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ISLAND UNTO ITSELF

The Supro Hampton

Supro's vintage Ozark guitar is famed as Jimi Hendrix's first axe. According to legend, his father bought him an off-white '57 Model 1560S in 1959 from Seattle's Myers Music for \$89. It doesn't get much more illustrious than that.

Fast-forward half a century and change, and the resurrected Supro company—highly regarded for its reimagined reissue amps—launches a new solid-body electric line based on the Ozark.

Today's Supro labels this their Island Series, and the three guitars that comprise it are modeled on the '62 Ozark; the base single-pickup Jamesport, the two-pickup Westbury, and the full-bore, triple-pickup, top-of-the-line Hampton.

Let's get things straight right from the start: these are *not* reissues. The Hampton and siblings are billed as both "a 21st-century update" and "high-performance adaption." In other words, the best of the old blended with smart modern innovations.

The Hampton's alder body features the Ozark's original shape with smoothly beveled edges. The set-neck construction offers ideal ergonomics, with black satin finish for ultra-fast hand movement. The C-shape maple neck topped with rosewood 12"-radius fretboard boasts a scale stretching 25.5". All in all, the Hampton's a supremely *comfortable* guitar.

The strings are routed from an updated Wave tailpiece over a Tune-O-Matic bridge to Kluson-style tuners. These fixtures mark the Hampton as a pro-level instrument, albeit at a budget price.

Fine and dandy, but how about replicating the famous Ozark voice? We plugged the Hampton into a new 1x10 Supro Comet 1610RT to try it out.

The original Ozarks had a lowdown, gritty growl, thanks to the single-coil pickups designed by electrical engineer Ralph Keller for Valco in the early '50s. The pickups not only featured broadband, versatile sound,

but did their tricks with remarkably low background noise.

Today's Supro worked with vintage pickup expert Ken Calvet to craft a modern take on that old sound. The new single-coil Gold Foil mini-humbucker-sized pickups are faithful reproductions of the original Keller pickups—but with some twists.

The bridge pickup is wound hotter than the others and deals out twang that never ends. Hit the strings hard when the selector's in the bridge position and you're instantly transported back to a sock hop circa 1960 and the glory days of rock and roll.

The middle pickup, meanwhile, is reverse wound, reverse polarity, fully canceling any hum in the second and fourth positions of the five-way selector switch. So not only do the pickups sound vintage cool, they also boast modern amenities, such as low noise and little buzz.

The Hampton's voice covers a lot of bases. In the neck position,

the sound is wonderfully fat, providing warm, even jazzy tones. Switching to the middle, the sound truly sparkles—and if you dig in and play hard, you can unearth a funky spank. Go to the bridge, and you get that never-ending twang.

The second and fourth positions offer more magic. Unreel compressed-sounding double-stops or 200-proof rock rhythm riffs that make it clear why Dan Auerbach of the Black Keys has long been a vintage Supro fan.

Built in Indonesia, the fit and finish of the Hampton and its siblings shows care.

With prices of original Ozarks climbing, the new Supro Island Series is an ideal old-meets-new axe with vintage looks and smart modern tech that makes it a great all-rounder for the home, studio, or gigging. — *Michael Dregni VG*

Price: \$1,099 (list)
Info: suprousa.com

