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Roscoe Guitars Century Standard 5, 11/12/2008

[Review by Jake Wolf](#)



Background: Back in the day, if you wanted an expertly made bass with an outlandish white snow leopard paint finish and a monkey grip, there was only one guy to call: Keith Roscoe. These days, Keith and his crew in their Greensboro, NC shop are firmly planted on the leading edge of the boutique electric bass scene. They have 4 basic models, the LG, SKB, Century Signature and Century Standard. The former 2 have been staples of the Roscoe line for quite some time, and have a devout following among professional players and bass enthusiasts. The two Century models are Roscoe's newest additions, the signature being the most extravagant (and expensive) of the entire line. In addition to several top shelf aesthetic upgrades, its longer upper horn and slightly larger body mass offers a subtle ergonomic alternative to the previous designs.

The Century standard on the other hand is the simplest, most stripped down offering from the boys at Roscoe, and it's designed to fill a void in the handmade bass market. Luthiers who have been known for decades for their high quality, custom/boutique axes are now starting to add to their line models that advertise the same quality control and materials as their revered US models, in a lower cost import version. The MTD Z series, Zon RT-K, Lakland Skyline, Conklin's Groove Tools and Sadowsky's Metro basses are a few that immediately come to mind. These are all fantastic instruments, and to be honest, the build quality of import axes is not at all what it was ten years ago, many of the instruments landing in US stores from abroad these days are extremely well made, and the above mentioned basses are all testaments to this fact. It should be noted that most of the above mentioned imports make a pit-stop at their US headquarters for final QC measures before hitting the shelves. The thing is, there are not a lot of builders making their lower end models entirely in their US shops, by the same guys, with the same tools, materials etc... that create their upper end models. Enter the Roscoe Century Standard. This bass is made entirely in the USA, with the same electronics and hardware that go into their \$3750 SKB/LG 5 string basses. From the Roscoe-Bartolini NTMB preamp to the Hipshot A style bridge to the graphite reinforced neck, this bass is a Roscoe through and through.

Construction: The standard comes with a one piece ash body that features an enhanced grain, black satin finish. The satin felt great to the touch and contributed nicely to the overall excellent fit and finish. The three piece maple neck is securely bolted to the body, the neck itself a departure from the familiar multi-laminated neck found on their SKB/LG offerings. Impressively, it contains the same graphite reinforcement and truss rod assembly as its big brothers. Fingerboard options include maple or rosewood and the uncapped, unpainted headstock look simple and clean. Bartolini is the chosen electronics package for this bass, with its passive style "CB" pickups and Roscoe spec. NTMB 3 band preamp. The hardware package is rounded out by top of the line Hipshot ultralight tuners and their Roscoe spec'd A style bridge, the same hardware as is found on their upper end models.

Features: There are several cool noteworthy features to mention about the Century Standard. As I mentioned, the finish is exquisite. I really like the look and the feel of the black satin finish. It is protective, low maintenance, and allows the wood grain to be felt on the surface, creating a smooth organic vibe. The bass arrived with a killer setup, it was perfectly intonated and the action was staggeringly low. I prefer the action a little higher, but that super duper low action really showcased the quality of the fretwork on this bass. With a soft touch the notes rang clear and open, there was no buzz and no dead spots to be found. The Low B is Roscoe pedigree all the way: Big, bold, articulate, authoritative, never blurry or unfocused. Bartolini's NTMB preamp offers 3 bands of boost/cut and also has a handy push pull option on the mid control pot to select between 2 affected frequencies. I found this to be particularly handy and ended up using both positions to help me dial in different situations.

Real World: The Century Standard possesses a quickness and zing that really helped it cut through a busy band mix. It has an upper mid/treble presence that does not translate to overly bright, harsh or aggressive as some other basses with this tonal quality can tend to possess. I would call it assertive without being rude or brash. The overall tone was quite pleasant, the powerful preamp delivering a wide range of tonal options. I was able to easily dial in focused yet huge dub reggae low end, burpy bridge pickup jazz tones, meaty yet classically hollow p-bass tones from the neck pickup, as well as a nice hifi piano-like tone from the bass. Ergonomically speaking, I found that the bass hung just right on a strap, its lightweight and slim neck did a great job keeping me free of fatigue on a 4 hour gig. The balance from string to string is nice and even, and the lack of dead spots in the neck allows unhampered travel up and down the fretboard. I used the standard on a Latin gig and it did a great job of sitting "in" the mix while still maintaining a juicy articulate presence, its notes jumping out of the fretboard with a strong edgy quickness.

Gripes: I'm trying hard to find something about this bass that doesn't quite work, or could use improvement. I'd like to say "I wish there were more options, more ability to customize" but then it hits me that A: these features have been carefully chosen to meet Roscoe's desired vision for this bass, and B: part of the reason they can keep the cost down is by limiting all the crazy custom add on's they're so accustomed to with their other models.

My conclusion about the Century Standard is that it hits its intended mark on the nose. This bass proves that it is possible to buy an expertly built, American made bass that looks and sounds every bit as classy as its venerable upper class extended family for just under \$2200. If you're a six string slinger, I don't know of any other entirely US made 6 string from a prominent established luthier for less than \$2500. In my research I was unable to find this approach being taken by another American luthier. Lower cost offerings by boutique builders? Certainly. Made in America, in the same shop, by the same staff, with the same parts as the upper models? I don't know of anything that hits the same price point, with the same features, from a luthier of that pedigree. Kudos to the boys at Roscoe, They have succeeded in creating something that truly stands out in a crowd, and at the same time appeals to the sensibly frugal rationale that's oh so appropriate these days.

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