





GMR Flow Out

6-String Fretless

Do you really need a bass that is both fretless and sporting 6-strings? You might think not, but as Kevin Sanders finds out, you could be wrong.

Of all the instruments in the bass player's arsenal, the most daunting to the uninitiated must surely be the 6-string fretless. If you've never played one, the feeling when you first place your left hand on that vast expanse of fingerboard is akin to driving across Dartmoor on a dark night – only the faintest idea where you are, and to be honest a bit unnerved. However, if you already play fretless and have perhaps used a 5-string for a while, then a 6-string fretless bass is a revelation and can expand your vocabulary and stretch what it's possible for you to do on a bass. Chords, alto and treble solo lines and subterranean lows are all suddenly possible – even at the same time!

Build Quality

The through-neck design of the Single Cut and the solid upper horn from which the bass derives its name are features that have been developed by Polish luthier Roman Koc over the last 30 years, but several bass makers now offer similar designs: Fodera, Elrick, Italian company W&T and others all make instruments that use a similar design philosophy. There are, as you would expect, important

differences between all of these and the GMR, and perhaps most obvious is the cavity within the upper rear bout on the Single Cut. This is an idea that's also favoured by Roger Sadowsky, who believes that lightening the body with internal chambers results in a more open, brighter-sounding bass. This is great, but a compromise if the shift in mass completely upsets the balance of the instrument. On the GMR this is definitely not the case – the bass balances perfectly.

The front consists of two beautiful pieces of evenly grained bird's-eye maple. These and their corresponding mahogany back sections make up the 'wings' that are glued either side of the neck assembly. This neck is the really impressive part of the bass – made of nine laminates consisting of black walnut for the outer two and central pieces, with two thinner strips of wenge, each flanked by thin maple veneers. The result is not only visually gorgeous but also incredibly rigid, and the generously thick ebony fingerboard glued to the front only adds to this structural stability. Being so strong allows the neck to be super-slim and comfortable, with a shallow and elegant volute at the headstock. The through-neck design



also allows for the body to be sculpted away at the neck-body join, allowing complete and easy access right to the top of the board – particularly important on this type of instrument.

Although the hardware on the Single Cut is 'off the shelf', it's all top-quality stuff. Black Schaller M4 machines, an ETS piezo bridge and Schaller security strap buttons make up the iron work, while the preamp is a John East 'U Retro' design. This British-designed preamp is powered by just one PP3 battery, housed within its own cavity on the back of the bass. The rest of the circuitry sits within a second, larger routed cavity, neatly shielded with copper foil and covered, like the battery compartment, with a matching

piece of walnut, accurately cut and flush fitting.

The controls on the front of the bass follow the contour of the lower bout, and foremost is the volume. The pickup blend is next, followed by two 'stacked' controls. The first of these has bass (boost only) on the lower portion, with treble cut/boost on top. The second stacked control takes care of the mids. This is a neat 'parametric' design where the lower part is used to select the required mid frequency while the upper part cuts or boosts it by up to +/-12dB. The next control is a push/pull pot which, when pulled out, allows you to use the bass in passive mode, whereby the control acts as a rotary tone. When pushed in, the bass is in active mode,

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION**GMR FLOW OUT 6 FRETLESS****PRICE: £5,200 INC. GIG BAG****Made in:** UK**Body:** Birds Eye Maple top/ Mahogany. Tone chambers.**Neck:** 3 pcs walnut + 2 pcs wenge + 4 maple stripes**Fingerboard:** Ebony**Scale:** 34 inch**Neck width:** nut 53mm; 24 fret 92mm**Neck thickness:** I - 20mm; XII - 23mm**Head:** angled**Machine heads:** Schaller M4B**Nut:** ebony**Scale length:** 34"**Radius:** 12"**Pickups:** Bartolini HB/HB dual coil soapbars

Birdseye maple covers

Preamp: John East U retro 5 knobs deluxe

+ John East MPB piezo module

Controls: volume, pan, piezo blend, treble, mid, mid freq, bass,**Bridge:** Brass ETS 3D with piezo pickups**Strings:** DR black beauties**Hardware colour:** black**Finish:** oil finish**Colour:** natural**Left hand model available:** yes**Case/ gig bag included:** Leather hand crafted gig bag or flight case**WHAT WE THINK****Plus:** Beautifully made from the finest woods and components available and with a beautiful tone.**Minus:** Expensive (although not for what it is); the controls would be nice in black anodised aluminium rather than black 'chrome'.**Overall:** If you wanted a fretless bass for nothing but solo playing, you'd be hard-pressed to choose anything better than this new GMR, but this is one instrument that's capable of so much more.**CONTACT DETAILS****GMR Basses Ltd**

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BGM RATING OUT OF FIVE**BUILD QUALITY****SOUND QUALITY****VALUE FOR MONEY****OVERALL**

bringing the rest of the tone controls into play. Last in line is the piezo blend control.

Sounds and Playability

Although undeniably a big instrument, the ergonomic design and low weight mean that the dimensions are soon forgotten once the bass is strapped on. The soft, satin, oiled finish lends the bass, and in particular the neck, a wonderfully sensitive, tactile feel, and even just gently playing acoustically you know this is going to sound great when plugged in.

Setting up a quick, usable tone is easy given the linear and logical layout of the controls, and I started by playing just the middle four strings, where the standard range gives a good reference and comparison to other basses. Even played in this limiting way, the sound is simply awesome – powerful, rich and creamy, with punch and gravitas to the bottom end and a clear grainy texture to the mids, and all with that textbook growling sustain you only get with the best fretless basses. Each note has its own natural rise and fall, crescendo and decrescendo, with the smallest amount of left-hand vibrato translated without loss to the tone, giving expression and dynamics to every note played.



settings, but I soon found out that the Bartolini pickups, John East preamp and piezo-fitted ETS bridge all mean that the basic sound, good as it is, can be manipulated in every way imaginable. The bridge piezo in particular gives the sound an almost 'amplified acoustic' quality, and the quiet but powerful EQ allows you to fully exploit the full range of the bass – as long as your rig can handle the range!

Conclusion

If I sound a bit 'over the top' with this bass then I make no apology. I'm completely smitten with it. Roman Koc and GMR deserve huge credit for creating such an exquisite instrument and work of art. Of course, at over 5k this bass is out of reach for all but the most well-heeled bassists. But I would love to see and hear this instrument in the hands of a great player who can use it to something approaching its full potential. It deserves to be on a concert stage where it can be played and enjoyed by one musician, and heard by thousands.

Kevin Sanders