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# JGS Africaster

**J**ohn Soderlund is a relatively new boutique electric and lap-steel guitar builder living in Pietermaritzburg. His guitars are characterised by unique and highly figured woods, top quality hardware and electronics, with each instrument being custom built for its owner. I recently had a chance to try out John's Africaster Tele-style guitar, putting it through its paces playing straight into Swart AST and Mesa Boogie Lone Star Special amplifiers.

## The Basics

The Africaster is, at its heart, a Tele-style guitar, with the usual body shape, bolt-on 25.5" scale length neck, two pickups and control arrangement. What immediately sets this specific model apart from most is the wood choices and the two-humbucker pickup arrangement.

## Neck

The neck is C shape and is very chunky indeed, starting at 23mm thick at the first fret, but with less of a taper than most, so it does not get that much thicker as you move higher up the neck, reminiscent in feel of the Brian May "Red Special." Having said that, bear in mind that neck size and profile are made to order, so if you prefer a slender neck, this ought not to be a deal-breaker. The neck itself is made from padouk, the fingerboard is ebony and the frets are jumbo. The headstock shape is close enough to a Tele to be aesthetically pleasing, but different enough to be unique. The headstock is faced with flame maple, but cut away in part to show some of the padouk below, with a pleasing contrast between the two.

## Body

The body is sapele mahogany capped with a very attractive and bold grained piece of padouk and the top is bound with flame maple and a simple and elegant pair of black pinstripes. The familiar Tele shape has both forearm and stomach. The forearm contour is capped with flame maple and the finish is nitrocellulose. The back also sports a vine-like inlay made from blackwood and abalone, but the inlay edge is a little ragged and uneven.

## Hardware

The Africaster sports good quality hardware all-round: a chrome modern-style six saddle Gotoh Tele bridge; the jack socket is an Electrosocket, which has been recessed flush with the surface; top-notch black Sperzel tuners with chromed posts; a traditional string retainer; ebony control knobs (but a plastic switch cap); and the neck secured with recessed ferrules. The recessing of socket and neck ferrules is a nice touch, but strangely the string ferrules have not been similarly recessed and the recessing has been done after finishing, which has unfortunately chipped the finish very slightly around the edges of the recess.

## Electronics

The pickups in the Africaster are Seymour Duncan – the familiar and well-proven '59 and JB at the neck and bridge respectively, both with chrome covers. Otherwise the electronics are pretty much as expected – master tone and volume and a 3-way lever switch.

## In Use

After a brief adjustment period to the rather unusual neck, the Africaster plays very well, the fret dressing is good and the guitar is well set up. The body contours and recessed neck ferrules make it a lot more comfortable and forgiving to play on than the usual "plank with strings" that is the classic Tele shape.

## Sound

Tonally, the Africaster is geared towards a more powerful, rockier sound than a traditional Tele. However, the mahogany body and dual 'buckers are nicely offset by the padouk neck and ebony fingerboard, yielding a well-balanced tone that retains articulation, giving the neck pickup a smooth, fat drive tone which stops short of being muddy and some jazzy but articulate cleans. The bridge pickup was a bit of a surprise as it is less over-the-top than I am used to getting with a JB, a little smoother too. The guitar responds well to a range of playing dynamics and variety of drive settings.



## Overall

The Africaster is a well-made modern take on a classic guitar with a unique voice and a look that is uniquely classy. Highly recommended.



Suggested Retail Price: R 19,200.00  
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