



# STERLING BY MUSIC MAN VALENTINE JV60 £749

With a flexible feature set, this Maroon 5 signature model will be loved

In terms of off-the-shelf electrics, Ernie Ball Music Man is best known for its formidable artist roster, which counts some of the instrument's most outstanding proponents among its signature endorsees – John Petrucci, Steve Lukather and Steve Morse to name but three – but one name that may have flown under your radar is James Valentine, lead guitarist for pop heavyweights Maroon 5. The band's material may not be your cup of tea, but make no mistake, Valentine knows his guitars, and this affordable version of his signature model makes a compelling prospect indeed.

that bridge pup is a single coil, lending the instrument the tonal palette of a HS Tele, à la Keith Richards' iconic Micawber. Except most Teles don't come fitted with an onboard boost: pressing down on the Valentine's volume control adds a full 12dB of additional volume to give your amp and pedals a good kicking. It should be noted that the Sterling incarnation loses the full-fat Music Man version's coil-split and adjustable gain levels, but then again, this one clocks in at under a third of the price of that USA model.

Any number of factors can affect a guitar's tuning during transit, but when we pull one fresh out of

## “ITS BODY LOOKS AND FEELS INSTANTLY CLASSIC”

Loosely designed to marry Valentine's favourite attributes of a Telecaster and an ES-335 (see Be My Valentine), the resultant shape is a curious hybrid that feels familiar and contemporary in equal measure. Its body cuts a comfortable figure that looks and feels instantly classic – it features contouring around the heel for easy access to the dusty end of the fretboard, but true to its Fender inspiration, there's no belly cut. The overall package isn't overly weighty like some slab bodies can be, yet it's reassuringly rugged, and looks sultry indeed with that transparent Buttermilk finish and tortoiseshell scratchplate.

While it's based on two classic outlines, the Valentine has a few tricks up its sleeve. For one, that ain't two humbuckers you see before you – no, sir. In actuality,

the gigbag in perfect tuning, it usually bodes well, and, accordingly, the Valentine is rock-solid during our time with it: a hardtail bridge paired with a set of Sterling locking tuners on the 4+2 headstock means there's no cause to touch the tuning machines, other than to test their smooth-operating action. There's a great feel all round: getting your hands on the Valentine reveals a gloriously light satin finish to the roasted maple neck – it's an eminently playable setup. If you can't stretch to Ibanez's AZ line, this electric offers a similar palm-filling yet swift feel for a little less.

Tonally, this guitar can certainly cop a decent impression of its two forebears, while retaining a flavour of its own. The balanced neck single coil is a blank



**1 BOOST!**  
Push that volume control for a mighty 12dB volume boost, very handy for your solos and chunky distorted tones

**2 SINGLE COIL**  
It may look like a humbucker, but this pickup is actually a spanky single coil in disguise

**3 ROASTED**  
The maple neck and fingerboard have been roasted for a sweet caramel colour and enhanced stability

### AT A GLANCE

**BODY:** Swamp ash  
**NECK:** Roasted hard maple  
**SCALE:** 648mm (25.5")  
**FINGERBOARD:** Roasted hard maple  
**FRETS:** 22  
**PICKUPS:** 1x SBMM single coil (bridge), 1x SBMM humbucker (neck)  
**CONTROLS:** 1x volume w/ push/push volume boost, 1x tone, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch  
**HARDWARE:** Hardtail bridge w/ vintage bent saddles, locking tuners  
**LEFT-HANDED:** No  
**FINISH:** Trans Buttermilk, Black  
**CASE:** Included gigbag  
**CONTACT:** Strings & Things 01273 440 444 [sterlingbymusicman.com](http://sterlingbymusicman.com)







## Be my Valentine

The Maroon 5 guitarist reflects on designing his Music Man signature

**"I** wanted something that looked classic, but hadn't been done before. I didn't want to just do another Telecaster or Stratocaster-shaped thing. I was talking about my favourite guitars, and Sterling [Ball, Ernie Ball CEO] brought out two different CAD layouts of a Tele and a 335. We put them on top of each other, starting pulling on the edges, and came up with that shape. While the guitar was still a prototype, I snuck it into Maroon 5 rehearsals, without any explanation. I wanted to gauge a true reaction. I got great feedback from my bandmates, but also from our front-of-house sound guy, who came up to me right after our soundcheck and was like, 'What is that? It sounds fantastic!'"

canvas ideally suited to chord vamps and background rhythm work, while the bridge pickup is like a supercharged single coil – it's smoother, more balanced than the spiky tones that can sometimes emit from bridge singles. That said, although the middle position dulls the bridge single's highs with input from the neck humbucker, it still leans heavily towards treblier tones – not quite as varied as perhaps hoped.

Unless you want to blow your audience's eardrums, the onboard boost probably isn't something you'll switch on and off during a



Seeing double: not two humbuckers but a cleverly disguised single-coil pickup



clean tone, but you may find yourself leaving it on all the time, depending on your amp and pedal setup. So many valve combos sound better with a boost up front, and this 12dB kick sets you up with some record-ready clean sounds. As you'd expect, the transparent boost comes in handy when you need to push existing gain over the edge for a sweet sustaining solo, too, and serves up a little more of everything for rhythm left.

We're big fans of Valentine's no-nonsense approach to guitar design. While there have been small concessions in bringing his

signature model to a sub-£800 price point, there's no arguing with the quality feel and workhorse performance, while the addition of that built-in boost elevates the whole package. More versatile guitars are available for this kind of money, but few offer the sheer class that Valentine has delivered.

**Michael Astley-Brown**

SUMMARY	FEATURES	★	★	★	★	★
	SOUND QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	VALUE FOR MONEY	★	★	★	★	★
	BUILD QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	PLAYABILITY	★	★	★	★	★
	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★

## ALSO TRY...

### FENDER CLASSIC SERIES '72 TELECASTER CUSTOM

£799

A clear comparison point is this HS-configured Tele, which comes with a Wide Range humbucker and Tele single coil.



### STERLING BY MUSIC MAN LUKE LK100D

£799

It may feature twin humbuckers, but the Luke also delivers a push/pull 12dB boost, and adds a vintage-style vibrato.



### IBANEZ AZ224F

£1069

Reviewed last issue, this AZ offers a similarly playable roasted maple neck and quality feel, with added flexibility.

