

YOU WEAR IT WELL

THINK AGED GUITARS ARE ALL ABOUT AESTHETICS? **MICK TAYLOR** MAKES THE CASE FOR TONE AMONG THE DENTS AND SCRATCHES OF NASH

... This whole guitar thaaang really is a strange business. Every month in these very pages we extol the virtues of the world's finest electric guitars, with their refined designs, beautifully glossy finishes and so on: attributes we've come to expect in new, high-class instruments. So the strange thing is, how come when we open the case to reveal this new guitar – beaten and scratched quite on purpose – the saliva glands still go into overdrive? Simple: Old Guitars Are Cool.

Well, that's the perception anyway. In reality, many old guitars are a complete pain in the behind, not least because of inconsistent build quality/playability and ridiculously high prices. There is another way, though. If you want an old guitar that plays wonderfully, sounds exceptional and doesn't cost the earth, what you want is a new guitar. Eh? Let us explain...

BODY & NECK

The first thing you'll notice is that this guitar is not a Fender. While based heavily, lovingly and with some considerable trainspotterish detail on the Big F's hallowed Esquire model (a Tele with the only pickup that matters), it is in fact a product of one-man-outfit Bill Nash. Now based in Olympia, Washington State, Bill has been obsessed with guitars since he was a kid, and fell into guitar building after repairing, modding and constructing his own instruments. In the ensuing years, he's gained a serious reputation in all the right guitar circles, reportedly building guitars for more than one rock star

who'd respectfully rather stay schtum, than risk their big-name endorsement relationships. As for the divisive issue of prematurely ageing guitars, Nash's argument is simple: "I was building a lot of both types at first – a lot of new-looking guitars and a lot of aged guitars, and the aged instruments all sounded better."

The huge, thorny issue of building replicas is of course copyright. Fender quite rightly defends its trademarks vehemently, so how come this guy manages to continue, legally unhindered? The answer comes in the fact that Bill Nash makes no claim to be milling his own bodies and necks, instead using officially Fender-licensed parts, from suppliers such as Allparts, Warmoth and others. Not only does it avoid litigation, it also helps keep costs down in terms of manufacturing/tooling costs.

Making up this Timewarp E-52 model, we have a two-piece ash body, the timber generally considered best for 50s-style Nocasters, Teles and Esquires. Nash himself says he's not that keen on the ultra-light bodies beloved of many '50s Fender Telecaster lovers, though he will source them if necessary. Instead, this one contributes to an overall heft just under eight pounds; it's not overly heavy, but vintage Tele freaks may still be a bit sniffy at that figure. In terms of shape, there are no doubts as to what we're aiming at here, but the complete lack of chamfering around the edges leads to an ultra-slab feel, and makes the bottom horn look a little beefy compared with a pukka '50s Tele or Esquire. The pickguard shape may be a contributing factor here also.

And so to the ageing process. Bill Nash remains tight-lipped about his

GBINFO



NASH TIMEWARP E-52
PRICE: £1,199
BUILT IN: USA
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5 inches)
NUT WIDTH: 41.2mm (1.5/8 inches)
STRING SPACING AT NUT: 35mm (1.38 inches)
BODY: Ash
NECK: Maple, bolt on
FINGERBOARD: Single-piece maple neck, 305mm radius (12 inches)
FRETS: 21 jumbo
PICKUPS: 1 x Lollar Special T Bridge single coil
CONTROLS: 1 x volume, 1 x tone, 3-way selector
BRIDGE: Unbranded ashtray-style bridge with three brass saddles
STRING SPACING AT BRIDGE: 55mm (2.165 inches)
MACHINEHEADS: Gotoh Kluson-style, aged nickel
WEIGHT: 3.6kg (7.93lbs)
CASE: Nash-branded rigid soft case/gigbag, included
FINISHES: Aged butterscotch, blonde shown. Others available – see website or contact dealer
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes
CONTACT: TransAm Guitars
PHONE: 01702 306262
WEB: www.nashguitars.com www.transamguitars.com



THREE STAGES OF AGEING

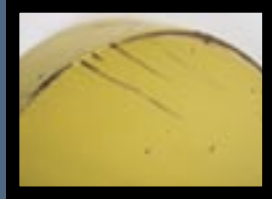
CHOOSE YOUR BEATING...

■ When you're considering a Nash, there are a number of variables to choose from.

The first is ash or alder for the body, rosewood or maple for the fingerboard, then either a C, soft V or fatback neck profile.

After that, you have your choice of vintage Fender hues... which Mr Nash will 'love' to the following states of distress:

1. Church Gig: Played soberly only on Sundays for the past 40 years.
2. Workingman: Very well used and loved. Lots of time on the road. Moderate wear overall.



3. Louisiana Roadhouse: Very well used, subject to some abuse and also some environmental stress.

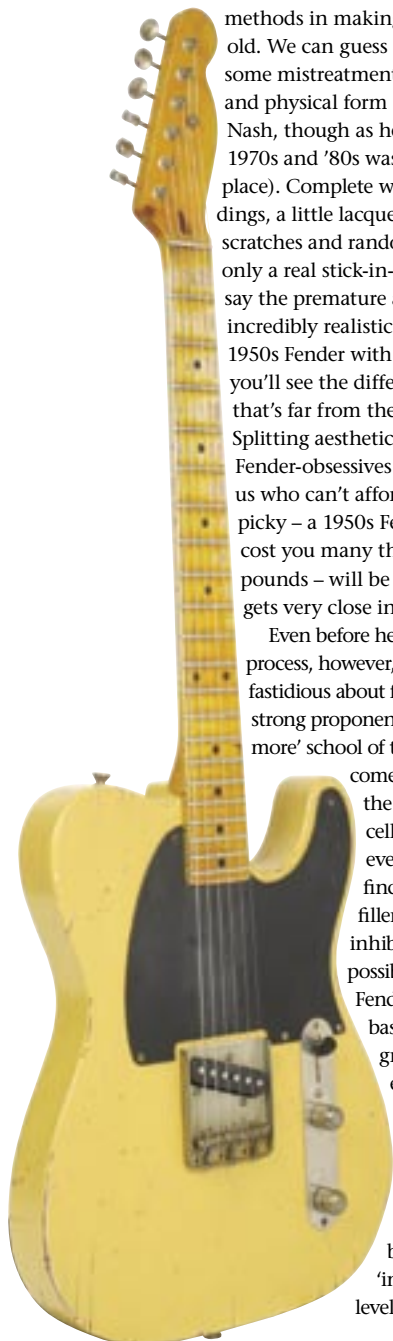
For your reference, UK importer TransAm Guitars reckons this particular E-52 model is somewhere between the 'Workingman' and 'Louisiana Roadhouse' states.



■ Mmm... huge frets on a worn 'board. It makes the Nash hard to put down



■ Nash has plumped for a set of Gotoh Kluson-style tuners and tarnished them accordingly



methods in making new guitars look old. We can guess confidently at some mistreatment in both chemical and physical form (the guitar, not Mr Nash, though as he says, LA in the 1970s and '80s was a pretty crazy place). Complete with the requisite dings, a little lacquer checking, scratches and random battlescars, only a real stick-in-the-mud would say the premature ageing wasn't incredibly realistic. If you've a pukka 1950s Fender with which to compare, you'll see the differences for sure, but that's far from the point here. Splitting aesthetic hairs is what Fender-obsessives do, while those of us who can't afford to be quite so picky – a 1950s Fender Esquire will cost you many thousands of pounds – will be happy the Nash gets very close indeed.

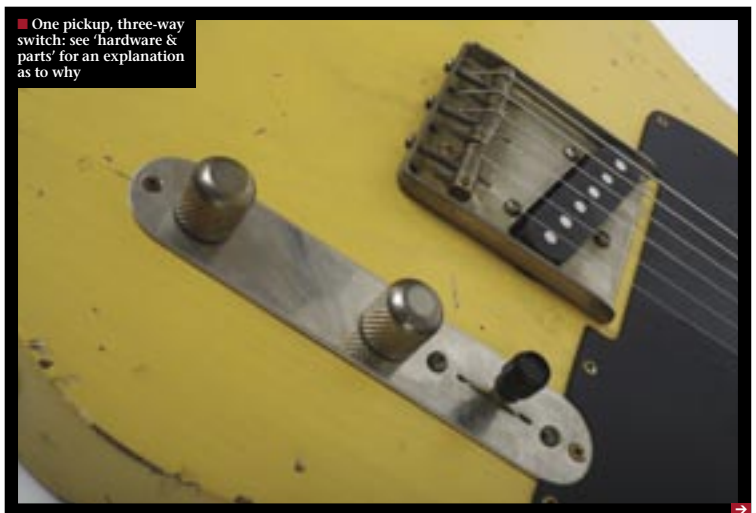
Even before he begins the ageing process, however, Bill Nash is fastidious about finishing guitars, a strong proponent of the 'less-is-more' school of thought when it comes to tone. As well as the requisite nitro-cellulose lacquer, he's even picky about finding the right grain fillers to limit tone inhibition as much as possible. Reportedly, Fender uses a polyester basecoat to replace the grain filling stage – even on some nitro-finished guitars – which means that although the lacquer is nitro-cellulose, the base coat is an 'indestructible' self-levelling polymer that,

while lovely to work with, can also suck tone from the body. No such thing here, according to Nash.

As for the wear on the neck, well, how picky do you want to be? Let's be honest, you don't really see 1952 Esquires or Telecasters every day, so for all intents and purposes, it'll certainly fool you from afar. However, if you want to split those hairs again, fingerboard wear rarely happens like that, with individual patches underneath all the strings at the first two frets. That's confirmed by a quick peek at a couple of pukka vintage maple necks, and also from poring unhealthily over a secret stash of vintage Fender pics. Also, the finish to the back of the neck – while fabulous to play on – is clearly not that of a 50+ year-old-guitar. Again, it looks worn, but a closer inspection reveals it to be merely the lacquer removed in the main part of the playing area, with a bit of grime rubbed in to take the newness out of the maple's anaemic hue. And that, in terms of body and neck, pretty much sums up the Nash

Time Warp E-52. In your hands the guitar has all the appeal of an oldie, even if vintage know-it-alls will tell straight away that it's a new guitar – just as they will with any Fender Relic.

The more important thing, of course, is that it plays simply wonderfully, aided by a relatively flat 12-inch radius to the fingerboard, and some substantial fretwire. These jumbo lovelies start their lives tall, so Nash can dress them down to a more played-in feel, and they're fat, fat, fat, to boot. Coupled with the substantial-but-not-too-chunky C profile, it makes for a choke-free, easy bending experience, even with a relatively low action. A factor in achieving that action is in the Heath-Robinson-style neck shim. It means that the neck doesn't sit with exactly 100 per cent wood-on-wood contact within the body cavity, which would score a black mark on a 'new' guitar. Here, it doesn't seem to be inhibiting resonance to any great degree, and it definitely improves playability. 'Vintage' guitars, eh?



■ One pickup, three-way switch; see 'hardware & parts' for an explanation as to why

MEET BILL

NOTES FROM THE NASH SIDE



■ Nash Guitars is currently a one-man outfit when it comes to building instruments. We thought that this quote from Bill's website says a lot about his ethos and general approach: top fella.

"I do no endorsement deals and think it is darn tacky to use famous names to try and sell my line. It is always nice when someone big plays my stuff,

but it is even nicer when someone who has a much more limited income chooses a Nash as it may be the only guitar he can afford. That says more to me than seeing one of my instruments played amongst a stable of others in front of 20,000 people a night."

Head to Bill's website at www.nashguitars.com to get the full story.

"THE NASH E-52 JUST RINGS OUT LOUD AND CLEAR – IT HANGS TOGETHER SONICALLY"

HARDWARE & PARTS

One of the things that's so appealing about Bill Nash's guitars is how matter of fact he is about components. Generally unfazed by big brand-name parts, he's plumped for a set of Gotoh Kluson-style tuners – neither particularly lofty nor expensive – that simply do the job as they should. Weight is the crucial factor in tone, according to Nash, and these Gotohs have the right blend of aesthetics and light weight to get the thumbs up. This once-shiny set is tarnished convincingly, dulling them down with a hint of rust here and there; Bill Nash won't age or tarnish anything to the point where it's unusable.

Likewise, the bridge isn't a 'name' part as such, moreover it's a simple, ashtray-style baseplate that's tarnished tastefully with random rusty marks. Up close, the rust looks like the result of some sort of water/solution treatment, rather than 50 years of sweat, grime and beer, but from more than about a foot, it's highly convincing. More importantly, it

employs the three brass saddles, intonation compensated in that they're appropriately angled to minimise the compromises you need to make for pairs of strings. It's a marked improvement on a vintage trio of straight saddles.

While Nash will supply any number of different pickups in guitars, Bill's current faves are from US brand Lollar. Jason Lollar is an extremely well-renowned luthier whose pickups are gaining a lot of interest just recently. Here we have his Special T Series Bridge unit, which is Lollar's take on an early 1950s, flat-pole Telecaster pickup, but with a little extra output and 'a rounder top end and fuller mids', as he describes it. Alnico V magnets are a given, as is the wax potting and cloth-covered lead wire. While the top bobbin is anything from new, it doesn't look as 'aged' as a Seymour Duncan's Antiquity, not least in that the polepieces are almost new, albeit hand-ground, looking.

So, one pickup: why the three-way selector switch? Bill Nash explains, "The wiring I use to squeeze as much out of the one pickup is: the front position puts the pickup to a capacitor that gives a pre-set midrange honk (original Fender Esquires used a different capacitor that was so bass heavy it made this position virtually unusable). The middle position is the pickup through standard volume and tone controls, while the back position is 'straight piped', which is to say that the pickup goes straight to the output jack with no volume or tone controls. This gives you the louder and brighter sound of the pickup with no 'drag'."

The 'drag' to which he refers is what happens when a pickup is impeded (quite literally) by a tone or volume knob – in this case two 250k pots –

that have the effect of 'loading the pickups' and causing minor changes to volume and tone. As we'll find out, however, it's really not that minor.

Rounding out the hardware, in addition to the period-correct control plate and knobs – all similarly aged and tarnished – you also get aged strap buttons and the requisite barrel-style jack socket. In all honesty, if you owned a 1952 Esquire, you'd see the differences on close inspection. Viewed in isolation, however, this Timewarp E-52 does a shockingly good impression of a 54-year-old guitar, except of course that everything works perfectly!

SOUNDS

Brrrrr, buzzzzzz, click, clunk... BRAAAAANG! Selecting the middle position on the pickup switch puts the Nash E-52 in standard, Telecaster-style bridge-pickup mode. Now, there are people who think that this style of guitar is somehow weak- or thin-sounding, but that's further from the case here than a dodgy market trader when the ol' Bill's on the prowl.

If the Lollar Special T Vintage Bridge single coil is going to sound good anywhere, it ought to be here, and it makes a superb show for itself. Great tone, in our opinion, is always a balancing act of poise and power; a happy combination of grunt and articulation that lets the whole instrument contribute to the musical party, and that's exactly what this guitar has. There's very little of the brittle high-end that plagues lesser examples of the breed, with the Lollar's relatively strong mids pushing a vintage-style tube amp into harmonically rich overdrive when you dig in. Indeed, the pickup feels expressive, responding well to varying



■ Aged strap buttons and similarly aged hardware add to the overall vibe here



■ Chips, scars, worn areas... some people will think that is sacrilegious on a new guitar

DETAILS

THE WOODS, FINISH, PLAYABILITY AND TONE ALL ADD UP TO AN EXTREMELY IMPRESSIVE GUITAR



■ Something missing? Yep, it's most definitely not a Fender



■ A 12-inch radius fretboard and jumbo frets are welcome modern playability factors



■ A barrel-style jack socket fits the vibe here, if not the hole it sits in perfectly!



GBOPINION

NASH TIMEWARP E-52

GOLD STARS

- ★ Drop-dead looks
- ★ Plays like a beauty
- ★ Sounds wonderful
- ★ Great price

BLACK MARKS

- You won't mistake it for a genuine '50s model if you know your onions

IDEAL FOR...

Anyone wanting a fabulous feeling, sounding and looking working guitar. 95 per cent of the appeal of a vintage specimen, 15 per cent of the price

picking dynamics. Sustain is impressive, too, making you want to hold on to those on-the-edge, first-position chords forever.

Flicking the selector switch to the rear position bypasses the tone and volume controls completely. Considering that this is a seemingly subtle change from where we were two seconds ago, the change in tone is remarkable, with considerable added punch, presence and edge. The caveat is that you need to be hearing it through a quality, classic-style valve amp at volume to fully appreciate the difference.

Mega gain levels strip the E-52 of its subtleties and send the Lollar squealing for something more tasteful. More practically, having the switch wired this way means you can flick instantly between two very different sounds, er, three in fact...

In the forward position you introduce a capacitor to the circuit that results in a more honky cut to proceedings. In isolation it sounds pretty square and unattractive, but in the context of a band mix, it's a credible lead tone that conjures a great late-'60s vibe, not least with an evil-



■ Various pickups are available, but Bill's current faves are from US brand Lollar

sounding fuzz pedal. Who'd have thought a single-pickup guitar could be so versatile?

What's underlying all of this, though, is a more fundamental union of body, neck, hardware and electronics. The Nash E-52 guitar just rings out loud and clear; it hangs together sonically as a whole instrument, which is its most appealing attribute of all.

GBCONCLUSION

ALL TOO HARD NOT TO BE TEMPTED AT THIS PRICE

■ **Our advice to you is this: If, like Bill Nash, you're going to scratch beneath the surface of what makes fabulous Fender-style guitars, be prepared for a life of longing, lust and most probably relative poverty.**

Nevertheless, a lot of people just can't see why some ostensibly similar guitars – comprising mainly of two planks of wood – are £399, and others £2,399. Lucky them. For those of us who can, however, this Nash Timewarp E-52 is a wallet-worrying example of the breed that will tempt the money from it quicker than a big-breasted girl with a tray of cold beers on a boiling hot day. The woods, the finish, the playability, and most importantly, the tone: there's no doubt whatsoever that this guitar is more than the sum of its parts. It seems Bill Nash is a man who understands how to bring that to fruition, and regardless of your stance on new 'aged' guitars, it's hard not to fall in love with this one, especially at this price. **GB**

GBRATINGS

NASH TIMEWARP E-52

BODY & NECK	★★★★
HARDWARE & PARTS	★★★★
PLAYABILITY	★★★★
SOUNDS	★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★
GBVERDICT	★★★★