

Bare Knuckle

Halcyon humbucker pickups

Could the Halcyon humbucker be the forceful sonic voice you've been seeking?

BY PAUL RIARIO

THE HALCYON HUMBUCKER is the result of a three-way collaboration between the U.K.'s Bare Knuckle Pickups founder Tim Mills, frequent collaborator and musical polymath Adam "Nolly" Getgood and Spiritbox guitarist Mike Stringer. Their aim? A signature pickup for Stringer that can precisely enhance the low-end density of a seven-string guitar that's being pummeled with gain, while also clearly detailing ambient and clean tones when both pickups are combined.

We opted to hear how these pickups fare with a six-string guitar, which we believe most players and readers will want to know about, and the dual-bladed Halcyons look absolutely killer in our Charvel with its five-way switch and coil-tap, allowing us to really dig into these pickups' tonal range.

Speaking of "killer," my guitar tech — the guy who installed these Halcyons — informed us, "I'm just gonna warn you — these are the loudest pickups I've ever heard in a guitar. Make sure you put the dogs and kids in another room before plugging it in." Noted!

Just like the Ragnarok humbucker, the Halcyon is among the highest-output passive pickups Bare Knuckle produces; the bridge measures at a gargantuan 17.9k ohms, but the neck reveals a more moderate 7.9k ohms. Having a twin-blade pole design (versus individual pole pieces) allows both pickups to maintain even string balance across various gauges and tunings — making these pickups

particularly effective for drop tunings and in use on multi- or extended-scale instruments.

The Halcyon bridge is stacked with a trio of custom ceramic magnets to deliver a biting midrange, muscular output and razor-sharp attack without being flabby in the lows. The neck pickup's leaner wind around an Alnico V magnet provides ample headroom for a refined hybrid of cleaner and ambient textures. Surprisingly, despite that intentional contrast between the Halcyon's individual builds, there is no discernible output drop as you switch between the neck and bridge, or engaging coil-tapping, which allows you to summon an array of dynamic tonal colors without sacrificing balance.

Heeding our tech's advice, we started on a clean channel of a Blackstar St. James head to catch the initial breath of these Halcyons. And yes, he's right; the bridge pickup has a massive output unlike anything we've ever heard. You can hear a colossal wall of rounded lows and weighted mids, but thankfully, no excessive "boom" on its bottom end.

After dropping our strings down to F¹ and pumping full-throttle gain from my EVH 5150 III head, it's apparent that the Halcyon doesn't possess a feral nature; instead, it captures pure brutality through

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STREET PRICE: Starting at \$195.00 per pickup (approx. \$240) or \$378.00 for a set (approx. \$475)

MANUFACTURER: Bare Knuckle Pickups, bareknucklepickups.co.uk

PROS

- A powerful, high-output bridge humbucker that capably handles drop tunings with clarity and evenness
- Twin-blade pole design balances string-to-string response

CONS

- Some may not prefer the look of a twin-blade pole design "dual-rail" humbucker
- Powerful response from the bridge humbucker may be too much output for some

VERDICT

Bare Knuckle's Halcyon humbuckers provide an unignorable foundation of intensity that demands your attention.

controlled aggression. By chugging away on the wound strings, you can sense how well the Halcyon bridge handles low-end with clarity and manages to preserve chordal articulation under the strain of increased gain from modelers and pedals, or in this case, a high-gain amp driven to its limits.

Sticking with the bridge pickup, we found it was great for injecting elements of Stringer's style. As we unleashed a barrage of rhythmic pick scrapes and thickly layered, low-end riffage, the Halcyon responded with surgical precision and presence.

Switching over to the neck, what's immediately clear is which pickup the Alpha is and which is the Beta — and that's not throwingshade at the neck. The Halcyon neck wastes no time pulling punches; it still hits hard, but it's all about firmly detailing its crystalline voice that doesn't clash with the bridge.

What's cool is that no matter the pickup configuration or coil-tapping we used between the neck and bridge, both consistently proved the Halcyons fuse precision with authority, allowing each riff and note to land with weight and vitality. **GW**

