

# ACG

## Salace E-Type

Mike Brooks investigates this five-string fretless from AC Guitars — and asks if there's something rather good in the water north of the border

AC Guitars  
www.acguitars.co.uk

£2600

Scottish luthier Alan Cringean's creations are always attention-grabbing, so when he offered us this bass for review at this year's London Bass Guitar Show, who were we to turn him down? A custom bass in every respect, this instrument is packed to the brim with interesting features, custom-designed hardware and a sophisticated electronics package. Care to take a look?



### Build Quality

The striking singlecut body shape may take a while to work out, but it's mightily comfortable to wear, helped greatly by the extensive rear contouring and sculpting, front chamfer and lower cutaway. It also has an unintrusive neck joint due to its set neck construction. There is some noticeable headstock bias, but the lower horn design helps the bass to sit well against the player when seated – and when placed on a strap, there are no balance issues of note.

From the back, the multi-timbered body, with its swamp ash core and wenge back facing, looks luscious; swing round to the front and the fraternal birch top with its cream finish resembles a particularly delicious form of ice cream. Not that that's a bad point, it's just that we haven't seen anything



## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

**Price** | £2600**Made In** | UK**Colour** | Cream**Body** | Swamp ash (core), wenge (back facing), fratal birch (top facing)**Neck** | 7-piece laminate of wenge, maple and ash, 34" scale**Neck Joint** | Set neck**Nut Width** | 46mm**Fingerboard** | Ebony**Frets** | 24**Pickups** | ACG RFB humbuckers, alnico bridge pickup, ceramic neck pickup with coil switching**Electronics** | ACG DFM 4K active dual filter module**Controls** | Volume/pickup pan (stacked), low pass filter frequency (neck pickup)/top cutoff (push/pull for low-mid boost) (stacked), low pass filter frequency (bridge pickup)/top cutoff (push/pull for pick attack) (stacked), sweepable mid/treble gain (stacked), coil tap selector switch**Hardware** | Black hardware, ACG/Hipshot custom bridge, Gotoh GB350 machine heads**Weight** | 4.3 kg**Case/gig bag included** | Yes**Left-hand option available** | Yes, as a custom order

## WHAT WE THINK

**Plus** | Impressive craftsmanship; varied tonal palette**Minus** | The control layout may be a little confusing**Overall** | A fine instrument that does everything well

## BGM RATING

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| BUILD QUALITY |  |
| SOUND QUALITY |  |
| VALUE         |  |



like it before! The seven-piece wenge, maple and ash asymmetric neck is finished in a satin lacquer, as is the body, and offers a well rounded, D-shaped neck profile that gives the player something substantial to work with. The 18mm string spacing at the bridge, 46mm nut width and broad, flat ebony fingerboard create a comfortable playing experience. As a five-string fretless, there is obviously a lot going on tonally: Alan has opted for a 34" scale, which makes the Salace a more comfortable instrument to play. Although the fingerboard is bare, pearl position markers have been used on the side facing, along with smaller guide dots between the larger markers.

The custom-designed ACG/Armstrong alnico and ceramic pickups and ACG/East dual filter circuitry are perfectly matched, and combine to give the player considerable scope for tailoring their sonic requirements. Refer to the spec table for a full list of what's on offer, but working on a filter-based system, and utilising four stacked controls with extra push/pull options and a coil-tap facility, the palette of sounds is impressive. A Neutrik locking jack socket, XLR output, low battery indicator, Gotoh tuners, derline nut and a custom ACG/Hipshot bridge complete the list of features.

## Sounds And Playability

Tested with an Aguilar Tone Hammer 500 amp and SL112 cabinets, the Salace stood out as soon as I plugged it in. With a strong, focused, forthright tone, the fretless nuances on offer were very prominent from the outset, and with the circuit set as flat as possible, the natural character of the bass became apparent. The mix of timbers worked well together, giving the bass a bit of everything in all departments, from full rounded low end, a tight sounding midrange and a clear and present top end.

Surprisingly, the low B string sounded a little restrained and flappy – but once I made some adjustments with the circuit and selected the low filter settings, there was considerably more 'oomph' when incorporating the low B into my playing. Playing with a pick or slapping certainly benefited from the pick attack option, giving the signal a better transient response when required. Panning between both pickups opened up some impressive tonal options which very effectively coloured the fretless tones, the bridge pickup in particular standing out very nicely when soloed. The neck pickup, when panned closer to it, created a full tone that seemed to work ideally in a supportive bass context.

Filter systems can take a little time to get used to: in my experience, it's best to think of each pickup as offering bass EQ (neck pickup) and treble EQ (bridge pickup). Once you've set the low filter frequency for each pickup, you can then make use of the mid-options and pan between the pickups until you hit the sweet spot you're looking for. With plenty of fretless 'mwah' on offer courtesy of the ebony fingerboard, the Salace will certainly benefit from some experimentation on the player's part.

## Conclusion

It came as no surprise that a lot of visitors to the LBGS were seen trying out this bass, and with good reason. It has a good acoustic tonal character which shines through, and the technological guts within simply enhance the existing tones. As a fretless five-string, the bass offered excellent playability and was surprisingly comfortable to play – all good traits to have in our book. Pricey, yes, but definitely worth investigating. ■