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# SUPPLY

VOX GUITARS | BY ED ENRIGHT

## THE UNIVERSAL VOX

Just as Vox amps appear onstage with everyone from shredders to jazzers, the company's new guitar line caters to players who require a huge variety of sounds but lack the budget for a huge variety of axes.

Introduced at this year's winter NAMM show, the Virage series includes the Virage DC double cutaway and Virage SC single cutaway. Designed for playability and comfort, these higher-end instruments are not recreations of the unusual-looking Vox guitars produced in England at the height of the British Invasion. They're semi-hollow body electrics with features like a unique, multiple-voice pickup system and an ergonomically curved, three-dimensional body shape. Listing at just over \$3,000 each, they're also made to match up with high-end Vox amps, so players can create their own tones.

According to Rich Lasner, vice president of R&D for Vox Guitars, the two models represented such a radical departure from typical, semi-hollow electrics that Vox developed them undercover for a full year. In between, Korg USA, Vox's parent company, sent in



From left: Vox Guitars' Rich Lasner and Korg's Joseph Castronovo, Michael Bradley and Mitch Colby with a prototype of the Virage SC

**The amp maker aims to corner the semi-hollow body guitar market with an all-things-to-all-players instrument**

endorsers secretly to test the prototypes.

The 3-D body concept and slightly smaller, lightweight design aim to make the Virage line more user-friendly to players who grew up with solid body electrics like Stratocasters and Les Pauls. "Traditional semi-hollows can be very off-putting because they're big, hard to hold and cause you to change your hand position," Lasner said. "We built in a set of ergonomic shapes through carving solid

wood on a CNC machine, so that the guitar actually curves against the player's body and rolls toward his right arm, like a solid body." The result is a semi-hollow instrument that fits the body's contours, regardless of whether a guitarist is sitting or standing.

### RETURN OF THE SEMI-HOLLOW

Michael Bradley, Vox and Toneworks product manager for Korg USA, said the company sees an untapped market for semi-hollow electrics,

which are currently making a comeback among professional musicians.

“We felt there was a lot of opportunity for us to improve the playing experience associated with semi-hollow instruments, while adding the sort of breakthrough features Vox has become known for in the amplifier world,” he said. “So we set out to create an instrument that is, on one hand, very classic and familiar but, on the other, groundbreaking and completely new. Between the unique body ergonomics and the new Three-90 triple-coil, passive pickup system, we feel we’ve accomplished our goal.”

The system Bradley referred to was developed by DiMarzio and relies on two triple-coil

pickups to deliver clean, crunch and lead tones. The idea was to have single-coil, P-90 and humbucking-style versatility all in one instrument.

“We wanted to add some versatility, but we didn’t want to add things that turn guitar players off, like active electronics,” Lasner said. “So we took three individual pickups and put them under one cover, and made that the size of a classic P-90 pickup. There are two on each guitar, and when both pickups are on, the combinations are limitless — you can put pretty much anything you want together. There’s no noise, you get all the classic sounds and the switches are dirt simple.”

Two intuitively placed

**‘We played these things to death with dozens of players in a room with 37 amps in it.’**

**— Rich Lasner, Vox Guitars**

three-way toggle mode switches also help players select different pickups on the fly.

Vox Guitars made its own proprietary hardware for the Virage SC and Virage DC. A Full Contact aluminum bridge provides rich tone, clear har-

monics and maximum intonation adjustment on every string. The guitars feature Integral Tonebar construction to reject feedback, and a deeply scooped neckjoint system with inverse heel gives players total access to the highest fret.

“There seems to be a group of discriminating people willing to spend a good amount of money for a great instrument,” Lasner said. “And since the solid body world is so populated by archetypes, we felt we could make a bigger mark in a place where we saw some room. We have to create some excitement around these guitars with artist endorsements and clinics, so that somebody comes in the store and says, ‘I went to see my favorite band last night.

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What's the guitar he's playing? I have to have one.' We have really good product specialists, and those guys are going to be out in the field in the next couple of months doing product demonstrations and training people in stores."

#### UNIVERSAL APPEAL

The Virages are now in production at the Fujigen factory in Japan, and Lasner said he hopes to get them in the hands of more pros, especially Korg-endorsing artists.

"A guy will go out and make a record if he loves the guitar, and then it becomes a sound people look for," Lasner said. "We're hoping to get the news out to the consumer that this guitar is happening and get it on as many stages as possible. We're looking for professional players to come on-board with this guitar and match it up with a nice Vox amp."

In fact, the Virage guitars were designed to sound good with virtually any kind of amp, from a small combo all the way up through a stack.

"We had to create something more universal, or we were really going to miss the mark here," Lasner said. "We played these things to death with dozens of players in a room with 37 amps in it, and I feel confident that this is one of the few guitars that can do that."

Customers who log on to [voxvirage.com](http://voxvirage.com) can have a virtual Virage experience by listening to high-quality sound clips of the guitars being played through a wide range of amps.

#### FUTURE FULL-LINE PLANS

The two new limited-edition Virage models will offer additional features, designs, colors and hardware in the future, but Lasner said the line will be exclusive for the first year or so.

"We're not trying to flood the market," he said. "We're trying to bring out a good number of really well-made guitars. Korg is allowing us to do that, and that's why I liked this project so much. It's not, 'Get it done, and get it done cheap.' It's, 'Get it done right.'"

"Korg is committed to the Vox brand, plain and simple, and we're treating it as such at all levels of the company," Bradley said. "We all keep a very open

mind as to the potential of what Vox means as a music company. We are committed to not limiting our ideas or scope to any one preconception of the Vox brand. While Vox is often associated with the AC30 and The Beatles, we've had a lot of success in new areas that push the envelope far beyond these classic notions of the brand."

Vox Guitars aspires to expand into a

full-line guitar company over the next several years.

"You can expect to see set-neck, arched-top guitars and probably bolt-on guitars in the future," Lasner said. "But we're working on ideas that will have at least three or four innovative points to each one. We're not just going to keep popping them out. They'll always be thought-out the way the Virage guitars were." **MI**

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