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THE GUITAR PLAYER'S BIBLE

JAMES DEAN BRADFIELD GIBSON FIREBIRDS SLAYER LINE 6 PODXT LIVE LIMELIGHT

THE GUITAR PLAYER'S BIBLE

ISSUE 257

# Guitarist

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MANIC STREET PREACHERS'

## JAMES DEAN BRADFIELD

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## Tyler Studio Elite HD £2,620



### The rivals

Don Grosh Bent Top Custom from	£2,199
Fender Showmaster FMT from	£2,449
Tom Anderson Drop Top Classic	£2,695

As befits a genuine 'niche' American builder, all of the models offered by Don Grosh's facility can be ordered to a personal spec. DiMarzio pickups, a rainbow of finishes (both coloured and exotic), a mid boost, the list goes on: great feel and top tones too. With a carved top and H/S/S configuration of Duncan and Fender pickups, this Custom Shop axe is the ultimate hot-rodded Strat that also bears the classic logo. A slim neck, LSR nut and Sperzel tuners completes the picture. Anderson has been a name denoting high quality for years and his star continues to rise. Beautiful guitars across the board and, at these heady heights, price is of a secondary consideration: absolute, unadulterated quality

Is this the best S-type electric available today? With an unusual 'shmeared' finish, awesome sounds and a gorgeous neck, it's certainly close... by Simon Bradley

James Tyler has been honing his significant skills for well over 20 years while modifying instruments for the top echelon of LA's session scene. Many of those players – Mike Landau, Dan Huff and Steve Lukather amongst others – remain close to Tyler today, and the majority of the features included in most of his current models came from innovations that he developed to satisfy these top players.

The first Studio Elite was debuted at 1987's Winter NAMM show. "I took some innovations I had come up with over the years and included the popular features of the time, like H/S/S pickups and the Floyd Rose bridge," says Tyler. "I shovelled them all into one instrument, as I thought it was time to make a guitar with all the good stuff."

### Studio Elite HD

So, what's the difference between a Studio Elite and the HD? James sheds some light: "The difference is the wiring. The Studio Elite has the lead/rhythm circuit and the HD doesn't. The HD is more straight-ahead without all the switching. HD stands for... well, we haven't come up with that yet!"

This particular example includes some optional features that we'll describe in due course, but what remains constant across the board is the subtle shaping of the body, neck and fingerboard. Both horns are slightly thinner than you may expect and, with some additional shaping within the cutaways and around the heel, access to the 22nd and top fret is unhindered. Coupled with the eye-popping 'shmeared' finish, the guitar's body looks more like a Henry Moore sculpture than a mere slab of American alder wood.



The small, cunning button allows you to switch the signal hike in and out

Ah yes, that unique finish. The name 'shmeared' is more onomatopoeic than anything else, and James wasn't giving much away: "I can't really tell you how we do it, but we apply many different layers of different kinds of paint that we manipulate in a certain way to achieve the patterns. The whole process takes about a week."

The finish is matt, totally smooth to the touch, and visually a cross between tie-dye and oil on a pond. With four different colours on offer (including hazmat spill, a strangely attractive red/orange/mauve combo that resembles a scene from Resident Evil), we concede that it's likely to be an acquired taste. Still, as it adds £195 to the basic cost (see Spec Check), you can always choose something more ordinary and save some pounds.

The pickups here include a humbucker wound to Tyler's exact

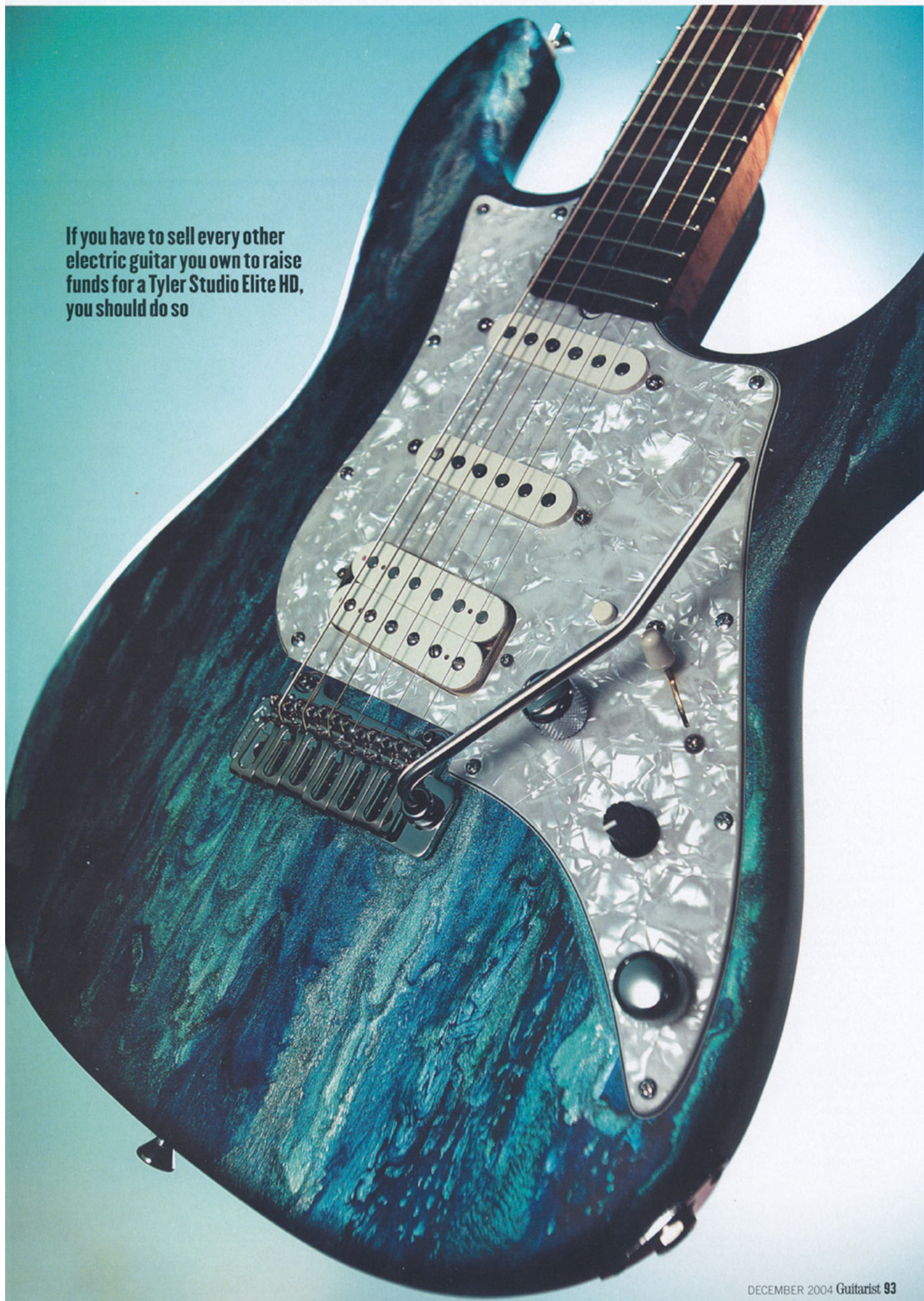
TYLER STUDIO ELITE HD	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** The awesome feel and tonal performance

■ **WE DISLIKED** The headstock is a little out of character

specs by Seymour Duncan alongside a pair of John Suhr single coils, controlled and accessed via master volume and tone pots plus a standard five-way blade selector. There is also the option of a trio of Suhr singles at no extra cost. Costing £65, the mid-boost circuitry is yet another optional extra. Powered by a standard 9V battery situated in a recessed compartment on the back, the circuit is always active. However, what makes this version that much more useful is an additional level →

**If you have to sell every other electric guitar you own to raise funds for a Tyler Studio Elite HD, you should do so**



## TYLER STUDIO ELITE HD £2,620

ELECTRICS  CD TRACKS 2-4

### TYLER STUDIO ELITE HD

PRICE: £2,620 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Double-cut solidbody electric

BODY: American alder

NECK: Quartersawn bird's-eye maple, bolt-on, 254mm (10-inch) radius

SCALE LENGTH:

648mm (25.5-inch)

NUT/WIDTH: Graphite/42mm

FINGERBOARD:

Rosewood

FRETS: 22, extra jumbo Dunlop 6100

HARDWARE: Wilkinson VS-50V vibrato, Sperzel locking tuners

STRING SPACING,

BRIDGE: 54.2mm

ELECTRICS: Seymour

Duncan humbucker wound to Tyler's specs, two custom-wound John Suhr V60 single coils, mid boost, mid boost preamp preset button and associated preset level control, five-way blade selector, master volume, master tone

WEIGHT (KG/LB):

3.4/7.5

OPTIONS: The price of a basic Studio Elite HD is £1,995 and excludes the 'shmeat' finish (£195), mid boost (£65), painted headstock (£65) and bird's-eye maple neck (£300) present on our review model

RANGE OPTIONS: Three John Suhr single coils, ash or mahogany body, non-figured maple neck, gold or black hardware, exotic bent maple top, solid colours with additional option of a matching painted headstock. The mid booster and associated pot is also an optional extra, and all is explained on the Tyler website, EPOA

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, at no additional cost

FINISHES: Arctic mint shmeat (as reviewed), red shmeat, copper patina shmeat, hazmat spill shmeat. Tyler also offers a huge selection of solid, metallic, trans, trans candy and vintage-style finishes as well as their legendary 'wacko colours', including Burning Water and Psychedelic Vomit. As ever, prices are specific and available on application

Sounds Great

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[www.tylerguitars.com](http://www.tylerguitars.com)



Smoothed rosewood between the 22 jumbo frets gives a fantastic feel



Additional shaping around the cutaways and heel adds to upper fret access

→ pot that allows you to regulate the actual amount of boost and, by pushing the small button just above the five-way, you can switch this signal hike in and out as required.

If there's one facet of all Tyler guitars that many players find striking, it's the neck and associated 'paddle' headstock. Our example has a painted headstock (adding another £65), plus a single-piece neck of quarter-sawn bird's-eye maple, which adds £300 on. The latter is of Tyler's '1959' spec, equating to a fairly deep 'C'-shape and 41mm nut width that feels similar in character to a Music Man Axis, though slighter heftier. The maple itself is lightly sealed to create a super-smooth matt finish.

That said, the jewel in the crown here is the fingerboard's pre-worn nature. The rosewood has been subtly smoothed away to give a slightly concave feel to both edges of the board between each of the 22 extra jumbo frets. Believe us, this gives the guitar

a feel so magnificent it transcends that of just about any other electric we've played. The quality of the fretwork and set-up out of the case ensures that the guitar is as difficult to put down as an icy can of Stella on a summer's day: you feel drawn to play it all the time, thus breathing new life and inspiration into any player's tired old licks.

**SOUNDS:** Thanks to the mid boost, the guitar is extremely versatile in the sounds department, and it's easy to understand why Dan Huff and chums only require a Tyler or two to cover any session or gig. Through a black face Fender Twin, and without additional boost, all five pickup selections are chimey, clean and strident – perfect for funky chops. With some boost dialled in, the humbucker especially begins to get a tad more urgent around the edges, ideal for that classic Frusciante rhythm tone, while the solo'd single coils simply sound fuller – the

crystalline recorded tone of Marvin and Knopfler instantly at your fingertips. Add a little more gain to the amp (we used a reissue TS9 with our Twin) and the guitar really begins to sing. With a combination of pickup settings and different levels of boost, blues players can genuinely go from an insistent Cray clean tone via dollops of SRV 'in-betweeny' aggression, to Gary Moore in full cry – boost the neck pickup fully and experience the latter for yourself.

Increasing the gain still further into full overdrive (thanks to a Mesa/Boogie 2 x 12 combo) allows the guitar to sustain that much longer, and the liltily smooth, crumpey-warm tones of Santana and Larry Carlton are immediately on tap, especially with any settings using the single coils. It's inspirational stuff, to say the least.

Of course, rock styles are perfectly served by the 'bucker and, although we'd stop just short of suggesting that the mid-boost is the answer to all solo hike problems, it does add body for extra-chunky rhythm, searing solos and full-fat chords. In fact, we were genuinely stumped to identify a style that the Studio Elite couldn't handle admirably. Jazz, country, rockabilly, thrash – all got a big tick on our check sheet, and we sincerely can't think of another guitar that's performed so well.

### Verdict

The part we've saved until last is the price. With the optional extras, this version of the HD is a hefty £2,620. But if you do without the 'shmeat' finish, bird's-eye neck, painted headstock and mid-boost circuitry, you can get a Studio Elite with the same gorgeous feel for just under £2,000.

Disregarding the cosmetic features is an understandably personal choice, and the superb feel of the neck will remain the same irrespective of the whether you go for bird's-eye maple or not. We would stress, though, that you will miss out on a huge selection of tones if the mid-boost is done away with, so ensure that this is one option you do keep.

This is among the best guitars we've ever played, which we concede is no small statement, and it performs so well across the board that we are happy to recommend that if you have to sell every other electric guitar you own to raise funds for a Tyler Studio Elite HD, you should do so. There are probably few owners of an Aston Martin DB7 who balked at the supposedly high price: after all, perfection costs, and this Tyler is as close as we've seen to perfection from an electric guitar in a mighty long time. **A**

### Tyler Studio Elite HD

Guitarist RATING



# Guitarist interactive



## HEAR!

### Tyler Studio Elite HD intro

Lakewood M32CP & M1CP  
Hofner Colorama Special  
Line 6 PODxt Live  
Godin xtSA  
5 DigiTech  
distortion FX  
and more!

## PLAY!

### Rush - Limelight

Manic Street Preachers,  
T-Bone Walker,  
George Benson  
& John Petrucci lessons

## BONUS AUDIO TRACKS!

The Shadows' live version of  
Guitar Tango  
Richie Kotzen demos the  
Cornford RK100

**SEE!**  
Swedish shredder  
**Mattias IA Eklundh**  
talks gear  
Video demo of new  
**Gibson  
Firebirds**