

## Gear

## TEST DRIVE



# John Page Classic Ashburn



TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

**JOHN PAGE HAS HAD A LONG HISTORY** with Fender. He joined the company in 1978 and basically worked his way up to becoming a guitar designer with credits for Bullet, and the Vintage, Elite, and Performer series. In 1987, Page co-founded the Fender Custom Shop with guitar builder Michael Stevens, where he built one-off instruments for a who's-who list of players, including Eric Clapton, David Gilmour, Pete Townshend, and Cesar Rojas. Page led the Custom Shop for 12 years before taking a post as Executive Director of the Fender Museum of Music and the Arts in Corona, California. He subsequently relocated to southern Oregon in 2003, and turned his attention to building artistic furniture for a time before launching John Page Custom Guitars in 2006. Page teamed up with HRS Unlimited in 2014 in order to produce a production version

of one of his most popular models—the Ashburn Custom—and the end result is the Japanese-made guitar on review here.

The Ashburn begins in classic form with an alder body that draws on the outline of a Strat, but has a more streamlined look and feels a little more ergonomic. The maple neck mates to the body via an offset-pattern 4-bolt joint that uses machine screws and threaded inserts to enhance vibration transfer and eliminate the chance of wood screws stripping in their bores. The neck's medium thickness and comfy C shape is instantly appealing, and maple 'board wears 22 nicely finished frets that measure .095" wide by .045" tall. The fretboard dots are also shifted to the bass side for greater visibility. Add a contoured neck heel for easier access to the high positions, as well as very musical intonation all

along the way, and it's easy to get that "nicest Strat I've ever played" kind of impression from the Ashburn. Staggered height tuners make string trees unnecessary, which may also contribute to the easy bending and buttery playing feel. The Gotoh 510 vibrato has a silky travel and I found it stayed reliably in tune when doing pretty aggressive pitch bends with the press-in bar.

Designed by Page, the Bloodline single-coil pickups feature alnico V magnets and flat-top poles. The middle unit is reverse-wound to provide hum canceling in positions 2 and 4, and the bridge pickup is wound a little hotter (7.38k $\Omega$ ) and installed in a reverse slant configuration to tighten up the lows and mellow out the top-end response. A 5-way switch provides the usual pickup selections, and the controls are pared down to just Volume and Tone, the latter of



which has a very musical taper and yields useful, musical textures throughout its range.

The pickup selections aptly cover the variety of tones that make Strats such versatile guitars. The neck pickup has a bold, ringing character and sounds great for clean jazz chording or, with some grind applied by Big Joe Texas Screamer and Seymour Duncan 805 pedals, a wailing blues-rock tone that stayed clear and defined when I rolled down the volume. The middle position is great for all kinds of rhythm duties, and it went easily into meaty overdrive when pushed through a wicked-up Dr. Z Z-Lux

combo. Through the higher gain channels of a Mesa/Boogie Mark 5:25, the Ashburn's bridge pickup made it easy to get badass rock rhythm and lead tones. Even with lots of sustain, there's no questioning the responsiveness to picking attack and Volume knob settings, and only slight attenuation of the Tone control was needed to keep everything sounding creamy. Positions 2 and 4 provide two flavors of classic Strat-style cluckiness, with that balance of chiminess and deep, well-defined lows that make them a blast to have as options for changing-up your cleaner rhythm and lead tones.

## MODEL

## ASHBURN

CONTACT [johnpageclassic.com](http://johnpageclassic.com)

PRICE \$1,499 retail

## SPECIFICATIONS

NUT WIDTH	1.69", graphite
NECK	Maple, medium C shape
FRETBOARD	Maple, 25.5" scale, 12" radius
FRETS	22 jumbo
TUNERS	Gotoh vintage-style staggered
BODY	Alder
BRIDGE	Gotoh 510 tremolo
PICKUPS	Bloodline by John Page JP-1 single-coils
CONTROLS	Master Volume and Tone controls, 5-way switch
FACTORY STRINGS	D'Addario .010-.046
WEIGHT	7.58 lbs
BUILT	Japan
KUDOS	A highly refined take on an S-style guitar that plays and sounds above its price.
CONCERNS	None.

The Ashburn is a well-conceived guitar that makes its case by virtue of a multitude of refinements—some subtle, some fairly dramatic—that make it inspiring to play and effortless to get great sounds from. Essentially a boutique instrument that's priced for working-stiff players, the Ashburn is a sweet deal and very much worth considering whether you're a seasoned Strat player or a newcomer to this time-tested platform. **A**