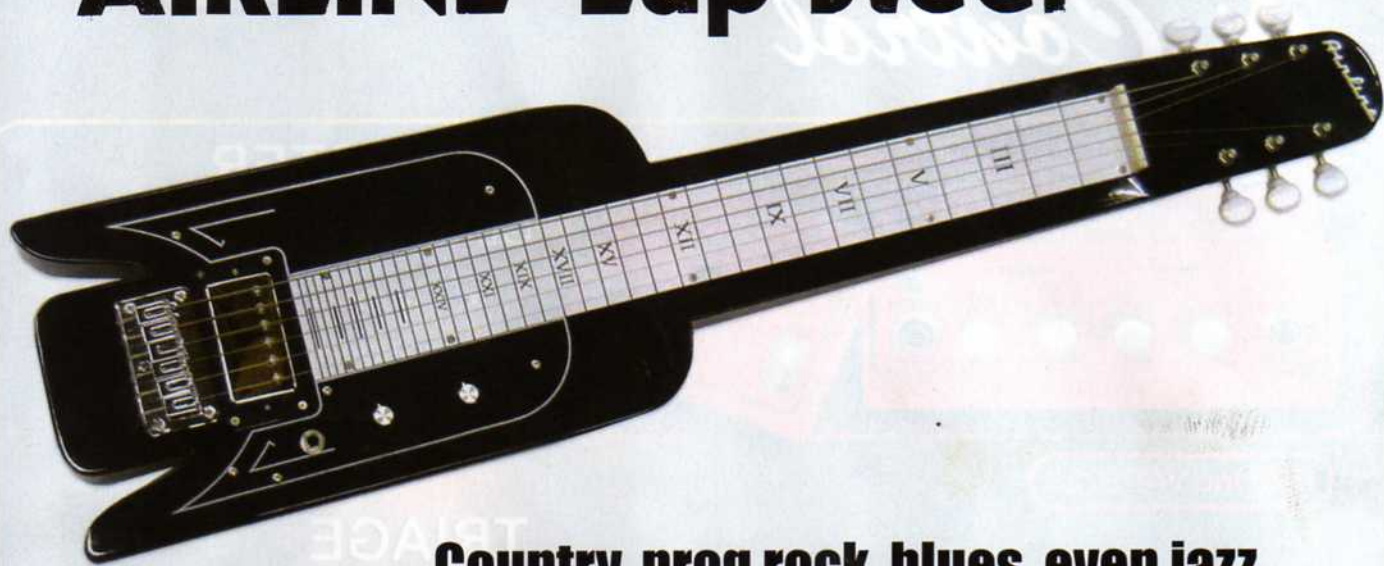


EASTWOOD

AIRLINE Lap Steel



Country, prog rock, blues, even jazz... anything is possible on this stunning lap steel from the masters of the unconventional, Eastwood.

Words: Tim Slater

EASTWOOD

Airline Lap Steel

SRP £199.00

All prices incl VAT

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WHAT IS IT?

An affordable and fun lap steel guitar.

WHY SHOULD I WANT ONE?

Learning to play a new instrument is always fun and the lap steel throws up plenty of challenges. It's not just for country pickers, either. If you are serious blues player seeking to expand your repertoire or range, the lap steel makes a great alternative to a standard slide guitar.

The lap steel, like its mysterious cousin the pedal steel guitar, is a much misunderstood and underrated musical instrument.

Played with a steel bar or slide instead of fretting the notes as you would a conventional six string guitar the lap steel – so named because it is generally played mounted on your lap or on a small table instead of being slung around the neck like a conventional guitar – opens the door to many exciting new sounds and musical ideas.

As the original forebear of the modern electric guitar the lap steel obviously has deep historical ties with

blues and roots music and you can find some fantastic examples of virtuoso lap steel work in the western swing of Joaquin Murphy (with Tex Williams) and Leon McAuliffe (Bob Wills) but look beyond the instrument's cultural origins and you'll also find that the lap steel pops up in some unlikely places.

Troy Van Leeuwen has introduced the lap steel to a new generation of music fans courtesy of his work with Queens of the Stone Age and A Perfect Circle but as far as the steel's use in rock goes, the crowning glory surely belongs to David Gilmour. The Pink Floyd guitarist used a lap steel

to create the soaring psychedelic glissando effects on Shine on you Crazy Diamond (with his lap steel tuned to D-G-D-G-B-E: see our box out for more useful info about alternative lap steel tunings) and as an accomplished steel player his huge guitar collection duly includes several nice vintage examples.

Still, it's no use hankering after a good lap steel if you can't afford to buy one but fortunately Eastwood guitars have come up with a great solution in the form of this handsome retro-styled lap steel. Part of Eastwood's quirky-yet-cool Airline range, this lap steel has a simple yet sturdy design and looks like a good starting point for anyone interested in learning to master the lap steel, so let's take a closer look.

Slide Away

The Airline lap steel is constructed around what is probably the most basic lap steel design. Essentially a basswood log fitted with machine heads and a single humbucking pickup, this lap steel nevertheless gives you everything that you need to plug in and start slidin'. Loosely styled to resemble a space rocket, the Airline is constructed from a single block of solid basswood.

Twin rocket 'fins' form the main section of the body and the instrument's reverse side is perfectly flat to let the instrument rest squarely on the player's lap. At around 2.5 ▶



Eastwood Airline Lap Steel



overhand slide style whilst picking the notes with your right hand thumb and fingers. Now, there are no hard and fast rules about which technique you should use – one or two players even use a flat pick – but the most widely used way to play the lap steel is to pick using a thumb pick and fingerpicks. Not having these items readily to hand we just muddled through with a basic 'claw' action, picking with the right hand thumb, first and middle fingers. It seems to work ok for us and in no time we found we were getting some nice tones from this lap steel. The single humbucker does a good job of amplifying the Airline's naturally rich and resonant tone and even fairly rudimentary blues licks sound really cool. Add some delay and chorus and you are getting into serious psychedelic territory; using effects focuses the lap steel's inborn ability

guitar due to the different tunings.

First impressions are that the lap steel is quite a limited instrument but the primitive design belies the versatility and range that a good player can draw from the lap steel.

Arguing that it falls slightly short of a conventional solid-body guitar in terms of range or expression is missing the point.

Play the Airline through an overdriven amp and you'll unleash an exciting and often overlooked dimension to the lap steel – it rocks like you wouldn't believe! The Airline steel just revels in big bluesy riffs buoyed up by a fat cushion of overdrive and we can see no reason why a reasonably competent blues guitarist shouldn't bring the house down once they've mastered a couple of tunes on this monkey.

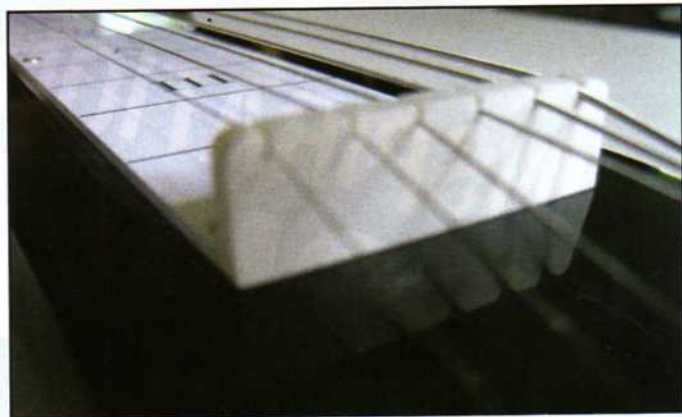
Imagine ripping a cover of a Stevie Ray Vaughan or Destroyers

► kilos the Airline steel isn't heavy but because you don't wear it around your neck the weight doesn't really come into it anyway. What really matters is the overall standard of construction and the sound. With no frets or action issues to worry about, the player relies on a faux fingerboard to indicate the position

of rotary tone and volume controls, mounted on an Art Deco inspired single ply black scratch plate.

The bridge is a 'top loader' design that feeds the strings through the rear before the string's ball-ends anchor them in place, from whence they extend up to the specially tall nut and tune to pitch via six

The Airline unleashes an exciting and often overlooked side of the lapsteel - it rocks like you wouldn't believe!



of different notes and keys along the neck and the Airline features a 31 fret 'fret board' that is screwed down onto the steel's upper surface and extends most of the way down the entire length of the body before stopping a couple of centimetres from the single humbucking pickup.

The pickup's chrome cover is complimented by a chrome plated fixed bridge with six individual Strat-style saddles that are independently adjustable for action and intonation; while the simple electronics comprises of a single jack output and a pair

of rotary tone and volume controls, mounted on an Art Deco inspired single ply black scratch plate.

See Me - Steel Me

With the instrument balanced on your lap, one of the things that you notice is how the extra tall nut raises the action a good inch above the main neck section. The high action and lack of frets makes it easier to run a slide up and down the strings without fear of grounding the slide but to play the lap steel you need to grasp the basic technique, which demands that the player adopts an

to create huge glissando (a smooth glide from one note to another) and if big washy atmospheres are your thing, the lap steel really puts you in the centre of the action. More conventional styles require a bit more application in the sense that you will need to adapt your favourite blues or country licks to the lap steel, which takes some work but will eventually pay off once you begin to get the hang of the intervals which are wider than a conventionally tuned six string

tune using the lap steel through a smokin' hot tube amp; you'll score tons of points for having the sheer balls to pull it off, not to mention the sheer novelty factor. Let's be honest here, how many lap steels do you find down at your local blues jam night? If you've got the patience and determination to learn how to play it, the lap steel deserves a place in your studio or live setup. It is light, portable and above all, bags and bags of fun. **PU**



Tuning Notes

Of course, how you tune the Lap Steel is up to you but here are some guidelines that might help you. Open E is a common way that many guitar players – especially those more used to a normal guitar in standard tuning – get to grips with the lap steel. Joe Perry from Aerosmith uses open E, which goes like this: Low to high. E-B-E-G#-B-E

Or you can try these:

Open G: D-G-D-G-B-D

Open A: E-A-E-A-C#-E

Open D: D-A-D-F#-A-D

C6 tuning is more commonly found on twin-neck lap or pedal steels and is great for copping licks from old Hank Williams records. There is no 'standard' C6 tuning, but this is a popular version which works well: C-E-G-A-C-E. **PU**