

# Smoke on the water

**Price: £2,225** Tyler Studio Elite 'Burning Water': For its sensuous curves and 'classy tart' image, this guitar wins our first 'Pammy Anderson Award' of 1999.



James Tyler makes his guitar necks feel 20-years-old... and brilliant!

**F**OR THOSE OF YOU WHO don't know who Mike Landau is, he's the guy who took Steve Lukather's 'LA Session King' crown back in the 80s and now plays with James Taylor – no, not James Tyler; that's who builds his guitars.

Tyler's small but immensely exclusive range includes such famous finishes as Psychedelic Vomit and this rather less grossly-monikered but no less striking Burning Water. Applied on a beautifully lightweight lump of ash, the finish is a mass of swirls in different metallic colours; in this case there's silver, blue, black, gold and a final coat of see-through red. James Tyler refuses to reveal the secret of this process, but it looks as though different layers have been sanded through in various areas to reveal the ones beneath. But that's not the case, because you can't sand metallic paint without leaving scratches... and the finish here's perfect.

## Who spilt the paint?

What strikes you next about the guitar is its gloriously sensual contouring.

The rear part of the lower cutaway is beautifully blended into an angled heel, so as to provide unhindered top-end access. The belly contour is just as smoothly handled, and it all sits there like a slightly 'melted', Daliesque version of a Strat body. I'd go as far as to say that the Tyler is a tactile sensation...

Hardware-wise it's industry-standard stuff: Wilkinson tremolo,

## The rivals

• PRS Swamp Ash Special	£2,099
• Ernie Ball/Music Man Axis	£1,399
• Fender Custom Shop Stratocaster	£Various

Sperzel heads and some specially designed to Mike Landau's specification Seymour Duncan pickups (two single coils with a humbucker at the bridge).

The necks on these instruments almost defy description, they're so friendly on the hands. This one is made from an attractive piece of birdseye maple with a slab rosewood board whose huge frets have been stupendously fitted and finished. There's an aged feel to the whole thing, with slightly bevelled, almost scalloped edges, which give the impression of 20 years of playing, straight out of the case. The big frets make any style of playing easy, but most especially bluesy rock, with its heavy bends and vibrato.

The Wilkinson, the Sperzels and a lubricated nut all conspire to make gentle wobbles or heavyweight dives a pleasant and remarkably tuneful experience. I liked the trem tension here, which felt like a well-oiled, souped-up Strat.

## Tone zone

Tonally, there's a fantastic ring to the guitar, played acoustically. Plug in and you quickly see why a sessioneer like Landau chooses this configuration. Crystal clear front, middle and in-between sounds are complemented by a humbucker that's been designed by Landau to sound beefy, but

## Spec check

### TYLER STUDIO ELITE 'BURNING WATER'

**PRICE:** £2,395 **ORIGIN:** USA  
**BODY:** Lightweight ash  
**NECK:** Bird's-eye maple  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood  
**FRETS:** 22 **FINISH:** 'Burning Water' finish **BRIDGE:** Wilkinson VS100 tremolo  
**MACHINES:** Sperzel locking  
**CONTROLS:** One volume, two tone, five-way blade switch  
**PICKUPS:** Custom-designed 'Mike Landau' Seymour Duncan humbucker & two single-coils  
**CASE:** Hard Tyler case included  
**CONTACT:** Stellar Distribution - 0191 267 3175 website: <http://www.tylerguitars.com>

also slightly single-coilish. Balance between the different selections is therefore perfect and I reckon this guitar would do anything you asked of it and never complain or fight back.

## Can you dig it?

Okay, Tyler's guitars are, uncompromising in appearance.

Whether or not you like his ridiculously bolshy headstock design (I love its ugly aggression) and those weird finishes, you certainly won't fail to notice them.

Playing and soundwise, you won't find anything better in this style of electric guitar; whether you can justify over two grand or not is quite another matter.

**Neville Marten**



Clever sculpting of the heel area looks cool and organic – makes playing easier too

## TYLER STUDIO ELITE

BUILD QUALITY	●●●●●
PLAYABILITY	●●●●●
SOUND	●●●●●
VALUE FOR MONEY	●●●○○
<b>VERDICT</b>	●●●○○
<b>WE LIKED</b> Everything except...	
<b>WE DIDN'T LIKE</b> The price	