



the SPIRIT of Indépendence

Why should I want one?

Go on just take a look at this guitar and tell me you don't want one already... The UJLP 2000 is stunning!

The Indie Guitar Company is already making fans for its take-no-prisoners approach to the musical instrument industry. Now Playmusic finds out how its guitars stack up. A fervently excited Chris Underwood meets the rather gorgeous UJLP 2000

UJLP 2000 Guitar
SRP: £409
The Indie Guitar Company
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As regular readers will know, here at Playmusic we pride ourselves on the unbiased and impartial reviews we dedicate to the weird and wonderful range of equipment that floods into our offices on a monthly basis. However, I have to confess it's going to be a little tricky to be completely impartial with this particular guitar because the moment I pulled it out of its box I fell instantly in love with it. That's before I'd even assessed its scale-length or cast my eye on the quality of the fret-inlays, because I cannot deny that this is just a fantastic looking instrument.

Not only is it the ultra-chic look of the thing that makes it difficult not to get rather childishly excited as you strap it on and crank it up, it's also the fact that it's one of a range of guitars which hail from the Indie Guitar Company.

Who they? The Indie Guitar Company is a small UK team trying to put a bit of that good old fashioned rock 'n' roll back into the manufacturing industry. They use words like "anti-establishment" quite a lot and are, to all intents and purposes, the Rough Trade of the MI industry. It all makes for a refreshing change and here at Playmusic we salute them for that. Oh, and they also make great-looking guitars. Did I mention that already?

So enough of the salivating, it's time to get professional. Let's don our perfectly tailored lab coats (complete with PM crest and dubious stains), pick up those clipboards and see what this instrument actually has to offer in terms of specification. After all, looks aren't everything. Just ask Rick Waller.

Speaking of looks, those who know their guitars will immediately recognise the shape of this guitar and excluding a scratch-plate, everything you would expect from the model which... inspired the UJLP 2000 is present, from the tulip shaped machine-heads and the toggle switch marked simply Rhythm and Treble to the frying pan-shaped pearloid fret inlays. But don't let's judge this guitar by other instruments. There are replicas out there which give the real deal a serious run for its money and there are cheap copies on a par with my first guitar, which comprised a Tupperware box with fishing-line stretched across it and a driftwood neck. The question is, which one is this?

Well the good news is that when you pick this guitar up the first thing you'll realise is that it is actually incredibly heavy. This is a bad sign in terms of potential back problems if you're going to be wearing the guitar round the house in your pants playing ropey Jet riffs (not that I've ever done that you understand). It is an excellent sign however in terms of quality because it suggests that the body is manufactured from high quality wood. In this case it's a solid block of Mahogany and judging by the weight, a really top grade piece too, probably Brazilian which is traditionally denser than African Mahogany.

Speak to any guitar manufacturer and they'll tell you how





“JUMP VORACIOUSLY ON YOUR CHANNEL SWITCH AND YOU OPEN THE GUITAR UP TO A WHOLE SOUNDSCAPE OF DISTORTED TONES. THE MIDDLE POSITION SOUNDS VERY WHITE STRIPES AND THE RHYTHM POSITION PLUNGES YOU INTO A DARK AND SINISTER WORLD OF DEATH METAL, SUMMON UP THE DEVIL KIND OF POWER CHORD ACTION.”

important the choice of woods is when constructing a guitar – and with a retail price of a little over four hundred quid, the decision here to go with solid mahogany already leaves a good percentage of the competition standing.

The neck is maple with a rosewood fingerboard, again a good choice of woods. It's impossible to tell the quality of the grain because both neck and body are covered in a thick polymer lacquer but the weight and tone both suggest that little expense was spared. The crucial body/neck joint is set as to be expected with a cutaway rising up to the neck at the 20th, fret leaving plenty of room at the top of the neck for twiddly-twiddly fans.

Moving onto the hardware, everything here is diecast chrome rather than nickel-plated. Nickel plate takes on a dull tarnish as it ages which vintage enthusiasts seem to like but the brilliance of the chrome here better suits the aesthetic of the guitar.

There's also good news down at the bridge, where you'll find a classic tune-o-matic bridge and stop tailpiece assembly. The original tune-o-matic was patented by Gibson way back in the 1950s and it's testament to the quality of its design that it's still something to look out for on this kind of guitar. The bridge is adjustable for height via two screws at either end while you can adjust the intonation via little screws on the backs of the individual saddles. This type of arrangement always feels really assured and sturdy, with the stop tailpiece anchoring the whole thing down lending the guitar a fantastic degree of sustain.


The gold, moulded plastic volume and tone rotaries seem a little at odds visually with the rest of the guitar (cream or silver would have made more sense). They do seem reassuringly well attached though, which again is significant. We all know what it's like to play a guitar with wobbly volume and tone controls

that feel as though they could just drop off with the tiniest tweak. Again, the cream three-way toggle switch seems reliable enough. The pick-ups comprise two humbuckers, the factory's own. The neck pick-up is positioned right at the bottom of the 22nd fret and the bridge pick-up, a couple of centimeters up from the saddle. Their chrome covers and screw-head pole pieces mimic the legendary Gibson PAF humbuckers that first saw active service in Les Paul guitars way back in 1957, before the advent of rock. How about that for foresight?

Enough of all this technical stuff though. I'm anxious to shed this lab coat, step back into my rock pants and actually put this guitar through its paces.

The most striking thing about playing this guitar is that the action has been set up beautifully. I don't think I've ever brought a guitar home before this that didn't need a little tweaking but this is ready to go. It sounds a bit nerdy but it's quite a personal thing. The action on one's guitar is rather like the positioning of cymbals for drummers. Whether it was a combination of telepathy and good luck on the part of Indie Guitars or whether this is just such a well laid out and proportioned instrument that it feels good anyway I don't know, but either way it's a total pleasure to play.

It could be something to do with the fact that when we interviewed the people behind these guitars in the last issue, they told us they put their new prototype models through their paces by “going out and gigging them”. If that has contributed to why this guitar feels so damned good, then it's a brainwave and should be emulated by all instrument manufacturers. Now I think about it, car, bicycle, armchair, ready-meal and underwear manufacturers should take note too.



Right, let's crank this thing up and, as a pockmarked old Canadian rocker once put it, wake up the neighbours.

Despite the close action, there's still enough space between the strings and the fretboard for the sound to really zing. In the treble position in fact, things are so zingy that you'll find yourself having to roll off some of the top end on your amp. The rhythm position on a clean sound is far nicer, with a warm round depth that would be well suited for moody Placebo-style hook-lines. But it's the toggle-switch middle position that really makes this guitar sing. It boasts an almost inaudibly phased quality that is absolutely perfect for rhythm playing. Big open chords sound rich and sonorous like acoustic rollers lapping at a beach, although there's still enough control in there to stop things getting messy (as is often the case when you play in an acoustic style on a solid-body electric guitar).

Jump voraciously on your channel switch and you open the guitar up to a whole soundscape of distorted tones. Again, the treble position is really very toppy and with a bit of adjustment would probably be perfect for making mullet-rock histrionics rise above the sound of a rabid heavy-metal band. The middle position sounds very White Stripes and the Rhythm position plunges you into a dark and sinister world of death-metal low-end, summon up the devil kind of power chord action. Or at least it did until the lady next door started beating on her living room wall to make me shut up.

If you're brave enough to turn up the volume on your amplifier then you'll be pleasantly surprised by the dynamic shifts and tonal qualities you can achieve with just subtle movements of the tone and volume rotaries. Far too many guitars in this price range seem to be fitted with tone and volume controls that do absolutely bugger all for about half of their rotation. Not so the UJLP 2000, which deals in subtlety as much as rock 'n' roll styling.

Overall this is a really great guitar and in my opinion definitely worth getting excited about. The feel and the sound of this instrument could easily fool you into thinking it was a far more expensive model, while a cursory glance through its specification sheet does nothing but bolster this illusion. We can think of countless reasons why you should check it out and also the other four guitars in the range. For starters, there's the excellent choice of woods, the unquestionably solid design and the playability. Add to that list the fact that they're made by a British company with a refreshing philosophy more suited to a gobby independent record label and you've got quite a few good reasons to part with your cash.

Above all though it has to be the design that will win you over. The monochrome Union Jack just looks so damned... sexy. Not even the image of me rocking out with the UJLP 2000 clad in nought but my pants is enough to diminish how attractive a proposition this guitar is. It's funky and fresh while still retaining something classically British and it's going to look fantastic on stage.

Of course image isn't everything but it does make a difference, and with this guitar you'll own a piece of kit that jealous fellow guitarists will drool over. Plus the really good news is that you'll also be playing an instrument that's been designed with a lot of attention to detail and an admirable specification. All for just over 400 quid. In fact impartial and unbiased reviewing aside, as soon as I'm done here I'm getting straight on the phone to Indie Guitars. I'm going to ask them if there's any chance I can keep this one. **PM**

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