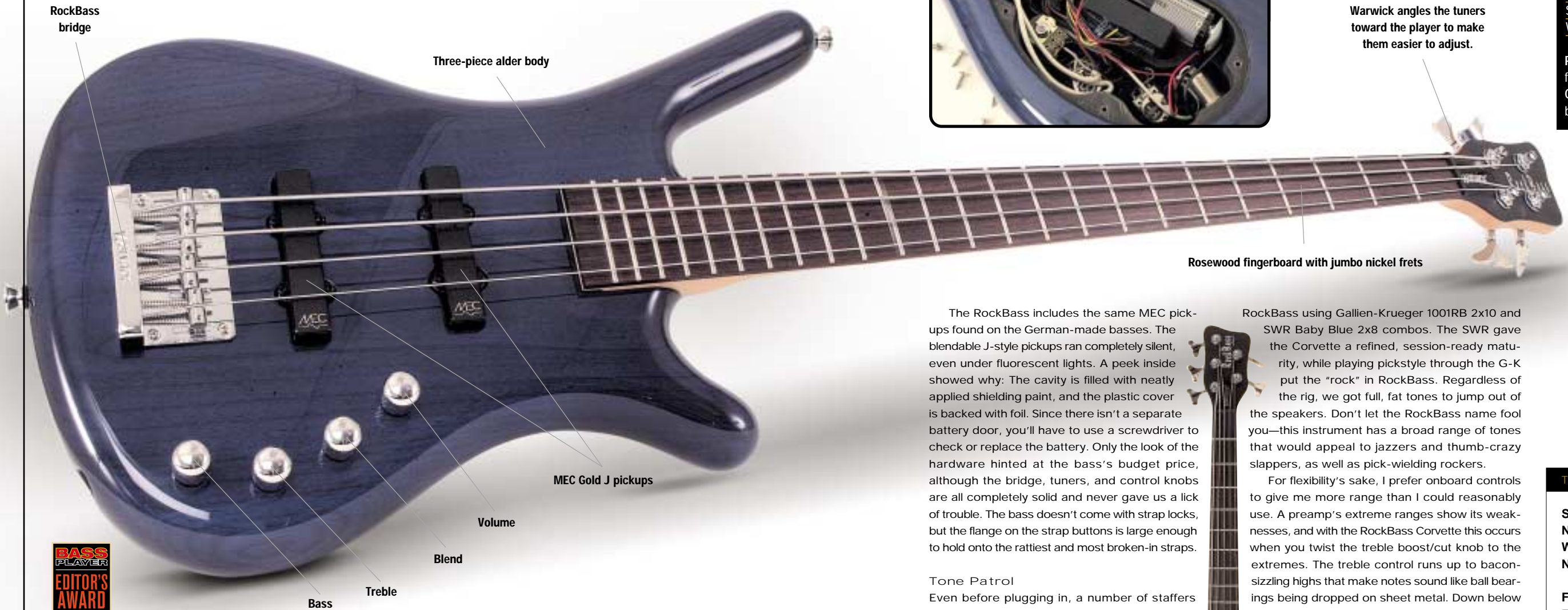


BOLT-ON 4-STRING WITH ACTIVE ELECTRONICS

WARWICK RockBass Corvette Basic 4



BY GREG OLWELL

For two decades, eyes and ears have been drawn to the sensuous curves, natural-wood feel, and modern sounds of Germany's Warwick basses. Built using exotic woods like ovangkol, wenge, and bubinga, Warwick's models have also inspired plenty of penny pinching from players saving up to purchase one of these Teutonic beauties. Now with the RockBass series, Warwick offers its sound, playability, and good looks in the highly competitive \$500 to \$1,000 price range.

At its shop in southern China, Warwick builds RockBass versions of a few of its popular models using the same data files as the routers at the Warwick factory in Markneukirchen, Germany. The resulting instruments are essentially the same as German Warwicks, but they're built using less costly wood, hardware, and labor. I took a look at the RockBass Corvette Basic 4-string.

Construction Zone

The RockBass Corvette is built using a three-piece alder body. (The German-made version has a bubinga body.) Our test instrument's body joints were so tight I couldn't even see where they were located until I held up the bass in sunlight. With the hard-to-reach spots around the cutaways perfectly sanded and buffed on the eye-catching transparent-blue finish, the only surface flaw I found was a barely noticeable chip on the neck pickup cavity's bottom edge. Warwick again steps outside its usual bubinga-and-wenge tonewood formula by using a five-piece maple neck and rosewood fingerboard on the RockBass Corvette. The neck's natural-wood feel is a sensual delight; staffers dug its comfy profile. Warwick attaches the neck using four offset bolts. The heel is flattened and rounded for easy upper-fret access. The trussrod needed no tweaking, even after shipping and climate changes. The 24 well-crowned and level frets kept all buzzes away up and down the fingerboard.



Warwick angles the tuners toward the player to make them easier to adjust.

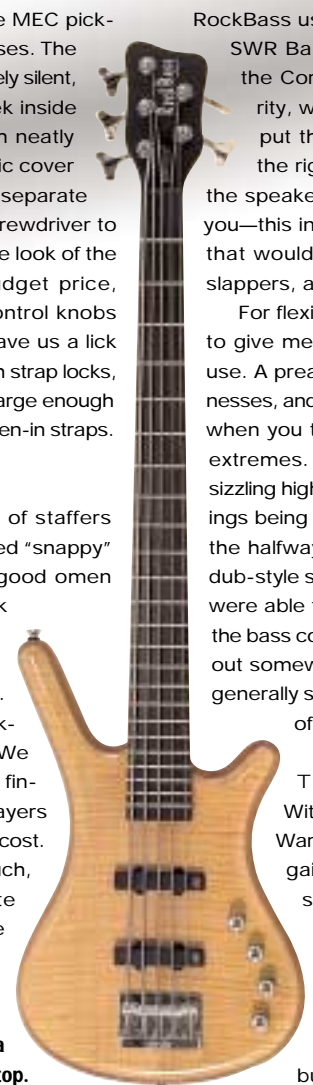
Rosewood fingerboard with jumbo nickel frets

The RockBass includes the same MEC pickups found on the German-made basses. The blendable J-style pickups ran completely silent, even under fluorescent lights. A peek inside showed why: The cavity is filled with neatly applied shielding paint, and the plastic cover is backed with foil. Since there isn't a separate battery door, you'll have to use a screwdriver to check or replace the battery. Only the look of the hardware hinted at the bass's budget price, although the bridge, tuners, and control knobs are all completely solid and never gave us a lick of trouble. The bass doesn't come with strap locks, but the flange on the strap buttons is large enough to hold onto the rattiest and most broken-in straps.

Tone Patrol

Even before plugging in, a number of staffers commented that the Corvette sounded "snappy" and that notes rang out clearly—a good omen for a punchy amplified tone. We took the Vette for a test drive with a Demeter VTBP-201 preamp, Crown K2 power amp, and Hartke 4200 4x10 rig. With the rig set flat we set about tweaking the bass for our favorite sounds. We were able to quickly get such great fingerstyle, pick, and slap tones that players repeatedly asked how much the bass cost. By boosting the bass and treble a touch, we were able to whip up a favorite meaty slap tone. We also tested the

The RockBass Corvette is also available as the \$999 RockBass Corvette Special Edition 5, featuring an alder body with a 5mm AAA flame-maple top.



RockBass using Gallien-Krueger 1001RB 2x10 and SWR Baby Blue 2x8 combos. The SWR gave the Corvette a refined, session-ready maturity, while playing pickstyle through the G-K put the "rock" in RockBass. Regardless of the rig, we got full, fat tones to jump out of the speakers. Don't let the RockBass name fool you—this instrument has a broad range of tones that would appeal to jazzers and thumb-crazy slappers, as well as pick-wielding rockers.

For flexibility's sake, I prefer onboard controls to give me more range than I could reasonably use. A preamp's extreme ranges show its weaknesses, and with the RockBass Corvette this occurs when you twist the treble boost/cut knob to the extremes. The treble control runs up to bacon-sizzling highs that make notes sound like ball bearings being dropped on sheet metal. Down below the halfway detent, I wanted more cut for dark, dub-style sounds than the control could offer. We were able to remedy this somewhat by boosting the bass control. Overall, although the tone thinned out somewhat above the 12th fret, staffers were generally surprised at the great tones coming out of such an inexpensive instrument.

The Toast

With its reverse-sticker-shock price, the Warwick RockBass Corvette Basic is a bargain for beginners. With its exacting construction and flexible electronics, this bass would also appeal to more experienced players looking for a second (or third, or fourth) bass that offers reliable quality and a different set of tones. Now if Porsche would start building cars in China . . . BP

Warwick RockBass Corvette Basic 4
 List price: \$649
 Score: 1 2 3 4 5
 Construction: ●●●●●●●●
 Electronics: ●●●●●●●●
 Playability: ●●●●●●●●
 Sound: ●●●●●●●●
 Value: ●●●●●●●●

Pros: More bass than you pay for.
Cons: The hardware calls the budget bluff.

TECH SPECS

- Scale length:** 34"
- Nut:** 1½", plastic
- Weight:** 7 lbs, 10 oz
- Neck:** Five-piece bolt-on maple
- Fingerboard:** Rosewood
- Electronics:** MEC Gold pickups, RBA04Q active preamp
- Colors:** Transparent blue or gloss black
- Other models:** RockBass Corvette Basic 5-string, \$699; RockBass Corvette Classic 4- & 5-string, \$699 & \$749; RockBass Corvette Special Edition 4- & 5-string, \$949 & \$999
- Made in:** China
- List price:** \$649
- Warranty:** One year parts & labor
- (805) 856-1701
- www.warwickrockbass.com