

WARWICK THUMB SC 6 PRICE £4749

 warwick.de



**THE ACTIVE
ELECTRONICS
HAVE EXTREME PUNCH
AND CLARITY, ESPECIALLY
IN THE CRISP TOP END**

WARWICK

THUMB SC 6

MIKE HINE GETS HIS DIGITS ALL OVER
THIS TOP-END EURO-BASS

Warwick Guitars & Basses
www.warwick.de

At the high end of the bass guitar market there are few manufacturers more prestigious and well regarded than German brand **Warwick**. So when a familiar-looking heavy-duty flight case, resembling a giant steel sarcophagus, arrived at *BGM* HQ, we were more than a little eager to get stuck in.

We had been anticipating delivery of the latest Thumb SC – a modern update on one of Warwick's most venerable models – for some time. But what does £4,749-worth of exotic woods and top-grade electronics actually translate to in the all-important performance stakes?

BUILD QUALITY

All the hallmarks of the German manufacturer are here, including downwardly-angled tuners and the single, unmistakable W on the unusually-shaped headstock – a powerful reassurance of quality. That letter alone will alert savvy bassists that this is serious territory – but if you still need any convincing, a quick glance at the pommel  bubinga top should do it.

From here on, it's not so much a question of whether this bass offers quality – rather, how much quality can it offer, and does that translate into value for money? After all, a quick glance at this instrument's price tag is enough to make any musician's accountant break out in a nervous sweat.

The SC feels solid and weighty, while the flowing lines and exquisite contouring are droolworthy. Once you've drunk in the rich browns of the top wood, flipping the bass over reveals its sumptuous pale underside, consisting of a US swamp ash body, shot through with the flame maple neck with ekanga veneer stripes – four of them, running along both top and bottom of the bass. The neck-through design means the woods seem to seamlessly flow into one another, especially considering the single cutaway design – the long upper part of the body doesn't deviate from the neck. Instead it is conjoined, giving the impression that the SC is one solid piece of wood. It's a design that committed four-string rockers might find a little goofy – or even downright fugly – but the discerning funk maverick or boutique bass enthusiast will have acquired the taste by now.

Warwick describes the 34" fingerboard as 'tiger stripe' ebony, owing to the light brown hues that punctuate the rich, dark browns. It really is a thing of beauty, and a bit of a behemoth, too. Our six-string test model's neck is 10cm wide at the 26th fret, and around 5.5cm at the Just-A-Nut III brass nut. That's a considerable width to wrap your hand around, but the shallow cut of the neck makes things a little less daunting.

The bridge comes in a two-piece format – black, like the rest of the hardware – with saddles fully adjustable for height, spacing and scale length. The brass nut can also be raised and lowered, as can the MEC pickups, via **Warwick's Easy Rider** pickup suspension system, which uses coiled springs and brass screw anchors to set the height of the soapbars.

SOUNDS AND PLAYABILITY

The Thumb SC sits nicely on the shoulder, though if playing while seated the tiny bottom cutaway doesn't sit all that easily on the thigh, with a tendency to slip if you shift your position. However, the upside of the cutaway is the free access it yields to the upper reaches of that vast fingerboard. With 26 frets and six strings to play with – offering four octaves above the 12th fret alone – it's almost like having another instrument appended to your bass.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

PRICE | £4,749
COLOUR | Natural oil finish; coloured oil finish and high polish finish available
BODY | Bubinga pommelé top; US swamp ash body
NECK | Flame maple with ekanga veneer stripes
FINGERBOARD | Tiger-stripe ebony
PICKUPS | 2x passive MEC soapbar humbuckers
ELECTRONICS | Active MEC 3-way electronics
CONTROLS | Stacked volume/pickup balance with push-pull function; treble, mid, and bass controls; two mini-switches for coil splitting
TUNERS | Warwick
HARDWARE | Colour black
BRIDGE | Warwick two-piece, solid brass
MADE IN | Germany
NUT | Just-A-Nut III
NUT WIDTH | 55mm
NECK JOIN | Through-neck
SCALE LENGTH | 34"
FRETS | 26, jumbo bronze
WEIGHT | 5.4kg
CASE | RockCase flight case included
LEFT-HAND VERSION | Available

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Superb build quality, visually stunning, and diverse tonal possibilities
MINUS | A little weighty; sky-high price tag puts it out of the reach of most
OVERALL | A dream instrument for the discerning active bass guitar enthusiast

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★★

Despite its width, the shallow cut of the neck makes moving around the fingerboard very straightforward. The fret widths make for easy playing, being nicely spaced right up into the top reaches. It only begins to become noticeably clustered around the 20th fret, but even then you've got position dots – which glow in the dark – down the side of the fingerboard to help you navigate that densely packed high-end region. Jamming acoustically on the Thumb SC reveals a nice natural tonality and allows you to settle into the feel of the neck and the note positioning before switching on...

Powered by a 9V battery, the **Thumb SC's** active electronics incorporate a control panel offering individual treble, mid, and bass EQ knobs, while the two MEC passive soapbar humbuckers have a stacked master volume/balance knob, which also acts as the passive/active push-pull. And the fun doesn't stop there: each pickup has its own mini toggle switch for coil splitting. In the up position, the switch puts the pickup in series mode, in the centre position it acts as a single coil, while the down position makes the pickups act in parallel. Each of these options alters the way the current flows between the pickups, and determines whether they work together or interdependently while wired to the same source. In practice, this all adds up to offer an absolute miasma of tone options.

Rolling the balance all the way towards the neck pickup, with the EQ flat, the **Thumb SC** emits a classic, well-rounded active rock tone, while rolling back towards the bridge reveals that punchier, mid-sound that lends itself so well to staccato Motown-esque plucking. Each pickup delivers its expected characteristics with aplomb – but the Thumb SC really comes into its own when making more inventive use of the balance control and EQ.

The active electronics have extreme punch and clarity, especially in the crisp top end. Laying down triads on the D, G and C strings is an absolute joy, given the ease of movement and



fingering. Once you've crept up that neck, it's tempting never to come back down!

Down at the bottom end, meanwhile, the lows are thudding but beautifully defined, with a great crispness, even on the low registers of the B string. But whether you want a direct, mid-heavy funky pop tone, or a thicker, sub bass, the Thumb SC will oblige – and then some. Tone sculpting options, along with the balance control, give you access to the entire pantheon of bass sounds – including passive rock if you choose to bypass the active electronics. Slapping is one of this bass's strong points, too, whether you want to scoop out the mid for a classic, beefy funk tone, or roll off the top and bottom for a punchier, modern slap sound. The EQ behaves itself very well while slapping, with neither the bottom becoming too muddy, or the treble too piercing or biting. It's an exercise in controlled, effective bass sounds, covering every permutation across the bass guitar spectrum.

Flicking the humbuckers into parallel mode boosts the output, lifting the already considerable volume of the active electronics into full swing. The cut of the body, too, contributes massively to this bass's big, big tone and massive sustain. You can feel the music surging through that giant slab of wood.

CONCLUSION

If you're a gigging musician with a larger-than-average budget, or a studio-dweller with a penchant for top-quality bass guitars, chances are you either have, or have seriously considered, a **Warwick. The Thumb SC** is targeted at such players, and unsurprisingly satisfies every demand expected of an instrument of this price: unique, characterful appearance; quality construction; diverse tonal options; and a walk-in-the-park playability that, once you've sampled it, becomes irresistible. Compared to some other high-price options, the Thumb SC has a relatively simple and elegant aesthetic that makes it applicable to many musical situations, both in the studio and on stage. You can't help but wonder how many people can realistically afford a bass like this – but for those dedicated enough to the low-end cause, this instrument will be seventh heaven. ■