

FLAXWOOD LIEKKI, AIJA & LAINE \$3,375, \$2,449 & \$3,695
ELECTRICS



Flaxwood Liekki, Aija & Laine **\$3,375, \$2,449 & \$3,695**

They're electric guitars, Jim, but not as we know them...
by Steve Henderson

It's a modern world, alright! iPods, mobile phones with built-in GPS systems, a digital recording studio in every PC – everyone's looking for a new way to do something.

Then there's the guitar – a traditional instrument for sure, but one that's had more innovation and experimentation applied to it than any other instrument in history. About a hundred years ago, steel strings were a new idea – now they

are the norm. Seventy-five years ago, Adolph Rickenbacher electrified the guitar using materials like aluminium and bakelite for his instruments. Since then, guitar companies have used materials from see-through plexiglass to ultra-dense carbon fibre. However, the marketplace continually returns to traditional timbers as its preferred material, in spite of the growing shortage of tone woods.

Flaxwood is a guitar company from Finland that makes electric guitars – really interesting electric guitars. Electric guitars made out of wood, but not in the way you'd think. Flaxwood's guitars are made from molded wood – Flaxwood – which, according to the company's website, "has been created by breaking the grain structure of wood and injection-molding it into shape together with an acoustically sensitive binding

agent. Kind of like a super-high-quality medium-density fibreboard that sounds good.

This process addresses a number of issues such as response to climate, consistency of tone, quantity and quality of the product, as well as being eco-friendly in that the Flaxwood people can use sustainable timbers. There are a lot of benefits to their strategy but the real question is how do the guitars sound and feel?

Flaxwood Guitars are doing something new. The guitars feel warm and organic, and not like rejects from Frankenstein's music room. It's great to see old-style craftsmanship applied to new ideas, materials and techniques to produce something that is fundamentally very traditional.

Liekki

Is this a cool guitar or what? Arched top, F-hole, glossy hollow body, shallow(-ish) C neck, whammy bar AND soapbars? Yeah, man! The Flaxwood Liekki is 100% rock, and 100% jazz, and 100% blues, and 100% country...

I'm not much on green guitars, by the way, but this one looks great – it has a kind of spalted grain (yes, I know flaxwood has no grain), and the glossy green burst gives the whole package a classy look without being grandiose. Flaxwood call it "Sammal Greenbursy" and I'm sure that means something in Finland, but here it means understated cool – and the Liekki has loads of that, visually and sonically.

The neck has, like the other Flaxwoods but more so, a built-in relic vibe – distressed



The swirly spalted-grain finish of the Liekki lends the guitar an understated touch of class



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right out of the mold. It gives it immediate character. The satin finish has a familiar feel and is great to play – never slippery, but it shines up a little after just a few minutes. Access is superb and the neck/body join has a lower profile than we've seen on anything else and, yet, it still feels solid as a rock.

Aija

The Flaxwood Aija is a serious rock guitar. From the rough-finished ("sandblasted") body and relic-ed neck, to the fixed bridge, black chrome hardware and EMG pickups – the Aija screams high gain, quad box, tape up the windows and warn the neighbours, even before anything's been plugged in.

Again, the first thing we noticed is how light and well-balanced it is. Even though it feels just a touch heavier than the Liekki and Laine, it sits perfectly on a strap or on a knee. But, no one's playing this one sitting down! The satin neck is great, and a slightly different shape to the Laine, but just as comfy. And it's fast without being slippery. The body finish ("Hiili Sandblasted" – whatever that is) has a rock vibe for sure and would survive decades of gigging and the associated beverage spillages! Again, there's that nice feel and great access that Flaxwoods are fast becoming known for.

The body is arched on this one too, and it works fine but I wonder what a slab cut would feel like. Seems a shame to waste an arch on a matte black guitar. And, like the others, this one resonates acoustically (and richly) from the body to the very top of the headstock.

Laine

The Flaxwood Laine is the most "obvious" of our three review instruments: three single coils, three knobs, a 5-way and a whammy. But even here, where you'd think there'd be no need to read the manual, they've put a bit of a twist on an old idea.

Like the Aija, the first thing we noticed is again how light and well-balanced the Laine is. The molded body hugs the player in a familiar way [*What, like embracing your ex-girlfriend's sister? – Ed.*]. The slick body finish (this one's gold and glossy) is contrasted by the satin neck, which slicks up nicely after just a short time. Another contrast is the perfect body finish against the "relic-ed" neck – very cool. The neck is a super nice D-shape and access is a dream no matter where you are playing. It feels the same right along its length and there are no dead spots.

The Laine's body is actually arched, which is a classy look, with chrome lipstick pickups and chrome hardware. You can feel it resonating before it's plugged in, but not as much as a 335 or similar. The rear resonator allows some acoustic output but this is more for the flavour it adds to the electric tone rather than any acoustic benefit (it's pointed into the player's body).

Sounds

The composite body of the Liekki responds quickly and with volume when strummed unplugged, and the vibes are obvious on every surface of the instrument.

Plugged in, that doesn't change, of course, but it translates through

the amp as sustain, and the Duncan P90s just lap that up. The sound is fat and focussed, as you'd expect from soapbars, but the sustain is significantly more than you'd hear from a Les Paul Junior.

The delivery is punchy and immediate, with plenty of harmonic content to drive the tubes. This is not a metal or heavy rock guitar, but it has loads of subtle colour that made us back the gain off a little. Even dialling the amp knobs randomly, we couldn't find a bad tone. Every amp sounded fine but the tweed Bassman and the Boogie were solid. The Ulbrick 12AXE worked with the mid focus of the P90s and added a little bottom end chunk; the Green Screamer didn't change to tone – it just put a furry circle

around the notes – while the Mark 4.23 Boost gave us serious spank and harmonic zing.

Moving up the neck, the body of the Liekki's tone remained solid and the sustain was surprisingly present. The flaxwood material (it's composition and lack of dead spots) seems to maintain the resonance no matter where you play along the Liekki's neck. What a great feeling to hit a note up high and have it actually ring for a time.

It seemed silly to plug the Aija into the old Deluxe, so we used an old brown Vibrolux instead – just as silly but with a bit more headroom. The EMGs just hammered that 45-year-old preamp but it did have tone to



Metal warriors prepare for your heaven

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spare. Into the Boogie and the Aija was right at home – the clean sounds were bold and in-your-face and the drive sounds were wicked. The hollow body doesn't affect the tone more than a little but, since it has much less mass than a conventional guitar, all the energy is delivered to the output socket. It has noticeably more thump than we expected.

Plugging into a 50w Super Lead offered heaps of dynamic control (as did channels 1 and 2 of the Boogie) and plenty of fat crunch. We had to try this guitar into a favourite preamp – the GT Trio – and it was expressive and smooth in each channel. This guitar loves pedals – the Zendrive needed a 'voice'

control trim and then was happy as can be. The Green Screamer and the Ulbrick 12AXE and Megalodon needed no trimming – actually, we couldn't find a bad sound.

Once more, we found the jack socket a pest with right angle jacks – but this is only minor. Another minor issue for the Aija is the pickup surround choice. It is an off-the-rack item on a custom-style, hi-tech guitar – surely something other than NOS Ibanez parts could have been used. A little thing, perhaps, but for the price tag you'd expect better overall quality.

Plugged into an old Fender Deluxe Reverb, the tone of the Laine had 'that sound' right away – and with plenty of juice.

The quackiness is limited a little by the lipstick design but there's still plenty there and more. We were surprised at the range of tones and then, when we started messing with the knobs, out popped a few more. And here's the twist: the second tone knob is not what you'd think. It is a blend knob for the front pickup – so with that, along with the five traditional Strat sounds, you can have the two that Fender should have provided all along: front and back, and all three. Plus, this knob allows you to blend the front pickup to your taste. Very cool.

The Laine's clean sounds are superb, with plenty of sustain and

body, even up the neck. Into the pedals or the Boogie lead channel, there's heaps of dynamic range and the body seems to respond accordingly – not just the electronics. We expected some feedback but it just gave us drive and more drive – all within that single coils vibe but with satisfyingly added body. The neck is a delight to play and the fretwork is first class.

The Laine's neck and body have a very solid feel and work together well. The trem is an absolute pleasure to use; it's a Schaller so you know it's going to be well made. Very smooth and with good memory, it is an expressive component that we didn't have to fight and, partnered with the locking machines, gave us no trouble at all.

Verdict

The Flaxwood Liekki is a delight to play and listen to. It doesn't have a

Plugged into an old Fender Deluxe Reverb, the tone of the Flaxwood Laine had 'that sound' right away - and with plenty of juice.



The rear resonator of the Laine allows for some acoustic output



wide range of tones yet it can be manipulated to suit a lot of different playing styles, and its blues voice is unmistakable. If you're looking for that middle ground between Stevie Ray and Gary Moore, your search probably won't start with the Liekki but it might just end with it.

The Aija is a serious guitar for the hard-rock/metal player and an absolute riot to play. It responds fast and with plenty of juice, bite and refined tone. If you're a Recto player (you know who you are!), you need to check this one out.

Lastly, the Laine is a beautiful guitar once you get used to the hi-tech feel of the instrument. Also, the jack socket is marvellously engineered but it won't take a right angle jack for more than a few minutes – if it is bumped (and it will get bumped) it disconnects! Also, do the knobs really need to be that big? The Kulita Gold paint job says this is made for the stage and there is no doubt that this guitar wants to gig. **G**



Flaxwood Liekki

PRICE: \$3,375
ORIGIN: Finland
TYPE: Electric
BODY: Flaxwood, single f-hole
NECK: Flaxwood, set neck
SCALE LENGTH: 647.7mm / 25.5"
TUNERS: Gotoh SG360 HAPM locking
NUT: Synthetic, Tune-X tuning system
WIDTH of neck at nut: 42.3mm/1.66"
WIDTH of neck at 15th Fret: 53.7mm/2.11"
FINGERBOARD: Flaxwood, celluloid markers, 12" radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Chrome
BRIDGE/SPACING: Schaller LP Tremolo; 51.7mm/2.03"
ELECTRICS: 2 x Seymour Duncan SP90-1 Vintage Soapbar, 3-way switch, 1 x volume, 2 x tone
FINISH: Satin finished neck; high gloss body
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.26 kg / 7.19 lbs

Crossroad Guitars
(07) 3805 8049
www.crossroadguitars.com.au

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Flaxwood Aija

PRICE: \$2,449
ORIGIN: Finland
TYPE: Electric
BODY: Flaxwood; arched, hollow; rear resonator
NECK: Flaxwood, set neck
SCALE LENGTH: 647.7mm / 25.5"
TUNERS: Gotoh SG360 HAPM
NUT: Synthetic, Tune-X tuning system
WIDTH of neck at nut: 42.3mm/1.66"
WIDTH of neck at 15th Fret: 54.3mm/2.13"
FINGERBOARD: Flaxwood, celluloid markers, 12" radius
FRETS: 22, jumbo
HARDWARE: Black Chrome
BRIDGE/SPACING: Gotoh GE-103B; 51.2mm/2.01"
ELECTRICS: 1 x EMG 81, 1 x EMG 85, 3-way switch, 1 x volume, 2 x tone
FINISH: Satin finished neck; black "sandblasted" body
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.21 kg / 7.08 lbs

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Flaxwood Laine

PRICE: \$3,695
ORIGIN: Finland
TYPE: Electric
BODY: Flaxwood; arched, hollow; rear resonator
NECK: Flaxwood, set neck
SCALE LENGTH: 647.7mm / 25.5"
TUNERS: Gotoh SG360 HAPM locking
NUT: Synthetic, Tune-X tuning system
WIDTH of neck at nut: 42.3mm/1.66"
WIDTH of neck at 15th Fret: 52.2mm/2.05"
FINGERBOARD: Flaxwood, celluloid markers, 12" radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Chrome
BRIDGE/SPACING: Schaller LP Tremolo; 53.8mm/2.12"
ELECTRICS: 3 x Seymour Duncan SLS-1 Lipstick Tubes (middle: reverse wound), 3-way switch, 1 x volume, 1 x tone, 1 x blend
FINISH: Satin finished neck; high gloss body
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.27 kg / 7.21 lbs

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

The Bottom Line

Flaxwood Liekki

We like: Honky P90 tone, loads of harmonics and lower-end thump, cool trem

We dislike: That jack socket design and relatively limited tonal range

Guitarist says: Despite the slight lack of sounds, this one can still get the job done.

Flaxwood Aija

We like: Wonderfully light, plays fast, loads of power, black chrome

We dislike: Jack socket position, generic pickup rings

Guitarist says: This one rocks, and heavy players and metal-heads will love it. Makes you want to use words like "dude".

Flaxwood Laine

We like: Wonderfully light, trad tones and more, good whammy.

We dislike: Jack socket position.

Guitarist says: A top end guitar that will last a lifetime and beyond.