

APRIL/JUNE 1982 *\$2.35

SONICS

The Australian music magazine dedicated to the art and craft of sound

Touring Production

*A Week with the
Angels*

SOUND
AND
LIGHTING
HIRE LISTING P55

**Ultravox
Rhythms**

*Acoustic
meets
Electronic*

**Cheap
Effects**

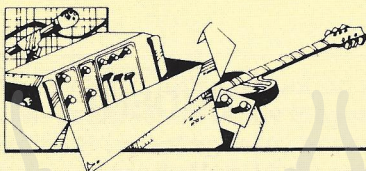
*Creative
Home
Recording*

Reviews

*Daion Guitars
Fostex Multitrack*

*Radio
microphones
Explained*





hardware

POWER TO THE MASSES!

DAION POWER SERIES MARK XX GUITAR

by Peter Sykes and Merridy Schrader

OVER THE PAST five to six years there has been an ever-increasing number of guitars released onto the Australian market that have filled the gap between the cheap imports from Japan and Taiwan and the top-priced American models.

Initially, although some were unique in their design, most Japanese guitars were styled on the Fender 'Stratocaster' or the Gibson 'Les Paul'. These provided the beginner with a reasonable instrument for his money and therefore fulfilled a need. However, the professional and semi-professional who demanded better quality had only much dearer instruments to choose from.

Now we have a situation where there is a greater choice of Japanese guitars, ranging from approximately \$250 to \$650 and upwards. Washburn, Ibanez, Yamaha and Vantage are just a few of these instruments that have both quality and a comparatively moderate price tag.

Daion, distributed by Central Musical Instruments, has released a series of electric guitars in the \$350 to \$600 price range. Previously known for its acoustic and acoustic/electric (with transducer fitted) six and twelve-string guitars, the company now have solid body basses and six-string guitars. These instruments were first seen in September 1981 at the Australian Music Trade Fair in Melbourne.

Range

Named the 'Power Series', all guitars are made from selected ash, rosewood and maple lamination. They feature Daion's own high output pickups, brass hardware, neck-through-the-body construction and high-gloss finish, and come in a variety of colours — 'tinted tan', 'wine red', 'brown', 'black' and 'dark green'.

The instrument under review is the top of the range 'Power Series' Mark XX, and assessing it proved to be an

interesting exploration of the advantages and shortcomings of such instruments.

The body

The model supplied was made of ash and maple sections, approximately 15 mm thick, laminated together and then stained — in this case dark green. It had been scalloped out to provide a comfortable and pleasing shape.

Although I preferred a brown model I

had seen previously, I'm sure the green (and other colours) will also have appeal.

At first glance the body finish seemed good, but on closer examination sanding marks were visible through the high gloss. Also where the stain had been applied around the edge of the body joining the neck, 1 mm or so of exposed and unstained maple could be seen. This was unfortunate as the rest of the body had been correctly stained.

I like the shape of the body with its



double cutaway and scalloped recesses, and there was easy access to the 22nd fret as the body joined around the 21st fret. Due to the scalloped shape, the 'Power Series' Mark XX is only 50 mm thick at the heel of the neck and somewhat less over other parts of the body. The combination of the smooth curves and the lightness of the body made it comfortable to wear. In addition, the guitar was well balanced

its appearance. Daion are not the only manufacturer to produce heavy necks; other Japanese makers have done the same and also some American manufacturers.

The use of ebony for the fingerboard was a good choice, as this wood is known for its close grain and smoothness. The result was an easily fingered board. In keeping with the rest of the hardware, Daion have used brass for the dot inlays and these look quite effective. The nickel silver frets were found to be more curved than the fingerboard and in a few cases they were not seated correctly. In some cases an individual fret varied from 1.5 mm high at the edge to 2.3 mm high in the middle. As a result the strings buzzed unnecessarily, especially when fretting in the first position. As fretting continued up the neck there were more rattles and buzzes. The neck had no twists or warps and the action was good, so these problems would seem to be due to the unevenly seated frets.

Despite the thickness of the neck, the Mark XX was reasonably comfortable to play. Chord work posed no problems and the ebony fretboard made position changes easy. However, with a thinner profile, single note work would have been less difficult. The string tension was good and bends took little effort.

For an instrument in this price group, the neck is acceptable, but I would have preferred a lighter profile and certainly ask that the frets be correctly fitted.

Pickups

With the arrival of pickups manufactured by such companies as Di Marzio, Schecter, Mighty-Mite, EMG, Bill Lawrence and Seymour Duncan, guitarists now have high quality replacement pickups for their once treasured 'originals'. Consequently there is a greater awareness of the range of possibilities in better quality pickups. No longer are pickups only compared to the standard sounds of the stock pickups, as found in Gibsons and Fenders straight from the factory. Many of the previously mentioned replacement pickups have high outputs, tapped windings and humbucked/single coil switchings. Any guitar manufacturer must be aware of the stiff competition now developing in this area, as there are so many quality replacements being

marketed. From experience with other Japanese pickups, I've found some to be microphonic and most to be lacking in warmth — a characteristic usually exaggerated at high volume.

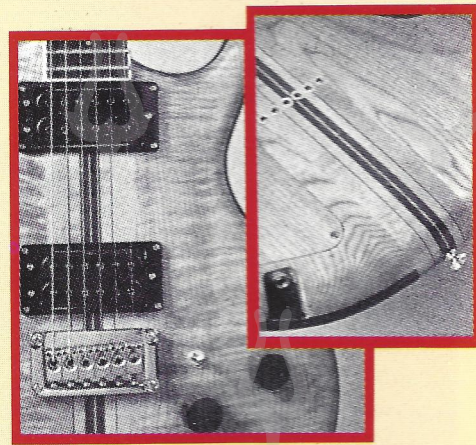
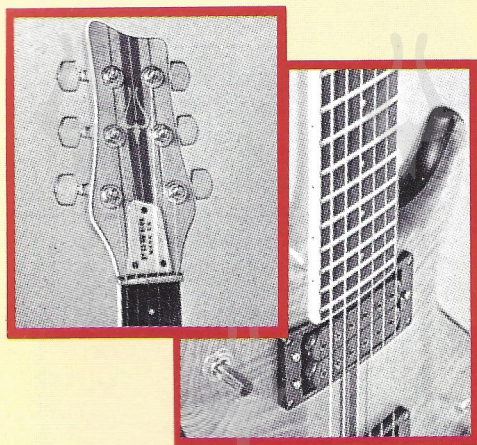
To gain an idea of the Mark XX's sound, I played the guitar firstly through a Roland Cube 60 and secondly a Marshall 50 watt valve amp, followed by a Fender 75. Daion's own 'original powered humbuckers', which are

identical for both front and back positions, were certainly high output but at the expense of being microphonic.

I thought the Daion sounded at its best through the Marshall. The combination of the warmth from the valve head and the 12" Celestions, which are fairly dull speakers not capable of reproducing high frequencies very efficiently, counteracted the guitar's tendency to sound thin. (It must be remembered that this sort of testing can only be a matter of opinion, and the Marshall was my personal choice.) I think the Mark XX would suit most amps that tend to emphasise the guitar's mid-range (like a Marshall or Fender valve amp).

The pickups sounded acceptable at low volumes but squealed at higher ones compared to some replacement pickups. Still for the price of the guitar maybe we shouldn't expect perfection? It's good to see Daion have also included a mini-toggle switch to split the coils in the humbuckers. This switch is a feature found in many other guitars now, so Daion are well up with current trends there.

In the single coil position, the front pickup produced a sound not unlike that ▶



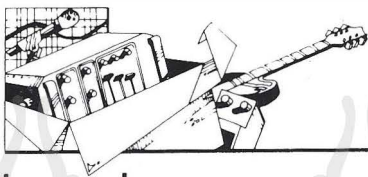
when strapped on.

Overall the body looked good and felt comfortable to wear, and while minor errors in the finishing of the wood were present in the instrument under review, this is not to say that such faults would be present in other individual models.

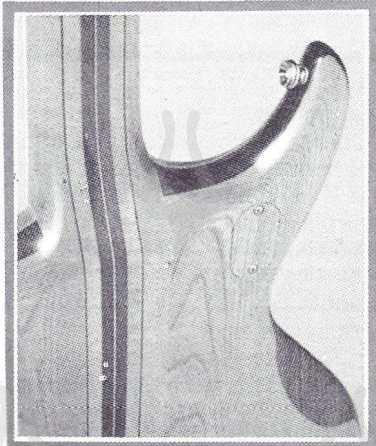
The neck

The 22-fret neck is composed of nine pieces of laminated maple and rosewood and, unlike the traditional neck which is bolted onto the body, it runs the whole length of the instrument, i.e. 'neck-through-body construction'. Manufacturers claim that this type of neck construction gives an instrument superior sustain due to the fact that the bridge, pickups, fretboard, nut and strings are mounted on one continuous and uninterrupted length. The Daion did have a reasonable amount of sustain and the neck construction would certainly have had an influence on this.

Unfortunately, the neck was quite thick, being 23 mm at the nut and 26 mm at the 12th fret, and this gave a slightly unbalanced look to the guitar. A thinner profile would have made the Mark XX an easier guitar to play as well as improving



hardware



of the front pickup in a 'Strat' — mid-range frequencies were reduced and highs were increased. It had the sort of characteristics that were suitable for a rhythm sound without over-driving the amp and thus producing distortion. The back pickup was just too thin to be split, although by combining both front and back pickups in the single coil position a slight 'out of phase' sound could be produced similar to a 'Strat' middle pickup.

It's interesting to note that the difference between the humbucked and single coil settings was not so much a decrease in volume, but more a change in tone, which may be an advantage if the player prefers a thinner sound.

On the Mark XX the pickups were set on a triple screw mounting which enabled them to be tilted as well as lowered or raised. For pickup selection the standard three-way toggle switch supplied was a bit loose and as a result it could be lifted slightly in and out of the body. However, it still worked satisfactorily.

The two tone and two volume control knobs worked well and proved to be free of noise.

Overall, for a guitar of this price, the electronics were good and compared favourably to other makes in the same price category. I hope, though, that something will be done to remove the microphonic characteristics of the pickups fitted.

Hardware

Apart from the volume and tone controls and switches, all other hardware on the Daion Mark XX was made of heavy-duty brass. The bridge had side lock screws which kept the saddles in place.

Although incorrectly angled, the heavy-duty saddles could be tilted to suit the neck because of the two threaded screws placed in front. This is the same principle as a 'Strat' bridge and, because of their ability to be adjusted to the contour of the fretboard, they are a good design feature in any guitar.

The adjustment of the harmonics wasn't a problem but was necessary in this case as three of the six strings were incorrectly set. The bridge mounting itself was also made from heavy-duty brass, but there were imperfections (though only slight) in the plating between the saddles and the edge of the bridge.

Four plated screws held the bridge onto the top of the body. If the bridge had been positioned a couple of centimetres further towards the neck of the guitar, restringing the instrument would have been easier. As it was on the guitar reviewed the first and second strings were difficult to thread through the string holes — the holes and their respective saddles didn't line up properly.

An engraved brass plate covers the end of the truss rod on the head stock and can be easily removed for any necessary adjustments. End pins are brass, in keeping with the overall look of the guitar, as are the eyelets in the string holes on the reverse side of the body. Both end pins and eyelets were finished satisfactorily.

The tone and volume knobs were grey brushed aluminium, and while they looked passable I would have preferred brass with some form of rough finish. This would both look more in keeping with the other hardware and would also prevent slipping during quick adjustments, especially by those with sweaty fingers.

Accessories

The 'Daion Power Series' Mark XX comes complete with case and a packet of allen keys for the bridge and truss rods. The case looked similar to old 'Les Paul' cases before the advent of the moulded plastic cases that never seem to stay shut. This case closed with no less than five clips, the centre one being lockable. However, the guitar seemed to slip around inside the case and a more generous layer of padding would have prevented this. However, this was a minor fault in a case that was generally well presented.

Conclusion

When reviewing any guitar it is important to remember the difference between manufacturing mistakes which may or may not appear on other individual instruments, and design problems which would occur in all. The problems with body finish, fret and nut seating, the misaligned bridge plate and the other manufacturing defects mentioned were not unusual for a guitar of the price, but still should not increase the cost of the guitar if they were rectified before the instrument left the factory.

As for the design problems, I personally would not mind paying a little extra money for a set of pickups that had been waxed dipped to eliminate the microphonics. A thinner, profiled neck, rather than the overly 'meaty' one that was on the review instrument would also be my preference.

I think Daion would have an excellent 'value for money' guitar if they modified both neck and pickup design, and certainly then the Mark XX could be favourably considered for a second guitar, or even a 'main-axe'.

The 'Daion Power Series' range, including the Mark XX (which retails for \$598), is available through Central Musical Instruments Pty Ltd, 568b Chapel St, South Yarra Vic. (03) 241-7446.

SPECIFICATIONS

Scale length	630 mm
Fingerboard width at nut	43 mm
at 12th fret	51 mm
Depth of neck at nut	23 mm
at 12th fret	26 mm
String spacing at nut	7.5 mm
at bridge	10.5 mm
Action as supplied treble at nut	0.5 mm
at 12th fret	1.5 mm
bass at nut	1.5 mm
at 12th fret	2.5 mm
Fret wire height	1.5 mm to 2.3 mm (unseated)
width	2.5 mm
Body measurements: overall length	980 mm
max. width	335 mm
thickness at heel	50 mm

Absolute copyright in this review and accompanying measurements is owned by SONICS. Under no circumstances may any review or part thereof be reprinted or incorporated in any reprint or used in any advertising or promotion without the express written agreement of the Managing Editor.