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# Guitar & Bass

## GEAR For The YEAR

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April 2014 Vol 25 No 7 £4.25



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Wood'n'wire wonders











# NS

## CR5 Radius Bass

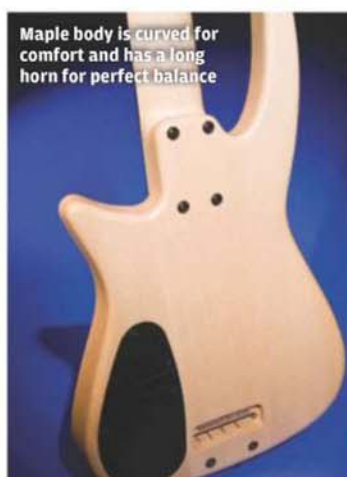
If a bass arrives from a Mr Steinberger then you know it's going to be an eye-opener, but this one really is something. Review by **Gareth Morgan**

**T**here are very few people who deserve a place at the very top table of bass design – the game-changers, the designers and the inspired individuals whose innovations became globally accepted as standard – but Ned Steinberger is definitely one of them.

Steinberger, son of a Nobel Prize-winning physicist, began by designing furniture in his teens before a chance meeting with luthier Stuart Spector led to the first Steinberger-designed Spector NS bass in 1976. By 1979 Steinberger had stepped out on his own, developing what became the L-2, the headless 'cricket bat' bass played by the likes of Rush's Geddy Lee in the '80s. If you could deal with the looks, the L-2 was light, with a beautifully balanced carbon graphite body and phenolic fingerboard; not even a shaving of wood was employed in the design. The tuning system utilised an ultra-fine 40:1 gear ratio via knurled knobs protruding out of the body behind the bridge which also reduced string slippage.

The company could never keep up with demand and, realising that he was more interested in design than the machinations of business, Steinberger ceded control of the company to Gibson in 1986. In 1990 he founded NS Design, which has largely focused on electric versions of bowed classical instruments (his small-bodied electric uprights have become virtual industry standards). But now Mr Steinberger is once again exploring the solidbody bass guitar.

Maple body is curved for comfort and has a long horn for perfect balance



While the L-2's minimal form gave traditionalists an easy target, the Radius is a different kettle of fish. Sleek and curvaceous, the double cutaway maple body has a sumptuous flamed maple top giving it high-end classiness that suits its £2000-plus price tag. Unsurprisingly NS, after extensive research and contemplation, have thrown a ton of innovation at the Radius, not least the curved, convex Diradial body, with the front more tightly 'radiused' (convex) to provide a more comfortable playing-hand position, as well fitting snugly over the stomach/ribcage. The deep lower cutaway makes the 24th fret as easy to play as the first, while the elongated upper horn contributes virtually perfect balance and doubles as a handle.

The Radius is headless but this doesn't mean you need expensive double ball-end strings, as it comes



The neck is maple with a carbon fibre core and an adjustable truss rod

with NS's excellent self-clamping tuning system. Simply snip the strings to length, just longer than the body, feed them through the slot just past the small black saddles and tune by winding the knurled knob: it's really easy and just as quick as using a string-winder.

While identifiable as one piece of maple, the neck has a carbon fibre core which aids stability and contributes sharper note definition and enhanced sustain. The dot-marker ebony board adds a traditional feel, and the extra-long 35" scale length offers extra definition and sustain, especially for the B string (the four-string is 34").

The Radius is kitted out with a pair of standard-looking soapbar pickups – low-impedance custom EMG units, to be precise – but this doesn't tell the whole story. NS and EMG have collaborated to produce a system that integrates ➡

### FACTFILE

#### NS CR5 Radius Bass

##### DESCRIPTION

Solidbody bass.  
Made in the Czech Republic  
PRICE £2149 with gig bag

**BUILD** Ergonomic Diradial maple body with flame maple top, bolt-on headless maple neck with carbon fibre core and an ebony fingerboard carrying 24 medium nickel frets. Custom Hipshot bridge and aluminium head plate (past the nut). Chrome hardware

**ELECTRICS** Active with two low-impedance EMG pickups plus NS Polar piezo pickup (bridge saddle). Volume, magnetic/piezo Blend, Treble and Bass controls, three-position pickup selector switch (magnetic) and three-position piezo EQ switch  
**LEFT-HANDERS** Not yet  
**FINISH** Natural satin, charcoal satin, amber satin  
**RANGE OPTIONS** Four-string Radius CR4 £1995; fretless four- and five-string same price as fretted versions

##### SCALE LENGTH

889mm/35"

##### NECK WIDTH

Nut 47mm

12th fret 64mm

##### DEPTH OF NECK

First fret 21.5mm

12th fret 22.5mm

##### STRING SPACING

Nut 10mm

Bridge 18mm

##### ACTION AS SUPPLIED

12th fret treble 2mm

12th fret bass 2.5mm

##### WEIGHT

4.04kg/8.91lbs

##### CONTACT

House Music Ltd  
01276 453 079  
housemusic@btconnect.com  
www.nedsteinberger.com



## REVIEW

ELECTRIC BASS  
£2149Like this?  
Try this...**LightWave**

Saber SL5 5-string  
Radically-shaped bass with  
an optical pickup system  
that's surprisingly warm  
and natural-sounding  
RRP £1050

**Dingwall**

Combustion 5 SII  
5-string Bass  
Beautiful design with  
individual string bridges,  
an EMG preamp and a  
fanned-fret layout  
RRP £1300

**Ibanez**

Grooveline G105  
The quirky body looks  
super-modern but  
underneath it's a simple,  
well-made active bass  
RRP £2289

these with the NS Polar piezo pickup, represented by the single metal runner/saddle mounted on the chunky steel bridge unit. You combine the output (or not) of each system via a simple-looking roster of controls, a master volume and, less inevitably, a two-band EQ. Sited directly beneath the bridge EMG, the remaining control allows you to balance between the pickup types or solo one or the other, and there are also a pair of switches. The rearwards one provides three EQ options for the piezos (forwards for more bass, back for more treble, and centre for a combination of both boosts), and the other is the EMG selector; forward for neck, back for bridge and centre for twin pickup mode. The Radius' 18v operation requires two 9v PP3 batteries, housed beneath a small plate within the electronics housing cover and accessed via a small knurled screw – not a true quick release option, but a pretty decent alternative.

The seated balance is nigh-on perfect, but if you've never played a headless or 35" scale bass before, you may find it takes a little time to feel comfortable; initially we probably automatically compensate for a non-existent headstock. Still, it's definitely a journey worth embarking upon.

**Sounds**

The three pickup settings and Polar piezo combinations are going to give a lot of variation, and it's especially interesting to combine each magnetic setting with its piezo blend version. In twin pickup mode the Radius is big



The 15" radius fingerboard is ebony, the headplate is aluminium

and brash with a solid bottom end, a slightly snarly midrange and highs that are bright and zingy, if a little high-mid biased. Blending in the Polar pickup sanitises the sound; the definition is still excellent but now the tone has lost the zingy high-mid sheen – a nicely even, controlled setting for pop exploits.

Soloing the neck EMG produces a natural sound which hints at its acoustic forebears with a dark, punchy midrange and snappy but controlled highs. Be careful, as boosting Bass here will cause fixtures and fittings to fall from the walls, but adding lots of treble will get you an as big and an as aggressive a rock'n'roll sound as you could ever want. Again, blending in piezo downsizes the tone, evening it out without leeching the EMG's signature elements, keeping the growling lower strings and the hint of acoustic seasoning but with less weight and impact. The A and D strings are lighter, while the G is smoother and more naturally full-range.

Head in the direction of the bridge pickup and you'll discover a very nicely-matched output level and a turbo-charging of the usual elements. It's burpy and gurgling, with a perfect amount of high mids for snappy playing, but it's also a lot more menacing with nasty, barking lows and almost as much of a snarl in the midrange. If you ever really wanted to scare someone to death with a finger-funk bassline, here's the sound you've been looking for. Blending in the piezo is the perfect way to reduce your heart rate; the tone gradually loses the excessive zing and bottom end recedes. At full blend the Radius is recognisably nasal and burpy but has a much more polite character.

Often the problem with piezo systems on electric basses is that they sound hollow and mismatched when combined with magnetics. That's not the case here. True, when soloed, the NS's



Controls include a piezo/mag blend knob and a piezo EQ switch

piezo side is wiry and tightly focussed, almost repressed, but there's more than enough bottom end on display and not too much clankiness; it sounds like a logical variation of what's come before and, best of all, the piezo is hard-wired into the EQ. Dialling in Bass heads you in a more upright direction with a thudding bottom end and a smooth rubberiness, while boosting treble gives sharp highs without fret-noise. The three switch settings offer even more subtle variations (try the 'more bass' setting with full bass boost and you'll get a very sweet tone for melodic meanderings in the higher registers), although you're more than likely to find one setting you like and stick with it.

**Verdict**

NS took their time putting the CR5 together, and they haven't wasted a single millisecond. It's a wonderful instrument that manages to look cooler than a headless bass has any right to, and the piezo/magnetic melange produces effectively three basses: a bit of an animal with the magnetics, more polite and refined when blended, or earthy and thudding in piezo mode. The neck isn't super-slim but it's very comfortable and contributes to the feeling of a bass that demands to be played, while the self-clamping tuning system is just fantastic. Of course, the plus-£2000 price tag is up in the professional echelon, but we think it's worth every penny.



Low-impedance EMG pickups are linked to an 18v active preamp with a two-band EQ

**FINAL SCORE**

NS CR5 RADIUS BASS	
<b>Build Quality</b>	19/20
<b>Playability</b>	18/20
<b>Sound</b>	18/20
<b>Value for money</b>	17/20
<b>Vibe</b>	18/20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>90%</b>



ERIC STEWART'S '59 JUNIOR

# Guitar & Bass

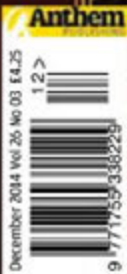
**SPECIAL  
AWARDS  
ISSUE!**

## GEAR OF THE YEAR

**Randy  
Bachman**  
Still in overdrive



**Private  
Collection**  
The art of  
acquiring guitars





# NS

## CR5 Radius Bass

Still head of the class

PRICE: £2149  
CONTACT: House Music Ltd  
01276 453 079  
housemusic@btconnect.com  
www.nedsteinberger.com

REVIEWED  
APRIL  
25/07

**T**here are very few people who deserve a place at the very top table of bass design – the game-changers, the designers and the inspired individuals whose innovations became globally accepted as standard – but Ned Steinberger is definitely one of them. The man who gave us that iconic, headless and wood-free wonder the L-2 is once again exploring the solidbody bass guitar. While the L-2's minimal form gave traditionalists an easy target, the Radius is a different kettle of fish. It's still headless, sure, but the sleek, curvaceous, double-cutaway maple body has a sumptuous flamed maple top that gives it a new high-end classiness. The three pickup settings and Polar piezo combinations are going to give a lot of variation, and it's especially interesting to combine each magnetic setting with its piezo blend version.

In twin pickup mode the Radius is big and brash with a solid bottom end, a slightly snarly midrange and highs that are bright and zingy. If a little high-mid biased. Blending in the Polar pickup sanitises the sound; the definition is still excellent but now the tone has lost the zingy high-mid sheen – a nicely even, controlled setting for pop exploits. NS took plenty of time in putting the CR5 together, and not a single millisecond has been wasted. It's a wonderful instrument that manages to look cooler than a headless bass has any right to, and the piezo/magnetic mixture produces effectively three basses: a bit of an animal with the magnetics, more polite and refined when blended, or earthy and thudding in piezo mode. The neck isn't super-slim but it's very comfortable and contributes to the feeling of a bass that demands to be played, while the self-clamping tuning system is fantastic. Of course, the £2000-plus price tag is up in the professional echelon, but we think it's worth every penny.

**WINNER**  
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Awards  
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Bass Guitar  
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