

# Guitarist

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### REVIEWED

★★★★★

**EPIPHONE JR, ES-175 & RIPPER REISSUES**

Huber Jr

Ibanez EP9

WKZ & Engl amps

Trace Elliot

715X bass combo

**PLUS CLAPTON'S 'THE FOOL' REBORN!**



# Guitarist REVIEWS



The world's best gear  
reviews every month

PHOTOGRAPHY GAVIN ROBERTS



Welcome to 2007! Already it's looking like a great guitar gear year. M-Audio's Guitar Box recording system has certainly made us think – everything you need to turn your computer into a recording and mixing workstation.

Epiphone's LP Junior and ES-175 reissues have got us thinking too – a corkin' little rock guitar and a more stately classic jazzier – both ideal to expand your playing styles. The Martin and Ibanez electros on review both feature Fishman's Aura preamp – more temptation. And you just can't have too many FX, can you? Check out DigiTech's latest multi-FX... or maybe you fancy a Brazilian-made Onerr pedal? And if, in 2007, you want to treat yourself to a super guitar, then Tyler and Huber must be on your list. You just wanna rock out? How about that Epiphone Firebird Studio and either a WKZ or Engl head?

You know what? It's gonna be an expensive year! Have a good one.

Dave Burrluck, Reviews Editor

## Ratings explained

What does it all mean?



**OUTSTANDING:** Impossible to fault, totally drool-worthy



**EXCELLENT:** Superior quality, detail or performance



**GOOD:** Meets requirements well



**AVERAGE:** Acceptable but uninspiring



**POOR:** Sub-standard



5 stars in all categories earns this rare gong



An excellent buy – highly recommended

## ELECTRICS

- 74 Epiphone '57 Les Paul Junior, ES-175 & Ripper bass reissues
- 80 Tyler Mongoose & Mongoose Retro
- 88 Peavey Jack Daniel's USA & Jack Daniel's EXP
- 92 Huber Junior

## ACOUSTICS

- 96 Martin OMC-28E
- 100 Ibanez EP9 Euphoria

## GUITAR AMPS

- 104 WKZ Amps Little Devil head
- 108 Engl InVader 150 head

## EFFECTS

- 112 DigiTech RP150 & RP250
- 116 Onerr Overdrive OVD-1, Tungsten Drivemaster TO-3, Nitrogen Chorus NC-2, Digital Reverb DGR-1 & Cryin' Wah Wah CB-1

## BASS AMPS

- 120 Trace Elliot 715x bass combo

## RECORDING

- 123 M-Audio Guitar Box

## QUICK TEST

- 126 RKS Wave, Zoom G7.1ut with Echoes From The Past, Epiphone Firebird Studio & Facelift



# Tyler Mongoose & Mongoose Retro

£2,999 & £2,099

Think of James Tyler and you think of high-performance Strat-inspired guitars. Think again and welcome the Mongoose by Dave Burrluck



**TYLER MONGOOSE** TEST RESULTS

Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

- **WE LIKED** First class design and build; great sounds
- **WE DISLIKED** Okay, it's expensive but if you love the style you won't be disappointed

Mention James Tyler and you'll probably think of two things: superbly built S-style guitars and, oh yes, an unusual headstock. Yet when we visited Tyler in LA early in 2006, he was insistent that he wanted a change from his regular Fender-inspired instruments to create, "a whole different guitar, not just a bolt-on Fender – that bores me to tears. I want it to be more my guitar." It transpires Tyler's vision centres around what was called the Mongoobastar – "my favourite guitar" – a sort of Les Paul-meets-Telecaster and one of the original Mongoose family. "The first Mongoose guitars were built in 1996," remembers Tyler. "I wanted to break away from the Fender-style guitars I had been building up to that point and try something more like a Gibson-style guitar. I wanted the guitar to feel good to someone who played a Fender-style guitar, and was comfortable with that kind of neck and the longer 25.5-inch scale length. I utilised my standard bolt-on neck into the Mongoose, and gave the same neck feel that those players were comfortable with on the new guitar."

It seems the original Mongoose family has now been streamlined into basically the two models we have here. The Mongoose (previously known as the Mongoose Special) and the Mongoose Retro (which used to be called the Mongoobastar). "Yes, the Mongoobastar name was kind of a humorous combination of the Mongoose and the Tylerbastar. But since I have discontinued the Tylerbastar, I felt like the name wouldn't make any sense any longer.



The Mongoose is a pro guitar in every sense

And now I have the Studio Elite Retro, I figured I would rename it."

Whatever the names, Tyler admits these 'Mongeese' are a pretty rare breed – the guitars on review being the first two ever to be imported into the UK. "Until recently there haven't been very many. It seems to be very hard for a builder like myself to do something different. I'm known for one thing and

that is what 99 per cent of people want. The last two years the orders for the Mongoose and the Mongoose Retro have been slowly increasing. I imagine as they get more visibility and more options, the orders will grow at a faster rate. Last summer we completed new programming for the CNC to offer the Mongoose with the Wilkinson Vibrato bridges and also a hardtail. I am

**TYLER MONGOOSE**

- PRICE:** £2,999 (inc case)
- ORIGIN:** USA
- TYPE:** Single-cutaway, hollow-bodied single-cutaway electric
- BODY:** One-piece mahogany, hollow, with two-piece 5A flame maple top, bound top edge
- NECK:** One-piece mahogany, bolt-on
- SCALE LENGTH:** 648mm (25.5-inch)
- NUT/WIDTH:** Graphite/42mm
- FINGERBOARD:** Madagascar rosewood, mother-of-pearl dots, 241-305mm (9.5-12-inches) compound radius
- FRETS:** 22, jumbo
- HARDWARE:** Gold-plated wide travel tune-o-matic style bridge with stud tailpiece, Sperzel Trim-Lok tuners
- STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 52.5mm
- ELECTRICS:** Two covered (gold-plated) Seymour Duncan humbuckers (59 at neck JB at bridge), three-way toggle pickup selector switch, volume and tone for each pickup
- WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 4.3/7.5
- OPTIONS:** The Mongoose Special is all mahogany, semi-hollow, with either soapbars or humbuckers chrome h/ware and unpainted headstock and no binding for approximately £2,400
- RANGE OPTIONS:** The Studio Elite Retro kicks off the Tyler line at £1,999

**LEFT-HANDERS:** Not currently  
**FINISHES:** Cherry sunburst, numerous other colours on request  
**Guitarguitar**  
 0191 261 1568  
[www.tylerguitars.co.uk](http://www.tylerguitars.co.uk)



**TYLER MONGOOSE RETRO**

**PRICE:** £2,099 (inc case)  
**ORIGIN:** USA  
**BODY:** One-piece alder, hollow, with two-piece ash top, bound top edge  
**NECK:** One-piece maple, bolt-on  
**HARDWARE:** Chrome-plated Tele-style bridge with six saddles, Sperzel Trim-Lok tuners  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 53.2mm  
**ELECTRICS:** Seymour Duncan covered mini-humbucker at neck with Tyler JTV single-coil at bridge, three-way lever pickup selector switch, volume and tone for each pickup  
**OPTIONS:** Base price £1,999 without binding  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** Not currently  
**FINISHES:** Tobacco sunburst (as reviewed), numerous other colours on request

**TYLER MONGOOSE RETRO TEST RESULTS**

Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

- **WE LIKED** Ditto Mongoose
- **WE DISLIKED** Very little – it's everything a pro guitar should be

→ currently building an all-mahogany Mongoose Special with three soapbars and a Wilkinson VS100 for a customer. I am also finally building myself a guitar that interests me – a Mongoose Special with a bound bloodwood top, 42.9mm (1.69-inches) nut and a hardtail, two humbuckers with volume, midboost and master tone.”

The Mongoose Retro has already found favour with ex-Giant, and now noted Nashville sessioneer and producer, Dan Huff, a long-time Tyler user who's been playing one for the last 12 months or so. So let's take a look at these unusual beasts...

**Mongoose**

We'd guess you could class this new-to-the-UK model as a 'supertele'. Or maybe that should be a super, supertele. Like Tom Anderson, John Suhr, Don Grosh and all the other US 'boutique' makers, Tyler simply makes guitars that are flawless in design and construction. It's not so much that one brand is 'better' than any other, it's just that you may prefer one style or exclusive feature to another. Even the 3k price-tag is simply not an issue to those who lust after the best.

If the outline shape shows obvious roots there's very little else about the Mongoose that's Fender-like in the least. Okay, it employs a bolt-on neck and the same scale length but the neck is mahogany, not maple, and the heel platform is carved away into the cutaway to aid comfort. But a bolt-on mahogany neck, as opposed to maple, remains an unusual choice. "I can only assume it is because when people think of a bolt-on neck," says Tyler, "they are thinking traditional Fender-style guitar



The distinctive Tyler headstock on the Mongoose features Sperzel Trim-Lok tuners

**If the Mongoose is the 'Les Paul' the Mongoose Retro is truer to its outline shape with an overall more Fender-like vibe**

with a maple neck, and that is what they want. Quite frequently when this subject comes up, I'll be asked why am I using a bolt-on mahogany neck on the Mongoose? Shouldn't it be a set-neck, wouldn't it be better if it were a set-neck? And I say, why? There hasn't been an answer to my question yet. Tradition, that's all it is in my opinion. That's how Leo did it, and that is what people know and expect to see. Since it has always been that way, a lot of people probably think that it is the only thing that works." Conversely on what is clearly a Gibson-inspired design shouldn't the scale be shorter? "No, as I mentioned before, I wanted the neck to feel like my other guitars, I am known for the feel of that neck, and I wanted to retain that so people would know what the guitar was going to feel like."

Fundamental to this, and to an increasing number of Tylers, is the hollow construction. Each Tyler model is hollowed in a slightly different

fashion and here the one-piece quarter sawn mahogany back is routed out leaving the sides, reinforcement around the control cavity, heel block and block under the tune-o-matic bridge and stud tailpiece. It's then capped with the approx 10mm thick book-matched 5A grade maple top creating an overall 'solidbody' depth of 46mm. The rear edge has a large vintage radius, the top edge is bound with grained ivoroid and an inner black/white purfling. It's all stupidly precise with paint shielded inner cavities and the requisite dipped-in-glass cherry finish.

In contrast the once-piece quartersawn neck seems simplistic. It's not. Tyler has a way with necks that is extraordinary. More of a square-sided D, there's a hint of V to the shoulders in the lower positions that rounds out further up as the depth increases. Then there's that almost scalloped edge rounding that's less noticeable on the rosewood, as opposed to maple, but you're meant to feel it – and, boy, does it feel good – aided by what seems like an oil finish but, as Tyler says, it's "my standard urethane finish. Eight coats. I don't use oil finishes, never have, but for some reason some people think I use an oil finish on the neck." →



→ It's like a pristine body has been mated with an old, heavily giggered neck from an antique.

You could shave in the mirror-like smoothness of the big frets (2.8mm x 1.4mm) and you'd swear the 'board is Brazilian rosewood – in fact it's Madagascar rosewood chosen for its likeness to the hideously expensive Brazilian. There are no wildlife-shapes decorating the neck, just classic mother-of-pearl dots on the face and smaller ones on the side that sit midway between the rosewood and mahogany. It's actually quite a thin 'board with the appearance from the side of Fender's 'vener' boards although the base is flat. Truss rod adjustment is not easily accessed at the body end of the neck – vintage Fender-style – under the 22nd fret overhang.

Hardware and electronics all follow the Les Paul-style, the optional gold-plating adds further opulence, only the retaining washer on the toggle switch is nickel – an unusual oversight – and strangely the strap buttons are non-locking and of standard size. Both volume controls have treble bleed capacitors to retain the highs as you turn down but neither pickup on the Mongoose can be split.

### Mongoose Retro

If the Mongoose is the 'Les Paul' the Mongoose Retro is truer to its outline shape with an overall more Fender-like vibe. Here the hollowbody's back is swapped to alder with an ash top and the same top edge binding punctuating the black edges of the three-tone tobacco sunburst. The neck moves to maple and what feels like a very slightly rounder profile – in fact both are Tyler's most popular 59 profile – and there's no black headstock face.

As befits the style a modern Tele-like bridge plate is used with through-body stringing but six block saddles, and a Tele-inspired scratchplate holds the neck pickup and three-way lever switch. Unlike the two rotary controls that are placed in the usual position, the latter is slightly angled like a Strat's five-way. Both guitars have a large metal plate to which the jack-socket mounts to survive wear and tear.


**SOUNDS:** People often ask us why they should pay this sort of money for a guitar? Well, one thing is tuning and it's often overlooked. We barely had to touch the tuning from the moment these arrived until they left and, vitally, it always sounded in tune.

Unplugged there's a brighter resonance from the Mongoose that translates to the amp'd sound – despite the dual humbuckers there's no shortage of highs. Using the controls unleashed a really wide palette: sparkly bell-like cleans to dark Clapton-esque Cream tones – there's even a passable Fender-like hollow twang in there too. Who needs coil-splits? The 'buckers are quite classic in output, certainly not hot, which unless you really want to detune and grind just adds to the versatility. Evaluating the hollowbody effect on the sound is, as ever, difficult. There's certainly less brutish power compared to a PRS Singlecut, more smoothness and sponginess in the mid-range, which with a cranked amp creates some beautifully resonant sounds. Feedback can be coaxied but it's not intrusive or microphonic. Conversely at higher gains the neck pickup can sound a little clouded but keep in the classic rock and blues area and there are an awful lot of tones here.

The Retro is no easier to describe. On the one hand there's Tele twang aplenty from the Tyler bridge pickup, a really good Strat-esque dual pickup tone with volume reduction and a characterful soupy hot-Strat neck pickup voice from the Seymour Duncan mini-humbucker that, in combination with the hollowness and a dollop of gain, is beautifully fluid. It's a little narrower sounding than the Mongoose's neck pickup but articulate with depth.

### Verdict

Not for the first time Mr Tyler and his team have us checking our bank accounts and wondering how we'd justify to our loved ones spending this kind of money on a guitar. Both guitars are drop-dead gorgeous in looks, sound and feel. For us the Mongoose, with its oh-so-posh Gibson vibe, moves a little too far out of our perception of Tyler's hot-rod Fender-alikes and the cosmetics up the price to that scary 3k mark. The Retro, frankly, is more than enough guitar for us and at nearly a grand cheaper has to represent keener value for money.

Stylistically and tonally, the Mongoose veers more towards the Gibbo palette, the Retro more towards Fender. But if you are lucky enough to spend any time with these you'll soon realise both have a lot more sounds than that. Pro tools for sure, but they feel so solid and reliable you could work them hard over thousands of gigs and both would be superb choices for studio work. Absolutely wonderful. 

### Tyler Mongoose

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

### Tyler Mongoose Retro

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★



### The rivals

Tom Anderson Hollow T Classic	from £2,445
Fender American Deluxe Telecaster HH	£1,249
Vintage Advance AV2	£359

Although Tom Anderson has announced his retirement from production building, the Hollow T Classic with scratchplate and non-scratchplate Hollow T (same price) should be tracked down. They're out there with numerous wood/pickup options and will, as of 31 March 2007, never be made again. Fender's mid-priced American Deluxe sports a quilted or flame maple top and dual Enforcer humbuckers with Strat-style bridge and versatile S-1 switching. In a more vintage mode there's the '72 Custom (£599) and dual humbucking '72 Thinline (£749). Vintage's Advance series AV2 may be a completely different price-point but it's a semi-solid 'posh' Tele-inspired guitar with maple veneer front and dual Wilkinson humbuckers. It's also available with bridge single-coil and neck humbucker at £329 in more classic styling.