

GROOVE TOOLS BY CONKLIN GT-4

Made in Korea
 Price: \$999
 Warranty: One-year limited
 Weight: 8 lbs, 8 oz
 Scale length: 34"
 Neck width @ nut: 1 9/16"
 String spacing @ bridge: 2 5/8"

	1	2	3	4	5
Construction:	■	■	■	■	■
Electronics:	■	■	■	■	■
Playability:	■	■	■	■	■
Sound:	■	■	■	■	■
Value:	■	■	■	■	■

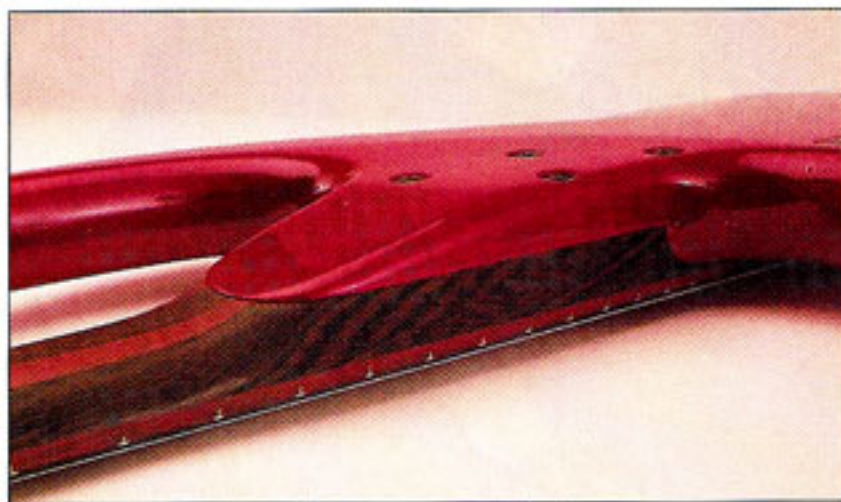
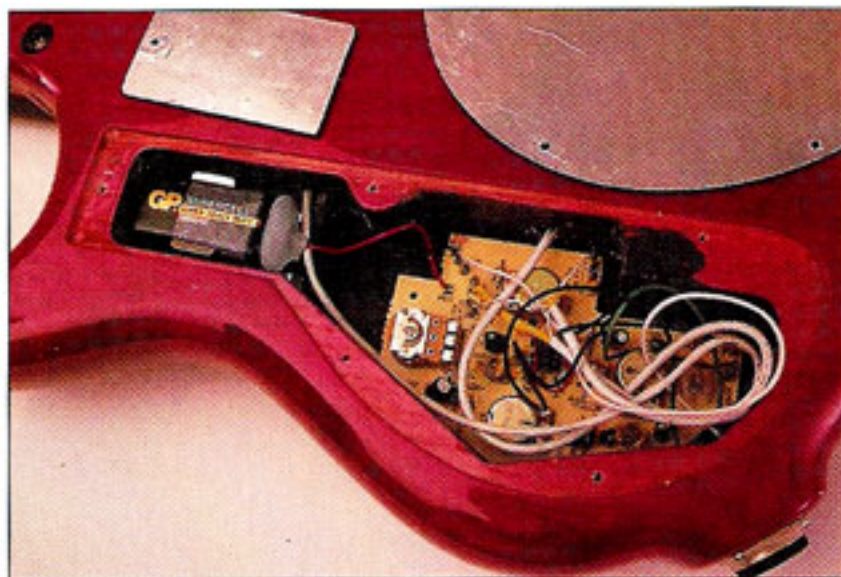
Bottom Line: Love-it-or-leave-it looks mask a surprisingly versatile instrument.

Tapping the same sensibilities that produced such audacious axes as the "Melted Top" doubleneck, Conklin's Korean-made Groove Tools line offers solid performance in an unusual package. From its transparent purple, polyester-finished quilted-maple top to its purpleheart fingerboard and distinctive shape, the bolt-on GT-4 has looks you'll either embrace or tilt an eyebrow at.

The GT-4's straightforward electronics consist of two active soap-bar pickups controlled by master-volume, blend, treble, and bass knobs. The Conklin-logo pickups are similar to the Mighty Mites found in the Cort Artisan, but the Conklin's have a different number of coil windings. Same goes for the preamp, though the battery has its own compartment. Copper foil and somewhat messily applied conductive paint shield the electronics cavity, where reasonably tidy wiring leads to a Neutrik locking output jack.

The Tool's skunk-striped wenge/purpleheart neck plays comfortably up to its extended heel ramp; access to frets 17 through 24 is best accomplished via upright-style thumb positions (fine for Steve Bailey, but a little tough for the rest of us). Our tester's frets were nicely polished with only one high spot and no gaps. However, our amps picked up a lot of rattling on the G string from frets 7 to 12. The headstock—which is either attractively contoured or looks like Gumby, take your pick—holds Gotoh tuners. The headstock is angled back for better downward string pressure on the plastic nut; the nut's high profile doesn't impede action or mess with low-fret intonation, but it does help give the strings a nice, tight feel. The satin neck finish feels pleasing to the palm.

Boasting especially sweet highs and high mids, the Conklin has a musical blend from top to bottom. The low boost has an unusual peak that can produce a ballsy growl, although one tester found the basic low-end sound a bit thin and the bass boost boomy. High boost is smooth with some noise at the upper end. Despite a lack of color on the E string, the tight, dry slap sound got high marks. Comments: "Upper horn very imposing to look down at." "Looks like a hot-water bottle." "Can do Stanley Clarke to reggae." "Amazing how basses in this price range have improved."



PRODUCT Profiles

INSTRUMENTS • AMPLIFIERS • SIGNAL PROCESSORS • ACCESSORIES



Conklin New Century Series Club Model 5-String

By Scott Malandrone

Making custom basses is the order of the day for Missouri's Conklin Guitars. Whether it's a wild-looking doubleneck with a "Melted Top" or a 7-string monster for the "Buddha of the Bass," Bill Dickens, Conklin specializes in building exotic instruments. Fortunately for the rest of us, Conklin also crafts a variety of "regular"

basses. Luthier Bill Conklin offered to send us one of his latest creations; we checked out a New Century Series Club Model 5-string. (Yes, it's also available as a 7-string.)

Three pieces of cherry wood are used for the body. (Conklin uses two to three pieces of wood based on available wood widths.) Cherry—which looks similar to mahogany and is also known as New England Mahogany—is

popular with furniture builders for its beauty. The test instrument's translucent purple stain enhanced the wood's grain nicely, and its polyester top coat finish had a mirror-like shine. The areas inside the horns (which are the toughest spots on a body to buff) were a bit dull, though.

The wide-and-flat-profile neck joins the body at the 13th fret. The neck joint on our tester was

super tight—so much so we almost couldn't remove the neck to inspect the cavity. A 7½"-deep neck pocket

allows string vibrations to transfer into the body more efficiently. Upper-register access is also enhanced by a beveled heel that tapers into the neck. Since neck stiffness plays a big part in an instrument's tone, the Conklin's neck sports five pieces of quartersawn flame maple and purpleheart. This strong "sandwich" design eliminates the need for graphite strips in the neck and reduces the chance of twisting or warping.

The headstock is tilted back 10° for better downward string pressure on the nut, which further improves tone; a volute reinforces the vulnerable area underneath the nut. The backside of the neck has a semi-gloss urethane finish that's sanded to a dull patina for a smooth feel. (We could, however, see a few small shiny areas on the test bass.)

Purpleheart, a hardwood found in Central and South America, is the wood of choice for the fingerboard; its density adds a warm attack to the tone. Rather than fit

PROS:

- Meaty B string
- Custom-tailored feel
- Woody, modern tone

CONS:

- A bit heavy for some players
- Onboard preamp could be mounted better

the board with both front and side position markers, Conklin places mother-of-pearl markers along the top edge of the fingerboard; these are visible from both the front and the side.

Two dozen jumbo frets are compression-fit into the fingerboard and held in place with super glue. They all shine like chrome and have smoothly polished ends and good crowns. Our

straightedge fret-height test revealed a few minor uneven spots, but these didn't result in any unusual string

buzzes. The super-hard Delrin nut has a good profile; each string sits with only half of its diameter in its respective groove.

The overall setup of the test bass was excellent. Its single-action truss rod was powerful enough to

keep the neck straight with standard .045-.130 strings. There was also a nice amount of natural relief (.020" at the 7th fret) without any tension on the rod—good for those who

Conklin New Century Series Club Model 5-String
List Price: \$2,797

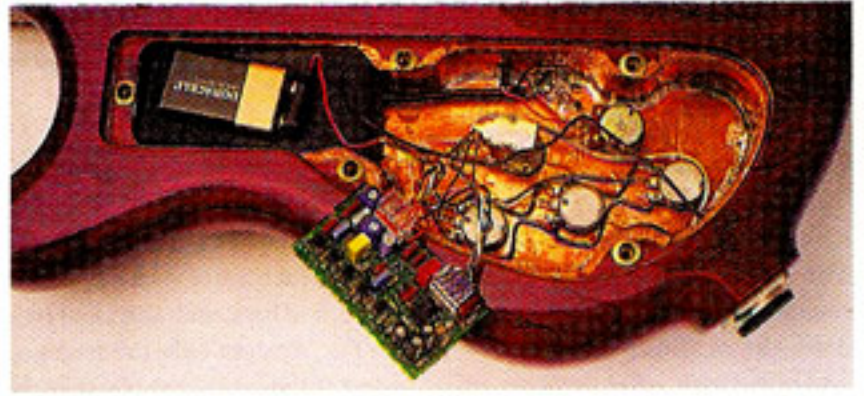
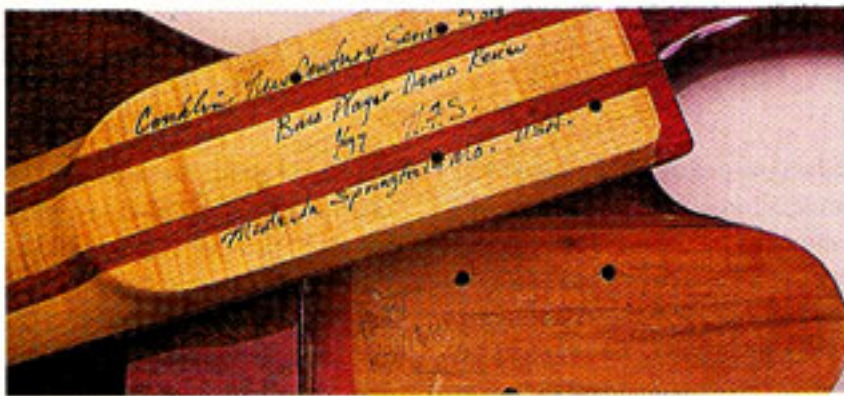
1 • 2 • 3 • 4 • 5

Construction: 
Electronics: 
Playability: 
Sound: 
Value: 

PRODUCT PROFILE RATINGS

The scores shown in each Product Profile reflect our evaluation of performance based on price. In other words, "average" performance at a list price of \$500 is understood to be less than "average" performance at a list price of \$2,000. We use this rating system:

- 5 OUTSTANDING
- 4 ABOVE AVERAGE
- 3 AVERAGE
- 2 BELOW AVERAGE
- 1 UNSATISFACTORY



Conklin extends the neck pocket deep into the body for maximum stability and better tone.

You can boost the slap contour's low end by as much as 9dB (at 83Hz) and cut the midrange by 11dB (at 633Hz) by turning the small pots located on the preamp board.

Conklin New Century Series Club Model 5-String

Delrin nut, 1¹¹/₁₆" (1.989") wide

Purpleheart fingerboard, 16" radius

24 jumbo frets (.110" x .050")

String height at 12th fret: 2¹/₁₆" (.046") G, 1¹/₁₆" (.078") B

34" scale

Three-piece cherry wood body w/polyester finish

Lane Poor SB 4230 passive pickups

ABM brass bridge, 1¹/₁₆" (.790") string spacing

13"

SN# 2

Made in: U.S.A.

List price: \$2,397 (\$2,797 as tested)

Hardshell case: Included

Warranty: Lifetime limited

Weight: 10 lbs, 10 oz

Color: Cellophane purple; many others available

Options: Maple, walnut, purpleheart, alder, or ash body (\$100); Plus package w/Basslines 3-band EQ (\$200); Pro package w/Lane Poor pickups, preamp, and EQ (\$400); Premium package w/neck-through-body construction (\$500)

Other models: Tour model w/figured-maple top (\$2,697); Session model with three-piece "Melted Top" (\$2,797)

Manufacturer's address
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Springfield, MO 65801
(417) 886-3525
(417) 886-2934 fax
pcs-network.com/conklin

Volute

Schaller tuners (Gotohs standard)

Oval-shape neck profile

Five-piece flame-maple/purpleheart neck with urethane finish

Recessed strap-lock buttons

45"

Four-bolt neck joint

22³/₄"

1¹/₈"

Master volume w/pull slap contour

Treble (±15dB @ 6.5kHz)

Midrange (±14dB @ 650Hz)

Blend

Bass (±12dB @ 30Hz)

Locking output jack

Conklin *continued*

have a heavy plucking-hand attack. The neck profile is beefy, but its smooth finish reduces hand fatigue. Also, the medium-low action—combined with a flat fingerboard (the Conklin has a 16" radius, while a typical Fender has a rounder 7¼" radius)—offers a great feel all the way up the neck.

Basslines soapbar pickups are standard on the Club Model; our test bass came fitted with the "Pro Package," which includes two Lane Poor passive soapbars. Looking at their magnet structure with magnetic viewing paper reveals a wide-aperture coil arrangement that extends well past the edges of the G and B strings. The pickups feature twin "Bi-Lateral" coil construction to reject 60Hz hum. They're wired to a Basslines STC-3P active preamp that sits inside a shielded control cavity. There's also a battery compartment; removing one screw

from a threaded insert provides access to the battery.

Five knobs on the face on the instrument control master volume, blend, and bass, midrange, and treble EQ. We didn't like the arrangement of the knobs: the blend knob is too close to the bass control, and adjusting it causes your fingers to get stuck between the knobs. (Bill Conklin responds: "We use this knob arrangement because it is most practical as our control cavities are often packed with such electronics options as parametric EQ, piezo buffers, and additional batteries. We will make every effort to spread apart the pots slightly; however, most players do not grab the entire knob but instead use their fingertips to turn them.") The preamp also has a built-in slap contour, which boosts the lows and cuts the mids for a modern slap tone. (The amount of boost and cut is adjustable via two small pots on the board.) This contour is engaged

when you pull up on the master volume control. We also weren't crazy about the mounting of the preamp board; it's wedged between the cavity wall and the master-volume pot. The pot is pushing very hard on the board (you have to move the pot to the side a bit to get the board into the cavity), and this could be a problem down the road. Mind you, these complaints have nothing to do with the fine sound and excellent playability of the bass (the main reasons you buy an instrument)—but bear in mind this instrument does retail for nearly three grand, so these details should be looked into.

Acoustically, the New Century is snappy and bright. Its heavy body, brute-weight ABM brass bridge, and laminated neck add up to a boatload of punch and cut. (If you play four sets a night, though, this particular wood and hardware combo may be a bit heavy—so you might consider one of the other optional body woods.) The B string has a nice

tone that's evenly matched with the other strings, although it requires a bit more delicate touch with the instrument's stock setup.

Plugged into our Eden, G-K, SWR, and Trace Elliot rigs, the Conklin had a very deep yet balanced sound. The B string has grand-piano-like clarity and sustain, which is impressive for a 34"-scale bass. We especially liked the mondo-J tone with the pickup-blend control rolled slightly toward the bridge pickup—perfect for fingers or funk. And we also liked the slap switch, although you'll need to tailor its curve to your particular amp setup to prevent input overloading.

The New Century Series Club Model shows why a handmade, custom instrument is worth the extra bucks. The amount of personal attention paid to the bass really shows. If you've got a particular dream bass in mind, I'm sure Bill Conklin and his staff can help you to find it. P

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