



## RONIN MORNINGSTAR

**JUST A FEW YEARS INTO THE GAME,** Ronin has already forged a reputation for inspired designs that nod toward the more interesting guitars of yesteryear, without doing anything quite the way it's ever been done before. Major players like Scott Metzger, Phil Lesh, Adam Rogers, David Torn, Oz Noy, and Jimmy Vivino are hoisting their own Ronins on stage and in the studio, so luthiers Izzy Lugo and John and Jack Reed have clearly got something going on here. The latest from this small team based in Humboldt County, California, is the Morningstar, a guitar that rises from obvious inspirations to take the formula somewhere else entirely. Like many of its brethren, the Morningstar's body is made from old-growth redwood reclaimed from fallen trees on Reed family land. Although the shape is clearly Strat-derived, its German-carved edges lend some funky nuance to the style, and this one looks and feels superb in its aged Aztec Gold nitrocellulose finish.

The neck wood is less exotic, perhaps, but still exquisite in its own right: a single piece of roasted, quarter-sawn maple, it displays a long, tight grain running end-to-end along the treble side of the back, which spreads out beautifully across the bass side. It has been carved to a deep soft-V profile that feels dead-on '57 Strat or Tele to me, with rolled edges for comfortable wrap-around playing, and a 1 11/16" width at the nut for a little extra playing surface. This Morningstar is set up with just two springs in the rear cavity. That's less than I'd ever work with myself, yet the guitar feels superb to play, and the sturdy MannMade two-post vibrato bridge has a light, easy touch, with impressive return-to-pitch stability. Thoughtful touches like the 1952 JAN Mil-Spec NOS Sprague tone cap, hand-made bone nut, stainless-steel Callaham saddles,

and open-gear Hipshot tuners further consolidate a quality-conscious build.

The Ronin guys are known for their predilection for gold-foil pickups. They often used vintage examples in the past when they could get them, then designed and wound their own renditions. The Morningstar's three Foilbucker units are their own creations, and seek to blend classic S-style snap and clarity with gold-foil depth and texture. They are wired through the classic control complement with two bonus push-buttons: one gives the bridge pickup a midrange boost; the other engages Ronin's "Resonator"—a piezo pickup designed for large harps and mounted beneath the bridge pickup, which blends with the signal from the traditional magnetic pickups.

I tested the guitar through a custom JTM45-style head with a 2x12 Port City cab with Celestion G12-65s and a Vox-inspired 15-watter with a StoneAge 1x12 loaded with EVM 12L Classic. Through both amps, several pedals, and a range of settings, I really dug how the Morningstar transmuted the oh-so-familiar Strat thing into a range of fresh voices that all had a lot to say for themselves. One thing I've always enjoyed about foil-type pickups is the way they enhance the high-end without getting spiky, and the Morningstar has that quality in abundance. Whether you hit it with clean indie-pop or gnarly Chicago blues riffs, the highs remain silky and just a little gritty, while the overall tone exhibits a touch more midrange body than most S-types, and still delivers bouncy low-end goodness. Overall, the Morningstar is beautifully textured, and it also manages to sound more open than a traditional Strat. The Boost switch delivered fat, smooth P90-esque tones from the bridge pickup—very handy—and the Resonator option presented creative potential for anything from trash-guitar noise outings to reso-like slide parts.

I personally found it something of a novelty, and the switch itself got in the way of quick setting changes, but hey, it's optional. All in all, though, this is an extremely well built and delightfully characterful guitar that earns an Editors' Pick Award for its achievements. —DAVE HUNTER

### SPECIFICATIONS

#### MORNINGSTAR

CONTACT	<a href="http://roninguitars.com">roninguitars.com</a>
PRICE	\$5,500
NUT Width	1 11/16", bone
NECK	Quarter-sawn roasted maple, 25.5" scale length, soft-V profile
FRETBOARD	Maple, 9.5" radius
FRETS	21 medium
TUNERS	Open-gear Hipshot
BODY	Reclaimed old-growth redwood
BRIDGE	MannMade two-post vibrato with Callaham stainless-steel saddles
PICKUPS	Three Ronin Foilbucker single-coil pickups
CONTROLS	Volume, Tone for neck and middle, Tone for bridge, 5-way switch, push-button switches for bridge Boost and "Resonator" piezo harp pickup
FACTORY STRINGS	Ernie Ball, .010-.046
WEIGHT	7.2 lbs
BUILT	USA
KUDOS	Very well made. Outstanding tonewoods and electronics. Great playability. Original and inspiring tones.
CONCERNS	The optional harp pickup might not appeal to everyone.