

Maton MS T-Byrd

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I have a number of guitars in my collection, but one that stands out like crazy is an Australian made one. Back in 2012 I wandered into The Guitar Lounge (275 Clarence St in Sydney City) as I occasionally do, saying “g’day” to Rob, the owner. I’ve brought a few guitars from Rob over the years, and he knows I love electrics. I also like the easy atmosphere, where you can try the guitars and there’s no pressure sales, etc. I’ve played many I didn’t buy as well. But I like going in to check out what’s new, usually a mix of the standards and the unusual – not a lot, but a nice selection, usually Fender, or Gretsch, orientated.



This day in 2012, there was an unusual guitar hanging on the wall, a hollow body electric in white. Looking closely, it turned out to be a Maton MS T-Byrd, in Ghost White, with a Telecaster style bridge and different pickups. I like the Maton electrics and have been quite sad that they’ve dropped their range only now making the BB1200 JH (Josh Homme), which is quite an expensive guitar.

So, Rob let me plug the Maton T-Byrd into an amp, but while waiting for the tube amp to warm up I played the guitar acoustically and it already felt so resonant and alive. Wow! I thought, this is amazing. Then once I played it through the amp, I was even more stunned. The price tag stumped me as it was at the higher end of what I’d pay for a guitar. Rob was agreeable for me to pay a deposit and pay off the guitar over a few pays.

Taking it home I was even more amazed when it played so well through my equipment. Like when you buy a new car, which seems fairly rare, once you buy it it seems to be everywhere. It seemed like that in 2012, that all these great artists were all playing Maton T-Byrds! Not surprising as they have a really unique sound. I like Fender Telecasters, although not a fan of their usual bridges, and this guitar has aspects of that, but it also has that certain thing that dreams are made of.

Not long after I brought the Maton T-Byrd the company stopped making them, and most of their other electrics, which is really quite sad as they were the premier electric guitar company in Australia. Probably due to the economics, but I think sad management as they are poor in replying to their customers’ emails and still owe me \$70 for goods not delivered from their online store. I think the luthiers and the guys at the coalface are good, as their guitars are still good, but as I say sad management. That’s why I don’t promote them like I used to.

However, they still have all their electrics on their web site, with all the information on them. For the Maton T-Byrd they had:

"A respectfully re-engineered classic, resulting in an all-rounder that will especially appeal to the roots and country crowd" Steve Henderson, Guitarist Magazine. From John Butler to Joe Walsh, the MS-T-Byrd is a favourite amongst some of the finest players in the world.

First produced in 1958 as a response to a growing musical trend called rock 'n' roll, the Mastersounds soon found their way into the hands of local and international musicians (most notably, George Harrison, the Kinks and our own Emmanuel brothers).

The T-Byrd represents yet another option for the musician searching for something a little different. T- style bridge and bridge pickup complemented by a T- style control plate with volume, tone and a 3-way. The front pickup is a Lollar "Charlie Christian" single coil.

The rock maple neck features a soft D profile and a tapered headstock. The taper also creates a more even string tension across the set, improving the feel across the fretboard. The neck is rock maple neck with a separate maple board. The T-BYRD's body, silver silkwood with a rock maple cap, is solid enough to handle the toughest road trip without being too heavy.

The MS T-Byrd is a time machine with a modern attitude." (https://maton.com.au/product/ms-t-byrd)

The Maton T-Byrd’s specs include: a Chambered Quandong With Rock Maple Cap (The Ghost White colour really allows the timber grain to show through – beautiful!); A Rock Maple bolt on neck with Rock Maple fingerboard (Easier to see on dark stages!); Grover Mini Rotomatic tuning heads; a bone nut, that helps sustain; the pickups are a Lollar Special T Series in the Bridge and a Lollar Charlie Christian in the Neck; Usually I don’t like Tele bridges due to intonation, but the Maton T-Byrd has a Wilkinson Compensated T style Bridge with Brass Saddles, which are again great for sustain; only one volume and one tone control, but I’m more of a set and forget man anyway; The body has a UV Gloss, while the neck is my favourite Natural Satin; apart from Ghost White the guitar is also available in Ghost Black or Tobacco Sunburst; and comes with a Hiscox Flightcase. Those are some serious specs for an electric I can tell you! You’d be paying a fortune more for a contemporary guitar from overseas I can tell you, this is premium stuff!

The Maton MS T-Byrd was reviewed by Peter Hodgson (May 21st, 2012):

"Manufacturer Maton is perhaps best known internationally for their stunning acoustic guitars, which are regularly seen in the hands of one Mr. Tommy Emmanuel. But Maton has a long history of great electric guitars too, such as the BB and Mastersound series, and some really funky vintage models.

Even so, the MS T-Byrd is a fairly unusual guitar for Maton to make. It seems to bring together a few disparate but equally historic elements: design cues from the Maton Mastersound and classic Tele-style guitars, along with an even earlier pickup design and a more modern-feeling fretboard adapted to current playing styles.

So, the most obvious marriage visible in the MS T-Byrd is that of the Mastersound and the Telecaster. The Mastersound angle is covered by the curvaceous body shape, as well as a semi-hollow design which incorporates a sexy sound hole on the bass



side body bout. The biggest giveaways as to the latter are the dot-inlay maple fretboard, the bridge, the single coil pickup and the controls.

The body is made of Quandong with a rock maple cap. The neck is made of rock maple and it's not overly chunky, but its profile fits in the palm nicely. It's not a particularly vintage-feeling neck but it's very comfortable. The fretboard radius is a flattish 12", a more modern rather than vintage appointment, and it makes playability a breeze, especially if you're into huge bends or speedier playing styles, be they based on country flatpicking, fusiony shredding or blues-rock wailing.

As for hardware, the tuners are Grover minis which do their job well. The ashtray-style bridge by Wilkinson features three intonation-compensated brass saddles, while the controls are the typical master volume, master tone and three-way pickup selector switch. The bridge pickup is a Lollar Special T, a familiar-looking Telecaster-style unit featuring a flat pole design with graded Alnico 5 magnets and vintage style cloth covered lead wire. The neck single coil is a Lollar Charlie Christian pickup, based on a very, very early pickup design that you certainly don't see very often these days. It's wound with 38-gauge wire like the originals, with a nickel-plated blade pole piece and alnico bar magnets.

"Incidentally, that sound hole is the source of something incredibly addictive about the MS T-byrd that I haven't encountered on any other thinline/semi-hollow guitar: its shape and location mean that if you're playing it unplugged, you will hear strangely beautiful phase-shift effects as your hand covers and uncovers the sound holes. It's a really striking sound, and I wish there was a way to capture it through an amplifier. It helps to create an extra layer of interactivity and tactileness for the instrument. I guess if you really wanted to capture this sound for the ages, you could do so by mic'ing the guitar up in the studio, much as you would an acoustic guitar.

The first thing you'll notice about the MS T-Byrd is how clear and musical it sounds, even when unplugged, but especially so once you plug into a nice tube amp. There's a great treble ring and tight bass, along with a slight bloom to the notes, thanks I'm sure to the semi-hollow construction. This helps the tone to sit somewhere between the attack and snap of a bolt-on and the warmth and sustain of the classic mahogany/maple set-neck designs, and this tonal voice makes it an especially great fingerpicker's axe, whether you play rhythm or lead, because it offers great note detail and separation. Complex chords maintain their definition, double-stops sound gritty, and single notes are articulate.

The bridge pickup sounds bright and sweet and stays that way when you add overdrive. The almost pedal steel-like sweetness is maintained even when you really lay in with the pick, and it allows for a terrific amount of cut when playing through a higher gain setting.



The neck pickup sounds very full, with a singing quality and great harmonic overtones. It's a really addictive playing experience, and it makes you want to play Santana licks or something equally expressive and bendy. It drips with bluesy harmonics through amp or pedal overdrive, while clean settings bring out a full, round, warm, atmospheric quality which reminds me of Jeff Buckley's rhythm tone but with more muscle.

The combination pickup setting predictably presents the best of both worlds: the fullness and vocal quality of the neck pickup, with the top-end sweetness of the bridge one. I'd love to be able to blend the volumes of each pickup for the perfect balance in the middle setting, but it's already pretty damn close to perfect as-is. Aside from being a very attractive guitar to look at, the MS T-Byrd plays great and sounds exceptional. The neck pickup is a real surprise – it's so damn usable! It's a real left-field decision to use a pickup like that in a guitar like this, but it works spectacularly. And the various design elements – the Mastersound shape, the sound holes, the Quandong body, the unusual pickup configuration, the player-friendly fretboard – all add up to a guitar that simply sounds like no other." (<http://iheartguitarblog.com/2012/05/review-maton-ms-t-byrd.html>)

Even though I love playing the Maton T-Byrd I really felt like I would love to create a combination of Maton guitars. At the time I'd received an inheritance from my Uncle George and thought I would get a custom-made guitar, which I heard Maton did from one of their reps. No matter how many emails I sent, and I sent quite a few, I never got a reply. I even tried ringing many times. I wanted to get a MS503 Classic body, with the Rock Maple neck and Lollar Charlie Christian in the Neck, but with a humbucker at the Bridge. As well, I wanted to move the controls, so I don't keep hitting the selector, which I really dig on the MS503, but it's on the wrong spot for me. But no replies, as if the company doesn't give a shit about its customers. I have a number of Matons, acoustic & electric, and was a big fan but their attitude and the fact I paid \$70 for goods from their online store which I never received – yes, I did chase them up by email/phone, but they are very good at ignoring their customers. Love their guitars, but I despise their administration, or management, so my hats off the luthiers who must be under the yolk of tick boxers with no soul. Probably why they don't make electrics anymore?

As a side note, I tried a number of luthiers to get a custom-made Australian guitar. Many like Mark Gilbert basically wouldn't change their stock standard format so I couldn't get what I wanted. So, I eventually brought a Fender 72 Thinline Telecaster and some other overseas guitars with the money giving up on my dream of getting my own custom-made Australian electric.

However, I still have the Maton MS T-Byrd, and it's great to be able to play the epitome of Australian electric guitar building that I can afford. Maybe one day, if I save my pennies, I may buy the BB1200 JH (Josh Homme), but I'd rather have my own custom made, something that still irks me to this day. I think I'll just plug the tube Vox amp in and play some blues on the Maton MS T-Byrd as it's made for it. They do come up second hand, but that's rare, but if you see one, grab it with both hands and play the magic!!

