

Finnish Line

Price 1,499£ Versoul Caspian Electric 12-string Sitar: An unusual 12-string electric 'sitar' guitar from Finland complete with Kent Armstrong pickup and Shadow piezo

THESE DAYS, THE BEATLES are as popular as ever and psychedelia in general is firmly back on the musical agenda. Hardly surprising, then, that the electric sitar is back too.

Western music's ability to borrow from the Indian musical system was no more obvious than during sections of Vai's 'Fire Garden' album, where he takes his long-term love of Eastern themes - a Coral sitar has always been his weapon of choice - and mixes then with all manner of seven-string rawk.

On a more contemporary note, Kula Shaker's Crispian Mills has piloted his entire career to date around Indian themes and associated 'karma', and it follows that Mills is one of Versoul's big name customers, having bought one of the Finnish company's acoustic sitars.

This 12-string sitar is something of a departure for company mainman Kari Nieminen. He explains: "My aim was not to create a real sitar-sounding instrument, but rather to try to create some kind of new instrument altogether, with 12 strings to get more buzzing." placed mother-of-pearl fingerboard markers and those pickups.

BOMBAY PLUCK

The body, whose shape resembles the Ernie Ball Albert Lee model, is fashioned from two pieces of alder, finished in black and topped with nitro-cellulose. Pickup configuration is optional, but Kari uses Kent Armstrong vintage Alnico singlecoils on his electric sitars - this Caspian also features an undersaddle Shadow piezo and, with a stereo Y-lead you can have electric and piezo signals fed into separate amps at once.

The sitar sound comes from the bridge, made in this case from

solid East Indian rosewood. "The surface of the bridge has the same radius as the fingerboard, 9.56-inches," says Kari, "and the other direction has a little buzzing radius.

"When the string is picked the buzzing is created by the string actually touching the bridge. The same principle is found on real sitars, but my bridge has adjustable bridge pieces, so it's quite easy to adjust the angle of the bridge piece to get the right amount of buzz."

DELHI GOOD

Unsurprisingly, the Caspian feels a little unusual. The 19-fret neck is wide while the long 26.75 inch scale tuned down a stop means the strings are floppy.

This is a deliberate feature as the looser the strings, the more authentic the sound and feel.

The one piece mahogany neck tapers to a pointed headstock designed to reduce string pull as much as possible and the moose kneebone nut (no, really ...) is as frictionless as soapy ice,

Soundwise, the Caspian is excellent. Having played both a Coral and Jerry Jones electric sitars, I found the Versoul behaved more like a conventional electric guitar but also had the most authentic drone and resonance - thanks, in part, to the 12 strings.

My crucifixion of Metallica's Wherever I May Roam intro and even a stab at Vai's version of Bangkok sound totally genuine

VERSOUL SITAR

BUILD QUALITY	●●●●●
PLAYABILITY	●●●●●
SOUND	●●●●●
VALUE FOR MONEY	●●●●○
VERDICT	●●●●○
WE LIKED	
The feel and tone are authentic with a gorgeous build quality	
WE DISLIKED	
High price for something so specialist	

Spec Check

Versoul CASPIAN ELECTRIC 12 STRING SITAR

PRICE: £ 1,499 **ORIGIN:** Finland
BODY: Finnish alder **NECK:** Mahogany **ROAM:** East Indian rosewood **RADIUS:** 9.5 INCHES
SCALE: 26.75-inches **PICK-UPS:** Kent Armstrong vintage Ainico single-coil, Shadow piezo with Versoul preamp **BRIDGE AND TAIL:** East Indian rosewood **FRETS:** 19 **NUT:** Moose kneebone **CASE:** Hardshell case included **LEFTIES:** Yes, upon request **CONTACT:** versoul@kolumbus.fi

The Rivals

- Jerry Jones Coral Sitar s/hand

and even our resident sitar expert Matt Swaine, who's actually had lessons from Ravi Shankar, nodded in appreciation.

HELSINKING FEELING?

There's no doubt this will have limited appeal and £1,499 is a lot of money for an electric 12 string sitar and no matter how great it is, this figure is a difficult one to ignore for something so specialist. It's the best electric sitar I've played, though. If you're interested, talk to Kari... he's always willing to chat.

Simon Bradley

