



BASS CENTRE

Wyman Bass

The diminutive ex-Stone now has an equally pocket-sized signature bass – a reproduction of his humble and much-modified but much-recorded Dallas Tuxedo. Review by **Gareth Morgan**

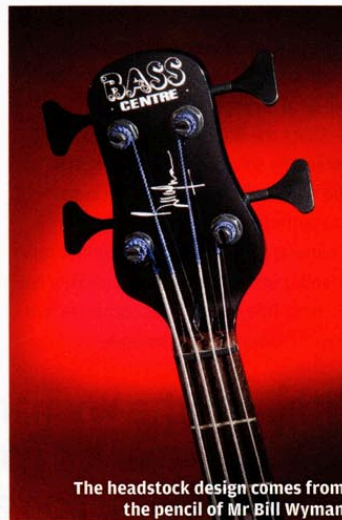
Way back in 1961 Bill Wyman acquired one of the few basses available in the UK, a Dallas

Tuxedo, and he rapidly concluded that it needed 'modification' to suit both his playing needs and aesthetic tastes. When he joined the Rolling Stones he took the mutant bass with him, using it on their first album in 1964, but as it was a 'one-off' Wyman didn't take it on tour for fear of it getting stolen or damaged in the melee that often accompanied the finale to a Stones gig. He continued to use the Tuxedo, especially for blues tracks, up until 1976, a period which encompassed the classic *Exile On Main Street* (1972) and sideman performances with Muddy Waters, Buddy Guy and Junior Wells at the Montreux Jazz Festival in 1974. The bass now resides in a glass display case on the wall of Wyman's Sticky Fingers restaurant in London.

Fast-forward to 2011. With the ex-Stones bassist's complete endorsement, and after several prototypes and much painstaking R&D, the Bass Centre has produced an instrument in the spirit of the original as part of their burgeoning British Bass Master series – a series that also includes the Blockhead for Norman Watt-Roy and the Woodstock for Ten Years After bassist Leo Lyons.



The body has a ribcage cut and the heel is chamfered to reduce bulk



The headstock design comes from the pencil of Mr Bill Wyman

With Bill Wyman's endorsement, the Bass Centre has produced an instrument in the spirit of his old Dallas Tuxedo

The original Tuxedo bass was a single-cutaway Les Paul-styled affair, so evidence of Wyman's main modification is clear for all to see: he got a friend to carve out a top horn which he then further shaped and sanded smooth. This is reproduced on the BC version, right down to the bulge above the neck – a feature that's probably representative

of the attempt Wyman himself made to guarantee the neck joint wasn't compromised. As if hacking out a new cutaway didn't reduce the size of the bass enough, Wyman then cut down the overall size of the body.

The result is... well, endearingly cute. To give you some idea of just how small this bass is, it measures ➔

FACTFILE

Bass Centre Wyman Bass

DESCRIPTION Solidbody bass. Made in Korea
PRICE £595

BUILD Alder body, maple neck with 20 medium nickel frets on a rosewood fingerboard. Hipshot tuners and high-mass bridge. Black/chrome hardware

ELECTRICS Passive with one custom vintage Baldwin-style pickup and one custom soapbar pickup. Two volumes and one tone control
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Black only

SCALE LENGTH
30"/762mm

NECK WIDTH
Nut 55mm
12th fret 55mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 19mm
12th fret 22mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 10mm
Bridge 19mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 2mm
12th fret bass 2.5mm
WEIGHT 7lbs/3.2kg

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approximately 260mm from top to bottom edge - some 60mm less than a Precision. Oddly, though, it isn't featherlight; a solid chunk of alder underneath the soupy black finish contributes to a 3.2kg/7lbs payload. There's a ribcage chamfer around the back, but the size of the body means the lack of a forearm chamfer isn't a problem. As for cosmetics, the Wyman is only available in black with a red scratchplate. We think the mixture of crimson, black and chrome makes for a très cool-looking bass.

The neck is a short-scale 30"/762mm affair, and there's maple under the black finish. The C-shaped contour tapers towards the black plastic nut in roughly Jazz Bass proportions and it feels comfy and easy to play. Wyman himself designed the curvy hourglass headstock, and it carries four black Hipshot tuners with medium-sized buttons alongside his signature and the Bass Centre logo.

The original Dallas buzzed so badly that Wyman made his fretless, but here 20 expertly-fitted medium nickel frets line up on a rosewood fretboard with pearloid dots on the face and smaller white dots along the top edge. The bridge is far more substantial than the one you would have got with a Dallas back in 1961. It's a chunky chrome high-mass affair of no specific origin with optional string-through capability.

Since the Bass Centre is striving to retain the spirit of the '60s original, the Wyman is passive. The pickups presented are one 'Baldwin' style pickup at the neck and a contemporary soapbar unit at the bridge. The knurled chrome Tele-style knobs comprise two volumes and one master tone.



The Wyman in front of a Precision: yep, it really is that small



The bridge is a lot more solid than the primitive original

A quick word about balance: you'll find that some recourse to a restraining forearm is needed when seated, but this is no more serious an issue than with most other basses. Slung around your neck the Wyman is stable but it wants to sit in a horizontal position, so some form of right arm intervention is needed to keep the neck angled upwards. Whether this is an issue relating to the positioning of the front strap button on the rear of the top horn (the spike is too small to place it in a conventional position) or to do with the oversized headstock is difficult to say, but those who rest forearms on the top edge will have no problems, while those who don't will have some thinking to do.

Sounds

There are no problems whatsoever in the sound department. The Wyman offers an excellent mix of passive tones and in either twin or single pickup

points between. In conjunction with the neck pickup, definition is good but a softer note core and a slightly more neutral sound makes this a good option for general low-down support work.

Although the neck pickup is noticeably down on level relative to the other two settings, on its own it has a pleasingly acoustic rasp. Less forceful midrange elements give it a real '60s flavour, whether it be for soul, blues, pop or rock. You'll need to up the gain on your amp to make this a properly practical option but there's plenty of fun to be had when you do.

Verdict

The Wyman bass is a quirky instrument with a body which feels too small and a balance that takes a bit of getting used to. If the price was a few hundred quid less then we'd just be saying things like 'excellent starter bass' and 'suitable for the more diminutive in stature', but we'd be ignoring the important stuff. Sure, the money is a tad steep, but the saving graces are the fun factor and the quality of the sounds - sounds with a tightness and focus that belie the popular assumption about short scale basses. It's a good option for beginners with some money to spend, but if you're just looking for a bass that's a little different, the Wyman is a welcome new contender.

Although the Wyman's neck pickup is down on level it's got a real '60s flavour for soul, blues, pop and rock



Simple control layout includes a volume for each pickup plus a master tone

modes the notes speak out clearly; the bridge pickup is the most assertive and the neck is the most rounded. In practice you don't get much in the way of variation from the tone control, other than at full cut, which gives a fat thud or a smooth, bluesy rumble.

The contemporary soapbar is the more potent of the pickups, adding presence, stature and a slight zingy edge. Use it in isolation for a punchier tone with a darker feel and low strings that really growl - lots of modern applications here, from dynamic pop grooves to heavier rock and many

FINAL SCORE

BASS COLLECTION WYMAN BASS	
Build Quality	18/20
Playability	17/20
Sound	17/20
Value for money	15/20
Vibe	17/20
TOTAL	84%