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Flaxwood Liekki Electric Guitar Review

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Guitar makers have been searching for ways to make guitars out of things other than wood for quite some time now. From Torres building a back and sides out of papier-mâché back in the 1860s, to Dan Armstrong's plexiglass bodied electric—not to forget masonite Danelectros, graphite-composite Steinbergers and assorted other things—the search for a stable, good-sounding material continues. Enter Flaxwood Guitars from Finland.

These guys decided that by using “small wood particles in a binding agent” they would avoid the obvious problems guitars have with moisture (or the lack of it), and a good, consistent sound would be obtained, because the wood particles would face randomly in all directions, so the soundwaves would resonate with equal force in all directions. They named the material flaxwood and a guitar company was born. Flaxwood tells me that although they use this flaxwood material, and the parts are made by injection molding, there is old-style luthierie going on, too. The neck is glued in, and the bodies are finished by hand, just like a wood guitar.

How'd They Do?

All the current Flaxwood models have the same body shape and look clean and modern. You can get them with a variety of pickup choices, different humbuckers, lipsticks, or H/S/H, and with or without the whammy bar. Our sample guitar is the Liekki (Finnish for flame), which is their P-90 pickup model featuring Seymour Duncan Vintage Soapbars SP90-1 pickups with one volume control and two tone controls.



1 pickups, with one volume control and two tone controls, one for each pickup. The Liekki also features a Schaller Les Paul Tremolo and Gotoh tuners.

The sculpted archtop body is hollow, with one F-hole, and the back is a large ported plate they call the resonator. The finish on our test model reminds me a bit of a bronze casting, and is beautifully done. The whole guitar (body, resonator and neck) is made of the Flaxwood material. When I picked up the guitar, the first thing I noticed was the straight string pull from the nut to the tuners; this has always seemed like common sense to me, and I am surprised more guitars don't do this. All the models are 25.5" scale, and I assume, because of the consistency of the materials, they all weigh in at just over seven pounds.



Watch Video Review:



Ring Them Bells

Previous non-wood guitars I have played have seemed to me to go with the idea that the guitar should be as resistant to vibration as possible, theoretically to maximize sustain. The Liekki I found to have a pleasant, alive vibration to it which feels quite natural and wood-like, and yet, it has a sustain like a piano, incredibly smooth in response. The P-90 sound is one I like very much; I regularly play a Gibson ES330, so I'm in familiar territory here. The Liekki will give you a broad palette of sounds, from a sweet Lenny Breau type of jazz sound to a Tele-esque twang. Click on some distortion, and you can go from roots slide to death metal and anywhere in between. Because it is hollow, Flaxwood cautions that you may have some feedback issues, but I had none (though I never got it up to arena volume). The Schaller trem bar did well with staying in tune, and I was able to take the strings slack and back several times before there was any tuning error—and that's without a locking nut. The nut is graphite, so this may not be your whammy if you need to go slack a lot, but for most players it will work very well. For my tastes, the bar rides a bit high, but I imagine that could be tweaked by bending the bar if it were a big issue for the player.

Now, what I really want to rave about here is the neck, wow! It feels absolutely rock solid and smooth—like buttah! The fret job is excellent, and those of you who are non-stop guitar junkies know that great fret jobs on a new guitar out of the box are few and far between these days. The Liekki comes out of the case ready to hit the stage, and I am finicky on this topic. I don't think that in my 40 years of guitar picking I have had more than a handful of guitars that didn't at least need the action worked a bit, but this one didn't—perfect set-up and intonation from the git go. The company tells me they are considering Fender-style replacement necks as a possibility, and I would buy one of those right now.

The Final Mojo

At \$3K the Liekki isn't an entry-level instrument, and Flaxwood so far only has a few dealers in the USA. I have played guitars many times the cost of these that can't touch them for playability, fit or finish. The sound is good and versatile, and the neck is probably the best feeling neck I've ever had my hands on. I would encourage you to seek one out and try it for yourself; I am sure you will be as impressed as I am.

Buy if...

you want a great playing, great sounding axe that won't warp.

Skip if...

you need a locking trem for never-ending dive bombs.

Rating...

