

Cort G290 & KX1Q

Electric guitars

These two classy solids confirm that Cort are still very much at the forefront of the Korean electric guitar industry.

Roger Cooper

Despite global economic upheavals and ever-increasing competition from other countries, Cort are managing to maintain their position as the major guitar manufacturer in Korea. Started during the mid '70s, the company were soon building instruments for many mass-market customers around the world, but it wasn't until 1986 that examples appeared under the actual Cort brand name. These were eventually imported here in the late '90s, and Cort have since maintained a pretty consistent profile via a catalogue covering virtually every type of electric. As in the past, many target the lower levels of the market, but some do aim higher, including various signature models.

Early Cort creations were very obviously influenced by Fender and Gibson best sellers, but more recent designs have been less derivative, such as the two reviewed this month.

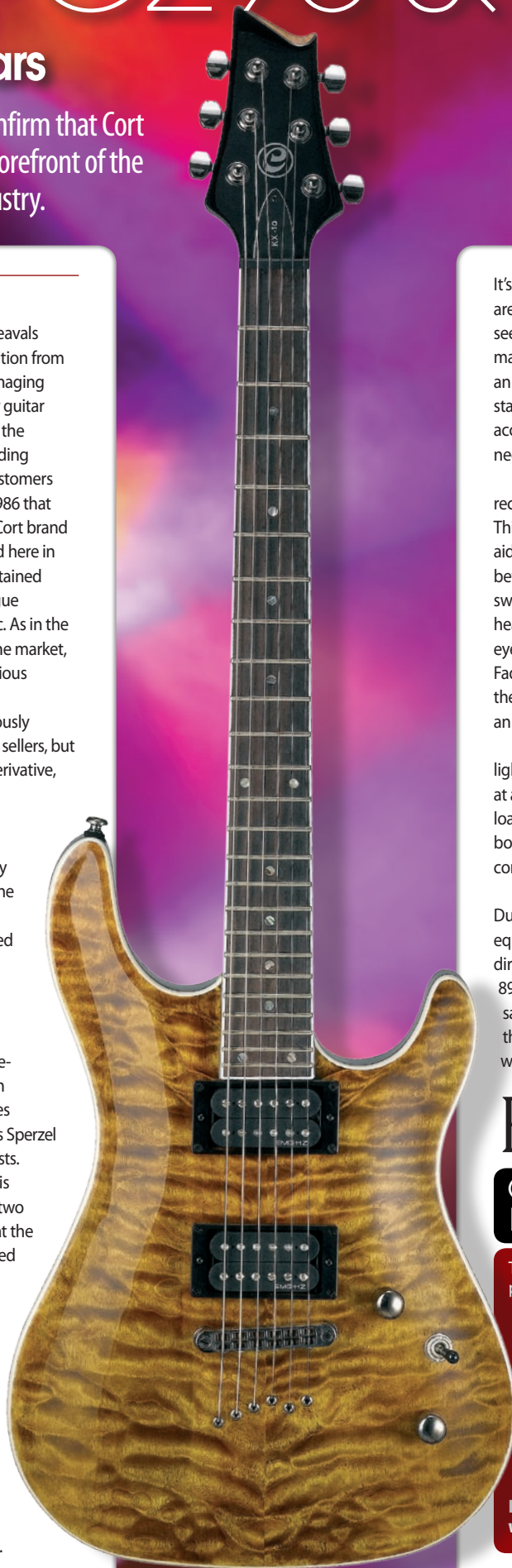
G series styling

The G290 (facing page) tops a currently six-strong G series, which succeeded the essentially similar S range in 2001. The latter models employed an exaggerated Strat body shape conceived by Cort in 1993, and the G models maintain the same styling.

One major change concerned the switch from a compact and curvy, three-tuners-per-side headstock to the stylish six-in-line design seen here. This ensures equally straight string travel and carries Sperzel locking-type tuners with staggered posts.

Sporting a silver Cort logo, the face is finished to match the body and hosts two roller-type string guides. I last looked at the G290 in 2003 and back then it employed a roller nut, which was something of a weak point. This has since been superseded by a conventional Graph Tech Trem Nut, which has beautifully cut slots.

Equally impressively finished are the 22 medium-gauge frets, which span a sleek and slightly radiused rosewood fingerboard. Position markers are offset small abalone dots, which certainly look classy, but tend to vanish from view under stage lights.



It's therefore fortunate that the side repeaters are bright white and accordingly much easier to see. The bolt-on neck is satin-finished birds-eye maple, which has been proportioned to provide an instant Fender feel. The truss-rod adjuster started out behind the nut, but is now an easily accessed wheel inset into the other end of the neck, just past the final fret.

Neck and body are secured via four screws recessed into a curvy and contoured heel block. This reduced mass makes upper fingering easier, aided by deep and airy cutaways that have bevelled edges for extra comfort. The two-piece swamp ash body boasts a carved top faced with heavily quilted maple. The figuring is made more eye-catching by the unusual colouring of the Faded Translucent Black high-gloss finish, while the ash elsewhere assumes a dark grey hue with an enhanced grain pattern.

Although described as being made of lightweight wood, the G290 still tips the scales at a pretty normal 3.5kg. It's an easily managed load, helped by rear waist chamfering, and the body back also accommodates the battery compartment for the EMG active system.

The G290 originally came with Seymour Duncan pickups, but since 2003 it's been equipped with EMG equivalents, with two direct-mounted SA single coils partnering an 89 humbucker at the bridge. Circuitry stays the same, with a five-way selector sited alongside the recessed master volume and tone controls, which bracket a mini coil-split switch for

Performing Musician

G290 £769
KX1Q £449

The unusual finish may not be every player's cup of tea, but the G290 offers a spec that wouldn't be out of place on a high-end American-made equivalent. Performance is equally impressive for the money, and the same can be said about the KX1Q. This isn't quite so high on character or component quality, but it very effectively combines classy looks with no-nonsense delivery.

HC Music Distribution +353 5991 34268
www.cort-guitars.co.uk

the humbucker.

Replacing the Wilkinson VS50II version formerly fitted, Cort's CFA-III version is an equally contemporary twin-pivot design with a slim brass block, chunky stainless steel saddles, and an arm that push-fits into a tension-adjustable collar. The unit is nickel-plated, as are the knobs, but other metalwork remains satin-finished — a lack of cosmetic cohesion that is caused by the continued use of components from the model's earlier incarnation.

Performance

Acoustically, the G290 is thin-toned but quite resonant, while the EMG pickups perform in predictable manner, delivering typically even balance and characteristic clarity, along with commendably low noise levels. The SA neck and centre single coils are quite fluid and open-toned, while the 89 humbucker has expected extra bite, but retains the innate precision that prompts some players to call EMG pickups sterile. However, there's no denying that they do work very well under dirty conditions, because this is where that inherent definition pays real dividends, hence their popularity with many leading rock guitarists.

In keeping with EMG quality, the controls are smoothly gradual, with the tone pot in particular offering a wide range of change. Even when this is fully backed off, the sound is still usable and far from muddy. The humbucker split switch leaves the coil nearest the bridge in circuit. On its own, this sounds somewhat thin and spiky, while the centre pickup combination setting isn't as aurally authentic as the full humbucker equivalent. In my opinion, using the inner coil would be a better option, providing sweeter and beefier alternatives.

As on the earlier G290, some return-to-pitch problems are apparent, and the cure remains the same, ie. removing the friction-inducing string guides. These are made virtually redundant by the staggered-height Sperzel tuners, and taking them off significantly improves tuning stability.

KX1Q model

The KX line is a more recent addition to the Cort electric catalogue, employing styling that plays it pretty safe via the stretched-horns Strat-based shape seen on numerous alternatives from competitors such as Schecter, ESP and Jackson. Most of the five KX models feature a fixed bridge with through-body stringing and the KX1Q (main picture, opposite) is no exception.

All KX models share the same three-tuners-per-side headstock — one that suffers from less sideways string deflection than more traditional designs. On the KX1Q, the offset twin-pointed top is enhanced by a natural-finished chamfer that contrasts the black face, which is a nice cosmetic touch. The nut is again made of graphite, with slots cut for equally minimal action, although spacing isn't quite as consistent. Modern-style machine heads work well and are black nickel-plated, like most of

the other metalwork.

The rosewood fingerboard employs the same 12-inch radius and is similarly smooth, although its bound edges engender a slightly less friendly feel. The scale length stays at a Fender-like 25.5 inches (648mm), while the well-finished medium-gauge frets now number 24. Although the abalone position dots are central and larger, they're no easier to see, but the black side repeaters show up well against the white plastic binding.

The latter contrasts the gloss black finish of the glued-in mahogany neck. This adopts shallow-C shaping, which supplies a more contemporary, but equally comfortable grip. The heel is curved, but not carved away, which is something that would've made upper-end excursions a little easier. The contoured front of the offset-cutaway mahogany body again features a heavily figured maple face. Front edge binding provides a dividing line between the rich amber Tiger Eye top and an otherwise all-black body.

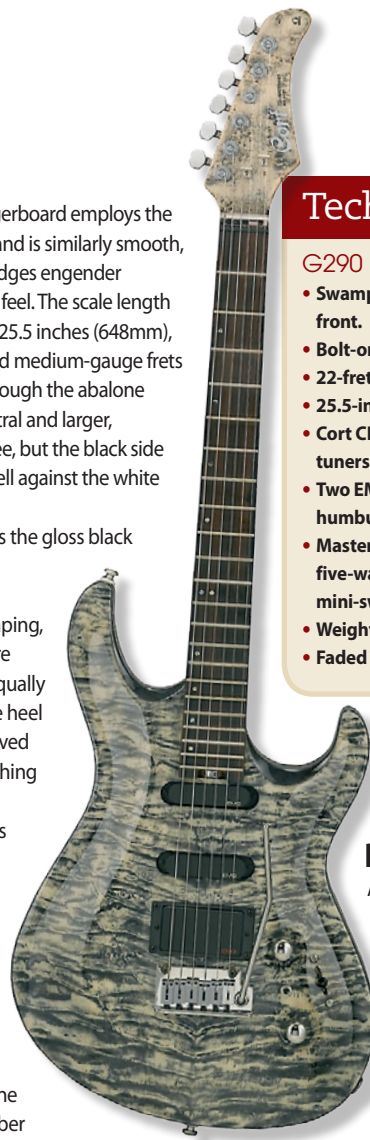
In keeping with its KX companions, the 1Q employs two humbuckers, these being EMG's conventional HZ model, employing Alnico V magnets and exposed black bobbins. The lean control layout comprises master volume and tone, and the latter has a push/pull switch for single-coil operation. The adjacent three-way pickup selector is the only component to obviously contradict the black nickel plating.

The bridge is a Tone Pros licensed Tune-o-matic type that therefore includes grub screws to ensure the tightest possible anchorage on the twin mounting posts. Stringing

Tech Spec

KX1Q

- Mahogany solid body, quilted maple front.
- Glued-in mahogany neck.
- 24-fret bound rosewood fingerboard.
- 25.5-inch (648mm) scale.
- Tone Pros licensed six-saddle bridge, through-body stringing.
- Two EMG HZ humbuckers.
- Master volume and tone controls (the latter with push/pull coil-split switch), three-way pickup selector switch.
- Weight: 3kg.
- Tiger Eye, Black Cherry or Deep Sea Blue finishes.



Tech Spec

G290

- Swamp ash solid body, quilted maple front.
- Bolt-on birds-eye maple neck.
- 22-fret rosewood fingerboard.
- 25.5-inch (648mm) scale.
- Cort CFA-III vibrato unit, Sperzel locking tuners.
- Two EMG SA single coils and one EMG 89 humbucker.
- Master volume and tone controls, five-way pickup selector switch, coil-split mini-switch.
- Weight: 3.5kg.
- Faded Translucent Black finish only.

is through the body, with ferrules front and rear arranged in angled four-plus-two formation.

Performance

Acoustically, the KX1Q is slightly louder and warmer than its stablemate, while the EMG HZ humbuckers sound as conventional as they look, supplying plenty of woody punch. The neck pickup goes suitably deep and meaty, while the bridge position provides extra edge and mid-range muscle. The close positioning of both pickups means that

the centre selection is blessed with an effective and almost Fender-ish blend of chime and clang.

Like the G290, the KX1Q is obviously made to rock, and upping the gain results in some great grind and grunt, with a low-down and dirty delivery that's rather at odds with this guitar's quite refined image. As on the G290, both controls work all the way round, but here, turning back the tone pot tends to woolly things up as usual.

Single-coil mode selects the neck-facing coils of both pickups, supplying three suitably thinned-down sounds that certainly increase versatility, although I feel that leaving both inner coils in operation would result in a couple of more useful selections.

Conclusion

Topping the G series, the G290 offers an impressive spec in terms of construction and components, with many of the latter coming from name-brand makers. The asking price has risen by £170 in the past five years, but this high-quality Cort still offers a lot of electric guitar for the money, along with more individuality than many.

The KX1Q may not be quite as characterful, but it looks equally classy, and although the components may be more price-conscious, they undoubtedly work well together. This successful mix means that underneath the deluxe image is a simple but effective solid, and one that certainly offers a viable alternative to similarly styled equivalents from other makers. ■ PM

Performing Musician

+LIVE SOUND WORLD

This article was originally published in
Performing Musician magazine, **June 2009 edition.**



Performing Musician, Media House, Trafalgar Way, Bar Hill, Cambridge, CB23 8SQ, United Kingdom

Email: subscribe@performing-musician.com

Tel: +44 (0) 1954 789888 Fax: +44 (0) 1954 789895

Subscribe & Save Money!

Visit our subscriptions page at www.performing-musician.com

All contents copyright © SOS Publications Group and/or its licensors, 1985-2009. All rights reserved.

The contents of this article are subject to worldwide copyright protection and reproduction in whole or part, whether mechanical or electronic, is expressly forbidden without the prior written consent of the Publishers. Great care has been taken to ensure accuracy in the preparation of this article but neither Sound On Sound Limited nor the publishers can be held responsible for its contents. The views expressed are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the publishers.