



Bare Knuckle Halcyon humbucker

Could the Halcyon humbucker be the forceful sonic voice you've been seeking?

BY PAUL RIARIO

BOTH OF THESE blokes’ collaborative efforts have already yielded the acclaimed Polymath and PolyPaf humbuckers, cementing their reputation for voicing exceptional pickups.

Not ones to rest on their laurels, Mills’ and Getgood’s work recently caught the attention of prog metal guitarist Mike Stringer of Spiritbox during a tour stop. From there, Stringer became deeply involved with this power couple to craft a signature pickup that can precisely enhance the low-end density of a 7-string guitar that’s being pummeled with gain, while also clearly detailing ambient and clean tones when both pickups are combined.

The result of this three-way collaboration is the rousing Halcyon humbucker, available in both bridge and neck models, which sounds even more monumental when you hear it in Stringer’s preferred drop F# tuning. If your musical proclivities span between metalcore chugging and taut cleans that slap and pop like Stringer’s, then the Halcyon humbucker could be the forceful sonic voice you’ve been seeking.

Usability and sounds

While it seems tempting to install the Halcyons in a set-neck, single-cut guitar, Bare Knuckle suggested that I try the Halcyons in a modern superstrat that’s more in line with how Stringer plays. Lucky for me, my Charvel Dinky DK24 is the perfect guitar to outfit these humbuckers because of the guitar’s five-way switching and coil tap switch that allows for multiple coil-splitting configurations to hear the Halcyon’s wide range of tones on tap.

Also, knowing that Stringer is a stalwart of the 7-string and I am not, I opted to hear how the Halcyons fare with a 6-string guitar, which I believe most players will want to know about.

I’ve never been a fan of rail pickups, and as good as some have sounded, I just never liked the way they looked. Nowadays, with the advent of more performance-driven shapes and sleeker contours on guitars, I’ve softened my position. Right now, the dual-bladed Halcyons look absolutely killer in my Charvel.

Speaking of “killer,” my guitar tech who installed the Halcyons informed me, “I’m just gonna warn you – these are the LOUDEST pickups I’ve ever heard in a guitar. Make sure you put the dogs and kids in another room before plugging it in.” Noted.

Just like the Ragnarok humbucker, the Halcyon is among the highest-output passive pickups Bare Knuckle produces. One look at the pickup resistances on the Halcyons shows the bridge measures at a gargantuan 17.9k ohms, but the neck reveals a more moderate 7.9k ohms.

Checking Bare Knuckle’s online chart, the EQ block graph displays a decreased bass with bumped-up mids and treble on equal footing. For this reason, PAF pickup partisans may want to look elsewhere since the powerful output of the Halcyon bridge is unapologetically voiced for modern aggression but also calibrated for balance.

Having a twin-blade pole design (versus individual pole pieces) allows both pickups to maintain even string balance across various gauges and tunings – making these pickups

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particularly effective for drop tunings and in use on multi- or extended-scale instruments.

The Halcyon bridge is stacked with a trio of custom ceramic magnets to deliver a biting midrange, muscular output, and razor-sharp attack without being flabby in the lows. The neck pickup’s leaner wind around an Alnico V magnet provides ample headroom for a refined hybrid of cleaner and ambient textures. Surprisingly, despite that intentional contrast between the Halcyon’s individual builds, there is no discernible output drop as you switch between the neck and bridge, or engaging coil-tapping, which allows you to summon an array of dynamic tonal colors without sacrificing balance.

Finally, the Halcyon is available in several cosmetic options to match your axe. You can get it in traditional black, but Bare Knuckle also offers a variety of covers and radiators, blade colors, and certain custom finishes. This pickup typically comes with 4-conductor wiring, which allows for versatile coil-splitting options, but is also available in braided 2-conductor wiring.

Heeding my tech’s advice, I started on a clean channel of my Blackstar St. James head to catch the initial breath of these Halcyons. And yes, he’s right; the bridge pickup has a massive output unlike anything I’ve ever heard. You can hear a colossal wall of rounded lows and weighted mids, but thankfully, no excessive “boom” on its bottom end.

You can gather from this clean state that it’s the kind of humbucker primed for utmost saturation. After dropping my strings down to F# and pumping full-throttle gain from my EVH 5150 III head, it’s apparent that the Halcyon doesn’t possess a feral nature; instead, it captures pure brutality through controlled aggression. By chugging away on the wound strings, you can sense how well the Halcyon bridge handles low-end with clarity and manages to preserve chordal articulation under the strain of increased gain from modelers and pedals, or in this case, a high-gain amp driven to its limits.

Sticking with the bridge pickup, I found it was great for injecting elements of Stringer’s style. As I unleashed a barrage of rhythmic pick scrapes and thickly layered, low-end riffage, the Halcyon responded with surgical precision and presence. Moreover, I could hear how cleanly my rapid two-handed tapping solos sliced through the untamed red solo channel of my 5150. The pickup’s fast attack and measured aggressiveness are so convincing that it almost made me sound like a dyed-in-the-wool Heshner who’s been playing industrial metal for years.

Switching over to the neck, what’s immediately clear is which pickup is the Alpha and which is the Beta – and that’s not throwing shade at the neck. The Halcyon neck wastes no time pulling punches; it still hits hard, but it’s all about firmly detailing its crystalline voice that doesn’t clash with the bridge.

GUITAR WORLD VERDICT



For players focused on tight distortion, multiple coil-splitting options, extended range, and maintaining clarity at high gain, these pickups are a highly compelling choice. However you utilize them, Bare Knuckle’s Halcyon humbuckers provide a pugnacious foundation of intensity that demands your attention.

PROS

- + A powerful, high-output bridge humbucker that capably handles drop tunings with clarity and evenness.
- + Twin-blade pole design balances string-to-string response.
- + The neck humbucker provides more headroom and dynamics, complementing clean or ambient textures.
- + 4-conductor wiring allows sonic flexibility for coil splits and parallel wiring.

CONS

- Some may not prefer the look of a twin-blade pole design “dual-rail” humbucker.
- Powerful response from the bridge humbucker may be too much output for some.

SPECS

TYPE: Twin blade pole-design humbuckers
ORIGIN: U.K.
DC RESISTANCE: 17.9 k# (Bridge); 7.9 k# (Neck)
MAGNET: Ceramic (Bridge); isotropic Alnico V (Neck)
FEATURES: 4-conductor or braided 2-conductor wiring; short or short-triangular mounting legs; available in the full range of Bare Knuckle’s humbucker colors, custom finishes, blade colors, and covers.
POTTING: Yes

Any combination of splitting the coils allowed me to articulate taut, clean notes that sound like slap-bass on the low strings, or to introduce delicate volume swells drowned in ambient reverberation, to which I accentuated arpeggiated lines using a dotted-eighth note delay setting. What’s cool is that no matter the pickup configuration or coil-tapping I used between the neck and bridge, both consistently proved the Halcyons fuse precision with authority, allowing each riff and note to land with weight and vitality.

Verdict

Bare Knuckle consistently brings something unique to the table, and here, the Halcyon is a powerful humbucker imbued with an aggressive nature that doesn’t sacrifice clarity. The Halcyons are uncompromising, high-performance pickups specifically designed for modern, drop-tuned, progressive, and industrial metal genres.