

Cherry Pies

Thirty years on from the golden era of widdly, dive-bombing, big-hair shred guitar, one of the icons of 80s metal has ditched the old school wood for some unexpected timbers

Words Ed Mitchell Photography Adam Gasson







JACKSON PRO SERIES DINKY DK2 ASH & X SERIES MONARKH SCX ZEBRAWOOD £819 & £559

CONTACT **Fender GBI** PHONE **01342 331700** WEB **www.jacksonsguitars.com**

What You Need To Know

1

Who says shred is dead, huh?

Not everyone is your 'one note says more than a thousand' BB King or Peter Green wannabe. Jackson has been kitting out speed freaks since the 1980s and these latest models follow in the tradition of metal/shred machines with big frets on super slim necks. These are the guitars Grunge and Britpop tried to destroy... yet they're still going strong.

2

What's the sizzle with these things?

Sniff around for a modern rock/shred guitar and you'll likely find yourself swamped by an avalanche of stuff chiselled from chunks of basswood. It's refreshing then to see Jackson use the old Tele favourite, ash, on the Pro Series Dinky DK2, and mahogany and zebrawood combined to form the chassis of the X Series Monarkh SCX.

3

Other than the wood, it's business as usual then?

Well, you don't usually find such a minuscule neck profile on single-cut guitars. The spellcheck triggering Monarkh has an even slimmer neck than the wide-thin profile job on a PRS SE. The Dinky DK2 shares the same profile. These guitars are definitely aimed at a certain type of player... and it ain't Joe Bonamassa.

Some guitars automatically transport you back to a time and place. You can't pick up an Olympic White Fender Stratocaster and not imagine Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock. A Gretsch Country Gentleman? George Harrison in 1964 at the height of Beatlemania. A yellowed Alpine White Gibson Les Paul Custom? Steve Jones, a knotted hanky, and the rest of the Sex Pistols in 1977. The list goes on...

For those of us who were actually alive at the time, a twin-humbucker, double-locking rock/metal/shred machine plunks us right back in the mid-to-late 80s. This was the era when guitarists were 'gunslingers' with a loaded six-string on their backs. They played for keeps apparently with a 22-inch waist, a bicycle pump thrust conspicuously down the inside leg, with hair like Tina Turner's *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* fright wig.

The new Jackson Pro Series Dinky DK2 taps right into what dexterous widdlers of the 80s considered to be the ultimate six-string specification: a 'super-Strat' format with two direct-mount Seymour Duncans, a floating Floyd Rose vibrato, big frets on a flat 'board, and a pointy headstock on a neck you could slide under an airtight door.

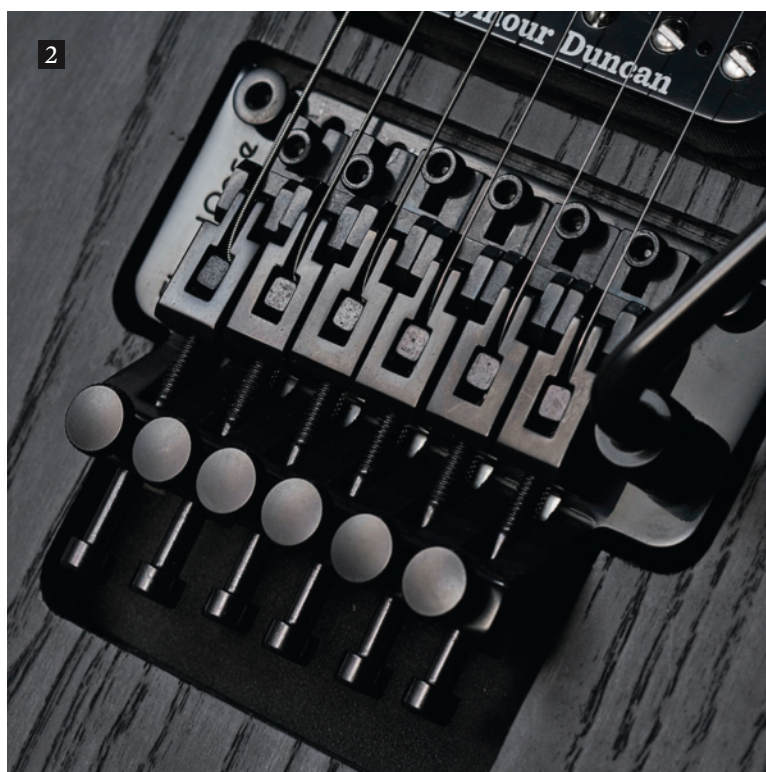
On the face of it, the double-cut, whammy-spec'd bolt-on Dinky DK2 and the single-cut, set-neck, hardtail Monarkh SCX that joins it in this review, appear to have little in common. Not so. Aside from a snake-hipped neck profile both guitars are the result of Jackson moving away from traditional metal/shred body timbers.

Getting to grips with the Mexico-born Dinky DK2 first, the Strat-like body, albeit with sharper edges, is cut from ash which is coated in a Charcoal Gray finish. Jackson has allowed the finish to sink into the wood grain meaning you can feel every bump and crevice in the wood. Tactile you might say. Bottom line: it looks fantastic. The body is contoured for rib cages and beer bellies on the back, and 'round the front to accommodate your forearm.

The quality control in this thing is higher than Jon Bon Jovi's wail. For example, the vibrato recess has a foam pad at the bottom to prevent noise when you pull up on the double-locking Floyd Rose FRT-O2000 vibrato. The pickup cavities are routed beautifully, playing host to a pair of direct mount Seymour Duncan humbuckers.

Let's be honest. No one at Jackson lost any sleep over the choice of pickups here. Installing a TB-4 JB Trembucker in the bridge position and a SH-1N '59 at the neck has become a rock guitar cliché. The good news is, this setup still offers the best combo of power, clarity and tone in our opinion so we'll greet it as an old friend.

With its Charcoal Gray finish the build quality on the Dinky DK2 is higher than Jon Bon Jovi's wail



Moving along, the 648mm (25.5-inch) scale DK2 features a super slim bolt-on maple neck topped with an ebony 'board with 24 jumbo frets and a 305mm to 406mm (12-16-inch) compound radius. The neck is described by Jackson as a one-piece but it features a scarf joint. For the uninitiated, this means the neck is actually two-piece. The headstock bit joins the main part of the neck at the third fret. This construction method has been used on metal guitars for decades. Some say it promotes neck stiffness, others that it's more cost effective for manufacturers. We reckon it's a combination of the two.

The neck is further strengthened by internal graphite rods. Flip the guitar over and you'll find the neck is secured to the body with three bolts with some sculpting at the heel to provide great upper fret access.

Sourced from Indonesia and looking not too dissimilar to an ESP/LTD Eclipse, the single-cutaway 628mm (24.75-inch) scale Monarkh SCX is built around a mahogany back partnered with an arched zebra wood veneered top. The latter timber species is apparently difficult to machine but the fruit of Jackson's labours looks great here. The zebra wood is also tactile and is offset by the non-direct mount black open coil 'High Output' humbuckers, tune-o-matic-style bridge and stud tailpiece, two volume and master tone controls and a three-way pickup selector toggle switch.

The glued-in maple neck is as slim as that of the DK2 and also features the same scarf joint and graphite strengthening rods.



Here you get a rosewood 'board with the same compound radius for excellent playability across said 'board, a bunch of trademark 'snowdrift' inlays and 22 jumbo frets. The Monarkh's body is only 37mm deep. This, along with some serious contouring at the neck/body join makes upper fret access a breeze.

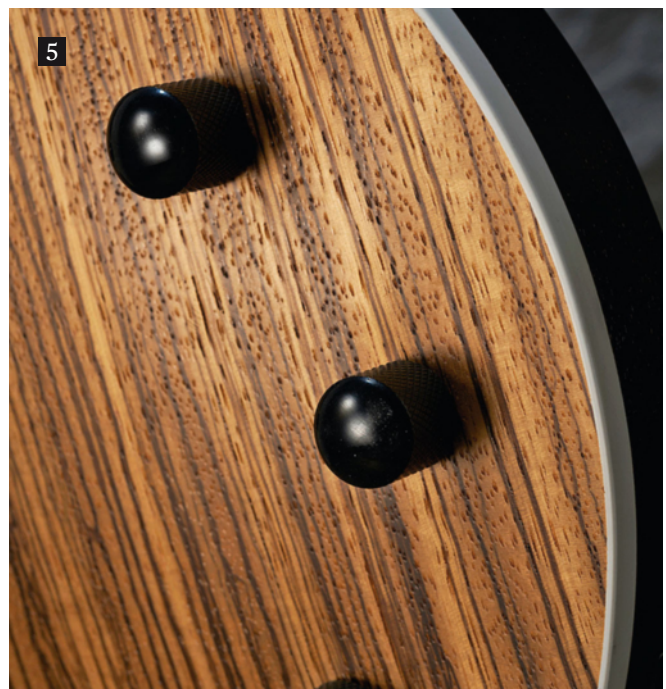
Feel & Sounds

While the neck profile of the DK2 and the Monarkh is the same, the performance differs considerably. Both models come fitted with 0.009-0.042 gauge strings. That's fine on the DK2 where the 648mm

1. The spear-like Jackson headstock is as iconic for 80s shredders as big hair and bigger choruses

2. Just like you can't really play rockabilly without a Bigsby, the DK2 has the essential shred accoutrement: the Floyd Rose double-locking vibrato. As ever, this well-engineered piece of kit keeps the tuning rock solid

3. Flipping the Dinky DK2 over you might be surprised to find only three screws holding its neck in place. The fourth screw has been sacrificed in favour of a sculpted heel for better upper fret access



(25.5-inch) scale maintains some snap in the bottom strings. On the more Gibson-like 628mm (24.75-inch) scale on the Monarkh, the bottom strings feel loose and less defined. If you've ever tried a Les Paul fitted with 0.009s you'll know what we mean. You could move up a gauge, or two, but then you're sort of defeating the point of the shred guitar setup.

That lack of focus in the Monarkh's bottom end is even more apparent when you plug in. The twin pickups have all the grunt that the 'High Output' name suggests, with a definite bias towards the midrange and high-end. The bridge unit is best described as brash on clean settings although flicking to the middle and neck positions does add a little warmth. Unsurprisingly, this guitar prefers to shake its fist than whisper sweet nothings. Adding some filth reveals the bridge 'buckers' true voice. It's punchy enough to cut through a mix and there's a decent amount of note separation.

The Dinky DK2's longer scale length makes the strings sing in every position.

That's not all. This is the most stable guitar neck we've ever played. On most guitars you can grab the headstock and give it a tug for some impromptu vibrato. That is certainly true of the Monarkh despite that fact it has the same strengthening gadgets. Yet, you can't do that on the DK2. Feel free to put that down to the graphite strengthening rods, the scarf joint, maybe even the ebony 'board. The fact is, that stability makes for a lively performance. There are no dead spots. Notes ping off the 'board like tiny rockets.

The DK2's five-way pickup switch offers in position 1, the bridge JB 'bucker; Position 2 splits the JB leaving only its inner coil in action. Position 3 voices the inner coils of both the JB and '59; position 4, the neck's inner coil only. Lastly, position 5 has the neck '59 on full power.

There's a lot of tonal variety on offer here. The JB in full-on mode has that classic blend of warmth and sparkle on a clean setting. Dial in some gain and you're in classic rock mode for big riffs and singing sustain. The ash body seems to bring a

lightness to the tone in all positions. There's less muddiness in the neck position than we expected and there's a sweet glassiness to the single coil settings. Don't typecast the DK2 as a miffed rock beast. This guitar is just as happy keeping it clean.

Verdict

If we learned anything from the explosion in guitar design in the 1980s it was that big frets on a flatter radius 'board equals happy days for choke-free string bending. What many of us also realised since the golden age of lollipop stick-necked metal machines is the amount of wood in your palm doesn't

The Monarkh SCX undoubtedly looks the part thanks to that zebrawood top but the thin neck feels awkward



necessarily impact on your fretting speed. Big necks can be just as fast. The super slim neck profile shared by the Dinky DK2 and the Monarkh SCX is an 80s throwback then, and the feature most likely to divide the opinion of potential investors. That's just personal preference, of course. You'll know which camp you're happiest in.

What we can say with certainty is the Dinky DK2 is the pick of the litter here. Even though we were surprised to discover that you don't get a gig bag for your 800-odd sheets, the body wood, scale length, direct mount Seymours, floating Floyd, compound radius and ultra-stable neck distinguish the DK2 as perfect a shred machine as you'll find at any price. The Monarkh SCX? Not so much. It undoubtedly looks the part thanks to that zebrawood top but the thin neck feels awkward with the 628mm (24.75-inch) scale.

Our advice? If you need a guitar with a tiny neck to get you up to speed go straight for the Pro Series Dinky DK2. Bicycle pump strictly optional. **G**

4. Like Jagger and Richards, Tyler and Perry, the DK2's Seymour Duncan JB and '59 pups are a great rock partnership. These guys have been a staple of rock and metal guitars since the 80s

5. While the Dinky DK2 features a decidedly non-metal Ash body, the Monarkh SCX goes for an even more exotic twist with a Mahogany and Zebrawood combo. Chosen for its distinctive grain, the latter timber ensures that every Monarkh will look different

6. From its gorgeous body to its gnarly headstock, the Monarkh looks stunning. Sadly there are a few issues when you start to play it



JACKSON PRO SERIES DINKY DK2 ASH

PRICE: £819

ORIGIN: Mexico

TYPE: Double-cutaway electric

BODY: Ash

NECK: Maple, with graphite reinforcement, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Floyd Rose R3 Locking/42.8mm

FINGERBOARD: Ebony, compound 305mm to 406mm (12-16") radius

FRETS: 24, jumbo

HARDWARE: Black Floyd Rose FRT-02000 Double-Locking vibrato and Jackson sealed diecast tuners

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53mm

ELECTRICS: 1x Seymour Duncan JB TB-4 humbucker (bridge), 1x Seymour Duncan SH-1N '59 humbucker (neck), master volume, master tone and five-way pickup selector lever switch

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 3.5/7.13

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: The Dinky DK2 is available in various formats including an alder or okoume body; the Dinky DK2QM HT offers a hardtail version at £819

LEFT-HANDERS: The Dinky DK2 LH at £819

FINISHES: Charcoal Gray (as reviewed)

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8/10

PROS: The build quality, choice of tone woods, hardware, pickups, and the astonishing neck stability, make the Dinky DK2 a killer package

CONS: The super slim neck profile will alienate some. A gigbag would've been nice, too!



JACKSON X SERIES MONARKH SCX ZEBRAWOOD

PRICE: £559

ORIGIN: Indonesia

TYPE: Single-cutaway electric guitar

BODY: Mahogany back with zebrawood (veneer) top

NECK: Maple, with graphite reinforcement, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 628mm (24.75")

NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic/41.3mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, compound 305mm to 406mm (12-16") radius

FRETS: 22, jumbo

HARDWARE: Black radius-compensated tune-o-matic bridge and stop tailpiece, and sealed die-cast tuners

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Jackson 'High Output' humbuckers with independent volume controls, master tone and three-way toggle pickup selector switch

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 3.3/7.3

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: X Series Monarkh SCX FM (with flame maple top) at £559; X Series Monarkh SCX7 seven-string at £629

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Natural (as reviewed)

6/10

PROS: Shredders will love the thin neck and easy access to the upper frets. We like the bold use of Zebrawood for the Monarkh's top

CONS: We've seen better finish quality at the price and, again, not everyone will go a bundle on the neck