

Spring 2014

Just got a red one in from Sweetwater. I've owned a ton of Precisions, and I have to say, the people who claim this doesn't sound like a Precision are correct. Imagine the Precision's mids, but with some bass and treble added, and that's what you have. It almost sounds like an active bass with maybe 3 dB of boost at the bottom and 3 dB at the top. Very balanced, but not at all sterile like the word "balanced" might imply. There's a beefy, authoritative character to the pickup. A "thickness" if you will. Like a big juicy steak, if a steak could make a noise. Location-wise, the pickup is almost in the sweet spot -- maybe 1/2" to 1" north of it, but not so far north (like the '51) that it sounds muddy. Any further south and the bottom end would probably weaken enough that you'd have to think about adding a pre with at least a bass control, like Music Man does. So, I think it was the proper call on Fender's part.

The strings are roundwounds, and they look like chromes, so that may have a lot to do with the clear, extended top end. I'll be interested to see what they sound like after I sweat on 'em a bit.

The tone control will cut back the highs without changing the overall nature of the instrument's tone, i.e. it won't do weird things to the mids and bass, like every Precision I've owned has done. That's one reason I always ran my Precisions' tone controls wide open, because rolled back the instruments would sound dark and distant. Not so with the Cabronita. I've been playing this thing all afternoon with the tone control rolled all the way back, and the tone is fantastic.

Volume control is touchy. Last few degrees of rotation are where everything happens. It could use a different taper. But in the real world, on real stages, you're running wide open anyway, so this is only a minor problem.

Balance on the instrument is fine, but the first thing I did when I unpacked it was to add strap locks, and those add about 1/2 of length to the pegs, so that may have helped. Also I use a 4" strap, so that helps, too.

The cutaway for your arm works well. The missing cutaway for your gut or hip or whatever -- I don't miss it, because I wear my basses low, so that part of the body never touches me anyway. For me, it's a comfortable body. And not cutting away the rear of the body probably adds a few ounces compared to a standard Precision, helping the instrument balance better, especially with its beefy neck.

Yeah, the neck. It's something I've never run across. I'm used to the 1.75" necks being like baseball bats, especially some of the early ones. But I've never run into 1.6" baseball bats (the 1.6s are typically thinner). The Cabronita has a 1.6 baseball bat. You may or may not like it. I have long fingers, and I cut my teeth on late '60s/early '70s Precisions, so it was sort of like coming home.

Frets are perfect. No fret sprout anywhere, and no buzzing.

Fretboard to neck mating is flawless. The seam is almost invisible.

Tuners were stiff, but smooth, and didn't feel like they were binding.

Back to the pickup: Adjustability is great. You can raise/lower the body and you can raise/lower the individual screws (two per string). This is important on a bass that has a neck with a tight radius, and one area where the Jazz has always done a face plant right on the pavement. (Sorry, Jazz guys, but it's true.) DiMarzio is the only manufacturer I know of that makes Jazz replacements with adjustable pole pieces.

For those who like to use the pickup as a thumb rest, it won't work on this bass because the pickup's too narrow width-wise. You'll inadvertently mute the E string with your thumb. I stuck a small square rubber foot (the kind you might find under an amp head) next to the pickup. I shot a couple coats of black on it first, so you can barely see it.

The output jack takes a good firm grip of the instrument cable's plug.

Dead spots? Yep, the usual ones for most if not all bolt-on necks: Db and D on the G string. (No surprise there.) Play those notes on the D string and all is well.

Finish was flawless but there were shallow gouge marks in the pickguard that look like they came from a screwdriver that was used to slice protective plastic. If these basses normally come with

protected pickguards, mine was an exception. This bass may have been a return for all I know. No big deal -- I bought this bass to get used, sometimes on the road, and it's going to take its share of hits over the coming months. I might even shoot a coat of black on the pickguard 'cause I think that might look better with the red body. I'll have to Photoshop it first just to make sure.

Took me about an hour to do a setup. The neck has an almost imperceptible bow. I left it alone and will check it from time to time as the weather gets warmer around here. Strings were cut short at the factory; I prefer to see 2-3 wraps around the posts. One of mine has only one (!). But the bass is staying in tune, so...

Intonation was way, way off. But I fixed that with a small Phillips as part of the setup (10 minutes tops, no biggie). Action was fine, though, so I left it the way it was.

That's about it. Glad I bought it.

EDIT: April 12, 2014

Thought I'd add a few things after having had this instrument for a while.

I replaced the stock strings with a set of white DR Neons. Cosmetically, they were pretty cool-looking, because they matched the pickguard. A lot less tension on the neck, too -- the bow disappeared and the neck went flat. But they sounded so uneven, and I had to play so many games with pickup height and pole-screw length, that I took them off and put on my old standards: Rotosounds. With all the pole screws all the way into the pickup, the G-string side of the pickup raised a bit, and the E-string side screwed all the way down into the body, the sound is smooth and even now.

This particular sample is heavy. I can't recall its exact weight from the Sweetwater ad, but I know it was listed at well over 9 pounds. They have one for sale now that weighs 8/11 and another that weighs 9/11. So if weight makes a difference to you, have that on your checklist while you're looking at the Sweetwater units.

I forgot to note in my original review that this pickup is hot. No... I mean, hot! For grins, I plugged the bass right into a power amp. There's more than enough volume there for an acoustic gig! Your sound man may have to pad this thing way down at the board. If your direct box has a pad switch, he may ask you to engage it.

On "a certain forum" there was some recent debate about whether the Cabronita would be suitable for praise & worship gigs. This is unbelievable -- I can't imagine a bass that would be more suitable. The Precision's mid punch typically has to be EQ'd out for P&W because that genre of music generally slots bass guitar low. Same with the Jazz, with the double penalty of its pickup pole non-adjustability which usually leaves you with hot G and E strings because of the ultra-tight neck radius, unless you've got a comp on duty somewhere in your signal chain. The Cabronita's bottom end is strong, smooth, full, and even -- precisely the formula needed for P&W.

I'll add more if I think of anything else.

EDIT: April 19, 2014

In my original review I commented that the volume control was touchy and needed a different taper. This morning I pulled the access cover, intending to swap out the stock pot for a better one. Guess what. The factory miswired the control. The positions of the pickup hot lead and the wire to the output jack tip were swapped. Resoldered them to where they should be, and now the volume control behaves normally.

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Praise & Worship bass guitar and vocals