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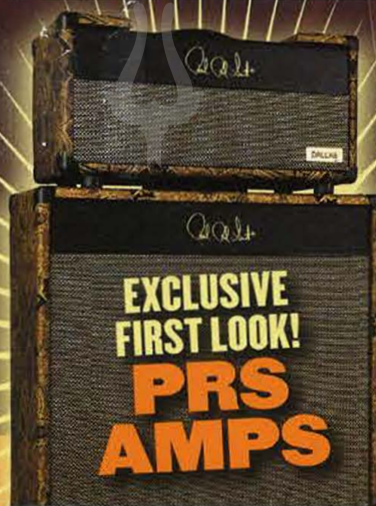
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# The Daion Headhunter HH-555

by MICHAEL WRIGHT, THE DIFFERENT STRUMMER

**T**he trajectory of the Japanese guitar industry in many ways has mirrored that of the United States, though in a slightly compressed timeframe on the front-end because America had a fairly big head start.

In any case, people worked for someone, had a better idea, went out on their own, and by the mid '70s there was – on both sides of the Pacific – a plethora of small designers working on innovative guitar concepts. Many of the Japanese products never made it to the U.S., but a few, such as the remarkable Daion line, did, including this wonderfully-named 1982 Daion Headhunter HH-555.

The Daion brand has a typically convoluted evolution. Following the War, two brothers named Yasuyuki and Hirotsugu (this name comes from literature of their American distributor; Kazuyuki is given as his name in one online fan source) Teradaira got jobs with a guitar manufacturer called Tatsuno Mokko. A part of Tatsuno broke off to become Hayashi Gakki, which was purchased in 1954 or so by the music distributor Zenon, a brand that figures large among '60s guitars sold mainly in Japan. Yasuyuki stayed with Hayashi/Zenon until 1962, when he left to begin his own distributorship called Daion (Japanese for "Big Sound"). Whether or not that brand was ever used on guitars in Japan is unknown, but probably. His brother Hirotsugu left the company five years later and started Yamaki ("Happy trees on the mountain"), a manufacturer of classical guitars. These were, understandably, distributed by Daion. By the early '70s, the Yamaki acoustic line included Martin-style steel-strings and are remembered for their quality. By '74, if not before, Yamakis were being imported into Canada by Great West, in Vancouver. A young Jerry O'Hagan of St. Louis Park, Minnesota, wanted to import them, but finding legal obstacles, instead invented the legendary O'Hagan Shark and the rest of his line.

Apparently any legal problems were resolved, and in 1978, Daion/Yamaki struck a distribution deal with MusiConics International, Inc. (MCI), of Waco, Texas. MCI is best known as the distributor

of the famous Guitorgan invented by Bob Murrell, who supervised their musical products. The brand name was to be Daion, not Yamaki, which probably suggests the nature of the legal solution.

Several online fan sources indicate a collaborative relationship regarding instrument design, but how much this was the case is uncertain. MCI was really an electronics firm that fitted its creations into whatever guitars came to hand. Hirotsugu Teradaira is identified as a pioneer in the use of brass and cedar, both characteristic of Daion acoustics. A good guess would be that Yamaki took care of the woodworking and, if it had any input at all beyond marketing, MCI may have influenced the electronics.

In any case, in 1978 MCI rolled out a series of Daion acoustics including the Heritage and Mark Series. As usual these were graded according to appointments, but all had cedar tops and brass nuts and bridges, as well as groovy brass inlays. These were quite superb acoustics, worth checking out. Except for the details

1982 Daion  
Headhunter  
HH-555  
in Honey  
sunburst.

mentioned, they looked pretty conventional. In '81 Daion rolled out two more radical designs – the Caribou and the Gazelle – with asymmetrical shapes and a dramatic scoop out of the butt-end. Both were acoustic/electrics with piezo pickup systems.

That same year, Daion introduced its first electric guitars, the spectacular rosewood-and-maple neck-

through Power Mark Series, the asymmetrical bolt-neck Savage Series, and the semi-hollowbody Headhunter HH-555 shown here. All were twin-humbucker guitars with Power Pulse pickups.

Introduced as a "Future Shape," quite a lot of care went into the design of the Headhunter that fans of thinlines should readily appreciate. Besides giving the guitar a novel look, the "negative space" at the bottom was claimed to improve the balance and make the guitar less tiring to play. It also was supposed to add strength to the "shell cavity," which it probably does. Why

*continued on page 108...*





Fender Custom Shop '60 Strat Heavy Relic, Olympic White over sunburst

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## The Daion Headhunter HH-555

...continued from page 46.

a player would care isn't clear, unless their roadie is a gorilla.

Otherwise, the appointments of this guitar are swell. The mahogany neck is glued in and has a bound rosewood fingerboard with pretty good access all the way up. The body is flamed maple, presumably laminated. The tuners are gold-plated, probably Gotohs. The bridge is polished aluminum. A plank of wood reinforces the center and cuts down on feedback. To increase sustain, the strings pass through the bridge and body, and mount through the back. The Power Pulse pickups each have a coil tap. There are more flexible tonal designs, but this is pretty good.

Headhunters shipped in a variety of finishes during their brief run. Honey sunburst is the most common, though a darker tobacco sunburst and a dark chocolate are also encountered. A metallic gold was available on special order and is probably quite rare.

Dating a Daion is pretty simple. Like most Japanese guitars by this time, the first digit or two encodes the date of manufacture; the one shown here is #82235, built in 1982, probably number 235 of the run.

Daion did a lot of promotion, but like many innovative Japanese guitars at this time, it met a market that was moving toward heavy metal and the "superstrat" era. If our assumption that the post-date numbers of the SNs are sequential counts (no other date codes make sense), all we've encountered suggest fewer than 500 per year were built, though this is hardly scientific.

Chris O'Connell and Ray Benson of the Texas band Asleep at the Wheel were the best-known Daion endorsers. Paul Yandell was associated with MCI, as well as a few other folks.

The last Daion ads appeared in September of 1983. Some sources put their demise at '84, but that might be generous. Some Daion copy guitars show up, probably sold in places other than the U.S. The brands Dion and JooDee may also be Daions sold elsewhere.

Daions have a small but fairly rabid fan base, with good reason. While there were more innovative designs made at the time, these were very fine guitars indeed. If you're looking to recruit an interesting piece for your guitar force, you could do a lot worse than a Daion Headhunter! **VG**



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'56 Sunburst (Alder body) 100% original, 9.0/10, Perfect bakelite parts, for collector!!

'56 Sunburst/Lefty (Alder body) 100% original, 9.5/10, Super rare, Perfect!! Expensive

'57 Sunburst Refret, changed nut, 100% original parts, 8.5/10 Super clean!!

'58 Mary Kaye 100% original, 8.5/10, Super rare for collector!!

'58 Sunburst Lefty 100% original, 8.5/10, Super rare for collector!!

'59 Sunburst/Slab rose neck We have 2 in stock, Check our website for more details!!

'60 Sunburst/Slab rose neck We have 4 in our stock, choose your best!! Check our website!!

'61 Sunburst/Slab rose neck We have 3 in stock, Please check our website for more!!

'61 Sunburst Tortoiseshell Pickguard/Slab rose neck 100% original, 8.5/10, with Tag and more, Rare!!

'62 Sunburst/Slab rose neck We have 3 in our stock, choose your best!! Check our website!!

'62 Sunburst/Round rose neck 100% original, 9.0/10 Clean!!, Strong Three tone SB color.

'62 Olympic White/Slab rose neck Gold hardware 100% original, original custom color and Gold hardware Rare!!, 8.5/10

'62 Dakota Red/Slab Rose neck 100% original, original custom color and Gold hardware Rare!!, 8.5/10

'62 Fiesta Red/Slab rose neck 100% original, One owner guitar, 8.5/10 condition

'63 Sunburst/Round rose neck We have 3 in stock, Check our website for more details!!

'63 Candy Apple Red/Rose neck 100% original, Silver undercoat, 8.0/10 condition

'64 Sunburst/Round rose neck We have 3 in stock, Check our website for more details!!

'64 Sunburst with Tortoiseshell PG 100% original, Tradision Logo, 7.5/10

'64 Burgundy Mist Metallic 100% original in 9.5/10, Rare color, For collector!!

'64 Olympic White We have 2 in stock, both Spaghetti logo '63 Spec.

'64 Dakota Red Refret, changed nut, Spaghetti logo & Black bobbin Pus, '63 Specs.

'64 Lake Placid Blue Lefty Refret, changed nut, Spaghetti logo & Black bobbin Pus, '63 Specs, Rare!!

'65 Candy Apple Red 100% original, Brand-New condition!!

'65 Burgundy Mist Metallic 100% original in 8.5/10, Featured book of "The Galazy Of Strat" Page 44&45

'65 Black Near Mint!! 100% original in more than 9.5/10, with Matched # Owner's manual.

'65 Sunburst We have 2 in stock, Check our

website and ask for more details.

'66 Sunburst We have 3 in stock, Check our website and ask for more details.

'66 Lake Placid Blue 100% original, Body color still keep original Blue, Clean!!

'69 Black/Maple Cap neck Refret, changed nut otherwise original, Add extra strings tree

'69 Black/Maple Cap neck Lefty Refret, changed nut otherwise original, Super rare!!

'70 Black/Rose neck with Tortoiseshell Pickguard 100% original, Body color turned to Yellow, Coll and Rare!!

'70 Black/Rose neck 100% original, Body color turned to Yellow, Coll and Rare!!

'70 Olympic White/Maple cap neck 100% original, Body color turned to Yellow, Coll and Rare!!

'71 Candy Apple Red/4Bolt 1Piece Maple neck Refret changed nut, 100% original parts, Rare!!

'71 Sunburst/4Bolt 1Piece Maple neck We have 3 in stock, Check our website and ask for more details.

'71 Sunburst Lefty/4Bolt 1Piece Maple neck Refret, changed nut, 9.0/10, Rare!!

'69 to '71 Sunburst/4Bolt Rose neck We have each one in our stock, 100% original, Check our website!!

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