

# BILLY JACKED

## Yamaha BB714BS Billy Sheehan Signature bass

BY ED FRIEDLAND

**I**N THE EARLY EIGHTIES, Billy Sheehan tore rock's bass-playing world a new one with a level of low-end mastery that has yet to be topped. If you think you're a badass, check out Billy—and then start practicing!

While Sheehan built his formidable technique on his trusty “Franken-Fender” P-Bass, in 1985 he joined forces with Yamaha to create a unique signature instrument, which became the Attitude bass. The Yamaha BB714BS is Billy's newest model and incorporates many of his signature features. And with a street price of \$699, it's well within the reach of most players.

### FEATURES

**SHEEHAN'S FIRST** Yamaha was built on the well-established BB platform, making the 714BS a return trip. The solid alder body is a bit larger than your typical Fender-style instrument, but the bass is a comfortable weight and balances well. The test bass was a sexy sparkling Lava Red finish with matching headstock, and it's also available in black. The four-bolt maple neck is capped with a 21-fret rosewood fingerboard, which is not scalloped like the Attitude bass. The 10-inch radius is a nice compromise between a traditional rounded feel and modern flatter fingerboards. The 1.56-inch width at the nut and rounded “C” neck profile were chosen to appeal to those that might be turned away by the Attitude's bigger neck. The solid brass bridge offers superior sustain and clarity and gets the same black-nickel finish as the rest of the hardware.

Of course, it wouldn't be a Billy bass without a big-old honkin' humbucker in the neck position, paired with a classic split-coil in P-Bass position. The ceramic pickup magnets give the bass an aggressive quality that fits its rock and roll pedigree, though the humbucker can certainly warm up the tone nicely. The humbucker uses dual ferrous blades instead of traditional pole-pieces to avoid dropouts when bending strings. The passive tone control operates typically but also employs an independent high-cut to the humbucker via its push/pull pot. The control panel is a simple volume/volume/tone arrangement. While the Attitude bass runs its two pickups to

separate outputs, the 714BS blends both pickups to one output, which is more practical for single-channel use.

The 714BS is built in Indonesia and exhibits workmanship worthy of a more expensive price tag. You'll be seeing many more excellent imports coming from this country in the future.

### PERFORMANCE

**BETWEEN ITS TWO** pickups, the BB714BS can cover a lot of ground. Certainly, classic P-Bass tones are all there, perhaps with a bit brighter presence. Vintage-tone freaks might find it a little edgy, but when you consider the need to blend with the humbucker without getting lost and the potential for multiple effects use, the pickup's cutting power makes perfect sense.

Yamaha calls its humbucker the “woofer” pickup, and due to its placement at the end of the fingerboard it has the authoritative bark of a St. Bernard. The company designed this pickup to have more high-end than usual. I expected to hear the classic “mudbucker” tone of an old Gibson but found it to have a clearly articulated, throaty rasp. That's when I discovered the stealthy high-cut switch built into the tone control. Pop that sucker, and it's volcanic-eruption time. Deep, dark, molten dub tones flowed from the Yamaha. Blending in the split-coil pickups narrows the beam for a more distinct voice, and because the passive tone control works independently of the high-cut switch, interesting tonal variations are possible with the two pickups.

Sheehan is not known as a slapper, and so one might expect this bass to be ill-suited to the style. However, if you can adjust to the very narrow window of opportunity between the neck pickup and the fingerboard, it's possible to slap and pop on the 714BS. The tone is super chunky, but there is enough spank in this plank to get across the funk.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

**THE BB714BS** IS a solid, well-built ax with a rock and roll attitude, but it offers many tonal options that make it useful wherever big-ass bass is needed. 🌟

PRO	CON
AFFORDABLE QUALITY; CLASSIC TONES AND UNIQUE DEEP VOICE; COMFY NECK PROFILE	SLAPPING IS POSSIBLE BUT DIFFICULT

**YAMAHA BB714BS BILLY SHEEHAN SIGNATURE BASS**

**LIST PRICE:** \$1,099.00

**MANUFACTURER:**

Yamaha Guitars,  
yamaha.com

**BODY:** Alder

**NECK:** Maple, bolt-on

**FINGERBOARD:**

Rosewood

**FRETS:** 21

**SCALE:** 34 inches

**PICKUPS:** Ceramic split-coil, ferrous/ceramic blade humbucker

**CONTROLS:** Two volume, master tone with high-cut push/pull pot

**NUT WIDTH:** 1.56 inches

The massive humbucker has two distinct personalities thanks to the high-cut switch.

