

RELEASED

THE THIEVES

'Tales From The White Line'

(Liquor And Poker)

At the start of 'Vacant Thoughts', two-thirds of the way through The Thieves' debut album, Hal Stokes draws a comparison between the comforting spires of his hometown, Oxford, and the vast expanse of his chosen residence, L.A. The Thieves – the band for so long known round these parts as Vade Mecum – may be the product of a shire upbringing, but this album reveals them to be now almost totally immersed in Stateside rock culture.

No great surprise really since they've always been rockers of the old school and years of constant slog around the American gig circuit have rubbed off on their character. As such they're more likely than ever to reap the rewards of their graft. 'Tales From The White Line' sounds like an album you'd expect to hang around the top of the US charts for month on end. Big on hooks and anthems, it's got plenty of bluster but more than this, it's got soul and melody.

The Thieves set out their stall from the off: 'Gimme Some Lip' is all big rabble-rousing rock riffage, with a bit of a snarl, a rootsy barroom blues feel and a bombastic stadium rock finale. The station wagon ride continues with the Aerosmith-inspired 'Don't You Lose Me' and through to the almost country-ish 'Silverliner'. It's a powerful and fresh-sounding album for



the most part though. 'This Road' is a bit of a plod, far too earnest and not helped by its clichéd guitar solo, but you only notice all this because it's sandwiched between the heroic 'You Get It Easy', with its subtle melody steal from Bowie's 'Heroes', and the stomping 'Tales From The White Line'. More offbeat is the synth-led 'Just A Piece', which could be Ultravox in rock-out mode (and with Hal sounding uncannily like Midge Ure), as well as the strident, robotic 'It Still Goes On', which veers closer to U2's most recent outings.

The Thieves' strengths are their tight, melodic approach to every thing they do: simple songs backed by heavy duty rock artillery, and their unselfconscious lack of irony. This is old-fashioned rock and roll as it was meant to be played and ever will be.

Ian Chesterton