two for starters to whet your appetite...

BODY & NECK – RAHBK COS-T

With Fender's headstock profiles strictly off-limits (the headstock of both the Telecaster and Stratocaster are now protected Fender trademarks), other manufacturers of Fender-style →

GBINFO

RAHBK COS-T

PRICE: £1499 (as reviewed, £1618)

BUILT IN: Denmark

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25 1/2 inches)

NUT WIDTH: 41.5mm (1.63 inches)

BODY: Solid swamp-ash

NECK: Maple, bolt on

FINGERBOARD: Maple, 241mm radius (9.5 inches)

FRETS: 22 medium stainless steel

PICKUPS: Seymour Duncan Antiquity

CONTROLS: Master tone and volume, plus three-way selector switch

BRIDGE: Fixed, Gotoh

MACHINEHEADS: Chrome Gotoh enclosed

WEIGHT: 2.9kg (6.5lbs)

CASE: SKB hardshell case included

FINISHES: You name it – see website for details. Dark butterscotch shown (finish used is similar to nitrocellulose lacquer)

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes

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GO 90!

NOT YOUR USUAL STRAT FITMENT...

■ Introduced by Gibson back in 1946, the P-90 has a unique voice that falls somewhere between the glassy-toned single-coils found on Fender's Strat and Tele and the warmer sounds of Gibson's classic PAF.

Bright and ballsy, the P-90 remains warm yet articulate across the guitar's entire sonic range, with little trace of the muddy bottom-end that can be the bane of humbucking pickups. Like all single coils, the P-90 is affected by extraneous noise

and hum, a problem that DiMarzio has addressed by applying its patented Virtual Vintage technology. Lovely job.



instruments have little alternative but to find an appropriate substitute of their own. Mavericks aside (check out Lindert and Tyler for two of the more radical solutions), most manufacturers have settled for a subtle variation on the Fender theme, often applying the same design to both their T- and S-style guitars. A comparison of the headstock silhouettes employed by Tom Anderson, John Suhr and now Peter Rahbek – all of which are remarkably similar – suggests that a standard alternative to the classic



■ Stainless steel fretwire feels great and wears far more slowly than the more common nickel silver

depth for an easy, buzz-free action.

Although its outline is obviously derived from Fender's Telecaster, generous S-style contouring lends the Cos-T a far more ergonomic body shape than its plank-like progenitor. ('Cos' is an abbreviation of 'cosmic' rather than a reference to a *Lactuca Sativa*, variety Longifolia [er, that's a lettuce – Smarty Pants Ed]). Angling the body heel and replacing the

built from lightweight swamp ash, the grain of which is just about visible through the faultless dark butterscotch finish: lovely, if perhaps a little too yellow this early in its life.

HARDWARE & PARTS – COS-T

The matt black plastic pickguard is secured by eight allen screws, the domed heads of which sit proud of its surface. Personally, I'd have preferred the screw heads to be set flush, as the current arrangement irritates my right hand. I also dislike the cutout along the pickguard's lower edge. This design evolved to accommodate the metal base-plate on which the Fender Telecaster's rear pickup and bridge assembly are mounted. Since the Cos-T's bridge pickup is mounted sans base-plate, the cutout serves no function at all, creating the impression that the guitar has been 'bought in' from a parts catalogue: we are assured that it has not.

Similar to the unit fitted to Anderson T-style guitars, the Gotoh bridge is adjustable in just about every direction, and in true Tele fashion, strings attach through the body via six metal ferrules.

Pickups are a pair of Seymour Duncan Antiquity neck and bridge single-coils for Telecaster, which is an extremely upmarket appointment even on a guitar of this calibre. Antiquity is Seymour's hand-constructed and aged range that sticks closely to true vintage specs. However, since the guitar makes no claim to vintage authenticity, easier access to the neck pickup's height-adjustment screws would have been a good idea (as on a traditional Fender Telecaster, the pickguard must be removed

"WITH ITS SATIN FINISH, THE COS-T'S C-SHAPED ONE-PIECE MAPLE NECK FEELS SEXY AND INVITING"

Fender headstock is emerging.

With its smooth satin finish, the Cos-T's C-shaped one-piece maple neck feels sexy and inviting. A small brown mark adjacent to the 12th fret – possibly a cosmetic flaw in the timber – detracts from its otherwise unblemished appearance, while the maple fingerboard is inlaid with 4mm green abalone dots, and carries 22 hard-wearing stainless steel frets, all of which are immaculately profiled and polished. Stainless steel fretwire is becoming increasingly popular with companies such as Tom Anderson and others, and is notable for its extremely hard-wearing tendencies, meaning far fewer fret dresses are needed over the guitar's life, even for very heavy players.

Fitted with oval vintage-style buttons, the chrome Gotoh tuners have a 16:1 ratio for a smooth, precise performance. The nut slots have been cut to exactly the correct

traditional Fender-style neck plate with four recessed bolts improves upper-fret access, and to the same end, the rear of the single cutaway is dressed away substantially.

While standard issue for the Cos-T is an alder body, the review guitar is

■ Four sturdy screws hold the satin finished neck firmly in place



before height adjustments can be made). Controls comprise the usual master tone and volume, together with a Fender-style three-way selector switch.

SOUNDS – COS-T

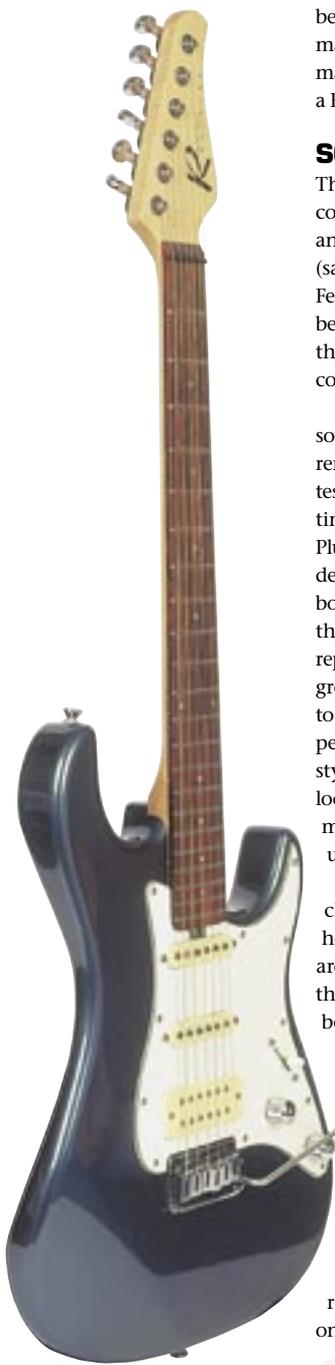
The Cos-T plays beautifully, its combination of medium-sized frets and 9 1/2-inch fingerboard radius (same as a current American Standard Fender) adding up to an inviting, bend-friendly feel. I particularly like the neck shape – one of the nicest I've come across in a long time.

Played acoustically, the guitar sounds vibrant and alive with remarkably good sustain that pays testament to the carefully selected timbers and loving construction. Plugged into a vintage Fender Super, it delivers much of the character that its body shape would lead you to expect, the Duncan Antiquities faithfully reproducing the clarity, snap and growl that has endeared T-style guitars to players of just about every musical persuasion. Indeed, before filing this style of guitar under 'Country', just look at the plethora of rock and pop musicians who have used – and still use – this type of guitar.

One significant departure from the classic Fender Telecaster design, however, is the lack of a bridge plate around the bridge pickup; something that Tom Anderson, among others, believes contributes to the high-

end squeal and general high-frequency unpleasantness you can experience with a Fender

Telecaster bridge pickup under distortion. As a result, where you'd normally have to roll a Telecaster's tone pot back for a pseudo-humbucker response to get rid of the nasty edges, the Cos-T holds on to higher gain more authoritatively.



LOCK FINE

PROOF THAT LOCKING TUNERS DON'T HAVE TO BE UGLY

■ Among the various locking machinehead types on the market are the sleek Gotohs you see here.

We particularly like these because they don't deviate too far from classic Kluson aesthetics, and they're straightforward to use; simply tighten the string as usual, which clamps it securely in place. Releasing the string requires a screwdriver or similar (although sometimes they'll shake loose

when the string tension is released), because unfortunately the slot at the top of the tuner post is too narrow for a coin.



BODY & NECK – RAHBEK CLASSIC

Like the Cos-T, the Rahbek Classic has a maple neck, this time with a subtle but attractive flamed figure. It is topped by a gorgeous Brazilian rosewood slab fingerboard (a £46 upgrade) that is inlaid with 4mm pearl dots. The neck's satin finish feels smoother than that of the Cos-T, possibly because the guitar has been played more. Nut, frets and overall set-up are once again impeccable.

Like many contemporary builders, Peter eschews the use of string trees (the small metal clip that is screwed to the headstock face of Fender Strats and Teles). Suitable downward pressure is achieved by reducing the height of the machinehead posts, thereby increasing the break angle at the nut.

Overall body dimensions are marginally smaller than those of a regular Fender Stratocaster, with a more pronounced waist (or, to quote Peter, "more of a woman's shape"!). The rear section of both cutaways has been contoured, while the treble-side cutaway is significantly deeper than that of an American Strat, for example. Body and neck are joined using the same angled heel and recessed bolts that we encountered on the Cos-T.

The pickups are mounted on an off-white laminated plastic pickguard, the same material used for the vibrato cavity cover. Personally, I would have preferred to see the latter set flush with the back of the body, rather than sitting proud, which is more 'vintage Fender' than 'modern custom'.

HARDWARE & PARTS – RAHBEK CLASSIC

The Gotoh vibrato bridge is a non-locking, two-pivot fulcrum system, set up so that its base-plate rests flat against the body of the guitar. While this arrangement offers certain benefits – if you break a string, for example, the guitar will remain in tune – it precludes any kind of up-bend, which is a serious disadvantage if you're an habitual wang-bar user. Peter, however, believes that the



■ A MusicMan-style truss rod wheel allows for adjustments to be made without removing the neck

MEET PETE

WE CAUGHT UP WITH MR RAHBEK FOR A QUICK CHAT...



■ Though a relatively new name in the UK, Peter Rahbek's company is well established in his native Denmark. "Our guitars can be seen onstage with Danish bands and on TV-shows in the hands of experienced session players who demand only the best," Peter says with pride. So...

Guitar Buyer: When did you start building guitars?

Peter Rahbek: "I began building and designing my own guitars 11 years ago. Rahbek Guitars began in Aarhus, Jutland. We moved to Copenhagen in January 2000, with a workshop located ten minutes from the Town Hall Square."

What would you say are the advantages of buying a custom-made instrument over something more 'off the peg'?

"We offer three basic guitar models, the Standard, the Classic and the Cos-T. If you can't find what you want within our standard

range of options – which includes Wilkinson/Gotoh hardware and pickups from DiMarzio, Lindy Fralin, Kinman, Seymour Duncan, Bill Lawrence and EMG – we can still work with you to build the exact guitar you desire. If you're searching for your own sound, then let us know, because we might be able to help you find it!"

What's your philosophy of guitar building, in a nutshell?

"Well, all of our guitars are handcrafted and we will only use the best woods and hardware available. Attention to detail is also very important to us. I am especially proud of our neck/body joint which allows easy access to the top frets."

What does the future hold for Rahbek Guitars?

"We have a new model soon, the Cos-T Deluxe is on the way. It will feature a mahogany body, maple top, mini-humbuckers and PRS-style binding."

DETAILS

TWO FINE EXAMPLES OF THE CUSTOM QUALITY ON OFFER FROM THE DANISH LUTHIERS



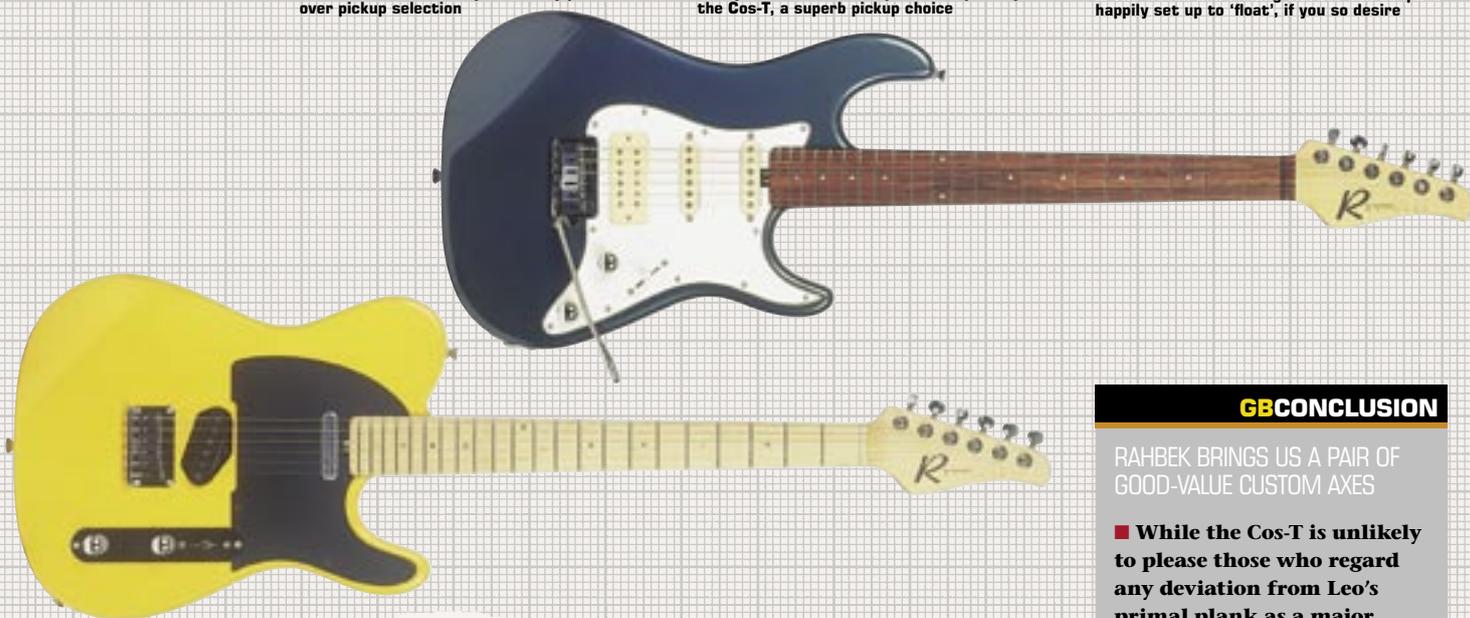
■ A standard Strat-style five-way presides over pickup selection



■ Seymour Duncan Antiquities sit proudly in the Cos-T, a superb pickup choice



■ The Gotoh non-locking vibrato can be quite happily set up to 'float', if you so desire



GBCONCLUSION

RAHBEK BRINGS US A PAIR OF GOOD-VALUE CUSTOM AXES

■ While the Cos-T is unlikely to please those who regard any deviation from Leo's primal plank as a major transgression, judged on its own merits the guitar is a fine instrument that combines superior build quality with a versatile performance.

Built to the same high standards, the Classic's combination of Fender-style single coils and Virtual P-90 at the bridge presents an attractive alternative to the typical single-coil/humbucker mix. Bear in mind that virtually every aspect of Peter Rahbek's guitars, from fingerboard radius to pickups to electronics to hardware, can be tweaked to suit your requirements, but as an example of what's possible, the two models here reviewed represent good value for money for custom-built guitars. **GB**

GBOPINION

**RAHBEK COS-T
GOLD STARS**

- ★ Great neck
- ★ Excellent set-up

BLACK MARKS

- Awkward access to neck pickup's height-adjustment screws

IDEAL FOR...

Everything from jangly indie to blues, to no-holds-barred rock'n'roll. Metal is probably out, however!

GBOPINION

**RAHBEK CLASSIC
GOLD STARS**

- ★ DiMarzio Virtual P-90 offers a welcome alternative
- ★ Good value for a custom guitar

BLACK MARKS

- Screw-in vibrato arm; Down-only whammy set-up won't suit everyone

IDEAL FOR...

Anyone seeking a relatively unique guitar in the S tradition with a little more balls at the bridge

current set-up improves resonance and sustain and besides, should you prefer, the guitar can easily be adjusted so that the whammy 'floats'. On a modern-leaning guitar, a push-in arm would be preferable to the traditional screw-in item provided, the threads of which are likely to wear with use.

The pickups on this particular example are DiMarzios that are custom wound to Rahbek's specs. Somewhat unusually for an S-style guitar, we have a Virtual P-90 at the bridge position, with the more customary single coils at the neck and middle positions. Although the controls follow the same basic arrangement as the Cos-T, a capacitor fitted to the volume potentiometer acts as a high-pass filter, enabling you to roll the volume off, with no accompanying loss of your top-end 'sparkle'.

**SOUNDS –
RAHBEK CLASSIC**

The DiMarzio Virtual P-90 at the bridge of the Classic adds a tonality that's a good deal fuller and fatter than that of a Fender-style single coil, but with a little more low-end

definition than a humbucker. Finally acknowledged as the classic design that it is, the long-neglected P-90 has a character that is both raw and raunchy, making it a perfect foil for the DiMarzio single coils at the neck and middle positions. How often have you flicked to the bridge position on a Strat and wanted a little more oomph? Well, this is a great solution that doesn't land you in over-aggressive humbucker territory.

The voicing of the volume potentiometer makes it easy to switch from screaming leads to lower-volume, clear chord work with little or no loss of high-end definition. Pickup choice and electronics is ultimately up to you, however, so your guitar could well sound quite different.

GBRATINGS

RAHBEK COS-T



GBRATINGS

RAHBEK CLASSIC

