

Victory Lap

Hamer Monaco

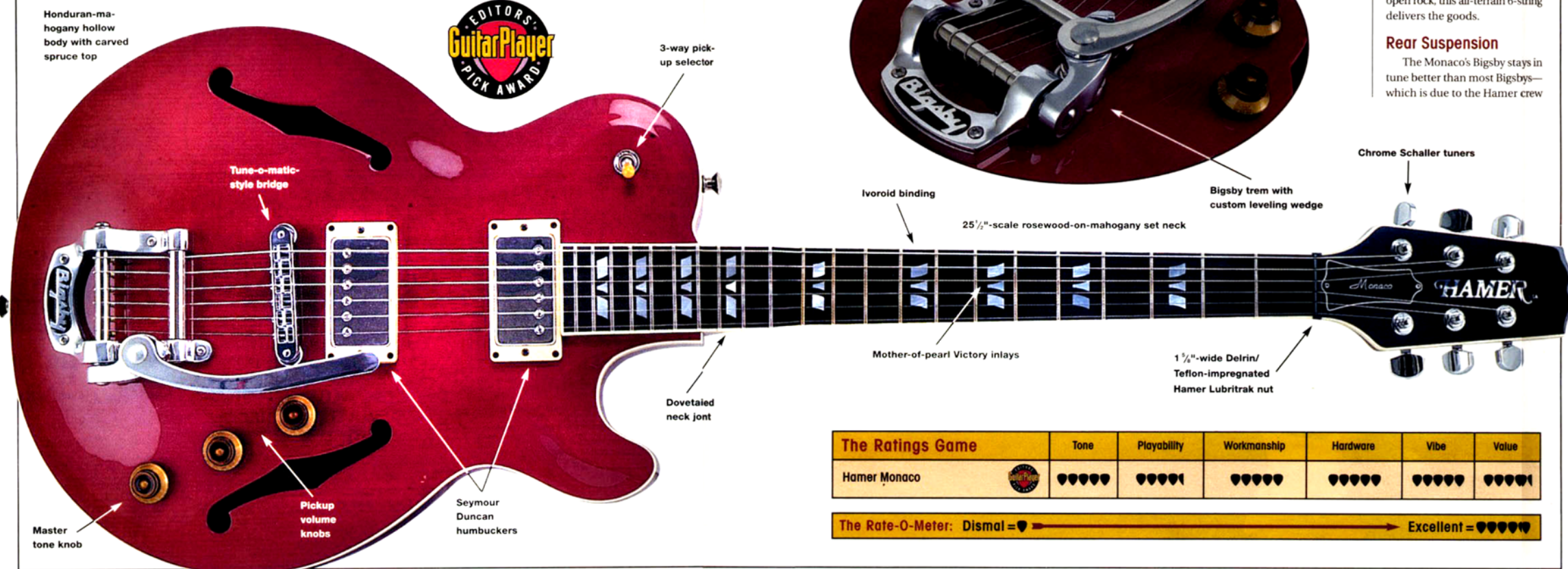
By Jude Gold

An arched top isn't the only thing the folks at Hamer USA know how to carve. They've also chiseled out a niche in the guitar

market by creating extraordinary handcrafted guitars that put quality before pizzazz. The company doesn't rely on aggressive body shapes, fancy circuitry, or flashy

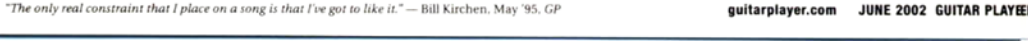
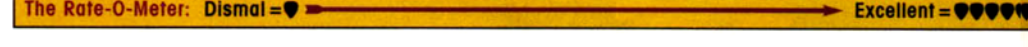
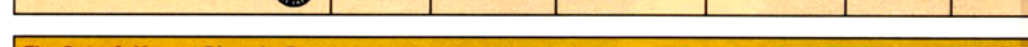
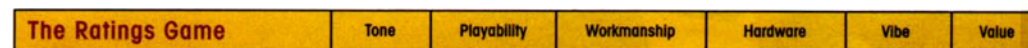
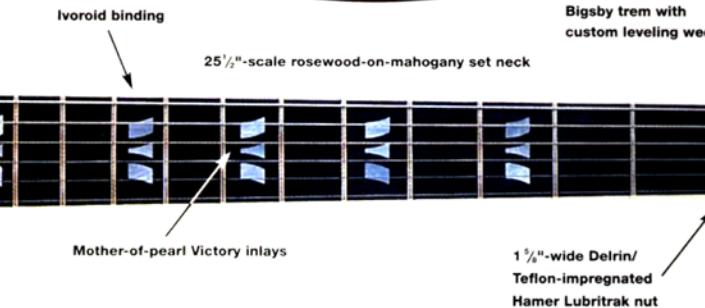
Snapshot

With its resonant spruce top, balanced tone, stellar intonation, and re-machined Bigsby tremolo, the Hamer Monaco (\$2,699 retail/\$2,159 street) has an irresistible vibe that will win over guitarists of every stripe. The Monaco receives an **Editors' Pick Award**.



The Ratings Game	Tone	Playability	Workmanship	Hardware	Vibe	Value
Hamer Monaco	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★

The Rate-O-Meter: Dismal = ♥ → Excellent = ♥♥♥♥♥



cosmetics to sell their instruments. If anything, Hamer guitars are spectacularly simple, and it's their tone and playability that win people over on the first strum. Such is the case with the Hamer Monaco (\$2,699).

Life in the Fast Lane

Like other Hamer models such as the Newport and the Daytona, the Monaco's name is inspired by a famous raceway. With its traditional, single-cutaway body, conservative headstock, straightforward electronics, and gentrified f-holes, the Monaco doesn't look like the 6-

string equivalent of a Grand Prix car. But when you strap it on, the Monaco all but sprouts airfoils and racing stripes. Licks, leads, and chord progressions seem turbocharged, and playability is tight and precise. Two things work together to give the Monaco such zip: a speedy neck that sports a 14"-radius, flawlessly intonated fretboard, and a carved spruce top that projects notes vibrantly with minimal effort. (Besides the model tested here, the new Monaco line includes two chambered-mahogany, stop-tailpiece versions: the flame maple-topped Superpro at \$2,899, and the de-tune friendly,

26 1/2"-scale, mahogany-topped SubTone at \$2,699.)

Pit Stop

You practically need a microscope to find a bummer on the Monaco. Its red, transparent finish is smooth as glass, and the ivoroid binding is rendered so well you can barely feel a difference between it and the wood. Aside from some high notes on the first string that fretted out during extreme bends (which I fixed with a twist of the bridge's treble-side adjusting wheel), the Monaco's setup was flawless. Hamer fanatics will notice the pickup-selector switch isn't

near the knobs, as on many of the company's other models. Although the switch's more traditional location on the Monaco's upper bout looks classy, players who strum wildly may be prone to chancing pickups unintentionally.

Ignition System

With its simple controls and absence of Strat-mimicking coil-taps, the Monaco would appear to offer only three basic sounds: neck pickup, bridge pickup, or both. However, the nicely balanced Duncan pickups (Pearly Gates bridge, Duncan Custom neck) provide all the fat humbucker flavors you'd ever hope for from a thinline hollowbody. Once you get rolling, you'll find the Monaco to be delightfully multifaceted. Whether you play high-revving rockabilly, fingerstyle jazz, skanky funk, vibey surf, or wide-open rock, this all-terrain 6-string delivers the goods.

Rear Suspension

The Monaco's Bigsby stays in tune better than most Bigsby—which is due to the Hamer crew

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re-machining the device until the bearings align perfectly, as well as making sure the spring is ultra taut and the trem arm is all but frictionless. The Monaco's Bigsby is great for moody vibrato effects, and, intonationwise, it's nearly invisible when not in use. Bend a string, and the other strings don't drift nearly as much as they do on a fulcrum trem. The Bigsby's "bar," however, is wide and flat,

and players used to instant access to their volume and tone knobs may sometimes find it in the way. Also, changing a string on a Bigsby is still an enormous hassle. Unless you have three arms, it's a struggle keeping the string's ball end on the post until your final turn of the tuning peg.

Scream Machine

Flat-backed like a Les Paul, the Monaco's hollow body wails in the most delicious way when

Contact Info

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coaxed with a modest amount of gain. Cranking through an AC30's Brilliant channel, the Monaco feeds back musically in glorious octaves, fifths, and thirds. Soothing jazz tones also abound when you plug it into cleaner sounding Fenders and Polytones. The Monaco may be closer to an ES-335 than an L-5, but it works great for everything from fingerstyle jazz to Freddie Green-style swing.

Paired with a Matchless Chieftain 2x12 combo at a full-contact funk-rock gig, the Monaco was completely in its element. Prince and Ohio Players tones were a cinch, as were roaring rock textures à la Malcolm Young

and Brian May. The Monaco's flexibility is outstanding, yet it never loses its identity when you subject it to over-the-top distortion or wacky effects chains.

Checked Flag

It seems only fitting that Hamer introduced its new Victory mother-of-pearl inlays on this model. With its speed and superb handling, the Monaco is sure to lose many of its competitors in the turns. If you've ever dreamed of a guitar that combines many of the best traits of a Gretsch, a Les Paul, and an ES-335, you should test drive this agile arch-top. It's a great ride. **A**



HAMER U.S.A. GUITARS