

# TOP GUNS

THESE ENFIELD BASSES FEATURE A UNIQUE PICKUP DESIGN THAT PROMISES MAXIMUM VERSATILITY. **NICK WELLS** IS IN THE FIRING LINE

**ENFIELD**  
 PRICE: £2,850 as reviewed  
 BUILT IN: UK  
 SCALE LENGTH: 863mm (34 inches)  
 NUT WIDTH: 44mm (1.73 inches)  
 STRING SPACING AT NUT: 38mm (1.49 inches)  
 BODY: Brazilian cedar with quilt maple top  
 NECK: Cedar core with chrome carbon wrap, bolt-on  
 FINGERBOARD: Macassar ebony  
 FRETS: 24 medium  
 PICKUPS: 1 x Enfield Super 8  
 CONTROLS: 1 x master volume, 1 x stacked pickup blend/passive tone & push-pull active/passive switch, 1 x stacked active bass/treble, 1 x stacked active mid/mid frequency  
 BRIDGE: Enfield adjustable top-loading bridge/tailpiece  
 STRING SPACING AT BRIDGE: 57mm (2.25 inches)  
 MACHINEHEADS: Custom Hipshot open-gear  
 WEIGHT: 4kg (8.8lbs)  
 FINISH: Three-colour double stain nitrocellulose; many other options available  
 CASE: Enfield/Hiscox moulded hard case included  
 LEFT-HANDERS: Yes  
 OPTIONS: Basic price £2,650 (without carbon neck wrap), see website for full list of options

Since the electric bass guitar first arrived on the scene in the early 1950s, its evolution has largely been limited to variations on three iconic models: the Fender Precision Bass and Jazz Bass and the Music Man StingRay. These three instruments are broadly similar in design – not too surprising considering they were all designed by Leo Fender – but each has its own identifiable tonal character, largely led by the pickup arrangement: a split-coil humbucker in the Precision, a pair of single-coils in the Jazz and a parallel humbucker in the StingRay.

Enfield Guitars is the brainchild of Martin Sims, who is perhaps best known as the man behind the Sims Custom Shop (you can read more about Martin in our interview on page 56). His Enfield bass features a new body shape and headstock design, an active preamp designed with the help of electronics expert John East, and a huge range of wood, finish and hardware options, drawing on all that the Sims Custom Shop has to offer.

But the real talking point here is the revolutionary ‘Super 8’ pickup. This unique design incorporates eight individual coils that can be configured either horizontally or vertically with a choice of split-coil, single-coil or

humbucking modes. Both sides of the pickup can be isolated and selected in any one of these three modes resulting in a possible 15 different configurations. Could this be the breakthrough in bass design we’ve been waiting for?

## BODIES & NECKS

Although each Enfield bass is built around the same basic body shape, the list of custom options available is vast. Prospective customers can select a range of different body and neck woods, a solid or semi-hollow body, four or five strings, a fretted or fretless fingerboard and take their pick from a list of finishes. Starting with the fretted model we have here, the body is constructed from two sections of Brazilian cedar with a quilt maple top. It features an unusual three-colour ‘double stain’ nitrocellulose finish. This process involves applying separate coats of red and blue stain, with a midnight blue sunburst effect applied around the edge. The result is a blended purple effect that highlights the maple’s sensational grain.

The fretless Enfield Thinline model, on the other hand, has a chambered mahogany body and an exotic Macassar ebony top, with a thin maple veneer sandwiched in between the two woods. The ebony top, which looks gorgeous with its alternating bands of dark and light grain,

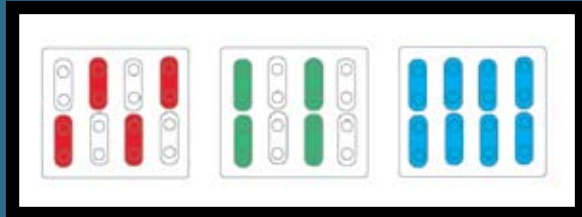


**GBINFO**

**ENFIELD THINLINE**  
 PRICE: £2,900 as reviewed  
 BUILT IN: UK  
 SCALE LENGTH: 863mm (34 inches)  
 NUT WIDTH: 40mm (1.57 inches)  
 STRING SPACING AT NUT: 47mm (1.875 inches)  
 BODY: Mahogany back with maple veneer & Macassar ebony top  
 NECK: Birdseye maple, bolt-on  
 FINGERBOARD: Macassar ebony  
 FRETS: None  
 PICKUPS: 1 x Enfield Super 8  
 CONTROLS: 1 x master volume, 1 x stacked pickup blend/passive tone & push-pull active/passive switch, 1 x stacked active bass/treble, 1 x stacked active mid/mid frequency  
 BRIDGE: Enfield adjustable top-loading bridge/tailpiece  
 STRING SPACING AT BRIDGE: 75mm (2.95 inches)  
 MACHINEHEADS: Custom Hipshot open-gear  
 WEIGHT: 3.9kg (8.5lbs)  
 FINISH: Natural gloss nitrocellulose; many other options available  
 CASE: Enfield/Hiscox moulded hard case included  
 LEFT-HANDERS: Yes  
 OPTIONS: Basic price £2,650 (without thinline body), see website for full list of options  
 CONTACT: Enfield Guitars  
 PHONE: 07768 401186  
 WEB: www.enfieldguitars.com

## SUPER SWITCHING

THE ENFIELD SUPER 8 PICKUP EXPLAINED



Despite appearing to be a single unit, the Super 8 pickup contains eight individual coils, each with two polepieces, arranged in pairs side-by-side.

It's perhaps easier to think of the Super 8's coils as being split into two groups of four. Each group has a corresponding three-way switch that can be used to toggle between three different formats – single-coil, split-coil humbucker and parallel-coil humbucker. Each switch features a tri-colour high-brightness LED to indicate the configuration of the coils. In

the down position, the LED is lit red and the relevant section of the Super 8 is in split-humbucker mode. In the middle position, the LED is lit green and the coils are wired in single-coil mode. In the up position with the LED lit blue, the coils are wired in parallel humbucking mode and all four are active. By switching each set of four coils independently, you can dial in nine possible configurations. Using the blend knob to isolate the 'neck' or 'bridge' set of coils produces a further six sounds.

is well served by a clear gloss nitrocellulose finish. A large 'f-hole' (for want of a better word) has been stylishly carved into the bass side of the body, and the Thinline option adds £250 to the basic price, which in both cases starts at £2,650. The Enfield body shape harbours influences from both Fender and Music Man camps yet looks highly individual. The asymmetrical body is fairly wide across the lower bout, thanks in part to the bulge on the treble side that houses the instrument's extensive electronics. This may give the impression of it being rather heavy, but both of these basses are perfectly manageable at around 4kg in weight. Both are also very well balanced on the strap, while that lower-bout bulge means that the basses show equal poise when played sitting down.

A straight, flat edge on the bottom of the body prevents it from slipping from your leg, while the top edge is subtly contoured to make your forearm more comfortable. More contouring can be found at the rear in the traditional 'ribcage' area, while the upper horns are gently shaped to protect the finish around these areas from any subsequent strap wear. The smaller treble side horn is also scooped from behind to aid upper fret access.

Five recessed bolts securely attach the necks and the slender heel joint remains unobtrusive when playing.



The nickel-plated control knobs feature rubber grip rings



The necks have a narrow, C-shaped profile that feels effortlessly playable and both examples on display here are meticulously fitted and finished. The birdseye maple neck of the Thinline model has a distinctive patterned grain, while the neck of the solidbody features a chrome carbon wrap. This process involves wrapping a thin carbon-fibre layer around a cedar core in order to add strength and improve general resonance and tonal balance. This process adds £200 to the basic price.

The headstock has a classicly-styled two-a-side outline and a gentle convex/concave profile, with a sterling silver Enfield cannon logo inlaid on the front face. The strings pass over the nut in a straight line, with a large yet unobtrusive string tree for the central two strings. The truss rod is accessed from the body end of the neck, though a small recess in the body at the base of the fingerboard means it is always freely accessible.

## HARDWARE &amp; PARTS

With manufacturers increasingly looking for ways to maximise the tonal potential of their instruments, often via electronics alone, there can be no denying that the arrival of the Super 8 pickup is a significant innovation that immediately distinguishes the Enfield bass from the competition. You can read all about this eight-coiled wonder in the box at the top of the page, but suffice it to say that each half of the Super 8 pickup can be switched between split-coil, single-coil or double-coil modes, yielding a total of 15 different possible configurations.

To make the most of the Super 8,

the Enfield preamp is a custom design by John East, who builds a number of highly-regarded retrofit systems. A master volume knob is joined by a trio of stacked dual-concentric controls. The lower pair are the active EQ controls. One set relates to bass and treble. The upper knob offers up to 18dB of cut or boost and you can put the corner frequency anywhere between 1 and 10 kHz, set by an adjuster wheel inside the control cavity. The lower knob offers up to 18dB of bass boost, variable in the same manner from 30 to 200 Hz.

The mid-range control lets you set the mid band's frequency using the lower knob (100Hz to 1kHz), and apply up to 12dB of boost or cut using the upper knob. On the final control, the lower knob is a centre-notched pickup blend control. When pulled away from the body, the upper knob puts the bass in passive mode and acts as a passive tone control.

Everything from the dome-shaped, nickel-plated control knobs with their rubber grip rings to the control cavity cover, which is held in place by magnets, has been designed from scratch. Even the lightweight, open-gear Hipshot tuners are custom made. The heavy-duty, top-loading bridge is another highlight. It's fully adjustable for action and intonation, and both of these basses arrived with an excellent setup. The side-mounted Neutrik locking jack socket sits next to an additional balanced XLR socket. The latter means that you can plug straight into the PA or mixing desk, completely bypassing the active preamp, so only the pickup switches, master volume, pickup blend and (if in passive mode) passive tone affect the signal. ➔

## DETAILS

UNPARALLELED TONE SHAPING OPTIONS FROM A TOP-QUALITY CUSTOM-MADE BASS



■ The colour of the high-brightness LEDs indicates what mode the pickup is in



■ The headstocks are fitted with lightweight open-g geared Hipshot custom tuners



■ The Super 8 pickup contains eight individual coils arranged in pairs

## GBCONCLUSION

### SUPER SOUNDS

■ The Super 8 pickup offers something completely new and unique to the bass playing public. But even without this innovative feature, the quality of build and materials and functional aspects of the Enfield design make for an outstanding instrument.

The price tag may seem high for some, but this is a bass aimed at professional players. Given the functionality of the design and the sheer versatility when it comes to tone, it still seems like excellent value for money. The range of options on offer is as broad as they come and the direct connection with the Sims Custom Shop means that each instrument can be completely personalised. Add to this the exceptional power and flexibility of the active/passive preamp and pro features like the direct XLR out, and what you have is perhaps the ultimate instrument for the working musician. **GB**

## GBOPINION

### ENFIELD & ENFIELD THINLINE

#### GOLD STARS

- ★ Huge range of tones from the unique Super 8 pickup
- ★ Extremely powerful and flexible preamp
- ★ Quality materials and faultless construction

#### BLACK MARKS

- None

#### IDEAL FOR...

Professional working musician who wants one bass to do it all

## SOUNDS

Starting out with the EQ set flat and the blend control centred, with both switches in the green single-coil mode, the tone takes on a recognisable character that has plenty of edge and an astute definition across a range of driven tones. This is definitely Jazz bass territory. Switching to the red split-coil mode, you are immediately faced with a more rounded tone, with more emphasis on the mid-range and plenty of bass. Flicking the switches to the blue parallel humbucking mode delivers the full power of the coils. The sound is bright with stacks of bottom end and crisp higher frequencies.

Further variations can be found via the blend control. If you're aiming for a Precision Bass type of sound, switching to red on the neck coils and turning the blend control fully anti-clockwise will provide a classic split-coil humbucker tone. Similarly, if you are after that classic Stingray sound, switching the bridge coils to blue and rolling the blend control fully clockwise will deliver a big bridge humbucker sound.

Exploring the 15 possible pickup settings, not all of the differences are

as marked as this, but the Enfield bass is aimed squarely at the pro player and variations that may seem subtle at bedroom volume can make the world of difference on stage or in the studio.

Surprisingly, we didn't find there to be any noticeable increase in gain when switching between modes, something that must have taken some clever preamp design to achieve. The active EQ is perfect for administering a precise extra boost in the desired areas, and the ability to adjust the frequency of all three bands makes these controls even more powerful.

Features like this, and the balanced XLR output, further increase the Enfield's pro appeal. There's a lot of boost and cut available, which can be a little overpowering at times. It's here that the passive mode can prove a very practical option when looking for a more traditional tone in a hurry.

Despite the marked tonal changes that come from selecting different coil configurations in the Super 8 pickup, the Enfield bass is far from a blank canvas. The fretless thinline model has a more rounded tone, while the fretted model with its carbon-wrapped neck has more drive and definition.

## GBRATINGS

### ENFIELD & ENFIELD THINLINE

BODY & NECK:	★★★★
HARDWARE & PARTS:	★★★★
PLAYABILITY:	★★★★
SOUNDS:	★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY:	★★★★
<b>GBVERDICT</b>	★★★★