The H.S. Anderson Mad Cat guitar is famous as Prince has performed with it quite frequently. In 2009 it was reissued but only available in Japan. As of today, the last 15 pieces are available for the rest of the world through the Belgian company, Amptec.

By Steven Faber

The first H.S. Anderson Mad Cats were produced between 1973 and 1979 by the Japanese company Moridaira, also well-known for the acoustic guitars they make under the Morris brand. Prince fans will most certainly know that his guitar shows a Hohner logo. This because Moridaira sold the rights to sell this model in the USA to Hohner. Moridaira kept on building the guitars itself, the only difference being the headstock logo. In that period around 500 pieces were made in total, one of these was acquired by Prince, and he's been using it since 1980 for recordings and live performances.

Design

The Mad Cat is clearly derived from the Fender Telecaster, just as other models of H.S. Anderson are derived from the Stratocaster and Jaguar/Jazzmaster. Yet Moridaira has opted for a completely different body construction than the one we know from the classic, which has led to a clearly distinctive sound. Whereas for Leo Fender one of the key points when designing the Telecaster was to be able to build the guitar easily and quickly, the production of a Mad Cat takes considerably longer because of its construction: these handmade guitars take about 8 production weeks. The most striking detail of the Mad Cat is the dark stripe running through the middle of the body. This is a strip of walnut, with on both sides a log of ash glued to it. This piece of ash is covered on the front and backside with a layer of beautifully flamed maple, which makes for a very nice looking ensemble. The bridge is not of the Telecaster type (on which the element is also mounted), but a standard hardtail model with six individual saddles with strings going through the body. The bridge pickup is attached to a plastic plate in leopard design, the same material which is used for the pick guard. The neck pickup is mounted onto the pick guard with two screws and is not -as is usually done with Teletype guitars- screwed on the body. With the standard three-position switch and master controller for volume and tone, the electronics don't show any surprises.

The neck and fretboard are made from high quality maple. The grain is regular and runs parallel to the fretboard rim. The peghead shows the Gotoh tuning mechanics, the serial number (12018) and -at the front- the brand name and cat head logo. The shape of the bottom of the peghead differs from the common Telecaster design; undoubtedly this has something to do with the copyrights of Fender.

Sound and playability

When playing the Mad Cat acoustically, you'll hear a clear sound with nice, rich basses, a delicious snap and a good sustain. The neck shares the same width as a standard Telecaster with an average thickness and has a good grip. The fretboard radius is a bit bigger than the classic 7,25 inch from Fender, so you won't have problems with dead notes while bending.

As expected, when amplified we can recognize the acoustic qualities of the sound very well. What is striking is that this instrument –together with the original- has got a huge dynamic range. We compared both instruments with an American Vintage '52 Telecaster reissue and a Strat with an ash body, but they couldn't come close to the dynamic range of the Mad Cats. The clarity of the reissue was a bit too much for me which made me turn down the treble control on the amplifier a tad. There's a frequency range in the mid-highs to highs that is quite prominently present. This has got to do with the construction of the body, because the original Mad Cat has this too, even though this specific one sounds a bit more rounded. Because of the guts and dynamics of these guitars, they can be very quick, tight and fierce when using them during well-played funky parts. Maybe this is what appeals to Prince?

When we used some effects playing the guitars, another characteristic came up which probably appeals to the little American: because of the clearness and snap, the Mad Cat sounds very good with modulation effects. Even if you turn as much chorus or detune into you sound, adding quite some delay, the first attack keeps cutting through very well.

Conclusion

The H.S. Anderson Mad Cat is a very exceptional guitar. Not just because you can admire Prince playing it in innumerable pics and videos and not because of its looks: a bit showy yet traditional. No, it's mainly a special guitar because of the unusual construction which impacts the sound of the guitar. Perhaps it won't appeal to every Tele-guitarist but with these guitars the statement 'some love it, others might not' is really the case.

The building quality is outstanding and the price is more than reasonable for this hand build guitar. So, if you're up for a dynamic guitar with a quick response that sounds very well with effects, than you really need to try this one. But don't hesitate: they won't be available for long.

Royal descent: the original Mad Cat

At first sight, the two Mad Cats seem almost identical but when you look closer, you can list quite a number of differences. Starting with the head, which has another shape and logo and is equipped with other tuning machines. The neck is almost the same, only the frets of the original are a bit thicker (or could this be jumbo frets replacing the original ones?). The '79 body has a black binding whereas the new version has got the same leopard design as the pick guard. The elements are different too, although we are not sure what was mounted on the original version. The front and back of the new MadCat are in beautifully flamed maple; this is less eye-catching on the old guitar. Finally the new design has a metal jack output. On the old version, this was mounted on a little plastic plate. Clearly an improvement.

So, the reissue has got some visual differences with the '79 original but the construction remained the same and you can hear so. Even though the original sounds (and feels!) more lived and perhaps a bit deeper and darker, you can assume that the reissue will sound and feel the same after a while. The timbre (clarity, rich basses, a good sustain and a high dynamic range) are clearly present in both guitars. In addition to this, the reissue has a nicer top and back and looks fancier with the leopard binding. Conclusion: this is a worthy successor of a legendary guitar.

Test results

Construction 4,5 / 5 playability 4,5 / 5 Sound: 5 / 5 Price/Quality 4 / 5 Opinion 4,5 / 5

We liked: timbre, dynamics, build quality, vibe We didn't like: sound won't appeal to everyone

ADVISORY PRICE: € 2556,-COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: Japan

TYPE: solid electric guitar with single cutaway

BODY: ash sides with walnut center strip and top and back in flamed maple

NECK/FRETBOARD: one part maple; fretboard radius: 11 inch

FRETS: 21, Sanko SBB23

SCALE: 648 mm

WIDTH NUT/12E FRET: 42,8 mm/52 mm

NUT: bone

ELECTRONICS: Bill Lawrence USA T1 (neck) en T2 (bridge) singlecoils, volume and tone control,

three-position switch

HARDWARE: chromed, Gotoh tuning mechanics

WEIGHT: approx. 3,3 kg FINISH: polyurethane COLOUR: Golden Brown LEFT-HANDED: no

EXTRA: SKB case included









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