Subject: Re: Used Instruments
Posted by Thermionic on Wed, 29 Aug 2012 03:24:29 GMT
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I've always preferred buying used stringed instruments, except when looking for something very specific, unique, and "just exactly the way I want it," in which case buying new is usually the only way to get it. The reason I prefer used stringed instruments is because the wood has had the opportunity to settle in and do what it's gonna do. A brand new electric guitar's neck will frequently require a truss rod adjustment after the first seasonal change. Usually, a quality guitar stabilizes after one or two adjustments, and will typically then remain that way for years, unless extensively exposed to extremes of heat, cold, and humidity.

But, the relatively small inconvenience of a truss rod adjustment and perhaps some minor action adjustments is not what I'm referring to here. Necks can also warp, hook, or twist, which can't be adjusted out. These problems don't rear their head while the guitar is hanging in the music store; they usually only happen after the guitar has been played, handled, and moved around extensively for a period of time. So now, to add insult to injury, the "surprise" you got when the wood freaked out came after you'd shelled out the 100% full new price for the instrument. Murphy's Law dictates that this always happens just after the guitar is out of warranty, that is, if it actually had one in the first place. The necessary repairs are often worth more than what the guitar is worth, unless it's an expensive, hi-end model. Of course, you don't see this as often on hi-end guitars as on cheaper ones, because the wood is usually of better quality and has been properly dried and seasoned. But, it still happens. I have a friend who has a Les Paul Custom with a warped neck, that a buddy of ours straightens in his neck press about every two season changes.

I especially counsel others to buy used when seeking an instrument for their kids to learn to play on, and always help them look for the best instrument that fits their particular budget. All the above applies here, plus the fact that you get a better quality instrument for a given amount of money when buying a used one versus new, full price. The better the guitar, the better it'll sound, and the better it'll play after a quality setup has been done. And, the better it plays and sounds, the more likely your kid is to stick with it.

Of course, you have to know what to look for when buying used, or you risk getting into other problems. Worn frets, bad fret surfacing or replacement jobs, worn or damaged tuning machines, cracks in the finish on the neck joint of set-neck guitars, and stripped screw holes on bridges, tailpieces, and locking nuts are some of the major things you wanna look for. On acoustic guitars, look for cracks, anything that's separating or coming apart, humped/pulled-up soundboards, and (especially) make sure the neck joint angle is OK and hasn't went sour. As indicated in the last post, it's very wise to bring a knowledgeable friend with you, if at all possible.

Thermionic