

OLP Guitar Port kit

Price: £329 Contact: Strings & Things 01273 440442

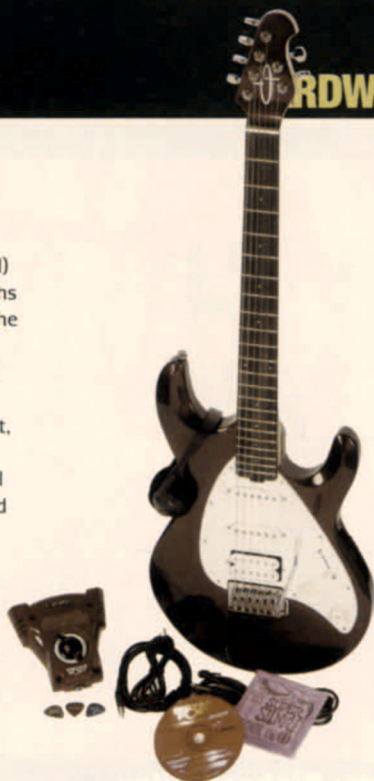
What's included? Instead an amp, OLP's kit includes a Line 6 Guitar Port modem plus all the leads required to set it up with your PC. Obviously there's a guitar too, specifically the MM4, OLP's version of Music Man's gorgeous Silhouette model, plus a jack-to-jack lead, a set of Ernie Ball strings and a set of headphones. The downside is there's no strap, picks or hard copy tuition material, but such is the quality of G-Port that, if you're computered-up, you'll win hands down – bear in mind you'll need to subscribe at www.line6.com.

What's it like? The whole success of this kit hinges on whether you have access to a PC; if you don't, there's little point in buying

this. The MM4 (and the OLP range in general) is of a far better quality than it was 18 months ago and is a very decent instrument, while the provision of a set of quality strings will save any embarrassment. If we pontificate about the benefits and authenticity of Guitar Port any further in TG, we'll be taken out and shot, so we'll just state (again) that it rules.

Verdict: An amless kit would be commercial suicide, but the provision of Guitar Port could prove to be a real winner. If you are online, this OLP-cum-Guitar Port pack is sheer good value for money.

RATING



Marshall Rock-Kit

Price: £210 Contact: Marshall 01908 375411

What's included? The awesome MG15RCD amp, a Korg GA-30 tuner, a set of .009-gauge strings, two plectrums, a Rocket guitar with H/S/S pickup configuration and a Marshall-branded gig bag. Although there's nothing included here on the tuition side, apart from a guide on how to re-string the guitar, Marshall offers a good section on its website www.marshallamps.com and you can register for free.

What's it like? This 15-watter is easily the best amp in this round-up. It has two channels with a master 3-band EQ, reverb, an FDD drive contour button, a CD-in and a socket for headphones. The guitar

is of a reasonable quality and certainly good enough to start playing on. Through the amp's drive channel, the sound is so convincing that you can really get into things, while the single-coils are more than good enough too. As usual, the trem isn't so hot, but at least you can use the Korg tuner to get things back in kilter after a bout of wobbling.

Verdict: The amp's reputation goes before it and we applaud the inclusion of such a great product. The guitar is fine – even though it's not in the Yamaha Pacifica category – and you've got everything you need to get started in one decently-priced L-shaped box.

RATING



TOTAL GUITAR BEST BUY

Encore Electric Guitar Starter Pack

Price: £179 Contact: JHS 0113 286 5381

What's included? A lightweight Encore KC3 Strat-shaped guitar, a Kustom KGA10 combo, lead, strap, gig bag, a set of Encore strings, a Qwik-Tune tuner and a 33-minute tuition video.

What's it like? The guitar is just right for beginners. Due to its lightweight construction, it's easy to handle and although players with more experience will poo-poo the slightly cheap feel, we're happy to report that beginners will probably neither care nor notice. The Kustom amp is also fine without being especially noteworthy, and the clean tones are particularly nice. It boasts a

headphone socket and a voice pot for use with the switchable overdrive, allowing you to arrive in at least the car park outside Nu-Metal Central as you turn it increasingly to the right. It's worth mentioning that the tuner, although perfectly easy to use, doesn't come with batteries, so you'll need to make a trip to your local corner shop to avoid disappointment on Christmas morning.

Verdict: This is a nicely put-together package, comprising near enough everything you'll need to start playing. According to JHS the price will vary depending on where you look, so it'll be worth shopping around until you find the best deal.

RATING



Conclusion

There's a real breadth of choice here and all things being equal, we recommend the Marshall Rock-Kit. Even though the guitar is of an unnamed brand, the quality of the combo knocks the others into a cocked hat. With a pro-quality tuner, strings and even specific online lessons, you've got all you'll need to get going. Probably the best guitar of the bunch is the Yamaha, but due to the quality of the amp, plus the lack of comprehensive tuition tools and accessories, the kit as a whole got marked down. With a book, CD and video, the teaching marks go to the Fender kit. Out on its own is the OLP pack, forgoing an amp in favour of Line 6's G-Port system. It's the most expensive kit but includes the best hardware. Of course, you do need to be online, but this could well be the future of such kits.