

# BURNS COBRA

PRICE  
£259

The latest cost-conscious Cobra boasts a new version of a classic Burns single-coil. Paul Dixon practises some scales and turns on the charm.

The Cobra name dates back to 1998, appearing on the least expensive electric in the UK-origin Burns range, which was the first from this maker to feature an overtly Strat-styled body plus three pickups arranged Fender fashion. Fast-forward to 2004 and the Cobra makes a comeback, joining the cost-conscious Club series introduced five years earlier. Launched in 2010, the latest version maintains the same design, but now boasts Burns' latest pickup: a downsized version of the company's classic Tri-Sonic single-coil.

## Body & Neck

Unlike Burns such as the Marvin or Marquee, the Cobra employs an unashamedly Stratty shape for the basswood body. Complete with ample contouring on front and rear, the end result runs predictably close to Fender's favourite 6-string. A selection of solid colours emphasises this image, the review guitar being finished in a uniformly high-gloss blue that's between daphne and sonic.

The heel block is traditionally square edged and carries an equally conventional four-screw neckplate to firmly anchor the maple neck. The latter is gloss lacquered, which contributes to a vintage feel engendered by the neck's soft C-profile and shallow-ish proportions.

The adjuster for the two-way truss rod is easily accessed just aft of a nut that sports evenly spaced slots cut for optimum depth. This attribute ensures an equally minimal action because, unlike some of its Burns buddies or the original Cobra, this 6-string serpent doesn't incorporate a zero fret.

Easy playability is maintained by the broad-radius rosewood fingerboard – likewise its complement of 22 cleanly installed and consistently well-finished



That distinctive Burns style is present in all its glory

medium-gauge frets. These are spread over a 648mm (25.5") scale length and partner simple position dots, but the side markers could be bigger for better visibility.

While the UK-made Cobra came with the company's distinctive scroll-topped headstock, this more recent revival has a single-sided design that offers usefully straight string travel. Its outline hints at Epiphone solids from the '60s, but more pertinently the shape echoes the scalloped styling first seen on some Burns instruments introduced earlier in that decade. The new Cobra initially shared this

retro-flavoured feature with the appropriately titled Batwing model, but the latter has since been discontinued.

The headstock face is painted to match body colour and carries a clear plastic badge boldly stating the model name. This identification method is another aspect borrowed from Burns' past, although here the end result is somewhat oversized and accordingly looks quite clumsy.

## Hardware & Parts

The smoothly positive tuners are a generic contemporary type, but

the casings contribute to brand identity by bearing the Burns logo. Although the Cobras pictured in the current Burns catalogue sport two string guides, the review example has just one and this sits on a sensibly high spacer to avoid undue downward drag-induced friction over the nut.

As before, the vintage-tint pickguard adopts the three-part pattern pioneered in the '60s on the Marvin. However, courtesy of an idea contributed by Trevor Wilkinson, the Cobra's scratchplate is essentially Strat-like, embellished by incorporating a separate right horn section that's partnered by an additional individual piece of plastic sited over on the bass side.

The main centre panel carries the pickups and all associated circuitry, with the former being the big difference about this latest Cobra. The previous Club series model used three regular Burns Tri-Sonics, but these have since been superseded by the new Mini equivalent. Designed by pickup expert Adrian Turner of Adeson Pickups, this smaller successor cleverly employs the same components, but with measurements that now match those of a standard Stratocaster single-coil, while performance is virtually on a par with the full-size Tri-Sonic. This revision enables easy direct replacement and Burns will accordingly be selling the new pickups separately for those who fancy indulging in such a mod.

As before, the trio is arranged in Strat-style formation and the plated metal covers increase the Cobra's chrome count. The control configuration seems equally similar, with a five-way selector partnering a master volume and twin tones. However, the first of the latter affects the neck and centre single-coils, while the other governs the bridge pickup. It also incorporates a push/pull switch that allows the extra neck-plus-



## REVIEW ELECTRIC GUITAR BURNS COBRA



### BURNS COBRA

**Price:** £259

**Built in:** China

**Scale length:** 648mm (25.5")

**Nut width:** 43.0mm (1.69")

**Body:** Basswood

**Neck:** Maple, bolt-on

**Fingerboard:** Rosewood

**Frets:** 22 medium

**Pickups:** 3 x Burns Mini Tri-Sonic single-coils

**Controls:** 1 x volume, 2 x tone (2nd with push/pull switch), 5-way selector

**Hardware:** Burns Deluxe bridge/vibrato unit, Burns tuners

**Weight:** 3kg (6.6lb)

**Finishes:** Blue (shown), black, red, white

**Case:** No

**Left-handers:** Yes, 10% extra cost

### CONTACT DETAILS

**Sutherland Trading**

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[www.burnsguitars.com](http://www.burnsguitars.com)

### GB VERDICT

#### GOLD STARS

- ★ Excellent sounds
- ★ Easy playability
- ★ Versatile selection of single-coil combinations
- ★ Impressively accurate vibrato unit

#### BLACK MARKS

- Small side dots are hard to see
- Push/pull switch not easy to operate

#### IDEAL FOR...

Players who fancy Strat-plus performance and some individuality for a pocket-friendly price

#### GB RATING



bridge and all-three-on coil combinations. The Strat-copy control knobs make this switch tricky to operate, while, as on many instruments at this price level, the five-way lever selector is a somewhat spindly type.

The recessed jack socket maintains the Cobra's friendship with Fender's finest, but the vibrato unit departs from equally vintage tradition. Labelled Burns Deluxe, this features a knife-edge pivot method that has echoes of the Marvin's innovative Rezo-Tube design, although the slim inertia block and screw-in arm keep things conventional, as do the six bridge saddles. Feel is quite soft with the unit set up for floating operation, but the action is smooth and responsive, while pitch return is commendably consistent and accurate, no doubt helped by reduced friction up at the headstock.

### Sounds

Played acoustically, this Burns sounds far from inexpensive, courtesy of abundant rich resonance and natural sustain. This cost contradiction continues under



Traditional rectangular heel joint



Just one string tree on the headstock

amplified conditions, with the Cobra delivering the sort of performance usually associated with a more appreciable price tag.

The pickups obviously play a major part in the process, proving the value of Adrian Turner's association. Although a little thinner and slightly more polite than full-size Tri-Sonics, the Mini equivalents have a well-balanced smoothness underlying excellent innate clarity and definition, while



We're big fans of these mini pickups

there's still more than enough typical punch to add matching depth and dimension. These characteristics come across in all three positions, supplying a useful mix of requisite Fender-ish snap and twang, but backed up with enough beef to avoid any brittleness. Some combinations are hum-cancelling, but those selections that aren't still benefit from the pickups' low-noise billing, as they're certainly quieter than many single-coils.

Thanks to these attributes, the Cobra copes equally well under clean or crunch conditions. The pickups ably deliver some satisfying gritty grunt in the latter mode, although further increases in gain prove less aurally rewarding, so metal merchants should look elsewhere.

### Conclusion

It would be easy to dismiss the Cobra as essentially nothing more than a simple Strat clone with a split scratchplate, but that would be doing this Burns a real disservice. Some features are certainly familiar, but they shouldn't overshadow the instrument's inherent original thinking and component count to match.

The pickups, circuitry and vibrato make significant contributions to an impressive overall performance. The Cobra's cosmetic quirks might not suit everyone's taste, but they serve to set this 6-string apart from the many me-too Strat-alikes that still proliferate in the shallow-pocket price sector. Combined with a £259 price tag, the end result is a high-value, very viable and more individual alternative to Fender's overused format. Simply put, the Burns Cobra is a genuine bargain buy. **GB**