





# K-LINE Springfield

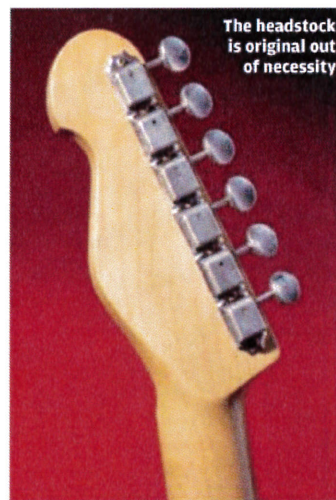
Pre-aged guitars can cost anything between £200 and £5000... so what makes this '50s style three-pickup item so special? The answer: quality, taste, tone and great attention to detail. Review by **Richard Purvis**

**C**hris Kroenlein used to spray-paint cars for a living. Leo Fender used to get his custom finishes from the DuPont car paint catalogue. See the connection? Now that Kroenlein has ditched the motor trade for his real vocation, it's no wonder that vintage-correct paint jobs should be a selling point for his beautifully-made K-Line guitars. That beauty is more than skin-deep, however. The all-American work of art we're looking at here combines hand-picked slabs of alder and maple, matched for maximum resonance in a meticulous attempt to recreate the tone and feel of an original Strat from the golden period before rosewood fingerboards arrived in 1959.

There's no harm in being skin-deep again for a moment, though. Nestling in its crimson-lined tweed case, the metallic blue nitro finish, grubby maple neck and aged plastic parts give this brand new instrument a totally convincing aura of '50s mojo. The fakery is not excessive - enough to make the guitar look old, but not to suggest it's been rescued from a binliner at the bottom of the Mississippi then attacked by wild dogs. It's most effective on the U-shaped neck, where that smoky staining has been worn back to bare timber along the comfortably rolled edges. And if you don't like blue, you



The K-Line's neck aging is some of the nicest we've seen



The headstock is original out of necessity

## The metallic blue nitro finish, grubby maple neck and aged plastic parts give a convincing aura of '50s mojo

can do just what Fender's customers were able to do if they didn't fancy the stock two-colour sunburst of the earliest Strats - dig out your original DuPont catalogue (well, a Google image search for classic American cars might be more practical) and let your fancy tickle itself.

There's a certain amount of choice over the hardware too. Our review guitar has custom-wound Klein pickups,

made with Alnico V magnets and voiced for a slight midrange scoop, but you can also specify Lollars; likewise, this bridge is a Callaham but you could also opt for a Wilkinson. The only thing you can't demand is naff quality. The tuners are trusty Gotohs, slightly tarnished to match the other metalwork, and under the hood you'll find names like CTS, Orange Drop and Switchcraft. ➔

### FACTFILE K-Line Springfield

**DESCRIPTION** Solidbody electric guitar. Made in USA  
**PRICE** £1799 including hard case and leather strap

**BUILD** Alder body, one-piece maple neck with 21 frets, Callaham Vintage bridge

**ELECTRICS** Klein K-Line Custom A5 pickups with five-way switch, one Volume and two Tone controls

**LEFT-HANDERS** Yes

**FINISH** Ice blue metallic (aged); unlimited custom colours available

**RANGE OPTIONS** None

**SCALE LENGTH**

648mm/25.5"

**NECK WIDTH**

Nut 42mm

12th fret 51.5mm

**DEPTH OF NECK**

First fret 21mm

12th fret 22.5mm

**STRING SPACING**

Nut 36mm

Bridge 56mm

**ACTION AS SUPPLIED**

12th fret treble 1.5mm

12th fret bass 1.75mm

**WEIGHT** 3.4kg/7.6lbs

**CONTACT** ToneDoctor UK

01775 713528

[www.tonedoctor.co.uk](http://www.tonedoctor.co.uk)

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In terms of woodwork, the Springfield differs from '50s Strat specs in three ways: the headstock, which has to be non-Fendery for copyright reasons but does, unfortunately, have something of a 'budget Peavey' look; the fretboard radius, which is a more modern 10"; and the angle of the neck pocket, which has been tweaked for 'better intonation and tone' as well as a smoother vibrato action. It's subtle - you could spend a long weekend locked in a hotel room with this guitar and not notice it - but next to a standard US Strat, the neck is raked back a degree or two for a sharper string-break angle over the saddles. That might seem a little anal, but Mr Kroenlein is clearly not in the business of messing with the formula just for the hell of it. At any rate, the acoustic tone is encouragingly bright and springy; time to see where those unfamiliar pickups will take it.

**Sounds**

Let's start with a clean Fender amp and go through the five pickup settings, starting at the neck. First impressions are very good indeed - it's chewy, slappy and sweet, with plenty of low-end beef, some delicate chime at the other end and, thanks to the mid-scoop specified in those Klein pickups, a beautifully transparent tone that's perfect for mellow blues. Things get especially pretty above the 16th fret,



The Callaham bridge is one of the hottest vintage upgrade parts on the market

where a slight cluckiness makes you almost think you've knocked the switch into the out-of-phase second position.

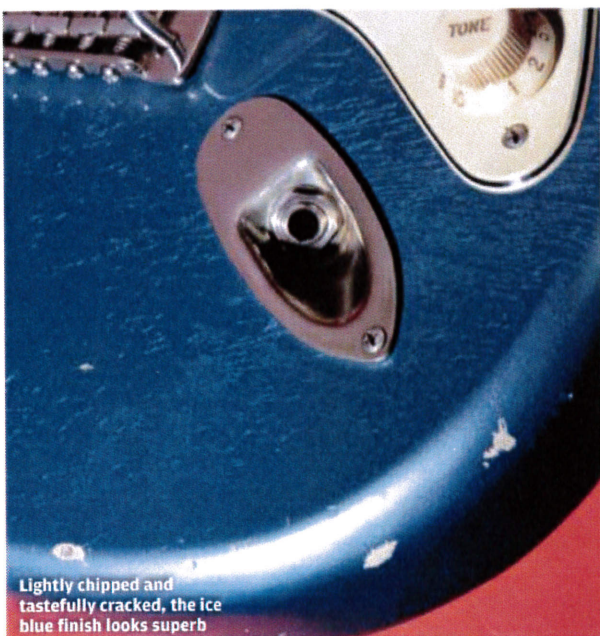
When you do hit that switch, the quack factor goes up but not in a huge, in-ya-face way. Purity is still the first word that comes to mind, and blues is still the second. The middle pickup brings some extra bite, and could be piercing in the wrong hands, but there's

five pickup settings offer exactly what you'd want them to: more of the same but with hairs on. The lack of excess honk in the out-of-phase positions makes them stupendous for dirty blues, and the volume pot will clean up for the quiet bits without taking any tone away. This guitar responds gloriously to a belligerent dig of the pick, and no matter how much dirt you throw at it, the Springfield's clarity, transparency and tonal balance keep shining through.

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**Verdict**

The best thing about this guitar is what, for some, is the worst thing about three-pickup solidbodies: the out-of-phase cluck that made '80s soft rock even worse than it otherwise would have been. The Springfield rises above all that through sheer tone. Is it the revised neck angle that prevents the sound from thinning out, or the pickup voicing that stops it getting too honky? It might be a bit of both. The important thing is, despite the slight shrillness of the bridge pickup, this guitar manages the remarkable feat of sounding every bit as good - and as old - as it looks.



Lightly chipped and tastefully cracked, the ice blue finish looks superb

still tons of body to the wound strings and it's a fine, well-balanced sound for chord work. And position 4? I've got three words for you: *Sweet Home Alabama*. It could not sound any better.

The bridge pickup on its own is not such an obvious winner - it's just about full enough for twangy surf riffs, but has a sharp edge that could whip the eyebrows off a sleeping pensioner. Just as well, then, that the bridge pickup has its own tone control (neck and middle share the other one). It does seem happier on 7 or 8 than fully open, but even so, maybe we need a shot of overdrive to get the best out of it. Are those EL84s warmed up yet?

They are, and that tone knob is staying down at 8. We're not going to lose sleep over that, though. Playing through enough gain to burr things up a fair bit, with either an English or an American accent, the Springfield's

FINAL SCORE	
K-LINE SPRINGFIELD	
Build Quality	19/20
Playability	19/20
Sound	19/20
Value for money	17/20
Looks	18/20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>92<sup>out</sup>/100</b>

