

## TRAVELS: FRANKFURT AND THE NEW STICK X36

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There are few experiences that can match following in Emmett's footsteps. My trip to the Messe last week was exciting and reaffirming on so many levels. To begin with, I think it's been since 1994 that Emmett was showing The Stick at a trade show in Europe. A whole generation of young musicians that have never before encountered The Stick in person got a close look and a chance to strap it on and explore. The impact of encountering Emmett's method and instrument for the first time is something I take for granted, and the excitement of the possibilities it brings is always energizing and refreshing. Then there were all of the musicians, press, builders and other contacts that were struck by their instant recognition of The Stick, and glad to hear all of Emmett's innovations, and to see this new evolution.

Heiko from BassLab has an excellent reputation here, as well, so there is great excitement at the prospect of an established design innovator like Emmett joining forces with a creative acoustic engineer like Heiko. We are only in the first stages of this new Stick project, but already it is easy to see that it is going to be a great success.

Here are my thoughts and impressions on the two prototypes. I played mostly the silver one with the ACTV-2 pickup because it was in Bari Melody tuning, but I made sure to spend some time on both to become familiar with the evolution of these two prototypes.

In case you haven't read the descriptions on the SE site, here's a brief rundown on the X36.

These instruments are hollow shell composite structures (what Heiko calls "monocoque design"), with an automotive lacquer paint finish. They are extended scale, like the graphite XG Sticks, and have Rails frets. On the Silver prototype (the first one) the lacquer was much thicker, so the sensation of playing the rails wasn't the same as on my paduak Grand Stick, but it still felt great.

My first impression on the instrument was a pronounced sonic difference. Heiko constructs his instruments from what he calls "tuned composite" so he influences the material to bring out certain harmonic characteristics. (Don't ask him what the formula is because if he told you, then he would have to kill you:)

When I listened to someone playing his 5-string basses, it was clear that the pitch definition of the lowest notes was much more pronounced on his instruments than on others I had heard. But this wasn't the primary difference I noticed on The Stick. On The X36, I heard what sounded like a higher ratio of the second (octave) harmonic to the first (the fundamental). I would have to get to some test equipment to see exactly what's going on,

but these are my ear's impressions. I think this makes the instrument more "3-dimensional" in sound. The closest comparison I can make is the difference between a hollow-body electric guitar and a solid body (like a Les Paul). This makes sense in light of the hollow structure. Yes, the space under the fretboard is also hollow.

So when you play the new Stick you are actually hammering onto an acoustic chamber. You can feel the vibrations in your hands (especially on the back with your thumbs, where the material is thinner). This sensation connects the player a bit more, and the fretboard has a slight bounce to it (although some of my impression of this might be the difference in scale length, as the strings are a little "slinkier" at 36"). Heiko tells me that the material on the prototypes is a little thicker than the productions might be, so the final version could be even more resonant and lighter (the current instruments weigh about as much as comparable graphite instruments).

My troubleshooter instincts went into action when I thought about hollow Sticks. What about increased crosstalk? This is a big worry for me because I can sometimes tend to use a lot of distortion on the melody strings. While giving demos at the Messe I didn't notice any difference between my paduak Grand and the silver prototype, both of which have the same pickup system, so that was a relief. Heiko and Emmett assured me this is something they will keep in mind as they take the next steps forward in bringing these instrument to the Stick-playing public.

The lacquer finish is beautiful and surprisingly smooth on the thumbs, which is a big consideration when you play like I do, with so much motion along the back of the instrument. Emmett tried an experimental inlay design which is similar to my own thinking on what would be an effective inlay on a more vertical instrument. The lines are adjacent to the next fret, so you can easily see over the frets and all across them. This gives the player a more complete visual reference, especially when playing the high melody strings, where sometimes the right hand can cover up the inlays. I would prefer to have the inlay a little more off the fret, and perhaps not extending all the way to the edge of the instrument, but from what I understand a great deal of customization is possible with these instruments in terms of colors and inlays.

The sound of the red prototype was also excellent, and with a thinner lacquer coating, the feel of the Rails was more like what I am used to. This instrument does justice to the PASV-4 pickup in the same way the graphite Stick XG does. It is "fat" and articulate all at the same time. The red color is beautiful (a tough choice between that and the deep blue I saw on Heiko's basses), and I think the black inlays look nice, but you should think about having maximum inlay contrast when ordering an instrument with a lacquered fretboard if you will be playing under stage lights (because of reflections on the surface). Right now I'm thinking blue with silver bar inlays would be really sharp....

Something tells me it won't be too long before we see and hear these new

instruments in many player's hands. Emmett has always striven to develop the function of his instrument as a vehicle for his unique music-making method. The addition of Heiko's acoustic expertise takes the Stick one-step further on the journey from the being the best tapping instrument to being the "perfect" tapping instrument.

Congratulations to both of you for making this happen, and thanks for all the hard work in pursuing your individual and now joint creative vision. For those of us who get to use play instruments, it's easy to forget all that goes into their development and support. Thanks!

You can read more about the new instrument at:

<http://www.stick.com/news/stickx36.html>

Ron Baggerman has also written about the new instrument and has posted a link to some photos below.

Happy Tapping,  
Greg

<http://www.greghoward.com>