

Versoul Swan

Price 1,889£ Ver-who? We've featured Kari Nieminen's guitars before, but as one of the top custom guitar makers in the world we always have time for another.

KARI NIEMINEN'S DIVERSE range of Versoul acoustic, electric, classical nylon and six and 12-string sitars now reside in a number of professional hands, including Crispian Mills, Golden Earring, Amancio Prada (top Spanish guitarist), Geoff Levin (Hollywood film composer) and Terry Britten (Tina Turner's producer/songwriter). In Los Angeles, top studio-rental man Andy Brauer has added Versoul to his featured products. Versoul was made Industrial Designer of the Year, by the Association of Finnish Industrial Designers in 1998, and one of the guitars was featured in a special stamp edition showcasing Finnish design in 1999. So why are these guitars so special?

Style is everything. Some highly eclectic influences are immediately obvious in this hollow-bodied Swan. Made from laminated curly maple with solid curly maple sides, the medium depth (60mm at the rim) hollow body features a single, rounded 'Venetian' cutaway. internal kerfed linings are tidy, the top is reinforced by two braces and the back with a larger single brace, but there's no centre-block or bridge post.

Contrasting the light amber-tinted, nitro-cellulose finish are the mahogany and birch bindings around the top and back edges, and along the edges of the ebony fingerboard. This contrasting amber/red-brown theme is echoed by the distinctive plastic laminate pickguard, pickup rings and truss rod cover, while the headstock is faced with a similarly coloured cocobolo rosewood veneer. Note the tip of the head: a multi-laminate of the same mahogany and birch veneers add to the distinctive appearance.

More obvious are the angular, modernistic and neatly wood-bound soundholes, the uniquely

The Rivals

Versoul's distinctive style is quite unique, but British makers such as GUS Guitars (01435 863048) offer a similar original vision with their solidbody range. If it's top-notch custom semis that interest you contact KGB Guitars (0151647 3268) and Poole Custom Guitars (01634 220817).

placed mother-of-pearl fingerboard markers and those pickups. The rivals

Like it or not, Versoul has character. But don't dismiss this guitar as an art-house project. You don't have to be a professional guitarist to appreciate that style aside, this is a superbly crafted piece. The beautiful mahogany neck - with gold leaf side 'dot' motifs - is eminently playable; the fingerboard and fretting first class.

Hardware is top-notch. We're treated to Grover Imperial tuners with unique T-shaped buttons, a proper Bigsby vibrato and Gotoh tune-o-matic bridge that sits on a floating ebony base. Versoul's single-coil pickups, with those perforated and chromed metal covers, may look like sci-fi tea-strainers but the wiring is conventional, with a horn-mounted three-way toggle selector, pickup volumes and a master tone.

Birdsong

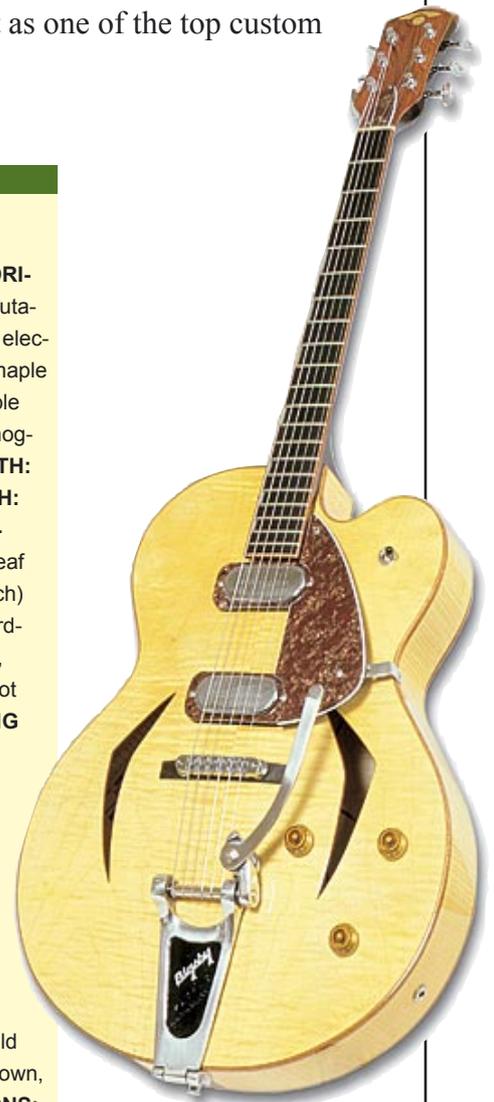
The Swan has reasonable acoustic projection with a typical, muted high-end, strong midrange and quite resonant bass. The sound seems to combine the fullness and mellow attitude of a Gibson hollow-body with the slight rawness, bite and unpredictability of a vintage Gretsch hollow-body. The neck pickup sounds broody, but its not too sombre; the dual pickup mix creates that almost elastic-sounding snappy bass and soft attack of a Gretsch and is contrasted by the noticeable

Spec Check

Versoul SWAN

PRICE: £1,889 (with case) **ORIGIN:** Finland **TYPE:** Single-cutaway, arched-top hollow-body electric **BOOM** Laminated curly maple top and back; solid curly maple sides **NECK:** One-piece mahogany, set-neck **SCALE LENGTH:** 635mm (25-inch) **NUTWIDTH:** Moose shin bone/43mm **FIN-GERBOARD:** Ebony, MOP/leaf gold markers, 305mm (12-inch) radius Frets: 22, medium **Hardware:** Grover Imperial tuners, Gotoh tune-o-matic/ebony-foot bridge, Bigsby vibrato **STRING SPACING:** Bridge: 52mm **ELECTRICS:** Two Versoul single-coils, three-way toggle pickup selector switch, volume and tone for each pickup. **WEIGHT (Kg/Lb)** 2.84/6.25 **OPTIONS: COLOURS:** pearloid pickguard, trussrod coverplate and pickup mounting rings emerald green, Rubin red, pearloid brown, tortoiseshell. **RANGE OPTIONS:** Versoul's electrics start with the Raya Baritone (£870); the Raya 12-string baritone and Henry; a Les Paul-inspired electric with real gold leaf or platinum finish, (both £940). **LEFT-HANDERS:** Yes **FINISHES:** Vintage amber (reviewed), other colours on request **CONTACT:** Email: versoul@kolumbus.fi

midrange bite of the tighter and more direct bridge pickup. The Bigsby holds its tuning well, allowing the Swan to cover country, rockabilly or those sixties-era twangy film themes just add tape-delay and reverb The single tone control can tame the highs for a more muted lounge-jazz tone, but a master volume on the upper shoulder could help performance as access to the twin pickup volumes is impeded by the vibrato arm. Feedback is problematic at



loud levels, but that's the downside of the resonant hollow-body. Kari's distinctive style, married with top-class guitar building skills, and a sensible price, make this beautiful Swan a worthy choice. Any lower volume styles: jazz,

A circular moon motif in gold leaf appears on the back and headstock blues, country and rockabilly, are effortless.

Dave Burrluck

VERSOL SWAN

BUILD QUALITY	●●●●●
PLAYABILITY	●●●●●
SOUND	●●●●●
VALUE FOR MONEY	●●●●○
VERDICT	●●●●●
WE LIKED	
Originality, Build Quality, Sound Quality and Playability	
WE DISLIKED	
A master volume may help on stage use	