



Fodera Monarch-P & Emperor-J Standard Classics

BY JONATHAN HERRERA

FEW BASS LUTHIERS ENJOY FODERA'S sterling reputation and enviable artist roster. The Brooklyn workshop earned its reputation the hard way, innovating at important moments in the instrument's history while maintaining a consistent standard of excellence for over three decades. Fodera's rarefied perch atop the boutique pile is matched by its jaw-dropping price list, though, making its instruments the object of fantasy for most players. To broaden its customer base, Fodera released its Standard line of instruments a few years ago. The Standard basses were no less high-end than their custom counterparts; they just didn't offer the same broad option suite and custom details. Now, the Standard line has expanded to include a pair of genuinely new Fodera basses, the Fender-esque

Monarch-P and Emperor-J. And while they're still quite costly, they're at least cheaper than the average new Fodera.

It feels like a universal law that at some point, even the most ardent bespoke luthier will feel compelled to build Fender-style basses. It's a sound business decision, given the enduring popularity of the Jazz and Precision, but it's also an easily defensible conceptual choice: As we all know, Leo Fender's most iconic basses were so well designed at their inception, and so ubiquitous on records, that for many players they fit the bill perfectly. Given the huge number of builders with Fender-style basses, yet another pair wouldn't register as noteworthy, but in this case our testers' provenance makes them worth a close look. Who wouldn't want to

see what the Fodera folks would do when tasked with making a P or J?

ROYAL BLOODLINES

Our test instruments were aesthetically pleasing. Each evoked the essential contours of its inspiration while being identifiable as coming from Fodera's aesthetic wheelhouse. Based off the Monarch and Emperor models, Fodera added a couple of vintage-style touches to the Standard Classics that help classify their ancestral heritage, including pickguards, groovy solid-color and sunburst finishes, and a plain take on the company's famed butterfly headstock logo. As one would expect for the price, our testers were exceptionally well made and included all sorts



of little details that separate high-end instruments from their lower-cost cousins. The proprietary hardware on offer was rugged and substantial, including the always cool Fodera bridge. Rather than source a bone or plastic nut, Fodera opted for a brass example. Each instrument's enormous control cavity was thoroughly shielded with copper foil, and the soldering and wire dressing were top-shelf. One perk of having a large control cavity is the ease of installing an active preamp, should you decide to go that route down the line. Fodera also offers its well-regarded Pope preamp as an optional upgrade.

The test instruments' fit and finish was no less impressive. The frets were superbly dressed, and the finish (the only part of the build that Fodera outsources) was even, lustrous, and free of buffing marks or haze. The neck joint was rock solid, as was the installation of all the hardware. Even though our test instruments endured a NAMM show en route to *BASS PLAYER*, their setup was excellent. Renowned for its extensive wood supply, Fodera didn't skimp on the Monarch-P and Emperor-J. You won't find fancy figured tops like on some of the other models, but you do get well-aged examples of the classic Fender combinations: ash body/maple fingerboard or alder body/rosewood fingerboard. The three-piece maple neck showed attractive grain, and the multi-part arrangement can help ensure stability as the weather changes.

Each instrument's playability was excellent, too. The subtle changes to the Fender designs and lightweight headstock made each balance better than the typical P or J. The basses have a subtly carved area at the neck joint to improve high-fret access. Both necks are fairly narrow at the nut and small overall, and I couldn't discern a difference between the Monarch-P and Emperor-J profiles, unlike with P- and J-style basses typically. While I appreciate that Fodera's basses are set up to accept Dunlop-style straplocks, I prefer a solution that includes the ability to use a regular strap in a pinch. As designed, there's no protruding strap pin to grab on to. There's nothing worse than realizing you've forgotten your straplock-equipped strap at a gig only to discover that you can't use one borrowed from, say, another band on the bill.

NEW & CLASSIC

The Fodera Standard Classics did an excellent job evoking the now deeply familiar sounds of Precision and Jazz Basses. The proprietary Seymour Duncan pickups feature a vintage-style wind and even come equipped with cloth-covered wire. I have a host of cool Fenders on hand here for comparison, and the Foderas acquitted themselves well against some pretty special examples of the breed. The Monarch-P tended toward the grindy, aggressive end of the P spectrum, rather than the syrupy vibe of some

Precisions. A quick swap to a set of flatwounds got me closer to the Jamerson-esque sound that some may want out of their P-style bass. The Emperor-J had a lithe feel and fast attack, with the sort of burbling and rich midrange people expect from a J-style bass. With the pickups blended it proved an excellent slapper, and I especially dug the slightly hollow bark of its soloed neck pickup.

The incentive to buy the Fodera Standard Classics can't be their uniqueness: they simply aren't. There are plenty of alternatives out there, some costing as little as a quarter the price. Rather, the incentive to get a Fodera Standard Classic is to have a taste of the flawless construction and attention to detail that rightly made the brand famous. It's also an especially cool way to join the Fodera family if the company's other more modern looks and sounds don't appeal to you. **BP**

S SPECIFICATIONS

FODERA

Street Monarch-P Standard Classic, \$3,950; Emperor-J Standard Classic, \$4,000

Pros Flawless construction and attention to detail; excellent tone that remains true to form; superb playability

Cons In relation to the competition, they're expensive

Bottom Line A cool example of what happens when a boutique builder tasks itself with making a simple bass.

Construction Bolt-on

Body As tested, Monarch-P, ash; Emperor-J, alder

Neck Three-piece maple

Neck width at nut 1.5"

Fingerboard Indian rosewood

Fingerboard radius Compound

Frets 22

Tuners Fodera Gotoh-style

Bridge Fodera chrome

Pickups Seymour Duncan proprietary P- and J-style

Scale length 34"

Controls Monarch-P: volume, tone; Emperor-J: volume, volume, tone

Made in U.S.A.

Contact fodera.com

SPECS