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Tests:

Roland MC-202 microcomposer,
Korg Poly 61, Drumulator,
M&A electronic kit,
Daion and Westone guitars,
Ibanez delay, Theatre Projects amp,
Zildjian Amir cymbals, TAC desk

GUITAR CHECK

DAION POWER MARK XX AND HEADHUNTER £555

RRP: £333.45 and £299

More often than not we get sent news of a new product with loads of info about how wonderful and revolutionary that product is, but a close inspection usually reveals that it doesn't really live up to the claims of the manufacturer's advertising department. It is, therefore, quite good to get the product without the information and boasts so that a review can be carried out on the instrument alone without any preconceived notions. Two such guitars are these Daions, which we feature in a double guitar check. I know very little about the products except their basic spec and prices, but for me at least the obvious quality of the guitars themselves speaks far higher than any advertising can. Simply if a guitar is good it's worth checking out, however unknown the company may be.

Daion guitars were initially available through Rosetti in the UK, but now the distribution has passed to Peavey Electronics, proving what I always thought to be true in that Peavey are a very shrewd company standing for quality rather than fashion. Made in Japan both the sample guitars owe a lot to other companies both American and Japanese yet both, especially the Headhunter, remain surprisingly stylish and individual.

Daion Power Mark XX

This is a small-bodied solid guitar featuring a multi-laminated construction of contrasting timbers. The neck is a nine-piece sandwich of Maple and Rosewood which extends through the centre of the body. The body 'wings' are made from wine red coloured Ash on the outside, with a centre of what appears to be Maple. The design has a very rounded feel which highlights the contrasting timbers and has quite a radical 'beer-gut' cutaway and heeless neck.

Rosewood is chosen for the fingerboard, unusual in the fact that it is lacquered giving it a feel that is usually associated with a Maple board. The fretting on this sample left little to be desired except for a couple of sharp ends, but the medium gauge wire is highly polished giving an expensive slinky feel. The board is bound with a single white plastic binding while the headstock has a white/black/white binding. The head itself is a pleasant rounded design and has a small brass Lyre logo as an inlay. It is unusual in



Power Mark XX — Well balanced and comfortable to play all round

that the Daion name is not featured on the head — only the model name is embossed onto the brass truss rod cover — the company name is featured between the 19th and 20th frets with a rather naff plastic sticker and, funnily enough, on the BACK of the head(?).

Whatever reasons Daion may have chosen to identify their guitars by is pretty irrelevant, I suppose, especially as the quality of the construction overrides

Quick check

(marks out of 20)	16
Appearance and Finish	17
Tonal Quality and Variety	16
Playability	16
Value for Money	16
Construction and Design	81%
Total %	

such peculiarities in design. The neck has a good solid feel without being too thick, but some of the small laminates have been left very slightly proud giving the neck a slightly bumpy feel. Again this is a trifling point soon forgotten when you're *playing* the guitar as opposed to looking for things to criticise.

In the hardware department the guitar scores very highly with its bridge. Basically a Strat-type arrangement with six individually adjustable saddles and strings that pass through the body. It is mounted on a solid gold-plated base that has two little grub screws which can be tightened to hold the saddles firmly in place after any adjustments have been made. The unnamed machine heads follow the Schaller M6 design very closely, and as with all the hardware and screws etc, are gold-plated or solid brass, as is the highly polished nut.

The pickup and control layout is very standard in the Les Paul style with a volume and tone control for each pickup, plus the 3-way toggle switch positioned on the upper horn of the guitar. Further tonal variations can be achieved via the two mini toggle switches which operate a basic but effective coil-tap for each pickup, and are mounted quite sensibly in front of the volume controls. The pickup units themselves are all black open-coiled affairs with 12 adjustable poles for each unit. Called Power Pulse pickups they seem to have quite a high output and a full tone also featuring three pickup height screws so that the pickup can be tilted in line with the angle of the strings.

On the cosmetic side the only thing I wasn't too sure of were the rather large anodised aluminium control knobs. Very smart, I must say, but they looked more suited to a hi fi than a guitar and had no visible calibration except for a single groove which is fairly impossible to see. Another problem which emerged when actually playing this guitar were the small brass position markers on the fingerboard which have an annoying habit of 'disappearing' depending on the illumination around. Metallic dots always have a habit of doing this in my experience, and while they do match the guitar's colour scheme they don't really do their job.

An unusual feature which I discovered prior to plugging in the guitar is the positioning of the jack socket. It's situated down by the controls but is housed in a small cutaway on the back of the guitar. This achieves two things, firstly to allow the socket to go directly into the control compartment making assembly a little easier, and secondly reducing the risk of the jack plug being accidentally snapped off if the guitar is dropped — a nice little touch.

In action the guitar really does perform well. The pickups have a

mellow tone overall but the coil-tap facility gives an optional cutting sound if required. The actual tonal range is quite wide and the sustain of the guitar is very good indeed. Obviously the high output pickups give a lot of distortion if required, but they also have a good deal of clarity and warmth, ideal for slightly mellower playing. If you turn one volume down it cuts the output from both pickups which can be an advantage as there isn't a master volume, but if you don't like this facility it is a very easy job to require this type of guitar.

I don't think the guitar had been particularly well set up before I played it; the action was a bit on the high side but still perfectly playable. Because of its construction getting up to the top frets is simple and effortless — it really was very well balanced and comfortable to play all round.



Daion Headhunter (HH) 555

Bit of a strange name this, but don't let it put you off. It's a semi-acoustic with a solid centre section combining very traditional aspects of guitar designs with more than a nod to the future. It is based on the Gibson ES 335 design but with a very obvious difference — the bottom of the body has been quite drastically cut away. Apart from giving the guitar a striking but not ugly look this cutaway allows the guitar to stand up quite securely when leant against an amp or similar. The body is made from a flamed Maple laminate which combined with its 'honey' sunburst finish gives the appearance of age & quality. The body, neck and headstock are bound with a multiple black and cream binding which add a real touch of class to the guitar's appearance. The 'F' holes on the front are a good bit wider than on the original Gibson designs and don't look quite as tasteful. The inner edge is painted with the customary matt black paint — a feature I've never found appealing — it also reveals the laminated timber.

The centre section of the body appears to be made mainly from Maple with a piece of Spruce on the top and bottom. The neck fits into this section in the standard manner with a well carved and unobtrusive heel. Judging from the grain of the neck timber I would say it is made from a Mahogany of some type — it's certainly well shaped as with the Mark XX. It seems to be made from just a single piece of timber and has a slightly triangular feel.

Rosewood is chosen for the fingerboard material and once again the fretting is near perfect with the same gauge as the Mark XX. The HH has 'O'

shaped dot inlays made from brass, and as with the Mark XX these get lost under certain lighting conditions.

The head on this guitar looks very classy with a black facing and brass logo. The company logo is embossed on the truss rod cover which is a more logical choice than the Mark XX.

Overall, the construction of this guitar is excellent. In fact, for the price I



Headhunter — A touch of tradition and a nod to the future

Quickcheck

(marks out of 20)	18
Appearance and Finish	18
Tonal Quality and Variety	16
Playability	17
Value for Money	17
Construction and Design	17
Total %	86%

would say virtually faultless. The combination of its fairly standard looks and antique finish give it a rare touch of class so often missing from Japanese guitars in this price bracket.

The hardware, pickups and control layout is the same as on the Mark XX except that the 3-position pickup

GUITAR CHECK

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selector is placed above the top volume control and the jack socket is front mounted below the tone controls.

Although the control layout is cosmetically the same with the coil-taps etc, the actual circuitry has something called 'inductive-reactor tone circuitry



The classy headstock is set off by the brass logo

Centre section of the body is mainly Maple, with Spruce used on the top and bottom

for smoother tone variation'. Which frankly doesn't mean a thing to me. However, whatever this tonal circuitry may be, the guitar certainly sounds excellent.

Overall it has a slightly brighter characteristic than the Mark XX which is rather unusual for a semi-solid. As with the Mark XX the tonal variation was very wide but the difference between the full and tapped pickup sound seemed somehow more pronounced on this guitar. With both pickups on, the sound adopts a pleasant hollow characteristic similar, though not so pronounced, as an out-of-phase sound.

Conclusions

Judging by these two guitars Daion have got quite a future. Both instruments combine craftsmanship with a few touches of originality. They both provide a full and rich sound with enough variation for most tastes. For my money at least, the Headhunter was the better of the two both in looks and

sound. The edge on the semi-acoustic was a great bonus and I would imagine this to be the result of the modified tone circuit.

I feel that the Mark XX suffers from being a little too much like so many other Japanese guitars in that it lacks any great character — it's all there but I was left with wondering whether it has sufficient appeal to be a good seller. It is, however, also offered in a wide range of colours including a translucent black and green which sounds a little different. In the Power range there is also a Mark XX bass and the cheaper version — the Mark X bass and guitar.

The Headhunter is, as far as my limited info sources go, only offered in this antique sunburst but at the price it offers an excellent semi-solid guitar which can be put to a lot of playing uses right through the spectrum from Jazz to Hard Rock.

Dave Burluck

DAION POWER MARK XX

Dimensions

(in mm unless stated)	
Scale Length	630
Action as Supplied Treble at 12th fret. Bass	2.0
Width of neck at nut	42
Width of neck at 12th fret	50
Depth of neck at 1st fret	20
Depth of neck at 12th fret	23
String Spacing at nut	35
String Spacing at Bridge	53

DAION HEADHUNTER 555

Dimensions

(in mm unless stated)	
Scale Length	630
Action as Supplied Treble at 12th fret. Bass	1.5
Width of neck at nut	2.5
Width of neck at 12th fret	42
Width of neck at 12th fret	50
Depth of neck at 1st fret	20
Depth of neck at 12th fret	24
String Spacing at nut	35
String Spacing at Bridge	53