

# WORKING-CLASS HERO

## Washburn P70 Pilsen Idol electric guitar

By **Eric Kirkland**

**I**T SEEMS LIKE EVERY TIME I TURN around, another rock star is being honored with a signature guitar that reflects every nuance of their taste and style. While I appreciate the importance and historical significance of these guitars, I'm often left wondering, What about the rest of us, the average hardworking players? We may not fill stadiums and sell millions of records, but don't we deserve a guitar too? The folks at Washburn seem to think so, and they've built a guitar just for us: the new Pilsen Idol P70.

Built in Washburn U.S.A.'s production facility, the Pilsen is named for a hard-working Chicago neighborhood not far from the Washburn headquarters. In the Thirties, Pilsen played a key role in the New Deal's labor movement, and today this history-rich town is home to a diverse and hard-working population, which happens to include a large number of Chicago's artists. The Pilsen guitar exemplifies the town's attitude and its residents' passions by its absence of frills and fanciful options. What it delivers instead are pure tones, playability and superior workmanship at an affordable price.

### Features

The Pilsen's two-inch-thick body takes its stylistic cues from the Washburn Idol Series. These include an elliptical lower cutaway, a subdued upper horn and sexy flared hips. The mahogany body is topped with a maple cap that adds essential elements to the Pilsen's definition and bite. Given its dimensions, the body is, not surprisingly, hefty. My test model tipped the scales at a whopping 11 pounds! But this extra heft must serve a purpose, because the guitar's sound is absolutely divine. What's more, I loved the dark and tasteful semimetallic Root Beer finish that covered the body and neck with a reflective but satiny sheen.

The Pilsen's 24 3/4-inch-scale one-piece mahogany neck is fairly chunky, but the specially engineered C shape supports the hand through every position. Furthermore, the neck's substantial size and set construction helps notes sustain for long periods and allows players to hit the strings hard without affecting the tone or pitch. The rosewood board is marked with simple pearl dots, and the 22 jumbo frets are chamfered along the

edge of the board for a smooth feel. The Buzz Feiten Tuning System, standard on all Washburn U.S.A.-made guitars and basses, guarantees perfect intonation.

Beautifully complementing the Pilsen's natural singing tone is a chrome-covered Duncan '59 neck pickup and a Dunlop Custom Custom humbucker bridge pickup in aged cream rings. Each of these neoclassic PAFs has its own volume and tone knobs. A topside three-way toggle provides the switching, and each of the tone knobs features a push-pull pot that can tap its respective pickup. Other hardware includes 18:1 Grover tuners and a sturdy Tone Pros System II (Nashville-style) bridge and stop tailpiece.

### Performance

Heavy mahogany guitars rarely sound great until they're electrified, so I was really impressed by the Pilsen's lively and clear acoustic response. I liked it so much that I spent a lot of time soaking up its unplugged tone. However, once I plugged the guitar into my modified Marshall, I was hooked! Using the bridge pickup and tons of gain, I was able to approximate the complex solo tones of

Duane Allman and Billy Gibbons. I pulled the tone knob up when I wanted a more hollow tone and I rolled it down to sweeten the headroom at high volumes. The neck pickup provided a silky but defined crunch with heavy distortion and delivered truly angelic clean tones through my Victoria combo.

### The Bottom Line

I can say without hesitation that the Pilsen is one of the most musical and smooth-playing guitars ever to emerge from Washburn U.S.A. With its long sustain, gorgeous tone and ergonomically advanced design, the Pilsen Idol P70 easily competes with custom-built guitars that cost four times its price. ■

**PRO:** Amazing playability, sweet and defined tone  
**CON:** Heavy

#### KA-CHING!

**LIST PRICE:** \$1,659.00  
**MANUFACTURER:**  
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Courtland St., Mundelein,  
IL 60060; (800) 877-  
6863; washburn.com

## Washburn's director of marketing, Kevin Lello, discusses the Pilsen P70.

### What are you most proud of with regard to the Pilsen project?

We are most proud of the incredible playability and sustain of the guitar. Gil Vasquez, Washburn head of production, previously co-owned Baker Guitars, where he earned a reputation for building amazing instruments. As evidenced in the success of this

guitar, we are now reaping the benefits of his expertise.

### How did you get this guitar to play so effortlessly?

We believe that playability is related to the neck. So we get all of our guitars to play effortlessly by paying close attention to neck angles, neck work, shaping and fret dressing.

### Do you have any plans to expand on the Pilsen platform?

We are looking at doing a chambered version and a hollowbody version in the future. This will keep all the aesthetics of the Pilsen but offer a lighter guitar with different tonal qualities. —E.K.

