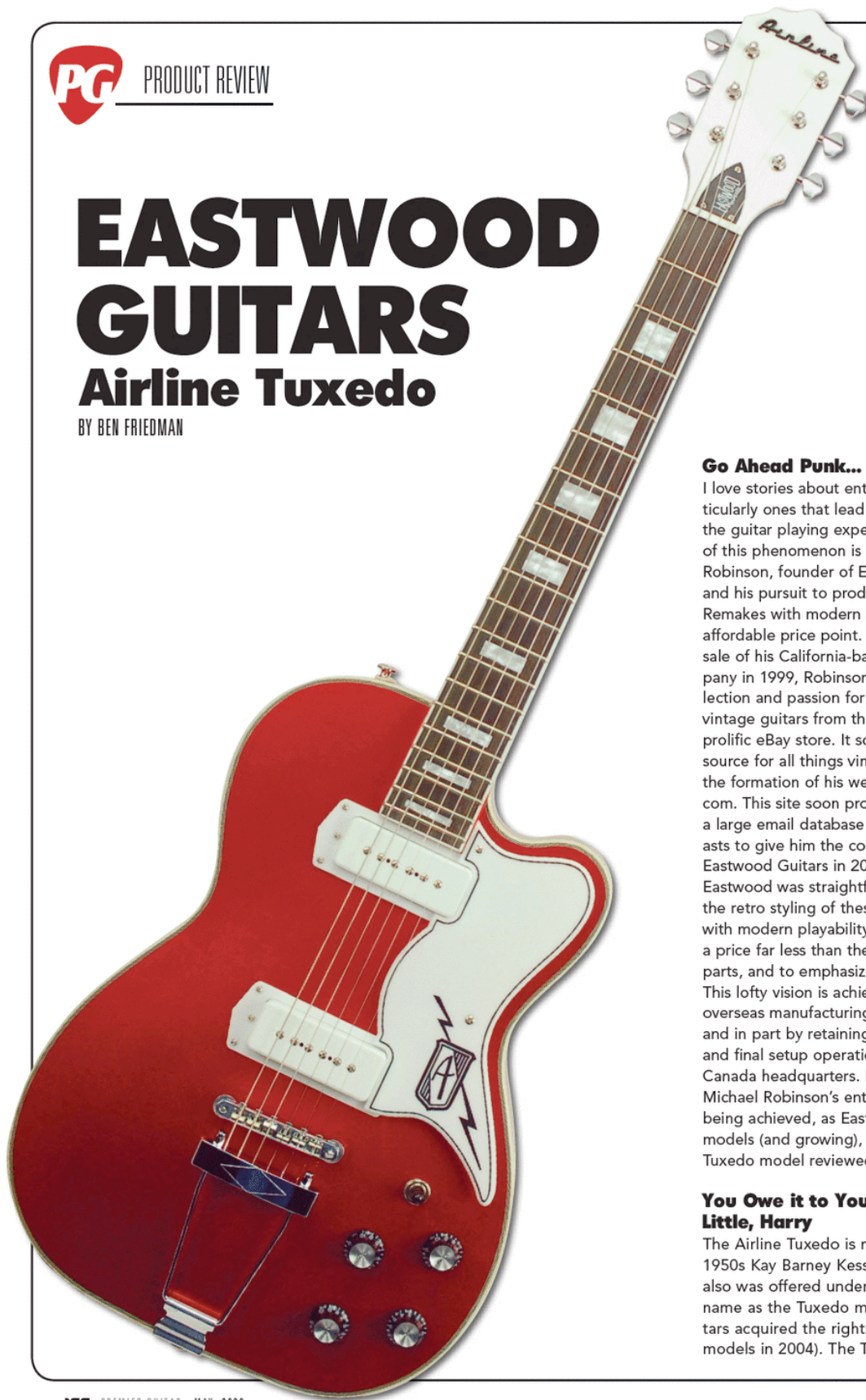




EASTWOOD GUITARS

Airline Tuxedo

BY BEN FRIEDMAN



Go Ahead Punk... Make Me Play

I love stories about entrepreneurship, particularly ones that lead to ways of enhancing the guitar playing experience. An example of this phenomenon is the story of Mike Robinson, founder of Eastwood Guitars, and his pursuit to produce Radical Vintage Remakes with modern playability at an affordable price point. After the well-timed sale of his California-based technology company in 1999, Robinson leveraged his collection and passion for low-budget eclectic vintage guitars from the '50s and '60s into a prolific eBay store. It soon became an online source for all things vintage bizzaro with the formation of his website myrareguitars.com. This site soon provided Robinson with a large email database of fellow enthusiasts to give him the confidence to form Eastwood Guitars in 2002. His vision for Eastwood was straightforward: to combine the retro styling of these long-lost classics with modern playability, to offer them at a price far less than their original counterparts, and to emphasize customer service. This lofty vision is achieved in part by using overseas manufacturing (Korea and China), and in part by retaining customer service and final setup operations at its Ontario, Canada headquarters. It is apparent that Michael Robinson's entrepreneurial vision is being achieved, as Eastwood now offers 45 models (and growing), including the Airline Tuxedo model reviewed here.

You Owe it to Yourself to Live a Little, Harry

The Airline Tuxedo is modeled after the 1950s Kay Barney Kessel guitar, which was also offered under the Airline brand name as the Tuxedo model (Eastwood guitars acquired the rights to the Airline guitar models in 2004). The Tuxedo oozes retro



vibe with its striking copper-metallic finish, white plastic veneered headstock with raised black metal Airline logo and white pickguard—complete with a 1950s Airline “Coat of Arms” imprint. The Tuxedo, true to its name, is also available in black, as well as sunburst with a flame maple top. The single-cutaway body shape features a maple back and top, mahogany sides, and is completely hollow except for a post under the bridge. No tone blocks or F-holes are used in the body design. The body is double bound with a strip of 5-ply cream and black binding along the top, which nicely complements the black appointments. Both the back of the guitar and neck feature a strip of cream binding that adds to the retro look. The binding around the neck did show some minor “bleed” from the fretboard in a few spots. The neck is maple and is topped off with a 12” radius rosewood fingerboard, which contrasts nicely with the 19 polished, medium-jumbo frets and pearloid block fret markers. The white plastic veneer headstock features a 3+3 tuner design and pairs well with the black “Eastwood Guitars” truss rod cover.

The Tuxedo comes dressed with a pair of white Dog Ear Eastwood Hi-Output P-90 pickups wired to a traditional three-way pickup selector switch. The pickups feature Alnico magnets and are fully potted. As with most single-coil pickups, there is

a discernible hum from the pickups, even in the middle position; consistent with the vintage vibe, the pickups are not wired in a reverse-wound configuration. One drawback to the design is that the pickguard covers the adjustment screws for the treble side of both pickups. This necessitates removing the pickguard in order to adjust the pickup height. Another nit is that the pickguard itself could use an additional mounting screw to more firmly secure it to the body. The guitar features a pair of well-placed black “top hat” style Volume and Tone knobs for each pickup.


Adding to the vintage vibe of the Tuxedo is the chrome trapeze tailpiece, with stamped diamond inlay and ABR-1-style tune-o-matic bridge assembly. The tailpiece is firmly secured with the help of the chrome strap button, and even though it floats above the body of the guitar, it is set close enough to the bridge that the string tension is not affected when resting your palm against the bridge. Other nice touches are the chrome strap button on the upper bout, which is secured to the body with a white felt bushing, and the black plastic square input jack that complements the other appointments on the guitar. The set neck is firmly attached to the body at the 15th fret, and given that the instrument has only 19 frets, access to the upper frets is not an issue. The 1-11/16” white plastic nut is well cut, but it does have some sharp edges to it. The vintage style Wilkinson open-back tuners perform well and, like all the other hardware on the instrument, are sourced from local Korean suppliers. The control cavity is accessed through the pickup routs, which is a minor inconvenience since the pickups are attached with “quick connect” clips.

Are You Gonna Pull Those Pistols or Whistle Dixie?

The Tuxedo is lightweight, resonant and balanced in both standing and sitting positions. The neck is very comfortable due to its medium-shallow C-carve, and the fretwork and setup are executed admirably. The combination of the bridge assembly and selection of tone woods give this guitar a Dobro-esque tone unplugged with a strong midrange emphasis. The hollow body softens the attack and provides a pleasing bloom on single notes. Power chords simply growl forever. Given the amount of maple used for the neck, top and back, along with 25-1/2” scale length, the guitar is not as snappy or as bright as one would think, but this shouldn’t be taken as a negative. The guitar has a decent amount of natural sustain and holds its tuning very well.

Fired up though a gritty Carr Mercury, the versatility of this design becomes apparent. The darker, mid-range focused fundamental tone of the guitar blends well with overdrive, providing a myriad of usable rock and blues tones. I found at higher gain/volume levels the guitar was capable of producing a cool, controlled feedback effect similar to an Ebow. The pickups are indeed hot, which does seem to bleed off some of the high end response and articulation. Using a vintage blackface Fender Bandmaster driving a 2x10 Music Man cab, I preferred to bring the volume down on the pickups to achieve a clean tone that provided a desirable level of articulation. I would be curious to hear this guitar with a set of the vintage-voiced P-90s that Eastwood uses for its other models. The bridge pickup exhibits a strong fundamental tone across the entire frequency range; it is not at all harsh and responds very well to pick attack. The neck pickup can get “boomy” if you dig in too hard, and the dual pickup combinations offered some very usable combinations, especially when adjusting the individual volume controls.

The Final Mojo

The Airline Tuxedo is a terrific value and truly stands out in the crowd with its unique tones, retro styling and excellent playability. I applaud Mike Robinson’s efforts in bringing his vision to fruition, to the betterment of the overall guitar community. 

Buy If...

you're seeking vintage kitsch with modern playability at a fair price; if you "get it"... get it.

Skip If...

you just don't "get it."

Rating...

4.0

ON THE Web

Head online to hear sound clips of the guitar in action at

premierguitar.com



Eastwood Guitars

Street \$849; Black Hardshell Eastwood Case \$99
eastwoodguitars.com