

Jammin' J-Style

The Dingwall Designer Guitars Super J

WHILE DINGWALL DESIGNER Guitars' Super J bass is unquestionably inspired by the Fender Jazz Bass, it's separated from the typical run-of-the-mill clone by several things, including its use of the patented Novax Fanned Fret system and a laundry list of high-end components and proprietary features.

In the Super J, Dingwall starts with the basics – a very resonant, lightweight alder body with a high-gloss finish (our tester sported the company's Bronze Age color, with matching headstock), and a narrow, three-piece U-shaped bolt-on maple neck with a satin poly finish (available options include maple or rosewood fretboard, choice of nine finishes and four pickguard materials, Hipshot drop D tuner, and color-keyed headstock).

Arguably the most notable feature of the Super J is the Fanned Fret system, in which the frets are installed at incremental angles across the fretboard, creating a progressively shorter scale length for each string; the E string is 34¹/₄", while the G is 32". This system adds definition to the tone of the lower strings (due to additional tension), and adds roundness to the tone of the higher strings.

The Super J uses a pair of custom Dingwall hum-canceling single-coil pickups mated to an 18-volt Aguilar OBP-1 active preamp with a mini toggle bypass, four-way rotary pickup selector, master volume, active bass control,

and an active/passive treble tone control. The four-position pickup selector lets the Super J be heard through the bridge pickup by itself, the bridge and neck pickups in parallel (the way most Jazz-style basses are wired), the bridge and neck pickups in series (like a humbucker) and finally, the neck pickup by itself. The Bass Tone control adds low-end only when the Aguilar preamp is engaged, and remains non-functional in passive mode. But its center-detent Treble control works in both the passive and active treble modes. Turn it clockwise (active mode) and it adds treble, turn it counterclockwise (passive) and it acts like a traditional high-roll-off tone control. Further refinement is apparent in the sculpted headstock and countersunk Hipshot Ultralight tuners (with drop-tuning function on the low E), which not only lighten the headstock for better balance, but eliminate the need for a D/G string tree. The Super J also uses a proprietary Dingwall saddle-lock bridge made of a combination of aluminum, brass, and stainless steel. One of the coolest features is the innovative battery compartment, which uses a recessed aluminum oval-shaped cover with two finger holes, held firmly in place by two magnets recessed into the body. Getting to the two 9-volt batteries

is as simple as lifting the cover – no hassling with screws that too often are lost or strip their holes.

The Super J arrived with a pro setup, spot-on intonation, and low, buzz-free action. The feel of its neck lives up to the legacy of the original, with a very comfortable, narrow (1.5" at the nut) U profile with a slightly rolled fretboard edge. And while one would think playing the Fanned Fret system would require some acclimation, among the handful of bass players (along with a few guitarists) who handled our review unit, most were too impressed with its ease of play to notice any major change in the way they had to fret notes.

In passive mode through the four pickup settings and plugged into an Ampex SVT3 Pro Head (Mosfet/12AX7/12AU7) mated to a 6x10" cabinet, the Super J readily offered all of the standard classic Jazz Bass tones, along with a very nice high-output P-bass-style tone with the selector running both pickups in series. The Dingwall noiseless single-

coils have plenty of warmth and body while still exhibiting the snappy highs for which single-coils are famous, with no buzz or RF noise.

Engaging the Aguilar preamp noticeably increases output, as do the Bass Boost control and the "boost" half of the Treble control. The Bass Boost circuit adds a well-contoured low-end boost (up to 18 db at 40 hertz) without getting boomy – just enough to lend some drive and fullness. The Treble adds a fair amount of crispness to the highs (18 db at 4 kHz), and while the Super J's voiced pickups have an excellent natural clarity and don't need much help in the upper registers, the active Treble can certainly be useful if the Super J is run through cabs that don't have a tweeter. And the Aguilar preamp is very quiet, emitting only minimal noise, and *only* when the active Treble control is dimed.

The Super J is "living" proof that Dingwall has done its homework. Every component, from the pickups and electronics to the selection of tone woods, and the hardware, are all well-conceived and executed, and the craftsmanship is superb. – **Phil Feser** VG

DINGWALL SUPER J

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