

## The Bottom Line

PERFORMANCE TESTING BY TOM MULHERN & ASSOCIATES, CAMPBELL, CA  
(408) 374-1353

### Zon Legacy Elite 6-String Bass

By Tom Mulhern

**AT A GLANCE:** An instrument of impeccable quality, the Zon Legacy Elite 6-string Bass combines high-tech with high art. Meticulous handcraftsmanship and the finest materials, including a carbon-fiber neck, make the Zon an incredible value for any bassist seeking the pinnacle of playability and tone.

Zon has been building fine basses for over a decade, starting with 4-strings, adding its first 5-string in 1987, and finally introducing its 6-string Legacy Elite just recently. Like other Zons, this latest handcrafted instrument combines top-flight technology, materials, and hand craftsmanship to form a stunningly clean, exquisitely playable bass offering extended low- and high-end performance. Its sound, playability, and beauty all deserve top marks.

For most bassists checking out a 6-string, the big question is, "Will I be able to get around well enough to do everything that I can already do on my 4-string?" With the Legacy Elite, the answer is an emphatic yes. Because the right hand's technique, from walking a line to slapping it silly, requires room to move, this spacing is very important. The Zon's distance between adjacent strings, both at the bridge and at the nut, is almost the same as on any standard 4-string; the distance from one string center to the next is  $11/16''$  at the bridge, a mere  $1/16''$  less than on most 4-strings. Does it make a difference when you're playing? Probably not. When I sat down with the Zon, I was looking for the difference, daring it to show. After about a minute of riffing around, though, I realized that I couldn't feel it. The

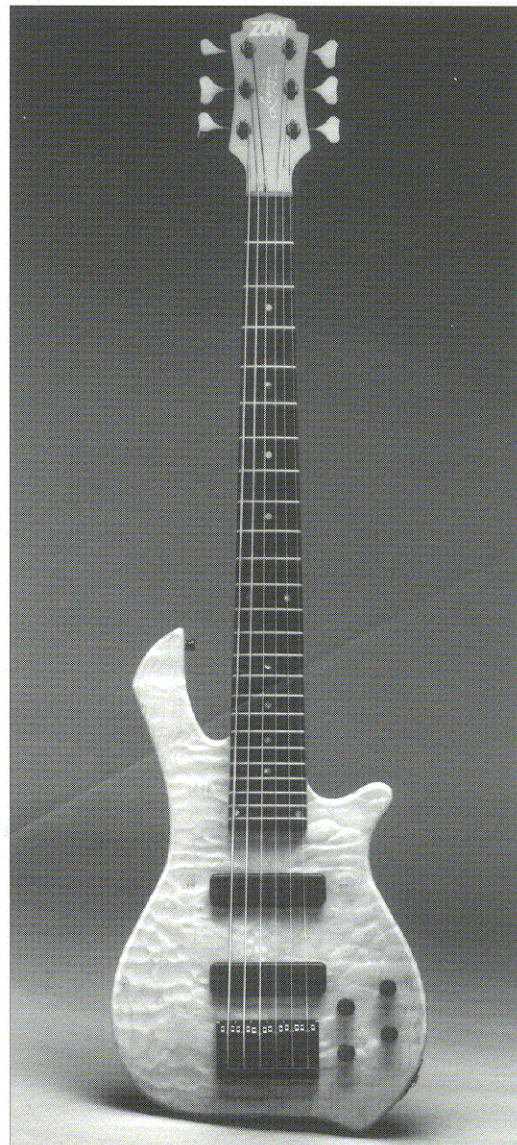


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cumulative effect of the slightly narrower spacing provides the neck with a slimmer feel, though, making the left hands work a bit easier.

The alder body is capped with two pieces of breathtakingly beautiful book-matched ¼”-thick quilted maple, which has a flowing, lively grain pattern. A clear glossy finish enhances the grain and complexity of the wood, lending an almost three-dimensional character.

Because of Zon’s approach to construction, the transition from neck to body is so smooth that it’s impossible to see or feel. Zon glues the neck into the body, using an extra-deep dovetail routing, and the fit and finish give the look and feel of an neck-through-body design. Made of a carbon-fiber composite, the neck has incredible strength and stability, yet it’s no heavier than wood. Its inherent rigidity allows for a thinner neck, from front to back, making it easier to move the fretting hand, especially when fingering low-string notes. Like the body and neck finish, the phenolic fingerboard is jet-black with an extremely attractive mirror-like surface. Large abalone dots are located on the front of the fingerboard, while small dots run along the side of the board. The fretwork is easily among the best going. The edges are smooth and properly tapered, and all have been crowned for buzz-free performance.

Where as the pickups on many 5- and 6-string basses have somewhat lopsided response (too much boom in the bass or shrillness in the treble), the custom Bartolinis on the Zon are perfectly balanced. When you run a scale or riff from the low B string up to the high C, the tone is true and even, without a woofy bottom or a peaky top. A desirable feature is the panpot that blends the pick-ups. With the knob turned to either extreme, you either get full bridge pickup or full neck pickup, with a proportional mix at every point in between,

In the middle, it’s an even mix. More versatile than a simple 3-way switch, it also has a center detent that tells you when you’re at the midpoint.

The 50/50 pickup blend gives the biggest all-around tone, perfectly balanced for fingering (or picking) and for popping. Moving the mix more toward the bridge setting gives you a bit more digging-in capability—exceptional for sharp, staccato attacks. For a mellower, more traditional sound, the bridge-pickup setting does the trick. Note that the balance control is active, which means that it doesn’t short any signals to ground, and maintains an even tone and impedance, regardless of its setting. All controls turn smoothly and evenly—especially the tone controls, which sweep through their respective ranges without exaggerating the sound or creating unwanted peaks.

Because of its balance and tone, plus its active circuitry, the Zon sounds excellent when plugged into an amp or directly into a recording console. In the studio, the texture is robust and solid, and it doesn’t lose its focus. When it’s plugged into an amp, the road to tone is wide open. If you like that old-time tube-tweaked thunder, pop up the Zon’s bass knob, and get ready to rock. If power funk is your domain, then up the bass and treble knobs and get your thumb in gear. A note on the Legacy Elite’s right-hand friendliness: The Bartolini pickups are about ¾” wider than the distance from the lowest to the highest string. For bassists who use two or three fingers and like somewhere to plant the right-hand thumb, the end of either pickup is an ideal place. There’s also adequate room between the end of the fingerboard and the neck pickup, making slapping easy; you simply won’t trip over the pickup or neck.

Adjusting the bass is a breeze. The bridge’s individual saddles let you adjust the strings’ length and height. Two miniature

Allen screws on each saddle adjust height, while a Phillips-head screw sets the string's length/intonation. Saddles are spring-loaded to keep them properly located. Both pickups can be height-adjusted (although neither has exposed pole pieces): Two screws on the top of the pickups can be loosened, and then two hidden screws (which can be accessed with a #0 Phillips screwdriver through the pickup's seemingly unused holes) set the height; tightening the top screws again locks the pickups in place. This approach thwarts the kind of rattle and rumble that sometimes comes from pickups mounted loosely on springs.

For overall looks and comfort, it's hard to beat the Zon. The gold-plated hardware beautifully complements the black neck, headstock, pickups, and knobs, plus the gleaming gold against the body's highly figured face looks extremely rich.

The body has a nice scoop cut from its back to make the bass hug your belly in a nice, comfortable way. When you sit down with the instrument on your leg, it's slightly neck-heavy. (Note that it's almost impossible to make a 6-string that isn't, unless you're willing to have an extra-long, extra-heavy body to counteract the larger neck and massive hardware complement at the other end.) On a strap, the bass balances perfectly, owing to its long top-cutaway

horn. The treble-side cutaway is deep enough to let you reach the highest frets with ease, making the Legacy Elite a good choice for soloists.

On treble sided, the short horn produces a wide-open cutaway, which lets you get your hand up there to reach the highest frets with ease, at least on the uppermost strings. Unless you have extra-long fingers, reaching lower than the E string in the top four or five frets requires some maneuvering.

This bass is so much fun to play! By the second day of working with it, I had a hard time putting it back in the case to play my 4-string. In addition, the high C and low B strings make it possible to get around with fewer position shifts—it's definitely built for speed.

Overall, the Zon Legacy Elite 6-string is a terrific instrument and an excellent investment. The range, the tone, and the feeling that it gives you aren't likely to be duplicated, especially by any production-line model. Plus, the handcraftsmanship shows in every detail. This is the bass you'll not only want to play, but when it's resting (or you're taking a break—you make the call), you'll want to leave it on a stand so you can just *look* at it. What a bass!

## Inside the Zon Legacy Elite 6-String Bass

Type of bass: 6-string with offset double-cutaway body

Retail price: \$2,925.00

Hardshell case: \$175.00

Body material: Alder

Top: Quilted maple

Neck: Carbon-fiber

Fingerboard: Phenolic

Scale Length: 34"

Neck width at nut: 2 3/16"

String spacing at nut: 11/32" at treble side to 13/32" at bass side; 1 13/32 overall

String spacing at bridge: 11/16". Center to center; 3 1/4", overall

Body width: 13"

Body length: 20 3/8"

Body depth: 1 1/2"

Number of frets: 24  
Bridge: Schaller gold-plated  
Nut: Graphite  
Tuning machines: Schaller gold-plated in  
3+3 arrangement

Pickups: Two custom Bartolini  
humbucking

Controls: Active master volume, active  
panpot pickup blender knob, active bass  
boost, active treble boost (note: a hole in  
the rear-cavity cover provides access to a  
screwdriver-adjustable midrange control)

Overall length: 46 ½"

Weight: 10 lbs

Finish: Duralite

Options: Black hardware, fretless  
fingerboard, assorted hardwood tops,  
various colors

Manufacturer's address: Zon Guitars, 2682  
Middlefield Rd. #P, Redwood City, CA  
94063