

Langcaster review in German Gitarre & Bass Magazine January 2004 Issue.

Langcaster guitar with 3 Langcaster pickups.

For us testers there is seldom the possibility to take something special under the magnifying glass. Therefore my eyes flashed when they notified me when a guitar, which recently appeared in the short joint tour of string acrobats Steve Lukather and Jan Akkerman, made its striking appearance.

In remembrance of the 60th birthday of their great idol, both had organized the 2003 Hendrix Tribute Tour, where of course Hendrix songs were performed.

Naturally, Strats were obligatory and Jan Akkerman, not yet familiar with the Langcaster version of the Strat, had selected one from unknown New Zealander Joh Lang.

Concert patrons noticed with surprise that this Langcaster has a body of Swamp Kauri. What? Never heard of it? Kauri (Agatha Australis) is of the family of Aurakarie bush, which only grows in the North Island of New Zealand. It is known as the dinosaur of the flora. After harvesting, it has been preserved since 1940 in a natural conservatory. The tree can grow to 50 meters in height and may have a diameter of 4 meters and the age can be between 150 and 2000 years old. Archaeologists have found centuries old petrified Kauri trees in the swamps of Northern New Zealand. Some of the dug out Kauri even still has the needles intact. This supports the theory that the trees were taken down by ancient glaciers.

In other places they found trees all lying in the same direction, which indicates a volcanic eruption. Based on the low oxygen levels in the inside sap, the trees have been preserved for more than 30,000 years.

Most of this visually impressive material is mainly used for lounge tables. But Joh Lang uses it for his guitars of which only small numbers are produced annually.

So, the Strat style body of our test guitar is made of wood, which according to university analysis is more than 35,000 years old. In words, thirty five thousand years old! And you can't see its age at all. It is almost impossible to describe this wood; grain, structure, colours and 3D effects. Yes, at some points it looks like Agathis.

Construction

From the archaeology excursion back to our test.

The Langcaster, which has the simple name #1, is not only visually stunning, it also has hardware, pickups and switching which give it a gloriously exotic image. So we continue.

The Strat shape body has, of course, its natural rich colour. The openings and small cracks are filled with acrylic or epoxy transparent lacquer and polished to a mirror like finish for a really impeccable job.

At the back a plastic plate covers the rear electronics department, which is carefully shielded with thick copper foil. An oval plate contains the output jack in the lower area. Four wood screws and a cover plate with plastic underlay and two graphite rods ensure that the reinforced rock hard maple neck is held in its place.

A little gap shows in the neck placing. That could be finished more precisely. If you tighten the screws, the connection is absolutely rock stable.

With a radius of 15 degrees the ebony fret board is slightly rounded and has 22 medium sized jumbo frets, which are perfectly rounded and polished. No unevenness; all is round and fluent. The perfectly placed and aligned nut is from the "Earvana" company who are specialists for compensation nuts.

Differently aligned bridge rollers for the strings enable perfect tuning in all frets. Above the nut a chromed plate covers the double action truss rod by which the neck can be adjusted. A tilt back headstock with a Maori carving design breathes life anew into the exotic image. For the inlaid company logo, intensive green and blue shining Paua shell is used. A jade string tree ensures straight running of the strings.

Schaller locking tuners guarantee precise tuning and on the body is a three dimensional (including string spacing) adjustable Schaller bridge.

The pickups are Langcaster made and designed with vacuum wax impregnation utilising copper shielded chromed covers.

Ten (10) magnetic poles ensure that with severe string bending, the sound of the string is always even. A bypass capacitor and ferrite choke keeps RF noise and hum away.

The switching offers very sophisticated possibilities:

Firstly, the three height adjustable pickups can be conveniently selected with a 5-way switch and can then be controlled by a volume and tone control.

A third pot mounted on the switch plate allows continuous mixing or blending of the pickups.

So there are together with the switch positions full up blend/mix control the following pickup combinations.

- Position 1: Neck pickup.
- Position 2: Neck and Middle pickup.
- Position 3: Middle pickup.
- Position 4: Middle and Bridge pickup.
- Position 5: Bridge pickup.

With the blend/mix control the following pickup combinations are possible:

- Position 3: Middle and Bridge pickup (Mix).
- Position 4: Middle/Bridge and Neck pickup (Mix).
- Position 5: Bridge and Neck pickup (Mix).

In this way, combinations of all 3 single coil pickups or bridge and neck pickup are available.

Practice

Based on the perfect fretting, the Lancaster #1 plays very comfortably. Although to my personal taste, the very flat D profile fills my hand too little. I have the feeling that I have the sides of the neck in my hands. For me that is normal, but small hands will certainly love this profile. It appears to me that hanging the guitar around my neck a little head heaviness is noticeable. But as soon as my playing hand is on the body and I touch the strings, everything is in order.

Who had thought that Swamp Kauri should be such a good wood for tone? Its resonance characteristics are really unbelievable. Every stroke sounds with an intensive string sustain.

The pure acoustic sound is powerful, loud and present with complete evenness. It has rich overtone spectrum and offers long and even sustain.

With its direct, bright response and good tone setting, the Lancaster has a sound full of detail and a meaningful tone. Is very dynamic and it also supports every form of chord formation. I am also enthusiastic about the Earvana nut, which lets you forget all conventional tuning problems. The guitar also intonates very accurately due to the rounded frets, which give the strings perfect pitch accuracy.

Electrically connected, the Lancaster single coils prove to be more powerful than vintage pickups. Regarding sound characteristics, they are very 60's sounding. With presence and having straight well-dosed highs and overtones, they are in some way more rocking than 50's single coils. In the lower frequencies they show a remarkable clarity and transparency.

Hum seems to be a strange word especially in the neck position, even in the in-between position. The bridge pickup is not so sharp and harsh as the original. It is noticeable that a single coil at the bridge has relatively less output although the distance toward the string is the same. While the middle and neck pickup have the same output, the bridge pickup has less output. So the coupling with the middle pickup has less output too. Three further sound variations are provided by the blender/mixer, which in the switch position 3, 4 and 5 (middle, middle + bridge, bridge) each respective pickup can be combined. This allows pickup combinations (all three, or bridge and neck pickup), which are not possible with standard switching to produce the additional bell-like semi-hollow tone of the mixed sounds.

Let's crank up the amp.

Directly it shows that the Lancaster single coils are clearly less sensitive to hum than corresponding single coils. Okay, it hums a little because there is no noise gate built in, but there is much less hum indeed!

How this guitar handles! Overdrive and Distortion sounds are really the cream on the pudding. No fumbling and mismatch of tones; instead, an open tone, every quantity of punch cutting through with power. Lead sounds can be biting sharp or butter soft all carried with a long sustain.

Even the many combinations can be easily used without any problem = Sound of a very special guitar art. When you like to control the expression with the volume pot, feel free. The model #1 does that courageously.

RESUME

A Strat version without vibrato that you don't see that much.

The Lancaster # 1 is not only a feast for your eyes, but is convincingly rich sound-wise in every way. The New Zealand made guitar has the neck setting and the bridge pickup output as the only points of criticism.

But on the positive side, we see eight different sound presets of which three are variable. Authentic noiseless 60's vintage sounds come with top class manufacturing, first class components, spectacular visual aspect and numerous accessories with a good guitar case.

Has this fantastic instrument a chance in view of its price in these hard economic times?

We surely hope so.

Plus:

Sounds.
String swing.
Compensating nut.
Shielding.
Manufacturing.
Playing comfort.
Impressive aesthetics.

Minus:

Neck has a little too much clearance space.
Volume difference of the pickups.

NOTE

After reading this review, Joh Lang of Langcaster guitars had the following comments to make.

Thanks G&B magazine for this unexpected test report.

I have hurriedly sent two Langcaster guitars to guitar Ace Jan Akkerman for his Jimi Hendrix tour with Steve Lukather on request of Cees Bakker guitar, journalist for Dutch magazine "GuitarPlus".

Two weeks before the tour started, I still had to assemble the guitars for this unexpected request. I had no idea at all that G&B magazine in Germany would review one of the guitars after the Hendrix tribute tour. If I had known, I would have explained a little more about the setup and pickups to the reviewer. But as it is, I am grateful that my Langcaster was tested for a review by this prestigious guitar magazine.

The points missed are that my pickup in the bridge has a different output to make the tone less harsh and can be mixed well with the neck pickup when in the mix mode.

Only the neck pickups have 10 magnets in it, the middle, and bridge have only 6 magnets as have most pickups.

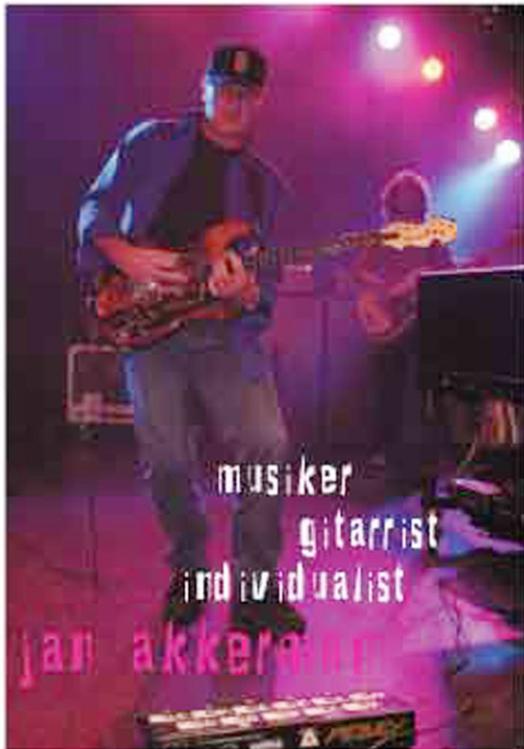
The neck is bolted in with two screws below the neck plate and four screws in the neck plate.

I also use a treble by-pass filter on the volume pot in all models and a capacitor and ferrite bead on all pickups to stop RF frequencies.

The bodies are all hand carved and covered with thick clear epoxy. When this runs off into the neck pocket it needs to be scraped out by hand and that sometimes creates a minuscule space between the neck and body. Point taken! But a little more time to assemble would have corrected this.

Thanks G&B for this great review and Cees Bakker for submitting my guitar.

PART TRANSLATION OF THE AKKERMAN INTERVIEW IN THE SAME ISSUE OF GITARRE&BASS MAGAZINE.



G&B:

Do you dislike Strats?

Jan:

I don't like the construction of the Fender guitars. The knobs are always in the way, so I like Gibsons and my own design of guitar, the Framus, more. The Framus Jan Akkerman of 1970 is my design. I have later let Wim Heins build that model and it has become a classic. But for this Hendrix tour I wanted a Strat and someone has picked up on that and directly phoned his friend in New Zealand. He is a Dutchman who lives there; Joh Lang! And he went out of his head when he heard that I wanted to play one of his instruments. I had the picture received by E-mail from a friend.

G&B:

What is the guitar made of?

Jan:

That is about 5000 years old. No idea what it is. It doesn't burn. (Laughs). It is a really beautiful Strat. But this guitar is very good. It feels very stable. That's probably because of the characteristics of the wood. Lang says something of 30,000 years old. But 30,000 years I find is a long time. Anyway it is a piece of art. The fret board is of ebony and I like that better than maple or rosewood.

See the Langcaster website for more photos on: www.langcaster.com