



FIREBIRD MAN

Mike Campbell on the pawn shop Gibson behind his sound



SPIRIT OF '52

The debut electrics from top acoustic maker Atkin



BRYAN ADAMS

Reveals what that 'first real six-string' really was

Guitarist

Issue 484

MAY 2022

ESSENTIAL ELECTRICS

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INTERVIEWS

TAJ MAHAL & RY COODER

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Growth Potential



This month's cover feature on workhorse guitars runs a little deeper than it maybe first appears. There are really several separate pastimes to be enjoyed within the umbrella of being 'into guitars'. Some people enjoy modding and maintaining guitars. Others get their kicks from collecting them. While other individuals are all about vintage gear. There's so much to enjoy about guitars that sometimes it's easy to forget the reason these instruments are made in the first place – to make music.

One thing I've learned is that buying a guitar that fulfils a genuine music-making need – and which allows you to do more music than you did yesterday – is never a regret. It's easy to get tunnel vision with guitar buying and focus solely on new toys that you want, to paraphrase The Stones, rather than what you really need. In that sense, it's often easy to end up buying another electric of the kind you have bought before – except maybe a bit better or with slightly different features – rather than branching out and buying, say, a nylon-string acoustic or a baritone electric. Okay, we all fall prey to impulsive GAS and there's probably no getting away from that. But that's why a really dependable workhorse electric can be so valuable: not only can it act as your go-to guitar for so many situations, but it can take the emphasis off the question of 'what electric guitar should I lust after next?' and free the mind to consider what might lead most to your musical growth, be that a different style of instrument, PA gear, studio kit, you name it.

Don't get me wrong, New Guitar Day will never be a bad day. But let's not forget the value of kit that stays with us over a lifetime, always dependable, always ready to make music. See you next time.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights



Get On Board

Ry Cooder and Taj Mahal have so much to say that's of value to guitarists that we'd pay to listen to them talk about music all day **p52**



PAF Secrets

Vintage gear expert Huw Price lifts the lid on that most venerated of pickups, the PAF, in forensic detail on **p126**



A Feast Of Guitar

Mascot Label Group has provided a dozen free tracks by some of the top guitar stars. For details on how to get your download, go to **p8**



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A man with short dark hair, wearing a dark green long-sleeved shirt, is seated and playing a white PRS Fiore electric guitar. He is looking down at the guitar with a focused expression. The background is dark and out of focus.

Fiore



PLAY IN FULL BLOOM

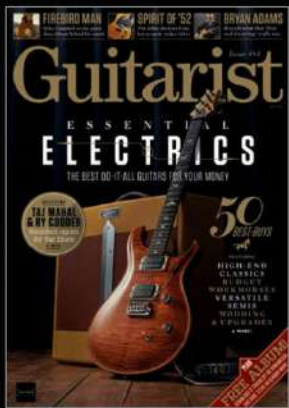
MARK LETTIERI SIGNATURE MODEL

"All guitarists have a sound in their head – a sound that evolves and grows as they progress, discovering all of the beautiful idiosyncrasies that define their individual voice. To facilitate this process, players need a vibrant, dynamic guitar that becomes a free space in which their personality can unfold. PRS and I designed Fiore to be this guitar."

- Mark Lettieri

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Neil Godwin

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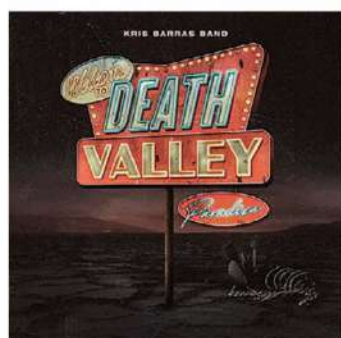
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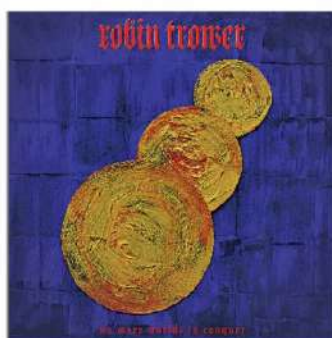
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Teeth Of The Hydra
(*Inviolate*)



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QUEENS
Down To The Devil
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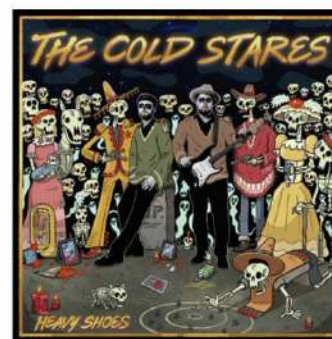
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TRACK #12
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FIRST PLAY



CORT G290 FAT II
£639

WHAT IS IT? Well-received Cort model is updated for 2022 with a roasted maple neck and fingerboard

State Of The Craft

Cor-Tek already makes a considerable number of the world's electric guitars, but can its own brand, Cort, compete with those bigger names? We think so

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis

It's rather ironic that many of the mid-to-low price guitars we lust after are made by instrument manufacturer Cor-Tek, although its own brand is, we'd suggest, far from a first choice for many players. But back in issue 471, we were very impressed with the G300 Pro, not least with its stainless-steel frets, roasted maple neck and Seymour Duncan humbuckers – and it was even a featured winner in our 2021 Gear Of The Year awards in the sub-£1k solidbody section.

The G290 FAT II – a V2 update of the model that was introduced a couple of years back – sits slightly below the G300 Pro, price-wise. It retains that guitar's sleek offset Strat-inspired body outline, and is now made from alder instead of light ash. It has a figured maple 'top' that you can clearly see, but it's just a veneer, whereas the G300 Pro goes for a basswood body with a 6mm maple cap.

The main upgrade to the new FAT II model is that, like the G300 Pro, we now have a roasted maple neck and fingerboard, although here it has 22 not 24 frets, which are standard nickel-silver not stainless steel.







1. For this year we get glow-in-the-dark Luminlay side dots, while the black face dots add contrast on the roasted maple fingerboard (compared with the small abalone-like dot inlays used on the G300 Pro)

2. Part of the makeover includes the caramel-coloured roasted maple used for the neck and fingerboard. Like the previous version, and flagship G300 Pro, there are rear-locking tuners and a Graph Tech Black Tusq nut

We get new glow-in-the-dark Luminlay side dots, too, and – like its previous version, and the G300 Pro – we have a compound 305mm to 400mm (12- to 15.75-inch) radius to the fingerboard face with a ‘spoke wheel’ truss-rod adjuster at the body end. Our Trans Black Burst review sample is new and comes with opaque black sides and back.

As we’ve come to expect, the build is very tidy. The neck is held with four recessed screws on a contoured heel, for example. The bright chromed hardware includes rear-lock tuners, with staggered height posts, and the CFA-III two-post six-saddle vibrato with push-in and tension-adjustable arm (a close cousin to Gotoh’s 510 vibrato) uses stainless steel for the saddles, top plate and shaped, deep-drilled block. In fact, pretty much the only criticism we have is that the finishing in the vibrato back rout is a little scrappy, lighter in colour with some flecks of visible white polishing compound that hasn’t been cleaned.

While it veers to the generic ‘SuperStrat’ side, this means it feels instantly familiar



The electronics are retained from the earlier G290 FAT: a set of Cort ‘Voiced Tone’ VTH77 covered humbuckers that are direct-mounted but height-adjustable thanks to a combination of hard foam and springs underneath each pickup. The five-way lever offers bridge, both and neck in positions 1, 3 and 5, while position 2 voices the outer single coils of both in parallel; position 4 does the same but with the inner coils.

3. Typical of the refined design, along with an ergonomic body, the heel is heavily shaped allowing super-easy top-fret access



UNDER THE HOOD

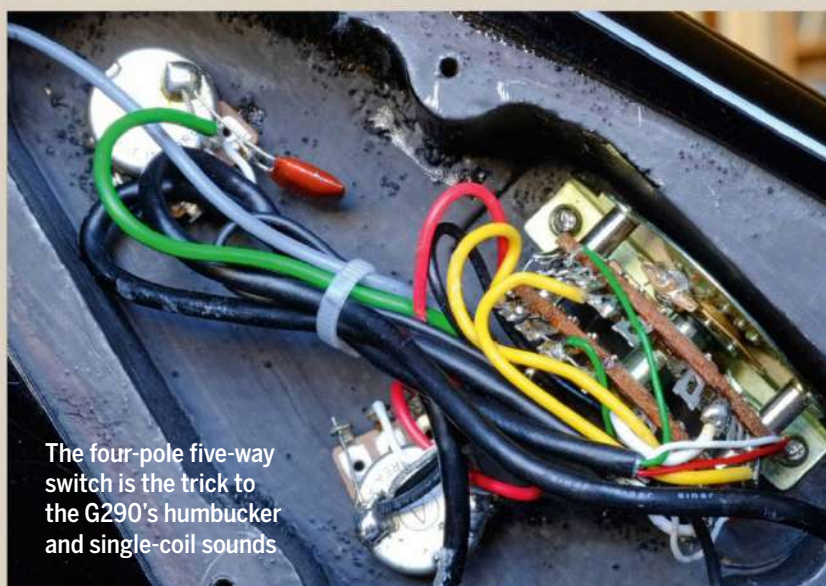
Smart on the outside, but what's it like inside?

There's some clever thinking behind the sounds and the way they're achieved here. The four-pole, five-way lever switch allows the tricky switching from the four-conductor humbuckers, resulting in two very balanced single-coil mixes, both of which are hum-cancelling. Both pots are small Alpha 500k types – the volume has a linear taper, the tone is audio – with a .033 microfarads tone cap. We'd certainly be tempted to add a treble-bleed circuit on the volume, but, as is, the circuit certainly works effectively.

We mentioned the rather unusual 'cushion' for the pickups and you'll also see what appears to be excess wax on each pickup's base. "The extra 'hotness' of these pickups was causing some sort

of electronic vibrations on the backplate, causing it to create more feedback than we anticipated," explains Cort's Jay Jun. "Normally, other manufacturers would just leave it be as these are some of the characteristics of a hotter pickup with louder output and heightened sensitivity. But for our design – and to better match the characteristic of the G290 FAT II – we decided to dampen it by waxing the backplate so that we could keep the feedback under control while maintaining high output."

The Alnico V-loaded 'buckers certainly have a healthy reading on our multimeter. The bridge is wound with 44 AWG and the neck with 43 AWG, resulting in DCRs of 15.44kohms and 9.58k respectively.



The four-pole five-way switch is the trick to the G290's humbucker and single-coil sounds.



Under each pickup are spring-and-foam cushions. Note the waxing of the pickup's baseplate.

Feel & Sounds

While the guitar does veer to the generic modern 'SuperStrat' side, this means it feels instantly comfortable and familiar. It's a good weight for the style, slightly heavier than the G300 Pro, but that's not surprising bearing in mind the different body wood. The fretwork is superb from a pretty standard medium jumbo wire (approximately 2.73mm by 1.14mm high), and aside from just needing slightly lower string grooves in the nut, it's hard to fault.

You might look at the spec and believe the fingerboard is too flat for you, but it doesn't come across like that at all. The fingerboard edges are lightly rolled and it feels very similar to Fender's Player Plus. In terms of depth it's pretty mainstream, too – 21mm at the 1st fret and 23mm at the 12th, slightly thicker in the upper neck than the Player Plus. It has what feels like a C-meets-D profile, whose fuller shoulders make it feel a little bigger than it actually is. The neck back is satin and will quickly burnish up to a dull sheen, or you can easily rub it with a fine Scotch-Brite pad or 0000 wire wool if you can't wait that long.

The back-routed vibrato floats slightly above the face of the body, much like a PRS, and even with pretty energetic

The G290 is a 22-fret design, unlike the 24-fret G300. While both covered humbuckers are classed as 'hot', the neck pickup certainly sounds more vintage-y... but still FAT!



4



Cort's CFA-III two-post vibrato uses stainless-steel block saddles and is back-routed to provide considerable up and down travel



CORT G290 FAT II

PRICE: £639

ORIGIN: Indonesia

TYPE: Offset double-cutaway solidbody electric guitar

BODY: Alder with figured maple veneer top facing

NECK: Roasted maple, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Black Tusq/41.8mm

FINGERBOARD: Roasted maple, compound 305-400mm (12-15.75") radius, black face dots with Luminlay side dots

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo

HARDWARE: Chrome-plated Cort CFA-III 2-post 6-saddle vibrato with push-in arm, Cort staggered-post rear locking tuners

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm

ELECTRICS: Cort 'Voiced Tone' VTH77 neck and bridge direct mount covered humbuckers, 5-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume, master tone

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.67/8

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: The G Series starts with the new G110 (from £189); all are HSS except our review model and the G300 Pro (£799), which are both dual-humbucking

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Trans Black Burst (as reviewed), Antique Violin Burst and Bright Blue Burst – gloss body and headstock face, satin neck

440 Distribution

0113 4433145

www.cortguitars.com



PROS Excellent build with quality hardware; great neck and playability with versatile 'fat' to 'thin' voices from the five-way pickup selector

CONS No gigbag, but that's about it!

bends the tuning stability impressed once everything had settled in.

Although there is only basic information available on the pickups, like the G300 Pro with its Seymour Duncan JB/Jazz combo, Cort's VTH77 set here captures a similar style: plenty of beef at the bridge and a more vintage-y voice at the neck. Cort tells us that 'FAT' isn't an acronym: "It just means that the tone it creates is FAT." With either humbucker engaged and a gainy amp, we'd call it fat, too.

It's a guitar with great potential for the studying player or anyone needing to cover a lot of ground

Again like the G300 Pro before it, we have the parallel single-coil mixes in positions 2 and 4 on the five-way, the outer coils in position 2 giving a subtly wider brighter voice, more Tele-like perhaps than the subtly more Strat-like mix in position 4, but there's not that much in it and all positions appear to be hum-cancelling, too. These are the 'thin' to the full humbuckers' 'fat'. You can't voice either humbucker split on its own, which might be useful, especially as the bridge would probably split quite well

like a JB. Nevertheless, the rock-to-funk duality here is perfectly valid: there are big arena rock sounds to be had from the bridge, an earthier bluesier voice from the neck, then you have those single-coil mixes for your Chic numbers. A lot of mileage, in other words. New sounds? Not really. But, to our ears, the G290 FAT II is about getting the job done and – particularly when paired with a half decent pedalboard – it pulls it off with style.

Verdict

Another hard-to-fault instrument from Cort, the G290 FAT II might not be the catchiest-named guitar we've had in our hands, but it's hard to argue with at this price. The 2022 upgrades are very on-trend, and the combination of the different body construction and pickups gives it a slightly different sonic spin compared with the award-winning G300 Pro. It's a guitar with great potential for the studying player or anyone needing to cover a lot of ground, with plenty of potential for upgrading, too, not least with some name pickups. That said, its voices are surprisingly good, especially the big fat 'buckers.

On the negative side, it doesn't have the cachet of some of the trendier brands out there, such as Ibanez or PRS, but the build quality is certainly on a par and just as valid. Good craft and good sounds at a price that's temptingly affordable. **G**

MEET YOUR OTHER HALF



REVSTAR

FIRST PLAY



LARRIVÉE D-03R
£2,199

WHAT IS IT? An Indian rosewood and Sitka spruce combo with all the grunt and bark we like from a good dreadnought



LARRIVÉE 000-40 CUSTOM
£3,269

WHAT IS IT? A limited UK run of a triple-O 12-fretter from Larrivée's Legacy Series with plenty of exclusive refinements

Sonic Bloom

Two acoustics from the celebrated Larrivée stables with contrasting spec and very individual personalities. Something for everyone? Let's find out...

Words David Mead **Photography** Olly Curtis

Jean Larrivée's guitar company has a very clear remit when it comes to making its instruments. All high-quality solid timber with no laminates or artificial woods used in the process and with top-class workmanship throughout. As the company's manifesto says: "We use FSC wood and engage in as much selective logging as possible. This means we like to be there, in the forest, personally taking part. Imagine, when we begin to create your instrument, we begin on the forest floor..."

This literally down-to-earth philosophy has been confirmed in every Larrivée that has passed through our hands in recent years. There's always something special about them and we admit to a smidge of excitement every time we open a case to view a new model. Here, we have two

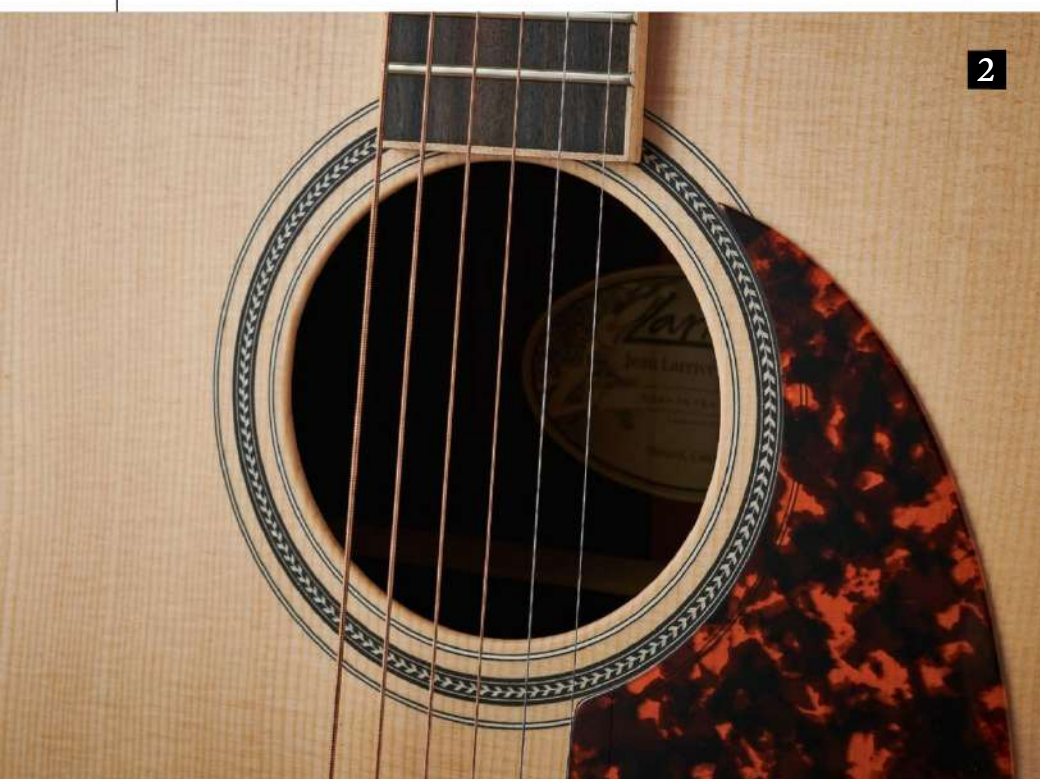






1. The D-03R's back and sides are Indian rosewood offset with maple binding

2. Sitka spruce forms the soundboard with an attractive herringbone inlay to the rosette plus a tortie pickguard



instruments from very different areas of the company's catalogue. One, a standard Recording Series dreadnought, the other a special UK-only limited run that sees a Legacy Series 000 souped-up with a few luxury refinements and an alternative set of back and sides timber. We'll consider each in turn, beginning with the D-03R. So let's get cracking...

There's something immensely satisfying about a dreadnought. Somehow it feels like an acoustic guitar ought to be in terms of both dimension and sound. This is probably due to the fact that the Martin D-28 seemed to be standard fare among the singer-songwriter crowd during that golden era around the late 1960s and early 70s. In those days, dreadnoughts were ubiquitous, offering the lowly solo performers all the drive and power they needed to render an accompaniment to their vocals – and dreads seemed to be totally at home in a band context as well.

It's only recently that we've seen the emergence of smaller-bodied acoustics take over as amplification, pickups and particularly PA and onstage monitoring





3

3. With a tried-and-tested combination of body woods, we found the D-03R to have the strident voice of a typical dreadnought without a hint of muddiness in its lower midrange

4. Jean Larrivée has been making guitars since the early 1970s and his company's aims are clear: all solid woods with top-class workmanship throughout the build



4

technology have come on in leaps and bounds. But there's something delightfully nostalgic about the power and the glory of a good ol' dreadnought in your hands. Well, for players of a certain vintage, anyway...

Larrivée's D-03R doesn't have any real surprises in store in terms of its construction. It has a Sitka spruce top with Indian rosewood for the back and sides with a mahogany neck and ebony for the headstock faceplate, fingerboard and bridge. It's a tried-and-tested combination and a recipe that has served generations of acoustic players well. The Sitka spruce top hails from Canada and features an even grain pattern with a satin finish that feels great to the touch – there's almost a 'worn in' vibe going on.

The D-03R has enough shimmer to satisfy any lovelorn minstrel and can get pretty rowdy, too

That finish extends to other areas, too, the dark-chocolate hue of the Indian rosewood offset by maple binding, and the African mahogany's wild grain pattern enhancing the general good looks of the instrument. The ebony fingerboard is maple bound and features 20 perfectly seated frets and dot-style position markers where you'd expect to find them. Both the nut and string saddle are bone and other onboard furnishings include Larrivée's own closed-back tuners, a herringbone rosette and a mock tortoiseshell pickguard.

Workmanship throughout is excellent, with everything neat and tidy inside and out. All in all we're eager to hear what the D-03R has to say for itself. But firstly we'll take a whizz around the spec of its companion, the 000-40 Custom. Having waxed poetic about the charms of the dreadnought, we must say we're almost as enchanted by the 000-size acoustic as well. Whereas a dread might have the sonic firepower and strength of delivery, OM or 000s are packed with a kind of refined charm all their own. As we've said, this is a custom variation on Larrivée's standard

model and so we'll begin by offering a quick tour of what's on offer in terms of upgrades.

The standard model has mahogany for its back and sides, but here we find koa, a body wood that's renowned for having the midrange of mahogany but something of the top-end of maple as well. It's also a wood that tends to mature with age, starting its tonal journey with a lot of brightness – something you find with maple – but maturing over the years to produce a rich, sweet midrange and exceedingly resonant overall tone. It's an attractive timber, too, maybe not as off the wall as some members of the rosewood or ebony families, but its mid-brown hue is embellished by a streaky sapele-like grain and here it has just a hint of a flame to it, too.

The 000-40's top has received an upgrade as well. The standard model's Sitka spruce is replaced by the slightly more ethereal-sounding moonwood spruce, which gets its name from the fact that it's harvested during the final quarter of the last moon before winter in its native Switzerland. Moonwood spruce also has the reputation for a close grain, a reflection of it being

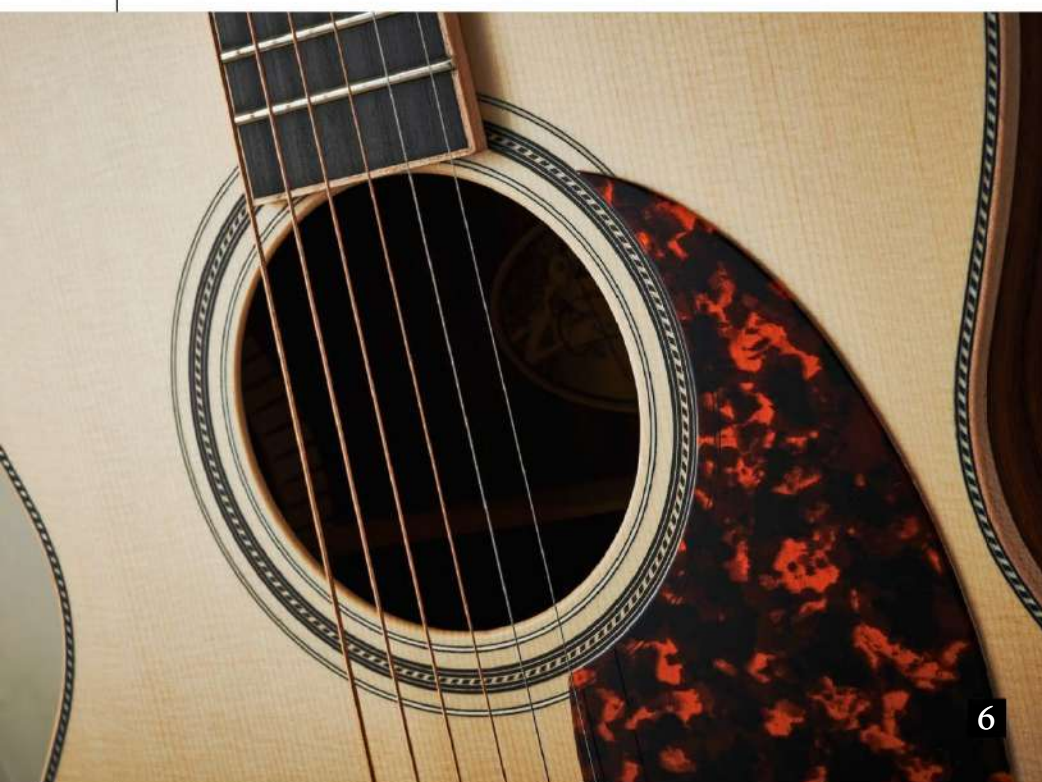


5

5. Among the 000-40's upgrades is the ebony pyramid bridge

6. The top is moon spruce from Switzerland, so called because it is harvested at a specific phase of the moon just before winter

7. Another refinement for this special limited edition is the choice of koa for the guitar's back and sides



6

Whereas dreads have the sonic firepower, OMs are packed with a refined charm all their own

grown at altitude, and is reputedly more sustainable than its counterparts.

The headstock fascia on this Custom model has a vine inlay and Larrivée has used real mother-of-pearl here and for the fretboard's position markers. Furthermore, the ebony bridge is of the 'pyramid' variety and the label inside the soundhole has been signed by Jean Larrivée himself. As you might imagine, this puts the guitar into a highly collectable area, above and beyond its tonal remodelling.

Feel & Sounds

Returning to the D-03R, we find a neck that feels satisfyingly wide and fairly chunky in the hand, that satin finish aiding and abetting the general good vibes in this region. Sound-wise, it's everything you'd expect... and possibly more. There's





7

8 The vine inlay on the headstock fascia of the 000-40 Custom is made from genuine mother-of-pearl

9. Open-back tuners – with some very fancy engraving on the buttons – adorn the 000-40's headstock



8



9

that compressed midrange punch to campfire chords, but it's overlaid with a generous dollop of sweetness. The sustain is well up to muster with a good amount of snap to the trebles and a refined bass – no ungainly boominess here – making the playing experience a very good one indeed. Strummed gently there's enough shimmer to satisfy any lovelorn minstrel and things can get pretty rowdy when you put your foot on the throttle, too. All being said, it's a great-sounding instrument and it looks the part as well.

Turning our attention to the 000-40, we find ourselves thinking that, conceptually at least, a triple-0 or OM-sized body always seems a lot smaller than the mighty dreadnought, whereas there's actually only around 25mm difference in body width and about 15mm in depth. Of course, you need to take into account that the triple-0 is a 12-fretter, which adds to the overall impression that we're dealing with something far more petite in nature. Anyway, we digress...

The neck of the 000-40 feels slightly thinner in the hand and the nut width is a

The 000-40 Custom's label has been signed by Jean Larrivée... putting it into a highly collectable area

couple of millimetres wider, but, like its counterpart, the playing experience is a good one. The main difference in performance is down to focus in that here everything seems more defined, with notes having a more individual presence without the compression that a dreadnought brings to the table. We've no way to accurately measure it, but we'd swear the 000 sounds louder, too. Perhaps this is the influence of the koa back and sides or that moon spruce top coming into the picture. It's a fingerstylist's dream, in many ways, with an elegant nature when we allow some open strings to ring within a suitably proggy chord arrangement.

As we've said, koa has the reputation of opening up and maturing over time and




10

when this is combined with the spruce top's natural inclination to become warmer and more mellow over the years, the chances are that this guitar is going to be an absolute stunner a little further down the road.

Verdict

We're not about to pick a favourite here as it wouldn't really be fair. The 000 is a custom instrument with a raft of refinements to its name and an extra £1k on its price tag, after all. But it's safe to say that we've been seriously impressed by both instruments. They both perform well up to – and maybe beyond – expectations, build quality is exemplary, and we'd happily take either out to a gig.

Price-wise, the D-03R comes in at a few hundred less than a Martin D-18 and hovers around the same price point as a few models in Taylor's catalogue. The 000-40 Custom is in a far more refined area, challenging Martin's Modern Deluxe 000-18, for instance. But if a 000 12-fretter or a dreadnought is the stuff of dreams for you, Larrivée should definitely be on your radar, along with the other big hitters. 

10. With a very sweet and powerful voice fresh out of the workshop, the 000-40 will surely be an absolute stunner in a few years' time, once the bodywoods begin to open up and mature



LARRIVÉE D-03R

PRICE: £2,199 (inc hard case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Dreadnought
TOP: Sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Indian rosewood
MAX RIM DEPTH: 127mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 406mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
TUNERS: Larrivée
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony/56mm
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.21/4.88
OPTIONS: D-03 with mahogany back and sides is £1,899. Various pickup options are available – see website for details
RANGE OPTIONS: There are plenty of dreadnoughts in Larrivée's catalogue: the D-03H/A featuring Bhilwara back and sides with a moonwood top (£2,499), the mahogany and spruce D-02 (£1,799), the D-40 with mahogany and spruce (£1,999) and D-40R with rosewood and spruce (£2,279)
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes
FINISH: Satin

440 Distribution
01943 818599
www.larrivee.com



9/10

PROS A good all-round dreadnought with everything you'd expect from this body size

CONS We weren't put off by anything in particular



LARRIVÉE 000-40 CUSTOM

PRICE: £3,269 (inc hard case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: 000 size acoustic
TOP: Alpine spruce
BACK/SIDES: Koa
MAX RIM DEPTH: 114mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 391mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
TUNERS: Open back 18:1
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/44.45mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 18
BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony/57.15mm
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.58/3.5
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: The standard 000-44 with mahogany back and sides is £2,649, and the 000-44R with rosewood back and sides is £2,899. Various pickup options are available – see website for details
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes
FINISH: Satin



9/10

PROS A special edition with superb build quality and a punchy, fingerstyle-friendly sound

CONS The koa might deter those looking for a more traditional 000

GOOD TO GO

WHENEVER • WHEREVER



A passion for playing means that inspiration can strike anytime, anywhere. With Elixir® Strings you know that when you pick up your guitar it's going to sound great—time and time again. That's because our featherweight coating protects your strings from the elements, keeping corrosion away and allowing your tone to sound great for longer, in any environment.

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FIRST PLAY



**LINE 6 CATALYST 100
1X12 COMBO**
£465

WHAT IS IT? One of a trio of affordable new two-channel modelling amps, also in 60- and 200-watt formats, with HX-quality amp sounds and effects

Year Of The Cat

Line 6 shakes up the budget digital combo market with a new range that packs HX-quality amp sounds and effects into handsome cabinets

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Olly Curtis

Line 6 is one of the original pioneers of digital amp modelling with a history that stretches back to 1996 and the original AxSys 212. However, it was the arrival of the POD a couple of years later that really cemented the company's reputation and changed the face of guitar amplification. While the POD separated the amp modelling and effects technology from speakers and power, Line 6 continued to develop 'proper amps', moving on to the Flextone and long-running Spider series. Beside the core ranges, there have been models that pushed the envelope in various directions, such as the Vetta, HD147 and Bogner-designed Alchemist.

Meanwhile, Line 6's modelling tech has been refined and developed into countless products including the Variax modelling guitar system, pedals and rack effects, culminating in the award-winning Helix, which has become almost an industry standard for studios and pro players around the globe. Now a part of the Yamaha group, Line 6 has returned to its roots with the

Catalyst: a new range of affordable two-channel modelling amps that combine the latest HX voicing technology with guitarist-friendly features and controls.

Line 6 has always turned out good-looking amplifiers and the new Catalyst is no exception, with a particle-board cabinet trimmed in heavy-duty matt-black vinyl and a smart speaker grille with a subtle pattern picked out in sparkling thread. The grille and neo-classical logo add a touch of class, giving the Catalyst a smart-yet-restrained visual appeal. The generously deep cab supports a single rear-loaded 12-inch Line 6 HC100 loudspeaker that's been specially designed for the Catalyst. Its large ceramic magnet indicates there's no shortage of headroom on this amp.

The electronics are contained inside a robust steel U-shaped chassis that's bolted to the cabinet's top rear, with one side of the 'U' forming the top control panel. Everything is printed circuit as you'd expect and there are boards for the top and rear panel controls, plus a larger board on the







1

base of the chassis for the power supply and output stage. It's all been neatly arranged and the assembly looks tough enough to handle live gigging.

Reassuringly, the Catalyst's control panel looks quite normal for a modelling amp. A single input jack feeds a rotary selector that accesses six original Line 6 amp voices, along with bank patches, effects and reverb types. Next, there's a Boost on/off switch with a level control, followed by familiar knobs for Gain, Bass, Mid, Treble, Presence and Channel Volume. Effects and reverb

are managed by separate level controls and illuminated button switches that toggle the effects and reverb on or off and enter edit mode when held. A multi-coloured LED indicates which effects are active, while a third button enters tap tempo or activates the Catalyst's built-in tuner. The last control on the far right is a non-programmable master volume.

The rear-panel features include an Output Power selector offering full or half power, together with a 0.5-watt setting and a mute option for silent recording. Next to this is a USB 'B' connector, which hooks the Catalyst up to a desktop for recording or deep editing of patches using the Catalyst editor app. The Catalyst can be remote-controlled by MIDI. Alternatively, there's an optional two-button switch that swaps between the A and B channels and toggles the Boost function.

Other connectivity options include an aux in and headphones output, together with a series effects loop and a handy direct out on balanced XLR that has cab emulation and a ground lift switch. The

1. The assignable Selector knob makes it easy to access amp voices, effects and patches. Each of the six patches has an A and B channel selected from the front panel or footswitch

2. The smart-yet-restrained design looks great on stage as well as at home or in the studio. Despite the deep cabinet, it's still compact and portable at just under 15kg (32lb)



2

It's a smart-looking amp ideal for live, studio and home, and boasts all the features most players need



Catalyst 100 is a smart-looking and well-presented amp that's ideal for live, studio and home use, and boasts all the features most players need and a clever simplified control panel.

Feel & Sounds

The Catalyst's voices are original Line 6 amp designs, created using technology from its acclaimed HX library. They're called Clean, Boutique, Chime, Crunch, Dynamic and Hi Gain, and while there are no direct references to the classic amps that may or may not have been used for inspiration, your ears might pick out echoes of Fullerton, Santa Cruz, Bletchley, Dartford, Seattle (maybe) and Petaluma if you listen carefully.

The realism and responsiveness on offer is impressive. Our favourites are the Boutique amp type, which uses a voice called Aristocrat, and the superb Dynamic, which uses a voice called Kinetic. With careful dialling in, these virtual amps breathe and react convincingly like proper valve circuits to the extent that there's little noticeable difference at lower volume settings. Each voice also has its own custom boost function, with a programmable level control and on/off switch.

Used live, some of the higher gain sounds were a little muddy and we'd recommend using the excellent speaker compensated

XLR output into a PA to improve definition. Recording with the Catalyst is quite easy using the XLR or USB outputs, with little or no extra treatment needed.

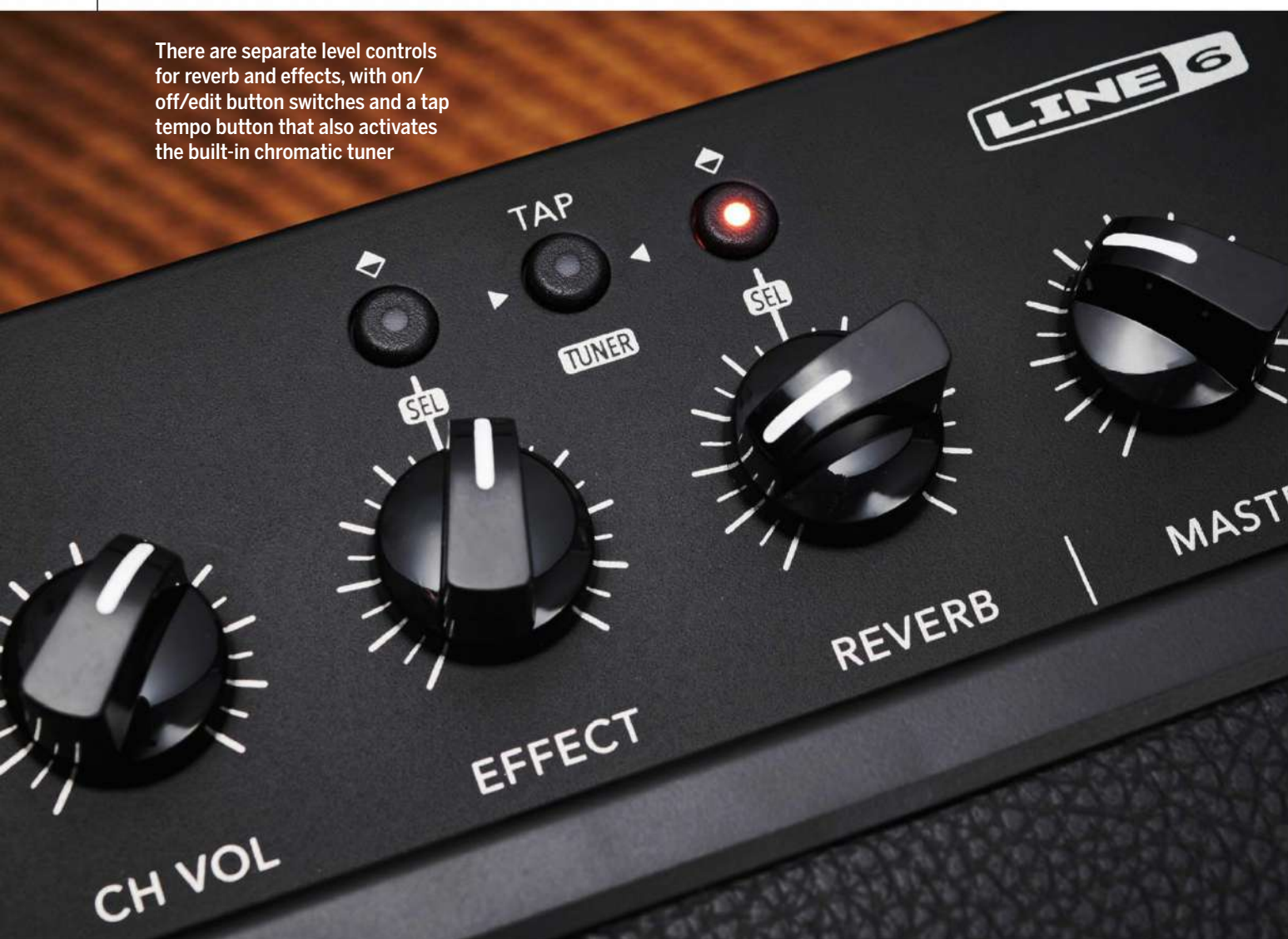
The effects are excellent with warm delays, lush choruses, a Uni-Vibe style effect and rotary speaker models combined with pitch shifting, fuzz and synth options. The level controls don't seem to have very much adjustment at the lower end of their travel, so the mix is either too little or too much. However, this is easy to correct from the editing app if needed.

The Catalyst has its own effects loop as well, which can be switched into 'power amp in' mode if you have an external multi-effects and just need the Catalyst's power and loudspeaker.

Programming is easy (after a quick read of the manual). The default setting for the Selector knob scrolls through the amp voices, and to access the Catalyst's bank patches, you hold down the manual button switch for a few seconds before turning the selector. Similar operations with the effects and reverb buttons access the Catalyst's



There are separate level controls for reverb and effects, with on/off/edit button switches and a tap tempo button that also activates the built-in chromatic tuner



18 effects, arranged in three colour-coded groups of six for delay, modulation and pitch, with a separate group of six different reverb types including hall, chamber, room and spring types. Having sorted your sound, you save it for easy recall in either the A or B channel in any bank – simply press the A or B buttons on the top panel. Or you can leave the amp in Manual mode, in which case all the knobs and buttons are active.

The relative simplicity of the Catalyst's controls makes this a great amp to quickly grab a tone and go, while control freaks will be pleased to know the MIDI in socket accepts patch change and continuous controller commands. However, we think the optional two-button footswitch that toggles A/B channels and the boost is all most players will need.

There's another way to access the Catalyst's features, including quite a few that aren't on the control panel, and that's by using the Catalyst Edit app, which is available for Windows, Mac, iOS and Android. The app hooks up seamlessly via USB and provides a real-time display of the amp's settings, letting you select amp voices and effects and write them into the amp or save them offline. You can also download and upload patches from Line 6's CustomTone marketplace. Extra features include a noise gate and deep editing of amp and effects parameters, with options including pre- and post-amp positioning,

While it is straightforward, there's enough under the hood to satisfy those who like to tweak things

sag and bias. There's even a slightly tongue-in-cheek option to add in artificial mains hum for authentic vintage gnarliness, but no choice of 50Hz or 60Hz. The app also accesses the Catalyst's direct output cabinet modelling, giving you a choice of three cabinet types and no less than 16 microphone options.

Verdict

While Line 6's Catalyst is familiar and straightforward to operate, there's just enough under the hood to satisfy those who like to tweak things. Consequently, it's great fun to use, despite a few relatively minor niggles, which could easily be corrected via future firmware upgrades.

That said, the Catalyst's sounds and effects are inspiring, pushing you to play better to get the most from them, while the range prices are very affordable – the Catalyst 60 is likely to sell on the street for under the magic £250 mark, making it a great 'first proper amp' choice. At these prices and despite stiff competition, we think amp modelling has never sounded so good. Check one out and see if you agree. **G**



LINE 6 CATALYST 100 1X12 COMBO

PRICE: £465

ORIGIN: Malaysia

TYPE: Digital modelling preamp, solid-state power stage

OUTPUT: 100W into 4 ohms, switchable to half power, 0.5W and mute

VALVES: None

DIMENSIONS: 487 (h) x 564 (w) x 262mm (d)

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 14.5/32

CABINET: Particle board

LOUDSPEAKERS: 1x Line 6 Catalyst HC100 12"

CHANNELS: 12x presets arranged as 6x banks of 2x A/B patches

CONTROLS: Channel A/B/Manual switches, amp voice/effects selector, boost level, boost select, gain, bass, mid, treble, presence, channel volume, effects level, reverb level, master volume. Effects/reverb/tap tempo switches, output power switch, fx loop mode switch, ground lift

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Balanced XLR line out with ground lift, series effects loop, USB 'B' connector, MIDI in, aux in, headphones output. Firmware updates via USB port on bottom of chassis

FOOTSWITCH: Optional LFS2 2-button footswitch controls channel A/B switching and effects on/off

OPTIONS: LFS2 2-button footswitch £44

RANGE OPTIONS: Catalyst 60 (£342) 2x12 Catalyst 200 (£603)

Yamaha Music Europe GmbH

+49 (0) 4101 303 0

www.line6.com



PROS Excellent HX-quality amp voices and effects; familiar controls; great choice for live and home/studio use; excellent direct output; Catalyst Edit app

CONS Some higher gain sounds are a little muddy and compressed when used with a real band; no Bluetooth link for the app



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FIRST PLAY



**VINTAGE V65 ICON
VIBRATO**
£449

WHAT IS IT? An affordable offset double-cut with a heavy reliced treatment and surprising boutique style – prime for a modder's workbench



Distress Yourself

A new heavily reliced and very affordable offset from the cheeky chaps at Vintage


Words Dave Burrluck Photography Olly Curtis

1. The V65V's distressed finish might not look realistically aged, but the good thing is it's clearly a very thin finish rather than a thicker gloss. It's also available in a Distressed Tobacco Sunburst
2. Like many modern offset designs, the V65V ditches the dual circuits of the original for a simple and functional setup. It also makes the guitar very easy to upgrade, should you fancy
3. A modified Fender-style headstock is a must on any inspired-by design such as this. While more stylish, simple logos would add to the boutique style, it's very functional with a nicely cut Graph Tech NuBone nut and perfectly good vintage-style tuners
4. Here's an example of how high DCRs (9.52kohms at the neck and 15.06k at the bridge) are not an indicator of output but plenty of thinner gauge wire that's used to temper the potential brightness of the ceramic magnets

During a time when low-end guitars are continually surprising us with their build quality, style and sound, this Jazzmaster-ish knock-off from champions of the underdog Vintage is perfectly timed. To be fair, the V65 has been around a while in both hardtail and vibrato forms, but for 2022 you can get it in two 'distressed' colours. Thank goodness Vintage didn't call it 'aged' because the body mangling is laughably inauthentic, and we did wonder if our courier was responsible. The guitar ships in a cardboard box with next-to-zero packaging, but pulling it out of its polystyrene bag it's not only perfectly in tune but has been very well set up, too. We're not laughing any more: we've had boutique-level guitars that have arrived less ship-shape condition than this.

Exactly where the guitars are made isn't obvious and when we last asked we were told "China or Vietnam". Whatever, according to the spec info it's made of the right stuff: alder body, maple neck with rosewood 'board, and a good weight of 3.5kg (7.81lb). Like many makers doing an offset, the V65 subtly downsizes the original in terms of the outline and simplifies the complex dual circuits of Fender's original with a pair of direct-mount Wilkinson soapbar single coils and a three-way toggle, master volume, tone and output jack that are all screwed onto the tortie scratchplate. It seems the distressing department might have knocked off early: though the perfectly usable Wilkinson Kluson-style tuners and chromed neckplate are aged, the tune-o-matic-style bridge and offset vibrato, not to mention the plastic parts, look newborn.

Modern offsets come in many flavours in terms of sound. This one may look like it's been toured for years by a US grunge band, but its voice is a little more refined, more Fender-y than thicker Les Paul Junior. Tuning stability is very good, thanks in part to the roller-saddle tune-o-matic bridge, while its relatively low height and lack of neck pitch means there's plenty of offset character and resonance due to the string length behind the bridge to the tailpiece. Still, if you want to hit it hard you may need to raise the bridge and install a neck shim. But as is, playability is good, not least the worn feel of that neck back – a well-shaped shallow 'C' that moves in depth from 21mm at the 1st fret of 23.4mm by the 12th.

This V65V is far from shabby, even though that's what the finish suggests. Boutique in style, budget in price? We'd say so. 



VINTAGE V65 ICON VIBRATO

PRICE: £449

ORIGIN: China/Vietnam

TYPE: Offset double-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: Alder

NECK: Maple, 'soft C' profile, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech NuBone/42.9mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, pearloid dot inlays, measured 241mm (9.5") radius

FRETS: 22, medium/jumbo

HARDWARE: Tune-o-matic-style bridge with roller saddles, offset-style vibrato tailpiece, aged Wilkinson WJ55 tuners – nickel/chrome-plating

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Wilkinson soapbar single coils, 3-way toggle pickup selector, master volume and tone controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.5/7.81

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: In the unrelie'd Reissued series is the V65 Hard Tail with a 6-saddle bridge, also available with offset vibrato (both £419)

LEFT-HANDERS: Vintage offers plenty of left-handed electrics but not for the V65

FINISH: Distressed Black (as reviewed) Distressed Tobacco Sunburst – satin aged finish to both body and neck

John Hornby Skewes

01132 865381

www.vintageguitarsrus.com

8/10

PROS Affordable, quality build; good weight; very thin finish; tuning stability; credible single-coil voices

CONS Very derivative in style; some would prefer a little more neck pitch; hardly realistic ageing





theWishlist

Dream gear to beg, borrow and steal for...

Gibson Custom Shop BB King Lucille Legacy £6,099

CONTACT **Gibson** WEB www.gibson.com WORDS **Dave Burrluck** PHOTOGRAPHY **Olly Curtis**

Guitar players like to give their guitars names, but, very famously, BB King named every Gibson guitar he used Lucille, after pulling his L-30 from a fire in 1949. Although he used various ES Thinline models, he became associated with the ES-355, and in 1980 Gibson released his first signature guitar models: the BB King Standard and Custom, the latter model in the Lucille style that's most associated with the great bluesman.

Technically, it wasn't the first Gibson ES Thinline with a sealed body (without f-holes). The Gibson ES Artist had appeared in 1979, and back in 1963 Epiphone's Al Caiola Standard and Custom were launched in the same sealed-body style. But this latest Custom Lucille Legacy celebrates the now-classic style – released just months after Epiphone's own tribute Lucille, which is considerably cheaper at £849 – and joins Gibson's fast-expanding Artist range. There's no lack of King's 'tuxedo' style, either, in the multi-bound body and pickguard, and gleaming gold-plating for the hardware and truss rod cover. Then there are the sumptuous inlays on the ebony fingerboard, and just in case you forget that name, it's inlaid on the headstock.

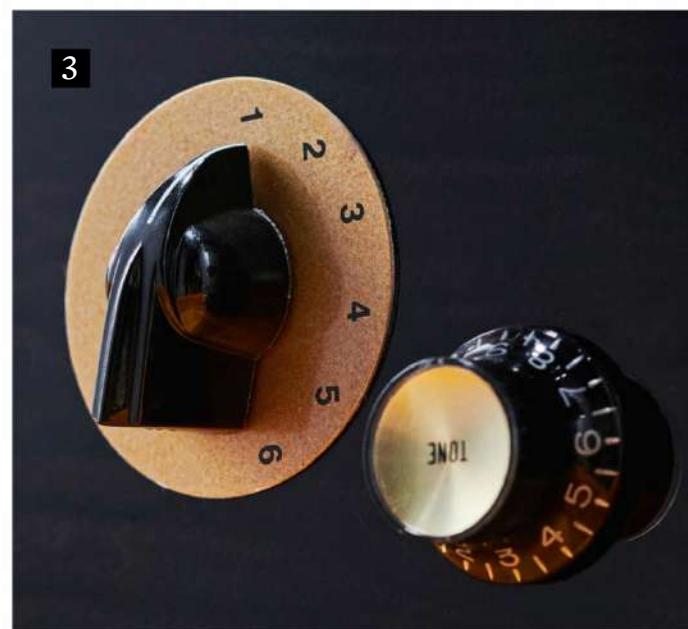
As you should expect at this level, the setup and playability are superb, as is the tuning stability, while the 'SlimTaper' neck profile feels noticeably fuller than the Jim James ES-335 we most recently evaluated. It's heavier, too (4.03kg/8.87lb). And while that guitar used the relatively new Gibson T-Type humbuckers, here we get a set of Custombuckers, originally developed for the Jimmy Page Les Paul and exclusive to the Custom Shop, which use Alnico III magnets. "We actually just recently redid our tests to make sure we still all liked Alnico III the best," Mat Koehler, Gibson's head of product development, told us last year. "For us, it seems to be the one that captures that 'bloom' and sound of the original PAFs."

The pickups have relatively low DCRs, measuring 7.7kohms at the bridge and 7.84k at the neck, and with the Varitone bypassed, in position 1 you can't help having a go at your BB licks. It's classic stuff, with a nice snap to the note attack and seemingly less thickness but slightly more width than our BurstBucker-equipped Les Paul. The Varitone's filters thin and shade the sounds, helping you emulate the great man's tone. The phrasing and note choice, however, are down to you. **G**

1. The distinct TP-6 tailpiece appeared in the late 70s and features on the original BB King Custom. Each string has its own fine-tuner and, as ever, all the hardware is gold-plated

2. Like the original models, the headstock features the script Lucille logo, which is inlaid mother-of-pearl, as is the Gibson logo. The gold-plated truss rod cover also features BB King's signature very lightly engraved

3. While plenty of earlier models featured dual outputs (so each pickup could be sent to different amps), the Lucille Legacy is mono, including the six-position Varitone



4. Originally offered in cherry or ebony, this Lucille's Transparent Ebony gloss nitro finish shows off a subtle velvet-like figuring to the maple laminate. There's multiple black/white purfling on the top edges, too, and the binding is bright white

5. Another change from the original specification is the long-tenon mahogany neck, which would have been three-piece maple back in 1980. The fingerboard is ebony, a change back to wood from the previous 2019 Alpine White Lucille, which used Richlite

6. Simply called "split block mother of pearl inlays", the decoration here doesn't follow any of the historic ES Thinlines but is the same as Gibson used on its archtops, such as the flagship Super 400CES and the Johnny Smith, for example





Gas Supply

Our pick of the month's most delectable and wallet-bothering new gear

Yamaha Revstar models **From approx £399**

CONTACT **Yamaha Music Europe** PHONE **0344 811 1116** WEB <http://uk.yamaha.com>

JARGON CRUNCHING

In Control

Push-pull? That'll be a coil-split then, right? Wrong. The Professional and Standard Revstars use Yamaha's Focus switch, which is a passive boost that reacts like an overwound pickup. The Element features the classic Revstar Dry switch, which acts like a high-pass filter to thin out your sound without adding noise or losing power.

Wait, is it 2015? I thought Yamaha already released the Revstar!

No, it's not – and yes, it did. But these aren't just a few colour changes. Yamaha has taken the Revstar (which was its first new guitar design in over a decade when it originally launched) and overhauled it.

Why are there three of them?

In a classic good-better-best approach, Yamaha has organised the new Revstar models into three tiers: there's the entry-level Element (RSE, around £399), mid-priced Standard (RSS, around £649), and the Japanese-made Professional (RSP, around £1,599) line-up. Those three tiers actually comprise eight different models in total, and that's not including finish options.

I'm with you, so what's the difference?

The first big change is that Yamaha has taken the Revstar double-cut body and given it some weight relief and resonant tuning with some fairly substantial chambering. The Professional models are bolstered with carbon reinforcement, with two strips set into the body behind the bridge and tailpiece posts.

Similarly, the Professional and Standard models also feature carbon strips flanking the truss rod down the length of the neck, which in both body and neck instances is said to help with faster transfer of vibrations, resulting in greater resonance and volume as well as strength.

All tiers feature the same body chambering, but the Professional and Standard are cut out of mahogany with a maple cap, while the Element is mahogany only.

THREE TIERS

The Revstar comes in three levels: Element (below left), Standard (above right) and Professional (below right) with humbucker or P-90 options in Pro and Standard



CARBON REINFORCEMENT

The Professional series Revstars are reinforced with carbon inserts in the body and neck, while the Standard includes carbon in the neck only. As well as adding strength, it improves vibration transfer



LEFT-HANDERS

Not every manufacturer caters for southpaws, but Yamaha has done just that with left-handed versions of the humbucker Revstars in the Standard and Element ranges



CHAMBERED BODIES

Yamaha has taken the weight off your shoulders and helped tune the resonance by chambering the Revstar body's mahogany core

Tell us about all eight guitars...

The Professional range includes three models. The RSP20, the dual-humbucker-equipped version, is offered in Sunset Burst, Moonlight Blue and Swift Blue (with the racing stripe). Then there's the RSP20X, which is a cosmetic twist featuring painted body binding that matches the gold racing stripes, and also features an anodised aluminium scratchplate. Finally, for the Professional range, is the RSP02T (Crisp Gold, Swift Blue and Sunset Burst), which is fitted with P-90-style pickups, with the 'T' denoting the racing-style tailpiece.

On to the Standard range, which also comprises three models. The numbering follows the same convention. The RSS20 (available in Café Racer-inspired Sunset Burst, Swift Blue, Hot Merlot, Flash Green, Vintage White, Black)

Yamaha has taken the double-cut body and given it weight relief and resonant tuning with substantial chambering

gives you a pair of humbuckers, and the RSS02T means P-90s and racing tailpiece. But this time instead of the 'X' version, Yamaha offers the humbucker version as a lefty with the RSS20L (available in Swift Blue or Black).

The Element series is only available as a model 20 dual-humbucker guitar, which features some tasteful-looking and, as with the Standard series, often subtle racing stripes (Swift Blue, Red Copper, Neon Yellow, Black, Vintage White). We're pleased to see that Yamaha hasn't forgotten about the southpaws here, with the RSE20 also available as a left-handed model in the same two finishes as its Standard counterpart, which we think could be a canny move at this price point.

They look pretty sparse on the control side of things, don't they?

Not so fast! Revstars have always come with a simple master volume/master tone control, but these are all packing some additional features thanks to their push-pull tone pots (see Jargon Crunching, on the page opposite). The Element sticks with the Revstar of yore's three-way blade switch, but the Professional and Standard both feature in-between positions, where the farthest pickup from the position you have selected is delayed slightly to give you a phase-shifted sound. [SW]

ALSO OUT NOW...



BOSS GX-100 £499

Boss is back with its latest multi-effects, the GX-100, which has inherited 23 AIRD amp models and more than 150 effects from the flagship GT-1000. It's the first Boss multi to feature a touchscreen, and, with 15 'blocks' in each preset, it offers dual-amp signal paths, as well as series or parallel internal effects chains per-patch, plus it has the ability to load speaker impulse responses. There's a whole lot of control and connectivity on offer, too. The built-in expression pedal is assignable, and on the back there are stereo outputs, a headphone socket, a hardware effects loop (with ground lift), an external footswitch socket and a five-pin MIDI I/O, as well as a socket that allows the GX-100 to switch your amp channel.

www.boss.info



LINE 6 DL4 MKII £TBC

More than two decades after we first clapped eyes on the green-shelled delay monster that is the Line 6 DL4, the modelling giant has revamped its classic time machine for a MkII version. It features all the original delay sounds and follows the same control layout as the original, but this is way more than just a facelift. First, Line 6 has doubled the delay count from 15 to 30 using Helix-derived models. Next, the looping time has been expanded to 240 seconds, or several hours if you use an SD card. The footswitches have been upgraded with Line 6's illuminated halos, and there's expanded connectivity, too, with an XLR socket allowing for vocal processing, five-pin MIDI in and out for control and patch changes, and USB for MIDI and firmware updates. Oh, and it's a bit smaller and about half a kilo lighter than the original.

www.line6.com

Albums

The month's best guitar music - a hand-picked selection of the finest fretwork on wax

PHOTO BY WILL IRELAND



Def Leppard's latest album aims to rouse with fewer riffs

Def Leppard Diamond Star Halos

Universal

7/10



Grandeur and grace... but a little light on hooks

Def Leppard have always occupied a unique place in music. Somehow they combine the hard edge of rock with an instinct for hooks that any pop act would envy. That irresistible combo reached its pinnacle in the band's glistering masterpiece *Hysteria* from 1987. All of that album's key elements are present in their latest album, *Diamond Star Halos*, but this time the band places the emphasis on sonic grandeur and lush orchestration.

Opener, *Kick*, certainly doesn't lack propulsive force, combining a 70s glam-rock groove with uplifting changes of the kind Leppard excels at. Like someone who always dresses well, Def Leppard are always impeccably turned out sonically: Vivian Campbell and Phil Collen's overdrive tones are girthy and three-dimensional, the soloing absolutely on-point. That mix of power and headrush-inducing chorus is at its peak on *SOS Emergency*, effortlessly changing up through the gears as the bridge slingshots into the chorus. But grand ballads such as *Liquid Dust* are more representative of the album's overall character – orchestral, sweeping and anthemic, they'll surely ignite a sea of lighters live – yet do seem a little anodyne and unfocused compared with the rockier numbers, and we wish there were just a few more irresistible riffs on the album. No guitarist could fail to feel their heartstrings tugged by Leppard's love-letter to six-strings, *This Guitar*, which is just as well as if it was a conventional love song it would be shamefully sentimental. Look past those points, though, and there's a 15-course banquet of uplifting rock to enjoy here. **[JD]**

Standout track: *Packing Up Getting Ready To Go*

For fans of: Aerosmith, H.E.A.T, Crashdiet

Edgar Winter

Brother Johnny

Quarto Valley Records

10/10



All-star tribute to legendary guitarist

Johnny Winter has a special place in countless guitar fans' hearts for being such an exciting and inspiring guitarist and writer. This new album by his brother Edgar has been years in the making and features a stellar list of performers, including Joe Bonamassa, Billy Gibbons, Steve Lukather, Keb' Mo', Derek Trucks and Robben Ford, to name but a few. It's a big album, too, with 17 tracks linked to Johnny and crammed with unique line-ups: *Johnny B Goode* has Edgar and Joe Walsh on vocals with David Grissom and Phil X on guitars; *Mean Town Blues* features Edgar on vocals and Joe Bonamassa on slide guitar; Billy Gibbons sings fantastically on *I'm Yours And I'm Hers*; and Michael McDonald's vocals are super smooth on *Stranger*, accompanied by Joe Walsh on guitar. A very fitting tribute from a broad array of musicians for fans of Johnny and timeless blues music. **[JS]**

Standout track: *Johnny B Goode*

For fans of: Johnny Winter, ZZ Top, Joe Bonamassa

Larry McCray

Blues Without You

KTBA Records

9/10



True blues from an established and well-loved master

Larry McCray is a Detroit-based blues guitarist/singer and up there with the best of the best. Produced by the new wonder-team of Josh Smith and Joe Bonamassa, *Blues Without You* sounds exquisite – 12 tracks that run the gamut of what many blues fans want: great songs, rich grooves, tight band interplay and stinging guitar solos. Opener, *Arkansas*, ticks all the boxes with a great band vibe (horns and Hammond organ glisten, the drums and bass are punchy) and Larry sings and plays his socks off. The swing feel of *Good Die Young* is infectious with Larry bobbing on the top of the band with his vocals and guitar solo. *Down To The Bottom* features great guitar trade-offs between Larry and Warren Haynes. *Drinkin' Liquor And Chasin' Women* highlights Joanna Connor's blues chops, and JoBo's solo on *Mr Easy* adds extra spice to the fat groove. **[JS]**

Standout track: *Mr Easy*

For fans of: Albert King, Robert Cray



Giuseppe Pucciarelli brings many layers to his latest album

Simon McBride

The Fighter

EarMusic

9/10



Riff-laden guitarathon from virtuoso rocker

You only need to be a couple of tracks into Simon McBride's new album before you realise that you're dealing with a rock-guitar heavyweight. Not only is the playing well up to pedigree, the songwriting is pretty high octane, too. Touring with both his own band and big-venue acts such as Don Airey, Ian Gillan (who has gone on record describing Simon as one of the best guitarists in the world) and Snakecharmer has given the Belfast-born rocker time to hone his skills as a performer, and here he decants it all into 12 tracks of rare maturity and finesse. Songs such as the latest single *High Stakes* and *Don't Dare* bristle with classic-rock riffery and rock 'n' roll attitude. It's not all sweat and leather, though; Simon's ballad writing is to the fore on the stadium-friendly *Let Me Go* with a singalong chorus and a suitably anthemic guitar solo. From what we've heard here, this could easily be the breakthrough album Simon so richly deserves – try to catch him live if you can. **[DM]**

Standout track: *High Stakes*

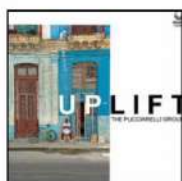
For fans of: Gary Moore, Joe Bonamassa

The Pucciarelli Group

Uplift

Ubuntu Music

8/10



Italian guitarist explores jazz terrain

Giuseppe Pucciarelli might be an unfamiliar name in the guitar world, but this album may change that forever.

Teaming up with bandmates Aldo Capasso on double bass, Ergio Valente on piano and Marco Gagliano on drums, Pucciarelli moves in a similar landscape to that of Pat Metheny's earlier work, with the occasional hint of Julian Lage's tenure with Gary Burton showing through, too. Leaving his native Italy to study jazz at London's prestigious Guildhall, Pucciarelli recorded his debut album, *Shall We Say It Is Worth It*, back in 2017 and considers *Uplift* a natural extension, insisting that it's about the sound of the quartet and not just him as soloist. The music is varied and continually engaging, the guitar work sinuous and inventive – we predict a bright future ahead. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Wooden Sign*

For fans of: Pat Metheny, Julian Lage



Flattley

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Guitarist Magazine - 2022

The award winning Flattley Revolution pedal is one of the many guitar and bass pedals hand built in England by Flattley Boutique Effects Pedals. For more information, demo videos & stockists visit

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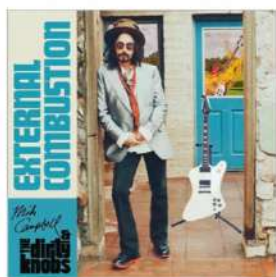


Tones Behind The Tracks

Heartbreakers guitarist **Mike Campbell** reassembles his band, The Dirty Knobs, to record a new album for 2022

Artist: Mike Campbell & The Dirty Knobs

Album: *External Combustion* (BMG Records)



External Combustion is the second album release for the band since 2020's *Wreckless Abandon*

Since the untimely death of Tom Petty, Heartbreakers guitarist Mike Campbell has kept himself busy. After touring extensively with Fleetwood Mac, he took to his home studio to record a second album with his band The Dirty Knobs. We catch up with him to find out how it all came together...

This is only the second album you've made with the band, and yet you've been together for quite a long time.

"Yeah, well, I was busy for many decades with The Heartbreakers and in between tours, I met these guys and we would record and play little clubs around town just for fun. These guys are really good, very patient. And so when my time opened up, this is what I wanted to do. We've actually been together quite a while and know each other well, and we have an intuitive style. So it worked out really good."

What are your influences when it comes to writing your own material?

"Well, the 60s is where I grew up, which I think was an amazing time to learn guitar. It was such a renaissance

as we look back on it – the 60s and early 70s. All those great bands and great songs. You just don't have that any more. Those are my roots and those are the influences that I draw on when I make my own music."

Was all the material written specifically for this album?

"About half of it was. I've got a bunch of analogue tapes and I've been going through them, baking them and restoring them. I found three or four songs from those old tapes back in the 90s that ended up on the album. I had forgotten about them, but they turned out to be really good, so it worked out. A song called *State Of Mind*, which has Margo Price on it, was an old track I had completely forgotten about. The title track *External Combustion* was [originally just] a piece of a riff that was on tape, and I thought, 'Well, I can make something out of that now...' and maybe a couple more. Those are the first ones that come to mind."

And you recorded this in your own studio?

"Yes, I've recorded in my home studio for a long time. A lot of Heartbreaker stuff, too. I have a great state-of-the-art studio in the annexe next to my house and it sounds awesome. Don't have to worry about the sounds, I just get to work on the music."

Talk us through the selection of gear you used on this album...

"I was using my '59 Les Paul, which I don't take on the road. It records really well. Occasionally, there's a Telecaster in there. The amp was a little Fender Princeton and an Ampeg Rocket amp – little amps in a nice-sounding room, mic'd up, you know, close and far away. That was pretty much it. The other guitar player [Jason Sinay] played a Strat most of the time. He has a '72 Strat and he also played through a Princeton amp. That was our sound. That's what we use on stage, too."

Using a small amp to get a huge sound was a secret weapon of many 70s bands. Can you explain how you also came to do that?

"When The Heartbreakers started out, we had big loud amps. We had these things called Vox Super Beatles, which were 100-watt amps and they're about 4ft tall. Loud as crap, and I don't know how Tom [Petty] sang over those, but he did. As the years went on, we got

Mike Campbell (front) with guitarist Jason Sinay, bass player Lance Morrison and drummer Matt Laug

PHOTO BY CHRIS PHELPS



tired of loud stage amps and got the slightly smaller amps. I went down to an AC30 for a while. But when I started playing with my band in the clubs, I went down to an even smaller amp like the Princeton, and I also used a Fender Tweed Deluxe from the 50s. I got that idea from Neil Young, actually.

"I went to see Neil Young here in LA once and he was playing through a little tweed amp, and they had a microphone on it and up through the big PA – it sounded huge, you know? And what's great about that is the stage sound is not blasting. You've got a nice sound and you can put it through the PA to make it as loud as you want. I liked that so much I started using it with The Heartbreakers as well."

Did you record the band live in the studio?

"This band is all live. Most of the solos are live on the take, and most of the takes are the first or second. I like to catch the band unawares before they really know what they're doing too much and before they're thinking about it. You know, you catch the spark of discovery in the music, in the moment, and get that on tape, rather than labour over it and overdub later. I mean, there's a few overdubs here and there on the record, but a lot of the vocals and almost all the lead guitars and the rhythm tracks are basically us just playing. That's how we sound."

How do you approach a solo in the studio?

"I like to complement the vocals. I listen closely to the vocal and the melody, and, when I play, I try to be another voice that fits in and doesn't distract from the song. I have a basic outline of what I want to do, then I just roll the tape – I like to have things come off the top of my head. I rarely work them out in advance. I just like the spontaneity: run the tape and I'm going to play along and hope something happens."

Do you use pedals in the studio or do you go straight into the amp?

"Mostly straight into the amp. But with this band, and this record – since it is basically the way we play live – I had some pedals set up so I could kick up the volume here and there, or add a delay with my feet on the fly, so we don't have to overdub and put echo on it. It's all basically off the pedalboard. It's just a simple pedalboard: overdrive and a delay mostly is all I used."



"If you're really having fun and getting off on the sound and creating your 'little masterpiece', then that's 90 per cent of the game"

You play slide on the album. Are you a glass or steel slide player?

"I like glass. Back in the day they didn't make glass slides. You could get an aspirin bottle – a Coricidin bottle – and throw the pills out, put that on your finger. So I learnt to play with the sound of glass. I've used metal and sometimes ceramic, but the glass seems to speak to me a little better."

What's your personal philosophy when it comes to recording?

"I do a lot of recording on my own, which can be fun. I mean, the main thing really, with recording and writing, is to be truthful. It should not be a labour, you know? You should just be enjoying it and if you're really having fun and getting off on the sound and creating your 'little masterpiece', then that's 90 per cent of the game. And believe in yourself; you have to have confidence that you can make it good." **[DM]**

Mike is partial to a Gibson Firebird and, in addition to the model above, the beauty pictured on The Dirty Knobs' new album cover was actually a pawn shop bargain. Read more about how it became his favourite workhorse electric on page 75...



External Combustion, the new album from Mike Campbell And The Dirty Knobs, is out now on the BMG label
www.thedirtyknobs.com



Looking Back

Adam Goldsmith is joined by session veteran Les Davidson this month who shares his experience of playing in the 70s and 80s

One of my favourite things about writing for *Guitarist* magazine is that I've been reading it ever since I was around 12 years old. I have a memory from around that time of an article called something like 'One For The Mortgage' featuring a guitar player, Les Davidson, who has since become my friend. Les has had a long and varied career, which has included playing with Paul McCartney, Scott Walker, Jeff Porcaro, Pino Palladino and many others. I caught up with Les to hear how the London session scene has changed since the 70s and 80s, and his general thoughts on the modern music business.

What might a typical day of sessions in London look like in the 70s or 80s?

"It could be anything from an 8.30am jingle session (the studio rates were cheaper before 10am), then a 10am-to-1pm studio/soundtrack session, lunch, then another three-hour studio session. Each session could have been at different London studios. The sessions were generally booked through a fixer (agent) who then collected the fees and paid you at the end of the month – if you were lucky! Another day might have been an all-day-into-the-night band/artist session at a day rate negotiated with a record or management company."

What was your go-to guitar rig for sessions?

"Some studios had an amp – Scorpio [Sound] had one, Lansdowne I think, and possibly Marquee Studios – but they varied in quality. In the early days I only had a Strat and a borrowed Ampeg combo, but as I started to make a bit of money I got a Gibson 335, Ovation and Fylde acoustics, and a Fender Princeton, then a Mark 1 Boogie, which I got when I toured the US in the late 70s.

"Pedals were usually a wah-wah, a chorus/flanger (Electro-Harmonix's Electric Mistress was very popular) or Uni-Vibe, a Fuzz Face and a Colorsound Tone Bender/Overdrive. In the mid-80s, the rackmount stuff started to be essential if you wanted to be cutting-edge, so I got a fridge with a Rivera amp, a Boogie 2:90 with a TriAxis preamp, two 2x12 cabs, rack delays, reverbs, chorus, compressors, foot controller...

"You also needed to have a high-strung acoustic, a Tele, an SG or Les Paul. And a roadie!"

Who were your contemporaries?

"Alan Parker, Martin Kershaw, Clem Clempson, Ricky Hitchcock, Paul Keogh, Ian Bairnson, Mitch Dalton, Laurence Juber, Alan Murphy and Nico Ramsden."

What type of sessions did you find particularly difficult?

"Some of the harder sessions were when your ideas were just not working for the client/producer. I did one

session for Green [Gartside] from Scritti Politti, and he didn't talk much at all – we left after three hours without anything being kept on tape! Some reading sessions were stressful, too, as sight-reading has never been my greatest strength, especially when you're in Abbey Road/CTS Studios with an orchestra and a conductor waving their arms around.

"Another time I did a session for the great Scott Walker for an album called *Nite Flights*. Scott would only play me the drum track with no chord chart or other information. 'Just play what you feel,' he said. I asked what key it was in and he refused to tell me. The idea was to get the player to react in a different way to the music. And if you listen to the track called *The Shutout*, I think it worked!"

What do you think the main differences are in the music business today?

"Without a doubt, it's so much harder for upcoming musicians nowadays. In the 70s and 80s, the music industry was at its height, so record labels were willing to spend to speculate. I played on many a track that never saw the light of day. Today, if your first release doesn't make a big ripple in the pond then you are out!


"In general, the pro guitarist these days has to spread the work across sessions, gigs and tours, West End shows and maybe a bit of online or institute teaching. Back then you could be just a studio player if you wanted and make a really good living."

Is there anything you prefer about the modern music business?

"Digital recording means you can save everything, and editing is so time-saving. Remote recording is another tool that we could only dream about. We used to say, 'Can I phone it in?' and nowadays you sort of can!

"I'm now using the Neural DSP Quad Cortex, which allows me to capture my favourite amps, cabs and pedals in a very powerful, upgradable piece of kit. Another thing we could only dream about."

What advice would you give to the budding freelance guitarist?

"Networking is still the most important thing as the phone won't ring if nobody knows who you are. So get out and play with as many different people as possible. Push yourself, sail close to the sun and allow yourself to get burnt. If you're willing to learn, you will not make that mistake a second time. The alchemy happens when you play with other people. If you can compose, then keep working at it as the royalties will be very welcome when you're not the hottest guitar player in town any more. Don't just expect it all to happen 'cos you're on Instagram." 

From session playing to self-promotion Les Davidson is a firm believer in hard work: "Push yourself, sail close to the sun and allow yourself to get burnt," he says





Great Gig In The Sky

Neville Marten recently put on a show to play his album, *The Blues Headlines*. But how did it go? We find out...

Just before the first lockdown I completed my first ever album of original material. And why I didn't do it decades ago is a question I ask myself way too often. Concurrent with my recording, my mate Adrian Nash was in the same studio doing his. Many of the players were common to both projects – he played all the keys on my album and I played all the guitar on his, likewise with the drummer, saxophonist and pedal steel player – so we decided to put on a show at Komedia in Bath, playing songs from both. We also put the albums up on the streaming platforms the same day.

With sights probably set way too high, we decided we needed backing vocals, pedal steel, saxophone and percussion, another guitarist, plus, of course, a great rhythm section. It would be a 10-piece band and required rehearsals and a ton of homework from all.

I wanted to play more or less what I did on both albums. I don't know if you've ever tried to learn something you played spontaneously, but it's actually pretty difficult. For instance, on my album's title track I ripped out a solo in one take with half a million notes (very unlike me and all but impossible to replicate) so I knew I'd have to play something different. On other numbers, on both Ade's and my record, the parts were more like set pieces so had to be learned by rote. I played nothing but these 23 songs for around two months. Yet I didn't want to make them sterile by playing the hell out of them; I wanted an element of danger remaining.

I also asked my old friend Mick Taylor if he'd fancy joining us on a couple of my numbers, and he kindly agreed to play and sing two, then come on for the encore (yes, the crowd were going to get one whether they wanted it or not!).

Shakin' All Over!

Despite the enormity of it, I wasn't really that nervous at all... Until the day arrived. And then it slowly built up as I sorted out my gear: red Strat, Goldtop, Martin OM-42, Matchless Lightning, my new Dan Steinhardt-assembled pedalboard, clothes and other paraphernalia. The soundcheck was at 3pm and, with 10 of us all trying to be heard, it was a fraught couple of hours, but we got there. I was singing most of mine, too, and I'm no vocalist, so that was another Rubicon that needed crossing.

What I will say is that we had total confidence in the band – all of them top-flight players including the awesome Richard Barrett on guitar, the equally superb Richard Parry on sax and percussion, the wonderful pedal steel of Jim Martin, and the rock-solid and highly inventive bass and drums of Jon Durno and Neil Robinson. Vocally, we had Adrian's daughters, both excellent singers and musicians, Sophie and

Vicky Nash, plus the brilliant American vocalist and ex-Swingle Sara Brimer Davey who sang all but one of Adrian's songs and delighted the crowd with her stunning voice and stage presence.

We were terrified that no-one would come, but when we nipped out for a pre-show pizza across the road, someone said, "Look, there's a queue!" Indeed there was! *Guitarist's* Jamie Dickson and Rod Brakes came, as did old friends from near and far. Quite a few mag readers rocked up, too (thank you!), and the pretty full house lifted things no end, as well as bringing its own

"I played nothing but these songs for two months. Yet I didn't want to make them sterile by playing the hell out of them; I wanted an element of danger"

pressures – don't screw up. The nervy, shaking hands meant I didn't play as well as I'd have liked, but the band was incredible and Mick wowed everyone with his never less than stunning work. Thanks to all the musos. We are not worthy!

I'm so glad we did it, and everyone else has said the same. We're currently thinking could we possibly do another one, in Colchester this time as Bath is a bit of a trek for most folk. Watch this space.

Thanks to everyone who came, and remember you can have a listen to *The Blues Headlines* on Spotify and all the other platforms, should you fancy it. **G**

GAS OF THE MONTH

Hey, Good Lookin'

What? Gretsch G5700 Electromatic Lap Steel, Tobacco

Where seen? www.gear4music.com **Price?** £399

I mentioned Jim Martin above and his fabulous pedal-steel playing. In one of my songs I also namecheck Hank Williams, who I love. Now, lap steel is really nothing like pedal steel, but it did come about as an extension of the instrument so superbly played by Don Helms on Hank's records. This Electromatic from Gretsch is a peach. With a mahogany body, white plastic fingerboard with circle, square, diamond and triangle fret markers, plus chrome 'Art Deco' control plate, it looks stunning in Tobacco gloss finish. Its lone single-coil pickup should pack a solid punch, and once you've gained a bit of accuracy on that 28-fret, 572mm (22.5-inch) scale neck, you will have a sound that could make your band unique. If you'd prefer Black Sparkle, GAK has one at the same price. What are you waiting for?

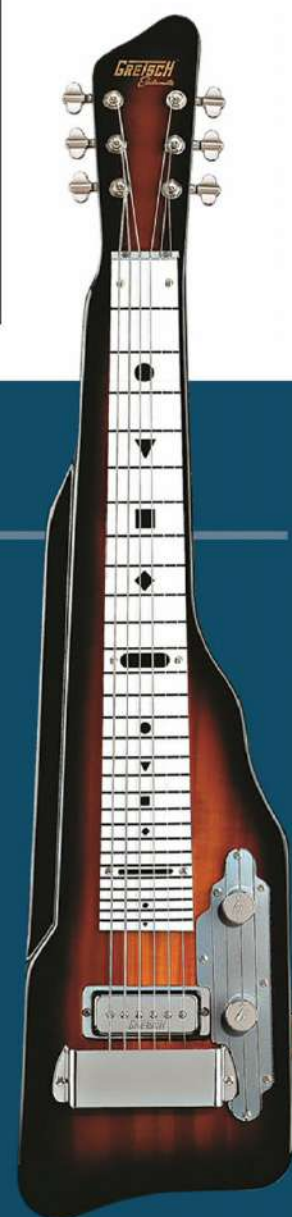


PHOTO COURTESY OF FENDER



National Treasure

This month **Alex Bishop** immerses himself in the captivating sound of the Venezuelan cuatro

A few months ago, Pedro – one of my guitar-making students – completed his first guitar. As anyone who has built an acoustic guitar will attest, this huge accomplishment is celebrated by first strumming a few tunes and then prompting the all-important question: “So, what do we build next?” My student’s answer was immediate: “A cuatro.”

If, like me, your first thought is “What is a cuatro?”, don’t reach for the internet search engines. Instead, let me try to fill you in. Although there are a few varieties, the cuatro – Venezuela’s national instrument – has a body shape and size not dissimilar to the soprano ukulele and is equipped with four nylon strings

“Just like the ukulele, [the cuatro has] a type of reentrant tuning, meaning that the notes don’t just ascend as you pluck across the strings”

fixed along a neck almost as long as a small guitar. Naturally, this long scale means that the tuning is a little different: A D F# B. For guitarists like you and me, this actually makes the instrument instantly accessible given that the strings are essentially the same as the top of four on a guitar, tuned up a 5th. This means that your usual chord shapes will work just fine, but there is a catch. Just like the ukulele, this is actually a type of reentrant tuning, meaning that the notes don’t just ascend as you pluck across the strings. In this instance, the high B is actually

only a tone higher than the bottom string, so an open strum produces a jazzy-sounding Dmaj6 chord.

My challenge was to help Pedro go about designing his own cuatro from the ground up and then apply our guitar-making skills to build it. Luckily, we had access to his fine collection of cuatros from some of Venezuela’s top builders. Cherry picking our favourite elements from each one, we drew everything up in CAD to generate a detailed plan drawing. Most controversially, we decided to stick to our usual methods and opt for a dovetail neck join, utilising an external mould to construct the body rather than building everything around the neck face down on a *solera*, bucking Spanish guitar building tradition in the process.

One of the trickiest steps was trying to determine the final thickness of the front, back and sides. As any guitar maker will know, this is crucial to obtaining the right kind of sound. Too thin and the instrument is structurally unstable and weak sounding, but too thick and it won’t resonate to its maximum potential. We noticed in our cuatro collection that there was quite a lot of variability, with some builders having chosen to construct instruments with very thin tops but substantially thicker sides and backs. I think of this as the ‘snare drum’ approach to instrument making, creating an instrument that has a stiff frame to contain all the sound energy bouncing around in the soundboard. The instruments built with a more delicate frame seemed to project a mellower tone, radiating the sound out in all directions.

Of course, wood selection is very important when it comes to trying to dial in the tone of your instrument. Just like in traditional classical guitar making, Spanish cedar is extensively used in the neck for the Venezuelan cuatro, but Pedro opted for a more flashy figured maple on the neck to contrast with a beautiful set of Santos rosewood back and sides. Ziricote was used for the fingerboard, headstock veneer and bridge to ensure that his cuatro would stand out in a crowd.

This week we finally tuned Pedro’s cuatro up for the first time and gave it a setup. The cuatro is played with a percussive right-hand attack, which demands a much higher action than one might expect on the guitar. Happily, we were not disappointed with the tone: a lively projection and a conga-like percussive clarity. It was a pleasure to be involved in the creation of this instrument and I’ve developed a real love of Venezuelan music along the way. The hours of time spent building this symbolic instrument was an education in itself, soundtracked on the workshop stereo by the groundbreaking talents of virtuoso musicians such as Jorge Glem and Miguel Siso. If there’s one thing I’ve learned, the Venezuelan cuatro is an instrument that truly embodies its nation’s musical identity. **G**



Pedro, one of Alex’s guitar-building students, proudly tunes his hand-built cuatro, the national instrument of Venezuela

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I'll Get My Coat

Some guitarists shy away from coated strings, fearing loss of tone. But is it a justified fear? **Jamie Dickson** investigates

Last month, I chatted with acoustic master Martin Simpson about the best way to reduce intrusive squeaks when playing fingerstyle acoustic guitar. Martin had some good advice on playing technique, but his main recommendation was to use coated strings. Martin has amazing tone and there's no way he'd accept second best in that department – so have the doubters got it wrong about coated strings?

For years, it's been fashionable to cast doubts about the tonal qualities of coated strings. Sure, they last longer, people will say, but what about the tone? Detractors will often claim a loss of high-end detail puts them off and sometimes say that the playing feel of coated strings is off-putting, too. To the sceptics, the corrosion-free lifespan of coated strings isn't worth the (alleged) trade-off in baseline tonal performance. Impressed by Martin Simpson's confidence in coated acoustic strings, I decided to get reacquainted with them and put a set of Phosphor Bronze Elixir Nanoweb on my Martin DR Centennial dreadnought.

Tonally speaking, the new Elixirs were a little different to the Curt Mangan Phosphor Bronze set that had been on the guitar previously, which I had very much enjoyed. Crucially, though, the difference didn't feel like a step down in sonic quality, just a shift in emphasis in certain frequencies. The Mangans sounded very classic, very much from the American acoustic tonal tradition. The

Elixir Nanoweb were, to my ears at least, more neutral-sounding – but very pleasant and balanced. And, notably, they banished the squeaks almost completely. So I decided to keep them on. For me, the benefits proved more compelling than the downsides, if indeed there were any.

To be honest, I hadn't quite expected the AB comparison to be such a close-run thing. Perhaps I had, without realising, inherited a few unacknowledged prejudices about coated strings myself. It also occurred that, like anything else, coated-string technology has come a long way in the past few years. Determined to bring my knowledge up to date, I called Justin Fogleman, Elixir's global product manager, to see if he could explain more about what current-generation coated strings offer. To kick things off, I ask Justin why it is that coated strings reduce squeaks and handling noise?

"The way in which we coat our strings is a unique process that helps us coat the entire string from end to end," he explains. "Now, if you think of the cross-section of the string having all those wrap windings, there are kind of gaps in between each wrap, right? And as your finger rubs against those [corrugated gaps], that's what's making this 'xylophone' effect up the register, that's what's making that zipping noise. So by coating the string from end to end, it helps to bridge the gaps between the windings. So it's partly that which reduces squeaks – but it's also partly the coating material itself, which is a unique and particularly slippery material."

In other words, just like when you drive over a cattle grid and a noisy buzz-like sound results, the gaps between the ridges of each winding generate unwanted noise when you slide your finger over them. By applying a coating that covers the windings, you turn that ridged surface into a smooth, slippery one.

So much for the squeaks – but what about tone? It's hard not to think of that coating as being like a sock, protecting but muffling the natural resonance of the string. Is that what happens or are there ways of countering that, I ask Justin?

"So without giving too many secrets away, we use a particular polymer that has some unique properties," Justin says. "First, it works well as a barrier, protecting against the elements, but it also provides a slick surface. But in the end, you can think of it as a very low-mass sheath over top of the string. So here's the trick: imagine you and I are stretching a big rope between us and we're 10 metres apart. And we're kind of whipping the rope up and down like a big vibrating string. If we then put something heavy in the middle of the rope, like a car tyre, it would then get really difficult to get the rope to move, right? But if we instead took something that's the same size as the tyre but less massive – like an inflatable plastic ring – it wouldn't have any impact on us being able to make the rope move."

Nanoweb hits the sweet spot between the warm sound of Elixir's heavier Polyweb coating and the uncoated-string feel of its light-touch Optiweb choice





“So it’s not about having a coating that is thin,” he continues, “it’s about having a coating that’s *light*. That’s the real trick: the coating needs to be durable but really lightweight. Those two qualities may seem to be polar opposites, but it’s important to find a way to have them both. It’s the fact that our coating is very lightweight that allows us to not have an impact on tone, but still deliver corrosion-resistance and reduced finger-noise,” Justin argues.

He goes on to explain that not all the coatings used by Elixir have the same tonal and tactile qualities – and that’s by design. Some are coated more heavily than others. This may be why there are misunderstandings from some players about what coated strings really sound and feel like. Because the answer is really another question: which ones are you talking about?

Elixir’s Justin Fogleman explains how coated strings banish the ‘xylophone’ effect you may encounter when playing your acoustic guitar

“It’s not about having a coating that’s thin, it’s about having one that’s *light*. That’s the trick – it needs to be durable but really lightweight”

“One size doesn’t fit all,” Justin says. “Every guitarist is a little different. So how does coating interplay with tone and feel? Some guitarists really like the sound of our Polyweb strings. Polyweb is a heavier-mass coating and we’ve intentionally designed it to have a warm tone and a feel that is slick and fast. On the other end of the spectrum, for electric strings, there’s Optiweb, and what we’re doing there is acknowledging that there are plenty of electric guitarists that want the benefits of coated strings, but they don’t want the perceived impact of it. Those players kind of want the ‘anti-Polyweb’ [laughs]. So they want longer tone-life, but they want strings to feel and sound like an uncoated string. That’s why that product exists.

“Lastly, there are some players whose needs are right in the middle where they like a balance of the two – and that’s Nanoweb,” Justin concludes. “So that’s the range of products. But really you need to try them to find out how it fits for you.” **G**

THREE TO GET READY

A trio of acoustics ideal for fingerstyle



Yamaha Storia III £319

This little all-mahogany OM-shape acoustic from Yamaha may have been made to a fashion-conscious design brief, but don’t let that put you off. It’s an absolutely cracking little guitar that combines easy playability, sweet sustaining tone and very credible electro-acoustic performance. The fingerboard might prove a touch narrow for some fingerstyle players, but it’s oh-so-hard to put this attractive and highly affordable guitar down.



Martin OM-28 Modern Deluxe £3,999

We’ve said it before, but OM-style acoustics offer the perfect balance of tonal richness and lightness of touch when it comes to fingerstyle guitar. And this is one of the best we’ve tried, from the originator of the OM, Martin. Exacting, exciting and bold of voice thanks to its quietly progressive construction, including unobtrusive use of carbon composites and special alloy bridge pins, the Modern Deluxe OM-28 is a grand piano among OMs.



Lowden F-34 £3,750

Unusually for a Lowden, the F-34 has a spruce top on a koa body and the result is a delightfully clear and articulate instrument that lacks nothing in warmth, either, making it perfect for detailed fingerstyle work. The elegant five-piece mahogany and rosewood neck is beautiful to play, and the 650mm (25.6-inch) scale promotes abundant ring and shimmer from a beautifully rounded, ergonomic body. Hand-built perfection.



Wide Intervals

Richard Barrett embraces a non-linear approach to intervals as he takes you on a journey around the fretboard

When we look at how chords are constructed, there's a tendency to stick to the linear patterns suggested by the conventional Root, 3rd, 5th/Root, 3rd, 5th, 7th and so on. This can sometimes be tricky for us on the guitar, where things do not always fall into place as easily as on the piano keyboard – or indeed paper! Odd groups of intervals can be hard to avoid in some cases it's true, but this feature is about embracing this, rather than trying to seek perfect symmetry.

In practical terms, we can also move shapes around the fretboard in a way there wouldn't be a reason to do on the piano. An E shape moved to the 7th fret gives an Aadd9, for example. The adding of the 9th here is anything but deliberate, but you get what I like to call a 'stacking' of notes that do not necessarily ascend as you rake across the strings. In the examples below, I have deliberately contrasted, adding a higher note adjacent to the open second string. **G**

Right: Steve Howe, pictured here in '72, often uses non-linear chords with wide intervals

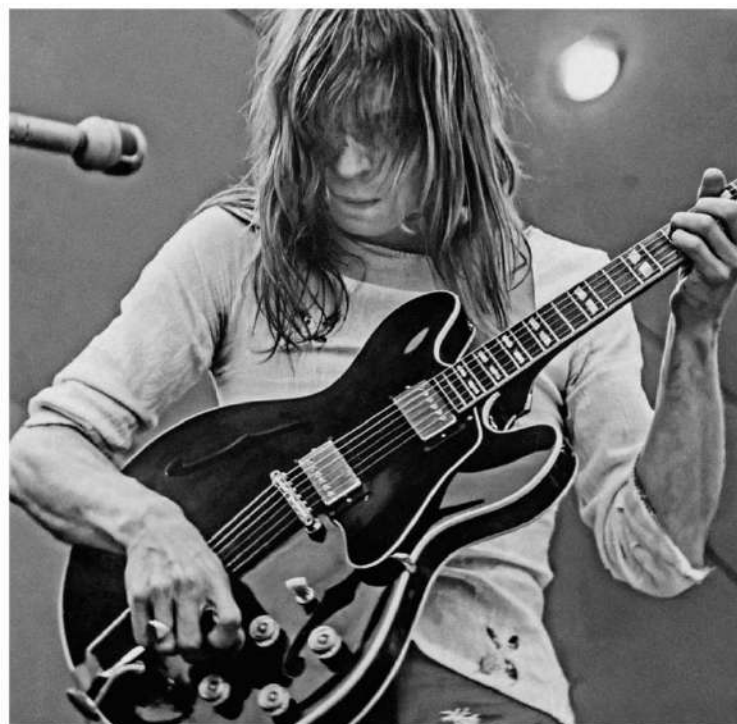
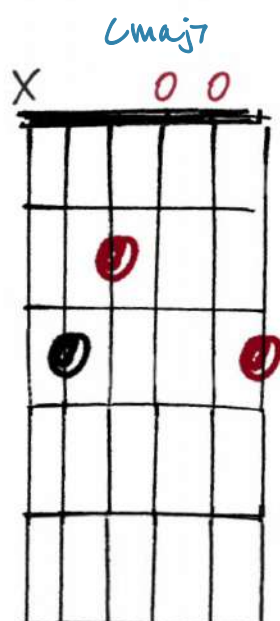


PHOTO BY DICK BARNATT/REDFERNS

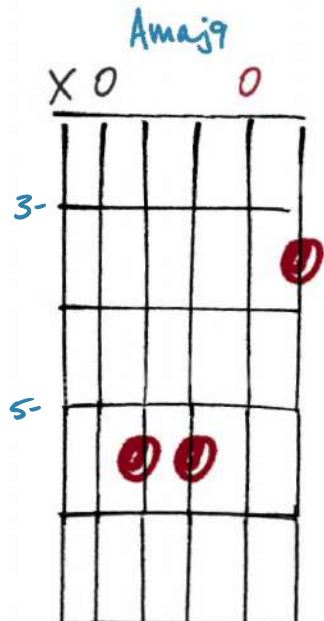
Example 1

This Cmaj7 features a G on the first string, which doesn't change anything in theory but can give a nice variation on the theme or be combined with the more regular shape with an open E as the highest note. As with any of these ideas, it's well worth moving this around the fretboard to see what surprises may lurk there.



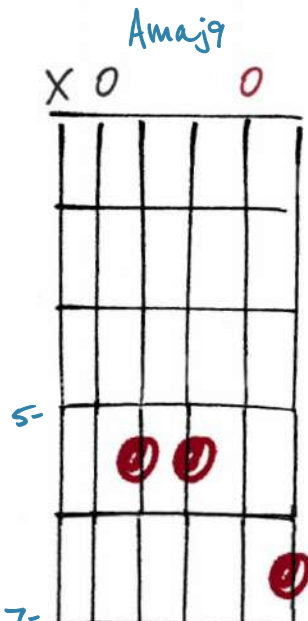
Example 2

Widening the gap slightly, this Amaj9 has the major 7th (G#) on top, rather than the notes stacking up in scale order. The open B string gives us our 9th, which would be the 'highest' extension if we were looking simply from a theoretical point of view.



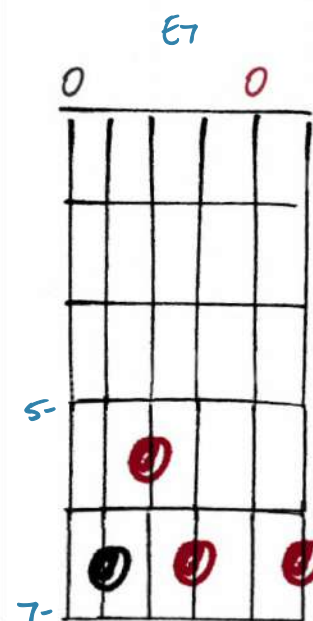
Example 3

Another Amaj9, this time doubling the 9th by widening the gap further and putting a B on top at the 7th fret. These are an octave apart, but both are considered the 9th due to the notes present elsewhere. The major 7th (G#) appears at the 6th fret of the fourth string.



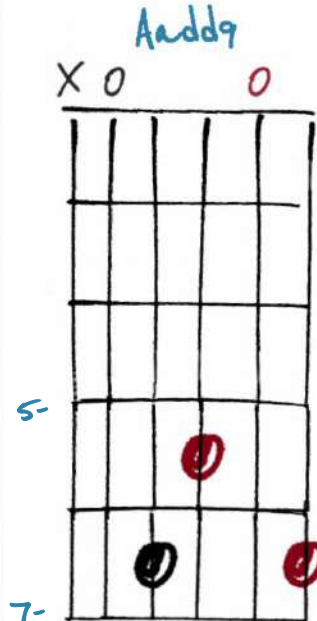
Example 4

From low to high, this E7 features: E, E, G#, D, B, B. We're ascending as we go across the strings until we reach the open B, which goes down a minor 3rd. Then we jump up an octave for the highest B – the effect is a bit like having the guitar in an open tuning.



Example 5

This Aadd9 follows the same principle as the previous examples, adding a high fretted note adjacent to the open second string. In this case, we're doubling the added 9th. As there is no 7th happening here, this is an add9, as opposed to a 9th where we would presume a 7th was one the extensions we'd added in sequence.



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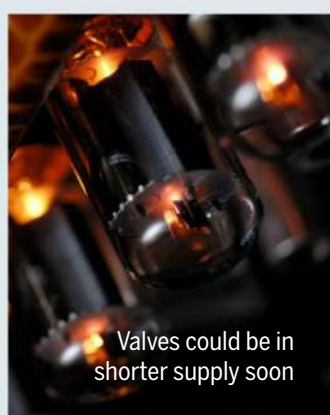
Feedback

Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor.

Drop us a line at guitarist@futurenet.com

STAR LETTER

SOLID STATUS



Valves could be in shorter supply soon

I enjoyed reading 'State Of The Tube' in your April edition [page 75] – but how can a British magazine print an article about the evolution of the transistor guitar amplifier and fail to mention HH? The iconic IC100S, with its backlit fascia, was a great-sounding amp and appeared in the backline of many famous guitarists including Wilko Johnson, Marc Bolan and Bill Nelson.

What is also strange is the timescale of the 'more recent innovation of Class D amplifiers', as they appear to have been available as far back as 1955. Class D amplifiers were designed to be very efficient at turning power to watts instead of heat – up to about 90 per cent efficient, as opposed to a good Class A amplifier, which is about 30 per cent efficient.

Lastly, your feature also states that the production of valves is on the decline, and that it isn't as big a problem for guitarists as it is for amp manufacturers. Surely the amp manufacturers who depend on valves for their products are likely to start buying up available stock? I for one am going to stock up on some spares before my amps go the way of Betamax and VHS.

Keith Marriott, via email

Thanks for your thoughts, Keith. I'm sure our writer Nick Guppy would be the first to admit HH would have been a fitting addition to the piece, and we suspect his comments on Class D amps may refer to their widespread adoption in the guitar market, rather than the time they were first available. We've always enjoyed the massive sound that Dave Brock of Hawkwind got from HH amps, though a Roland JC-120 is his main backline these days, also solid-state, of course.

To your other point, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the resulting heavy sanctions placed upon Russia that have followed will, inevitably, reduce supply of new valves still further – but most guitarists will agree such sanctions are right and necessary under the horrific circumstances. In the meantime, we have the knowledge that solid-state and modelling options are more attractive than ever, whether it's a little amp for the living room or a full-on stage rig. With that said, we don't think the valve amps of the world are about to fall silent any time soon. Either way, your thoughts have earned you this month's Star Letter prize.



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A NEW PAGE

My buddies and I were devotees of The Yardbirds from the early Clapton days and through the Beck and Beck/Page periods. We much preferred them to other blues bands for their earthier approach, but mainly for the virtuosity of their guitarists. When they returned home after a tour in the States, there was an announcement they would be playing the Newcastle Mayfair. As far as our collective memories go, the papers advertised it as 'The Yardbirds', but outside the venue the posters stated 'The New Yardbirds'. The gig was a revelation, of course, featuring a few original Yardbirds numbers but concentrating more on the content of the forthcoming first Led Zeppelin album. Opening with *Good Times, Bad Times* we were awestruck, but I still don't think any of us quite realised the quantum leap in rock music we were witnessing.

Geoff Tate, via email

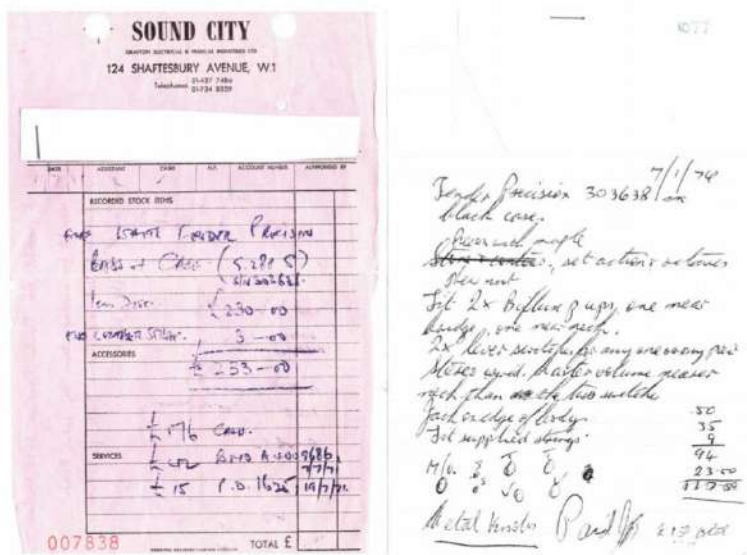
Hi Geoff, we are envious of that very special chance you had to see the birth of Led Zeppelin live – we don't know about anyone else, but there's a special place in our hearts for Jimmy's playing on a Tele. Listening to his solo on *Communication Breakdown*, we can't help but be reminded of someone thrashing the guts out of a 125cc motorbike – the engine's not quite powerful enough for the ambition, but boy do they make it hustle along!

ALL ABOUT THAT BASS

In the mid-60s, I graduated from a 1960s Egmond bass to a Burns Sonic and then a new Fender Precision in 1971. It was white, with a tortoise pickguard and a rosewood fingerboard. Three years later, I took it to John Birch's workshop near Birmingham for attention to the neck, but ended up with a maple fingerboard, new nut, two John Birch Biflux pickups either side of the original pickup, two three-way switches for any one or any pair of pickups, stereo wired, two volume and two tone controls plus a master volume control (all metal), the jack socket moved to the edge of the guitar body and a new white pickguard. Total cost: £150.

It roared and it sang. And the stereo aspect led me to experiment with a clean sound through one channel and sometimes a touch of phasing or whatever on the other into two separate amp and speaker setups.

The guitar was amazing, and I still don't know why, in 1983, I sold it. Over two August days, at Rockbottom Croydon and Soundwave in Romford, I changed to a mono Trace Elliot rig and a (US-made) BC Rich Mockingbird. I think the heat must have gotten to me! Don't get me wrong, the Mockingbird is a great bass



and I still have it. But how I wish I had the Fender/Birch, too. If it is idly leaning against a wall, forgotten and/or, for any reason, no longer wanted, I'd love to buy it back and welcome it home.

I bought another Precision a few years ago and, with the help of Andertons at Guildford, obtained the necessary fittings so it is identical (bar the optional through-body stringing) to my original one, prior to it meeting John Birch. But if you know where my Fender/Birch is, please let me know via *Guitarist*.

Dee Evans, via email

Thanks for sharing memories of your modded Fender, Dee. Have any readers come across this distinctive beast on their travels? Are you even the current owner? If so, Dee would love to hear from you and we'll be happy to pass on messages sent to guitarist@futurenet.com. Do any other readers have any tales of unusual guitars loved and lost to share?

STEELY MAN

Around five years ago I was in GuitarGuitar in Epsom and spotted an interesting guitar, so I asked if I could try it – it was a James Trussart SteelCaster. Being old enough to remember Kramer and Travis Bean aluminium guitars of the 70s I thought, 'This Trussart ain't going to stay in tune for more than five minutes.' How wrong I was. Purely from the tone alone I coughed up £3,300 within minutes of plugging it in. It has proved to be the most stable guitar tuning-wise of any guitar I have owned.

One of the many guys who approached me after a gig to ask about it was Tim Staffell – the singer in Smile with Brian May and Roger Taylor before Freddie Mercury joined them to form Queen. As a result I got to play the Trussart at a gig with Tim. It was signed by my idol Albert Lee some years back and it still blows away any guitar I have ever played or owned.

Colin Howell, via email

Thanks for your insights on metal-bodied guitars, Colin – we love the Trussarts. Like all design tasks, it comes down to how cleverly you use the materials and marry them up with the other parts. We've heard great-sounding guitars made from Perspex, carbon fibre and even fibreboard! We hope you get many more years of pleasure from your terrific Trussart.

GAUGE FRIGHT

In *Guitarist* 483 Jamie Dickson described how he fitted a set of preferred gauge strings for a prospective buyer. Like many who mainly play electric, I've only toyed with acoustics. Some find regular acoustic gauges too heavy, while others, like me, have limited ability [physical dexterity]. A bastardised version of the trick of using thinner strings from a 12-string set has my 25-plus-scale dread about manageable. It's taken truss-rod work and experiments to get near – and about 50 years of saying no to acoustics.

A more bendy short-scale acoustic is where my focus lies. But with 12s on new stock in shops I can't tell how bendy they might be... or if there'd be enough string mass to get a decent tone from 10s. Would a dealer restring for a trial? Tuning down far enough has tuning stability and tonal issues, as does messing with a capo. Some brands do intermediate gauges, maybe they'd work on a short scale?

Alex Oliver, via email

We're going to suggest trying a hybrid guitar, such as one from Fender's Acoustasonic series. From memory, they come fitted with 0.011-gauge acoustic strings as standard and could easily be set up to go lighter to a 0.010-gauge set. The Acoustasonics have some limited unplugged capability for strumming at home and sound decent through an acoustic amp or into a desk. If only a real acoustic will do, an acoustic luthier with a taste for design challenges, such as columnist Alex Bishop, could custom build something designed to work with extra-light strings or possibly adapt an existing guitar.

Top left: In 1971, reader Dee Evans bought a Fender Precision bass and, three years later, took it for repairs...

Above left: ... and here it is. It was sold in 1983, but if you have it lying around, Dee would love to hear from you

Above right: Colin Howell's James Trussart SteelCaster (signed by Albert Lee) is as arty as it is functional

Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor. Drop us a line at guitarist@futurenet.com



MIDNIGHT SPECIAL

Taj Mahal and Ry Cooder recently reunited, after nearly 60 years, to record a sublime tribute to Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee. Entitled *Get On Board*, it's among the best records either man has made. We joined Taj and Ry to find out why they decided to catch the late train...

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Abby Ross

Talk to any dyed-in-the-wool fan of blues music and it won't be long before they mention Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry. Hailing from Tennessee, guitarist Brownie McGhee learned his craft from Blind Boy Fuller. But it was when he paired up with blues-harp wizard Sonny Terry that he found his perfect foil – and the duo were lionised by the folk scene of 60s America.

Around that time, a young Santa Monica guitarist, Ry Cooder, stumbled across their records in a secondhand record store. After that, he sought out live performances by Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry, learning licks directly from McGhee after the shows. Meanwhile, another aspiring blues-folk artist, Taj Mahal, was piecing together where he might witness

1. Taj Mahal and Ry Cooder (pictured below, far right) played together during the mid-1960s with Rising Sons, alongside (L-R) Gary Marker, Kevin Kelley and Jesse Lee Kincaid

2. Taj Mahal was on the cusp of his 20s when a Robert Johnson album opened his ears to a sound that was surprisingly little-known

the music of a duo he had heard fragments of over the late-night airwaves. Like Ry, he couldn't believe Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry weren't major stars. And, like Ry, he found that their live performances were a wellspring of pure musical joy. Weaving together strands of blues and folk, their music defied easy categorisation – which is, in itself, reflective of the underlying reality of the music of America's South. Eclectic, entertaining and wide-ranging, it was a huge influence on Ry Cooder and Taj Mahal.

The latter moved to Santa Monica in the 1960s and met Ry – and Ry played on Taj Mahal's eponymous debut album in 1968. Now, nearly six decades later, they have reunited to record *Get On Board*, a captivating tribute to the music of Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry. We joined these two past-masters of American music to discover why returning to their roots yielded one of the best recordings of their career, and we learn why a guitar so large that Ry could barely get his arm around it was the star of the show...

When did you first encounter the music of Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee?

Taj Mahal: “Well, I started hearing them probably when I was 15 or 16 years old. You'd hear little bits and snatches of them on the radio and whatnot. Not on regular radio – but some late-night blues programme would be on and you'd hear it and be struck by how good it was and how come you didn't hear it all the time? And then I just wondered where these people

were. But later I came to university, during the 60s, when the whole folk-craze came through. And many of these musicians, people like Brownie and Sonny and Bukka White, Mississippi John Hurt, Sleepy John Estes and others, were being brought around to coffeehouses and played at folk festivals. So I began to realise that there was a place you could go and see them play, you know?

“I got to see them and I thought they were just incredible. And I hoped that I would be able to be that good someday. I mean, I could play a little bit and I could sing quite well, but I was just learning to get my guitar chops together. But Brownie was really good and Sonny was just a wizard on the harmonica. Those guys, they'd play with Lead Belly, they'd play with Pete Seeger, they'd play with Blind Boy Fuller or the Reverend Gary Davis... they had some versatility, to be honest. They were involved in different plays on Broadway like *Finian's Rainbow* and came up with some great stuff. I mean, that whole *Fox Chase* blues stuff that Sonny Terry came up with – that's a Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina style. Goes over to Arkansas, too – but it was always a great show. I never saw them put on a bad show. Ever.”

Why do you think history has remembered Robert Johnson and BB King, for example, but only hardcore blues fans tend to know about Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry?

Taj: “Well, I don't even think that everybody knows the aforementioned people you're talking about. In fact, I'd never heard *Dust My Broom* [by Elmore James], none of that, until I came to the university and I was about 19 years old and they put out that record *Robert Johnson King Of The Delta Blues Singers*. I was like, ‘Who is this guy I've never heard of before?’ Why, all of a sudden, was this whole group of folkies going, ‘Wow, wow, wow – listen to this guy *play*...?’ I had absolutely no idea! So I put the record on and at first it sounded [quick]. And the reason was they had printed the record at too fast an rpm. But when they finally got it at the right speed, it really made more sense.

“But still, never heard of Robert Johnson before that. Now, John Lee Hooker I'd heard of. BB King I'd heard about. And maybe now and then I would hear that sound when I'd be at a neighbour's house... their moms and pops were in the kitchen and maybe BB King would be on in the background. But I'd never heard Elmore James or even understood the sound of slide guitar, except that it was on a couple of Jimmy Reed records I knew. But a lot of that comes from the record-selling industry – they were always trying to put music in boxes. You know, like, ‘This is *this* kind of blues, *this* kind of country & western, *this* kind of pop,’ separating things like that. Oftentimes, the listener didn't get a chance to realise that [music] was just one big river full of lots of different fish.”

How did the idea of working together again start?

Taj: “Well, we literally hadn't played together for over 50 years and I was getting a lifetime achievement award in Nashville at the Ryman Auditorium, which is the Mother Church of Country Music. Ry and his son were involved in the band, as well as Buddy Miller and Don Was, and so Ry reached out to me and



PHOTO BY MICHAEL LOCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

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*“I was about 19 and they
put out Robert Johnson’s
‘King Of The Delta Blues
Singers’. I was like,
‘Who is this guy?’”*

TAJ MAHAL

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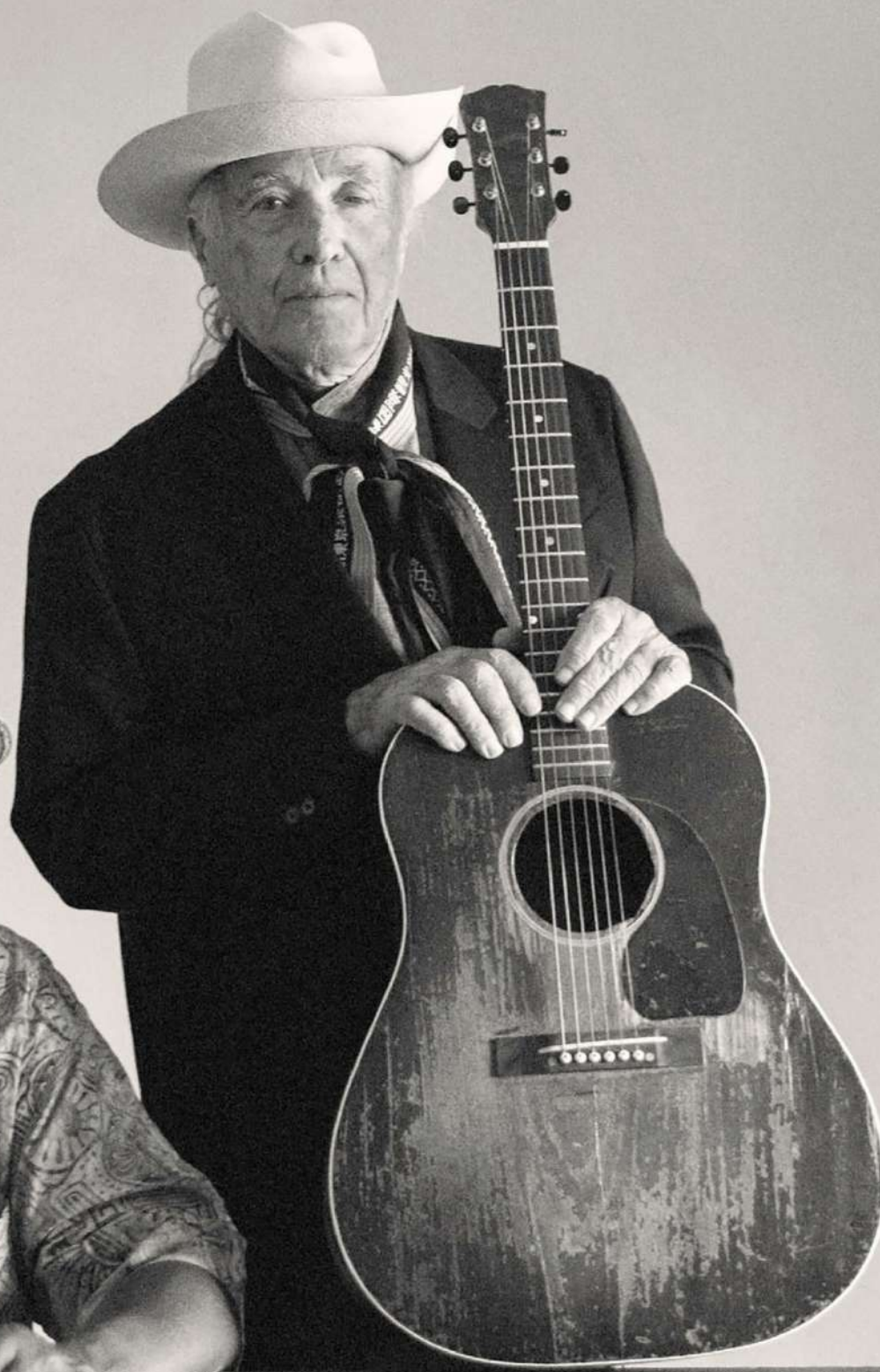


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“We had lots of rapport. The way we recorded, it was kind of a back porch-y, living room style. Real music, live music... the way it is”

TAJ MAHAL

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“If you like the sound, you can record anything. If you don’t like it, you might as well go home”

RY COODER

•

said, ‘What material do you think you’d like to do?’ I suggested maybe something that was a little more country. He said, ‘Oh, well, I mean, that’s all right, but I think we should pump it.’ And I was like, ‘Okay, I do, too – but I was trying to be a little diplomatic.’ So I said, ‘Well, that only means only one thing, Ry – *Statesboro Blues*.’ He says, ‘You’re on,’ and so we did a version, which is now on YouTube.

“Little by little, we started communicating with one another again and his birthday came and I called him up. Then we started sending music back and forth and, at one point, he came and he said, ‘Well, what do you think about this? I’ve got an idea. Why don’t we do a tribute to Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry?’ Well, I was ready right there [laughs]. So I came down to Los Angeles and we played together again and it was just great. We had lots of rapport, lots of communication and it took off from there. The way we recorded, it was kind of a back porch-y, living room style, you know? Real music, live music... the way it is. Ry set the music up and then we got to playing and we’re talking to one another. That’s what you really want to happen is that, ultimately, you’re speaking to one another through the instruments.”

How did the sessions for *Get On Board* go down?

Ry Cooder: “Well, [my son] Joachim’s got this nice old Spanish-style California house down the street from us here. We’re in an old neighbourhood – we’re not in LA any more. We’re all out in this other area. But I mean, it’s an older neighbourhood, it’s an older area. His living room is about the shape of what you might expect in an early recording studio with a very high ceiling, wood floor and some plaster as well. The architect that designed the house was a very good architect. I happen to know who it was – and at the time, in 1927, he came upon this shape of this room somehow, and he thought it would be pleasing. But maybe he didn’t know that it’s also acoustically perfect, as long as you don’t play too loud. You can’t hit a loud snare drum in there and you can’t play electric bass in there. But you can do all kinds of things acoustically.

“Then [there was] our engineer friend Martin Pradler – to say he’s a genius is like saying Beethoven was a pretty good orchestrator. I mean, he’s a tremendous interpreter of how the music should be recorded and we’ve worked with him for a lot of years now. So I said to him, ‘Martin, I’m going to play acoustic guitar, which I hardly ever do in recording, and Taj is going to play harmonica. We’re going to sing. It’s all live and Joachim bangs on these strange oddball drums. And we’re going to sort of be in a triangle. The drums a little further away from the vocal mic, but

it’s a good-sized room and we want to mic the room... don’t mic us too close. We want it so it sounds like you walked into a place like a little juke joint or a little bar or somewhere where you hear the thing [as a whole], not as isolated individuals...’

“So he set the mics up. Tube mics, naturally. We’ve got all this old equipment – me and Martin between the two of us – that’s really good. But, the point is, it’s period equipment. It’s vintage but good. We record through an old AM radio tube-powered board [desk] and he moves mics around until you hear in the earphones, ‘Ah, that’s the spot for that mic.’ You know, that’s capturing something that’s well defined, but it’s ambient – like being in the room. That’s what I want. When I hear it, I’ll like it. And when we like what we hear through the earphones, then we can go ahead and play and we don’t have to work too hard and it’s very natural. If you like the sound, you can record anything, you can play anything. If you don’t like the sound, you might as well go home.

“I overdubbed stuff here and there, but the basic tracks with the live singing is what you’re hearing. Yes, I added bottleneck here and there and whatnot, and maybe another harmony sometimes because it’s nice to hear three voices just for fun. Nothing fancy but just to get the feel. Get the groove going right. If the groove is right, you’re in business with that music. That’s really what it is. Who cares what the lyrics say so much? They’re fun lyrics, but the point is the groove, you know?”

3. The Spanish-style Californian home of Ry Cooder’s son Joachim played host to the recording sessions, with its “acoustically perfect” shape and high ceilings

4. When Taj was awarded a Lifetime Achievement award from the Americana Music Association a few years back, Ry Cooder was part of the band at the Ryman. And so the seed was sown for their latest collaboration...

5. Taj has released numerous solo and collaborative records since his debut album landed in the late 60s



PHOTO BY MARKA/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES

6. Pictured here in the 70s, Ry Cooder says his proficiency on guitar has improved as time has passed: "I'm a slow learner. So now I'm playing the way I wanted to play when I was young... I can say to myself, 'This is exactly what I aspired to do all those years ago'"

The acoustic sounds on *Pawn Shop Blues* are incredible. What guitar did you use for that?

Ry: "Oh yeah, that's a nice guitar. That one there is one of these Banner [logo] Gibsons J-45s. I think it's from 1943. But I like to vary things. The real oddball guitar, the crazy guitar, was on the track [*What A Beautiful City*]. It's the most goddamnedest thing you've ever seen. It's an Adams Brothers guitar that's so big. It's as big as a guitarrón, and I can barely hold it and wrap my arm around it. It's enormous and it has a short neck, so it can only be played in one key, E. But it has this incredible sound, it's a big goddamn guitar, real thin. 1905 it was made, and how it survived all these years, who the hell knows. That's a wonderful guitar."

"But that J-45 on *Pawn Shop* is nice, yeah. It's not as resonant as the D-18. I used the D-18 for most of the tunes because that's what Brownie played and it's a good one, 1946. Very, very good guitar. For that music it's perfect: very big, twangy sound. But for *Pawn Shop* I needed something a little quieter and played a little softer, so that Banner J-45 is nice – it was in a fire, I think, so it's real damaged [laughs]. It looks like somebody in Pompeii had it when the volcano erupted, but it's good."

Taj: "Ry also had a cello banjo. The [pre-war] instrument makers made violins, viola, cello. And they made banjos like that, too – bass banjos, mandolas, mandocellos or banjolins. That was the imprint from the European instruments when they came over here and started to make them. Ry had some extraordinary ones... I had a steel guitar and a wooden guitar and a plethora of harmonicas."

•

"[The Adams Brothers] guitar is the most goddamnedest thing you've ever seen. It's so big"

RY COODER


•

***Pawn Shop Blues* has a really slow, meditative tempo that gives it huge emotional weight. You don't hear that so much any more in blues. Why?**

Ry: "First of all, everybody's moving too fast. If you don't think so, just go on to LA freeway sometime. People move too fast or they're in a hurry all the time, like, 'I get my brown shoes – no socks – I get my tattoos, I get my beard and my hat and my little box-back coat. And then I'll get my guitar and then I'll make my record and then I'll be famous.' [Laughs] And that's the order of battle, that's how it's going to play out. Well, that's ridiculous. There's no way that can work. I mean, we older people know that – but it's basic. So it does take some time."

"The other thing is, if you're going to play real slow, then you have to go into that song as a meditation. I mean, shall I use that word? You have to immerse yourself in it. You have to have the ability... the desire is very important, but stop thinking about 'brown shoes, no socks, beards and tattoos' and think about nothing and just play the goddamn song. Can you evoke something? Can you make it felt? If you feel it, your audience will feel it. And yet at the same time, you have to have enough ability."

"By the way, it's taken me a lifetime since I started guitar when I was four or so. It's not something you learn overnight, and I certainly didn't learn it overnight. I'm well aware records exist that show us there were people who were very young, such as Louis Armstrong, who had an epiphany and they became who they became suddenly. So that can happen – but not me. I'm a slow learner. So now I'm playing the way I wanted to play when I was young. I actually can hear that I'm doing it, and I can say to myself, 'This is exactly what I aspired to do all those years ago.'"

"I remember one time, Terry Melcher, the record producer, said to me – and I was in my 20s at the time or even younger – he said, 'The rate you're going, it's going to take you 20 years to get anywhere.' And I thought, 'Jeez, that's harsh.' But it wasn't. He was actually way off the mark: 20, hell! 40, 50 years maybe. You have to realise I'm not from some little podunk town in the South with uncles to teach me. I didn't have uncles to teach me. In Santa Monica, there's no uncles! You're just on your own. I mean, if you can get anywhere and not have to become an insurance underwriter or an auto mechanic... I mean, they should have taught me auto mechanics when I was in high school, but they didn't. So I went on and learned guitar [laughs]." 



Get On Board by Taj Mahal and Ry Cooder is out now on Warner Music Group
www.tajblues.com
<https://rycooder.com>



PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

PJD

Guitars

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Guitarist
GEAR
OF THE
YEAR



"Sounded
exceptional... It's
got it's own thing
going on."



ESSENTIAL

ELECTRICS

WHY YOU NEED A WORKHORSE GUITAR – AND WHY YOU’LL WANT TO OWN IT FOR LIFE

Words Jamie Dickson, Dave Burrluck & Stuart Williams **Photography** Neil Godwin

During our lives as guitarists, instruments will come and go. Some will be sold in disgruntled disappointment a few days after purchase. Others will be let go in a moment of weakness and their loss regretted bitterly for years. But just a few guitars stay with us for life – or at least for a great many years. They are our go-to guitars, our reliable friends. Often, they’re not the flashiest instruments around, but that just means we’ll be all the more likely to gig with them and take them places. Every player needs such a guitar and, in the following pages, we’ve selected over 40 dependable electrics with great tone that we think might be ‘keepers’.

So, what is a workhorse? Well, it’s the kind of guitar that genuinely might pay for itself in a few years – or even less if you’re a busy gigging guitarist. For that reason, we’ve kept

most of our choices well under £2,000 and some below £400 making them attainable to most players. But we’ve also singled out some higher-end instruments that embody the no-messing attitude of the true workhorse, though with a higher level of craft to raise the bar of tone and playability to a truly professional level.

The good news is that, whatever your budget, guitarists have more credible choices than ever in the ‘workhorse’ guitar category. In the following pages, not only do we recommend dozens of electrics to try next time you’re looking for a real keeper, but we also explore some of the options you should weigh carefully when buying. From getting the most from your budget to easy mods that magnify a guitar’s potential, we hope our cover feature helps you to find an electric you’ll own, play and enjoy for many years to come.

Prices: We’ve quoted full retail prices throughout where available for consistency, but in many cases you’ll be able to find these instruments for less in-store or online

With thanks: We’d like to thank GuitarBitz (www.guitarbitz.com) for the loan of the Fender Player Plus Nashville Telecaster in Butterscotch Blonde and Player Plus Stratocaster in Aged Candy Apple Red with pau ferro ‘board



KEEPERS

Why do some guitars stay with us for life and get used all the time?

Words Jamie Dickson

Guitars are funny things. We ought to simply examine our musical needs, buy a guitar within our budget that fulfils those needs, and then just focus on getting better at playing. But, as Roger Daltry sang in *I've Had Enough*: "Things ain't quite that simple."

It can be hard to shake the feeling that if we just bought that next guitar we might achieve more on the instrument than our poor backsliding selves have done to date. We might, if only we had that new guitar, turn our attention to practice with redoubled zeal. We might play more gigs. We might record that album. The fact is that, provided you have a serviceable guitar that sounds good and stays in tune, it's probably not the instrument that's holding you back. Yes, it's true that new guitars can be inspiring and certain guitars just work beautifully for certain musical jobs. But there's also much to be said for guitars that fit you like an old pair of shoes and can be used for most musical jobs.



Yamaha's LL16 rosewood dreadnought matured beautifully in Jamie Dickson's care – a true workhorse instrument

I'll give you an example. Many years ago I bought a Yamaha LL16 dreadnought from eBay for £400. As always with Yamaha, it was nicely built with good materials and a few years of playing had already been put into it. I then played that guitar almost every day for a decade and it sounded better and better with time and use. It was never a 'dream' guitar, but I wrote more songs on it than on any other instrument I own. By and large, I spent more time playing

devote time to selling unused gear or saving up to afford it, while obsessively researching where you can find the best example of that model for sale. We all do it and it's part of being into guitars. But none of those activities is musical – they're about the thrill of the chase. Also, chasing down that aspirational guitar takes up a lot of our time, thought and money. Prioritising buying it might also mean you hold off from buying nice mics for the studio, for instance. It might even mean you put off getting a band together until you have found the 'perfect guitar' for the project in your hands...

I don't mean to moralise about any of the above; those are, after all, just itches you can decide to scratch or not. But when the object of your GASing has finally been bought with great fanfare and shown off to all your friends, you are left, at the end of the day, with a guitar that you will either use a lot to make music – or not.

And there's the rub. Dreaming about guitars and then finding ways to buy them is great fun. But it's a pursuit that is about desire. Playing guitars, by contrast, is about actual satisfaction. And that's why, like the tortoise and the hare, the workhorse guitars that we buy without much drama, in an affordable way, to fulfil a specific need, sometimes end up winning our hearts as time goes by – long after those trophy guitars have been bought, tired of and sold on again. Because we keep them. We use them. We create good memories and actual recordings with them. That, to me, is the real value of a workhorse guitar. They are tools with which you build your real life as a guitarist, not your dream life.

"A workhorse must do the fundamentals well: sound good, stay in tune and meet our everyday musical needs"

it than any other guitar in my keeping, too. Despite that 'daily drive' usefulness, it was pretty conventional to look at and I didn't swoon every time I opened the case. In some ways, I barely noticed it was there. It was part of the furniture of my musical life and, in a workaday way, I achieved a lot with it simply because it let me just focus on playing. I gigged it, wrote on it, recorded it. I didn't go around showing it off to people because it wasn't that kind of guitar. It was a workhorse and I now think of that quality as an incredible strength of that instrument, not a weakness. And I eventually came to love it for that, too.

Don't get me wrong, it can be exciting to fall in love with a dream guitar,

Reasonably priced, but unreasonably good, the Yamaha Storia III proved a bargain and immediately useful




Martin's Gear Of The Year award-winning DR Centennial dreadnought is another simple but superb all-rounder

So, what is a workhorse guitar? Firstly, it must do all the fundamentals very well: it must sound good, stay in tune and meet our everyday musical needs. But we also should feel comfortable around it, not put it on a pedestal. If we're going to use a guitar all the time, it should feel like an extension of our arm. It should feel like a guitar that we don't mind taking to gigs and practice sessions. It should feel like a guitar we're not afraid to ding every once in a while. Despite that, workhorse guitars aren't really defined by price range, I'd suggest (consider that a workhorse might be a £300 Squier or a £3,300 Custom Shop Les Paul Junior). But I will say that, if something is to be our gigging and studio breadwinner, it doesn't harm if its bang-for-buck performance is high.

I'll give another example: I recently bought a Martin DR Centennial secondhand for £1,500. It has some great features, such as a VTS Adirondack spruce top, but it has an unadorned

"It should feel like a guitar we don't mind taking to gigs and practice sessions and that we're not afraid to ding"

workhorse aesthetic – simple, classic styling and great dreadnought tone. A few weeks later I spotted an all-mahogany Yamaha Storia III OM-style acoustic for £225 and, on a bit of an impulse, I bought it. I expected it to be good enough to leave in the lounge and strum from time to time. It's actually a fantastic guitar that is way more capable than the price tag suggested, which was an unexpected bonus. Both these guitars will be workhorses. The fact that one cost a fraction of the other is something that makes me feel extra good about it, but they are both played, used, enjoyed and appreciated every day. And what better six-string companions could you have than that? 





BUDGET WORKHORSES

Versatile guitars to see you through a variety of gigs, without breaking the bank

Words Stuart Williams



IBANEZ AZES40

Many consider Ibanez top-of-the-tree when it comes to hot-rod double-cuts. In the AZ Essentials line, the brand has applied decades of exploration to a softer take on the Super-S format that still wildly out-performs the price tag – with a poplar body, 635mm (25-inch) scale maple neck, All Access joint and extra-adjustable Comfort Round Steel Saddles to keep the action low. HSS pickups are Ibanez's Accord/Essentials, and the Dyna-MIX9 switching system offers a massive nine tone options. For versatility and zero sharp angles, look no further.

PRICE: £289 WEB: WWW.IBANEZ.COM



HARLEY BENTON FUSION-T HH ROASTED FNT

Who says 'affordable' and 'high spec' can't go hand-in-hand? Not Harley Benton, who only wants to relieve you of around 300 quid for this flame maple-veneered T-type model, complete with a Canadian roasted flamed maple neck, stainless-steel frets, Wilkinson 50IHK two-point vibrato and Graph Tech Tusq nut. The humbuckers are Harley Benton's own Roswell LAF Alnico 5 models, and while the natural blonde finish may not be to everyone's taste, it's available with the same spec in a number of finishes.

PRICE: £311 WEB: WWW.HARLEYBENTON.COM



GRETSCH G2215-P90 STREAMLINER JUNIOR JET CLUB

It's funny how we'll sniff at a bolt-on neck when it's attached to a single-cut body at entry-level prices, yet happily fork out without batting an eyelid when 'it's supposed to be there'. The G2215-P90 from Gretsch is one in the eye for gear snobs, with its raunchy tones courtesy of the neck P-90 and bridge humbucker. Gretsch twang it is not, nor is it Gibson tradition; what you get instead is a versatile and quirky single-cut that presents plenty of scope for modding if you want to, or that will see you through a wide range of styles out of the box.

PRICE: £370 WEB: WWW.GRETSCHGUITARS.COM



SQUIER CLASSIC VIBE '50S STRATOCASTER

You know where you are with a Strat and this '50s example from Squier's excellent Classic Vibe range will have you covered from Hank to Frusciante. It might not be down in the weeds, spec-wise, with its pine body, slightly homogenised C-shape neck profile and 241mm (9.5-inch) radius, but that's part of what makes it a one-for-all workhorse. The hallmarks are all here – a trio of Alnico single coils, the five-way switch, six-saddle bridge and vintage-style vibrato. Plus it comes in a quartet of familiar Fender finishes.

PRICE: £389 WEB: WWW.FENDER.COM



VINTAGE V65 ICON VIBRATO

There's nothing quite like the mojo of a beaten-up offset, and thanks to the Vintage V65 Icon, all you'll need to find in the back of the sofa is your plectrum. The body is a familiar outline, and the scale is 648mm (25.5 inches) as expected, but those are Wilkinson Soapbar P-90s rather than JM-style pickups, and note that the control circuit is a simplified volume/tone/three-way switch affair; no mini-toggles here. An alt-rocker's cut-price dream, surf fan's budget ride, thanks to the traditional vibrato, or just a vibey all-rounder for not a lot of money.

PRICE: £449 WEB: WWW.VINTAGEGUITARSUS.COM



PRS SE STANDARD 24-08

PRS's SE range has long been a heavy-hitter in the budget end of the shop, and the Standard range makes this even more accessible with 24 frets and eight sounds on offer (hence the name). These are accessed by the two mini-toggles that split the coils of each TCI humbucker, plus the three-way selector switch. We're also treated to some fine appointments elsewhere: a bound mahogany body with Shallow Violin carve, bound maple neck with rosewood 'board, rock-solid PRS Patented Tremolo and bird inlays. They even throw in a gigbag.

PRICE: £620 WEB: WWW.PRSGUITARS.COM



PREMIUM BREADWINNERS

These pro-level instruments present impeccable craft that's designed to go the distance

Words Dave Burrluck



FENDER AMERICAN ORIGINAL '50S TELECASTER

It's hard to argue with this recreation of Fender's original workhorse, the top level of vintage-style guitars before you get into the Custom Shop. It does change the recipe slightly with a flatter 241mm (9.5-inch) 'board radius, but otherwise, from the nitro-finished ash body and one-piece maple neck with U-shaped profile, it follows the vintage recipe, not least with its Pure Vintage '52 Telecaster single coils and vintage-style hardware. It'll take you right back in time. Equally workhorse in style are the '60s and '70s Custom Telecasters (both £1,949).

PRICE: £1,899 WEB: WWW.FENDER.COM



PJD CAREY STANDARD

A pro-level UK-made workhorse punching well above its price tag. The build is super sharp: roasted maple neck (bolted to the body, not screwed), slightly compound 254mm to 305mm (10- to 12-inch) radius 'board and boutique-level fretwork. The body is chambered light ash for a great weight and resonance. Gotoh hardware is standard, with a choice of Bare Knuckle or Cream T pickups, and a Hiscox case included. It's good to see an original shape (and a nod to Nik Huber!) that recalls the classics but emerges as very much its own thing.

PRICE: £1,899 WEB: WWW.PJDGUITARS.COM



GIBSON LES PAUL CLASSIC

With its plain maple top and uncovered zebra Burstbucker 61R and 61T humbuckers, the Classic is the most affordable 'proper' Les Paul in the current range. It also has pull-push switching for simulated single coil, out-of-phase and direct-out (bridge pickup), which expands the sounds. Aside from those differences and the nine-hole weight relief, it's the same guitar as the posher '60s Standard, including the same SlimTaper neck profile. With four colours and a hard case, it's a perfect far-from-precious workhorse 'Paul for classic rock and plenty more.

PRICE: £2,049 WEB: WWW.GIBSON.COM



PRS FIORE

As the signature guitar of Mark Lettieri – the epitome of the hardworking pro – the Fiore might not have the prestige of A-lister John Mayer's Silver Sky, but it's a lot more versatile, particularly with that bridge humbucker. It features some neat switching to voice the humbucker in both series and parallel, plus you can voice bridge and neck and all-three pickups together. Once upon a time, we might have called it a 'SuperStrat', but PRS's re-evaluation of a classic recipe has certainly put the Maryland brand on the serious bolt-on map.

PRICE: £2,599 WEB: WWW.PRSGUITARS.COM



PATRICK JAMES EGGLE MACON SPECIAL

What can you say about Patrick James Eggle's superb boutique-level builds? We've played most of them and whatever the style, the quality level, sound and feel are up there with anyone in the world. While the Macon Single Cut fills the classic Les Paul Standard slot, the flat-front Special changes the recipe, typically with a roasted maple (glued-in) neck and 6mm figured maple top. There's a lived-in vibe, too, with a cut-back satin nitro finish, worn-through neck back and aged hardware, although there's not a ding in sight. You can do that yourself.

PRICE: FROM £3,100 WEB: WWW.EGGLE.CO.UK



NIK HUBER KRAUTSTER II

The Krautster not only changed the fortunes of Nik Huber's small-output 'shop, but it's been an influence on other makers worldwide. The simple stripped-down style (compared with the posher vibe of Huber's Dolphin and Orca) gives it the serious pro-level working-player vibe. Every detail is studied and the wood quality is exceptional, while the design uses subtle modernisms such as the 254mm to 355mm (10- to 14-inch) compound radius 'board and pickups typically custom-wound by Harry Häussel. The options list is considerable.

PRICE: FROM APPROX. £4.2K WEB: [HTTPS://NIKHUBER-GUITARS.COM](https://nikhuber-guitars.com)



A LITTLE GOES A LONG WAY

Why small mods and upgrades can make the difference between pro and just for show

Words Dave Burrluck

Not only does your workhorse have to be the right tool for the job, it has to work properly. That's obvious. But it's all too easy to forget about basic maintenance – a process that starts at the end of every gig or serious practice session. If you wipe down your guitar, especially the strings, it'll feel so much better when you pull it out for your next session, and it'll keep those strings in better condition for longer.

Judging by the guitars I get in to work on for various mates and local players, a common theme is setup... or lack thereof. The thing is, especially with your main guitar, it's easy to get used to a slightly higher action, for example, that might be caused by the neck moving a little. Suddenly, it feels like your workhorse is set up for slide guitar. Wood moves and you need to get used to it. But

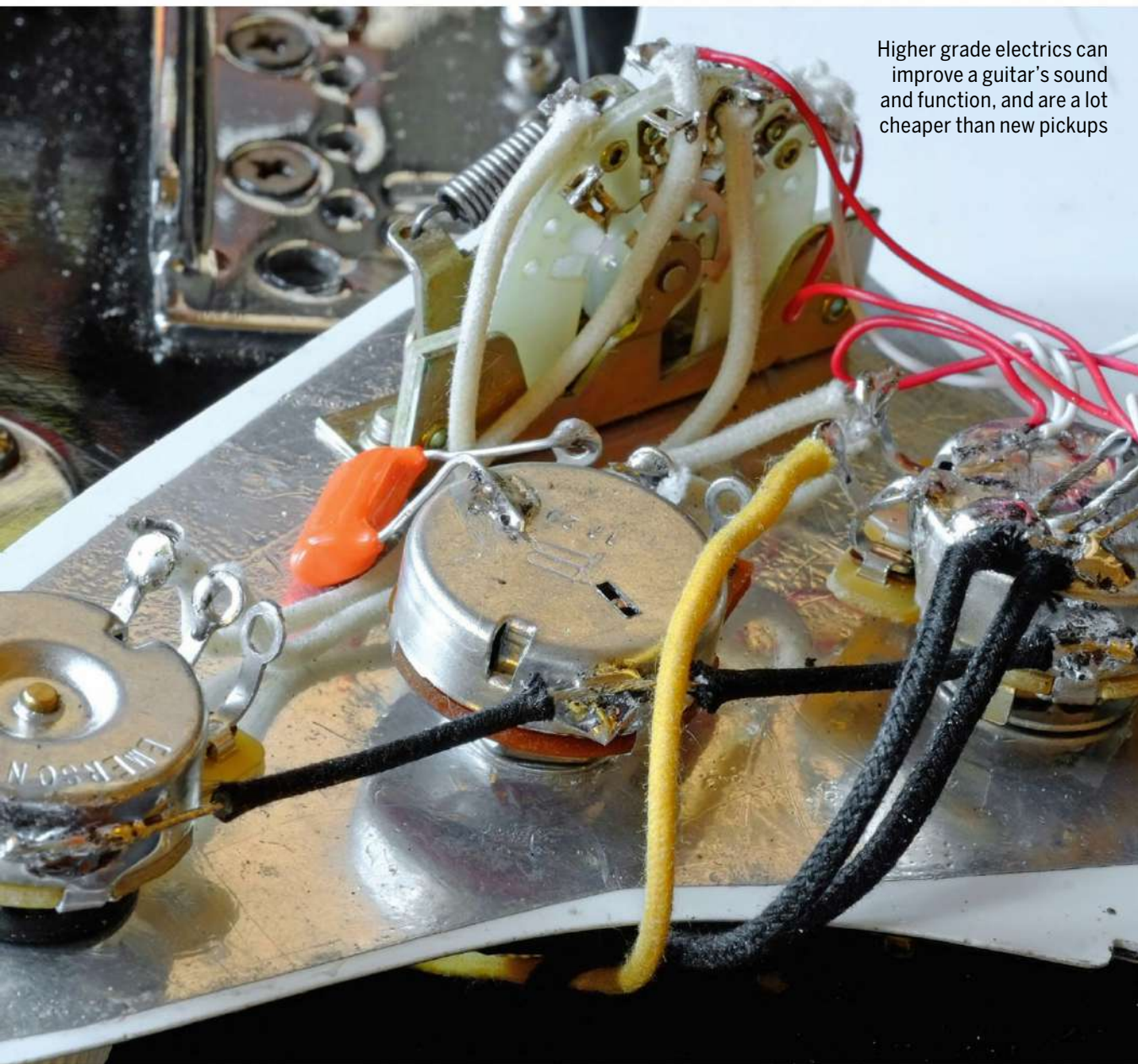
one thing I see time and time again is that many players' guitars just haven't been set up properly in the first place. Think of it like a service for your car. You do that regularly – and you need to do the same with your guitar. If your instrument is getting a lot of playtime, as the workhorse label suggests, treat it to a visit to a knowledgeable friend or pro. I'll pretty much guarantee it'll come back feeling like a new guitar.

So, is this magic? No. But a few checks and updates are all you need: new strings, a clean-up of the fingerboard (always a good time to inspect the frets for any wear) and maybe a dab of fingerboard oil if needed, a check for neck relief and possibly a truss-rod tweak, a check of the string height and even saddle radius, with a little lube applied to the nut and saddle slots then a check on the intonation. Of course, check things such

as your output jack, especially that the large retainer washer is tight. If your tuners are adjustable, tighten them up. Are your strap buttons secure?

If you experience a problem, don't leave it – it won't get better on its own. That three-way toggle switch that sometimes cuts out when you switch to the neck pickup? Sort it or replace it. Likewise, with any volume or tone pots that crackle. They can be cleaned or, in the worst case, replaced. And be serious. Not all workhorse guitars are custom shop or boutique level – far from it. The electrics in many lower-end guitars can be of an equally low quality; the cost of a new wiring loom with top-quality pots and switches is simply insurance in the long run.

Tuning is something we discuss a lot in The Mod Squad. That might be a vibrato that's not staying in tune or a guitar that



Higher grade electrics can improve a guitar's sound and function, and are a lot cheaper than new pickups

“Think of it like a service for your car. You do that regularly – and you need to do the same with your guitar”

doesn't sound in tune. The former is usually fixable, but a nut that's slightly in the wrong position, or its string grooves too high, are going to give you a guitar that might not sound in tune. Again, these are things that should be covered by that initial setup, not to mention regular servicing.

Upgrades are a common theme these days. Virtually every part on your guitar is replaceable and it's a tempting, and potentially addictive, route to take to 'improve' your tone. It's also a good way to quickly dispose of the hard-earned money you got for those gigs. Practical fixes, such as compensated saddles for your Tele or Highwood saddles for your Strat, are definitely worth considering for your lower-end workhorse, as is a tune-o-matic bridge upgrade for your lowly Les Paul-alike. Tuning problems are rarely caused by cheap tuners, but

1. Low-end guitars can certainly be workhorse-worthy... after a little modding and maintenance
2. Simple fixes, such as compensated saddles for your Telecaster, are sensible upgrades
3. New pickups and hardware transformed this workhorse Tokai Love Rock

a new set might be good insurance as a part of getting your guitar to play and stay in tune.

Pickup upgrades are an area where you can certainly spend plenty of cash. And presuming your workhorse is doing pretty much what you want (otherwise, it wouldn't be your workhorse, would it?), it might be better to sort out your control circuit first. You might also want to look at any of the other aforementioned fixes before spending money on something that may have little effect, certainly in the context of a live band setting.

That said, when you consider the potential problems that single-coil hum can create, it's far from daft to have hum-cancelling versions of your Fender single coils – or even Gibson-style P-90s – on your workhorse, leaving the pure single coils for your recording guitars. Hum-

“One of the biggest dangers your workhorse might face is the battlefield of the live gig”

cancelling mixed pickup positions on your dual-P-90 or Fender guitars can certainly give you some insurance, as can a backup guitar with humbuckers, which can sound close to a single coil if they're low output.

One of the biggest dangers your workhorse might face is the battlefield of the live gig. There's never enough space, everyone's setting up at the same time and then, after you've played, you have to get your gear off quickly as the main band awaits their time in the spotlight. Gigs are no place for precious pristine instruments. Why take the risk?

But let's be serious, a higher-end guitar will invariably have fewer of the issues we've discussed and that inherent quality might well mean you're spending less time and money trying to improve something and more time actually playing on that 'horse. **G**





NO-FRILLS ROCKERS

Lean, mean stripped-back workhorses equipped to perform in the less-is-more arena

Words Stuart Williams



PRS SE STARLA STOPTAIL

2008's Starla was a departure from the sleek cutting-edge we'd become accustomed to from Maryland, nodding towards retro-rock and making its way into the SE range as the Starla Stoptail. With the same bulbous single-cut body, its two-pickup design and curvy scratchplate slightly echo a Special. But this is PRS, so we're unlikely to be short on features: you get PRS DS02 humbuckers, with three-way switching and push-pull coil-splitting for both, the classic 'in-between' 635mm (25-inch) scale length, and a bevelled body for an element of modern styling.

PRICE: £649 WEB: WWW.PRSGUITARS.COM



GORDON SMITH GS1

Gordon Smith's original guitars were a cult collection, but since the brand's revival via Auden, the GS name is now more widely available – and we're better off for it. This GS1 typifies the no-frills rocker brief: a well-made, good-looking WYSIWYG guitar. There's meat in the right places, thanks to the double-cut mahogany body, classic-profile neck with rosewood 'board, brass nut and adjustable wrap-around bridge. The versatile GS Homewound 'bucker can be split by the push-pull switch, it comes with a case, and is made in the UK. What's not to love?

PRICE: FROM £899 WEB: WWW.GORDONSMITHGUITARS.COM



EASTMAN SB55DC/V

While the outline of the SB55DC/v is a double-cut LP-style, there's a lot going on, from the mahogany-like okoume body and neck and ebony 'board, to the Bakelite scratchplate. Premium third-party components include Jescar fretwire, aged Faber tuners and wrap-around bridge, plus Sprague Orange Drop cap, CTS pots and Gavitt wiring. But if you're only going to have one pickup, best make it a good one: the jewel in the crown is the Lollar 50s Spec dog-ear P-90 and its no-load tone pot, offering a wide range of tones from a minimalist configuration.

PRICE: €1,399 WEB: WWW.EASTMANGUITARS.COM



GIBSON LES PAUL JUNIOR

The archetypal no-frills rocker, Gibson's Les Paul Junior is your deadbeat older brother who always manages to get you to lend him 20 quid. There's no maple top, no carved body, no binding – but there is a whole heap of attitude, and it sits in that bridge-position P-90. Manipulating the single volume and tone controls is your gateway to everything from blues to punk, and the Junior has served up everything in between since its arrival in 1954. Proof, should it be necessary, that one is all you need.

PRICE: £1,449 WEB: WWW.GIBSON.COM



GIBSON SG SPECIAL

Les Paul might not have liked it, but the SG has certainly left its mark on rock 'n' roll, and not only with its two-humbucker Standard version – we owe a debt to the SG Special, too. While Townshend was busy windmilling out some of rock guitar's punchiest ever sounds, Tony Iommi used one to invent heavy metal. Today's SG Special features the same two-P-90 pickups, lighter-than-an-LP mahogany body, SlimTaper set neck, bound rosewood 'board, four-control layout and small-size scratchplate. There's a reason the SG never left the Gibson catalogue.

PRICE: £1,449 WEB: WWW.GIBSON.COM



KNAGGS KENAI-J P2

No-frills doesn't have to mean no spec, as evidenced by this Kenai-J P2. Here in a gloss Crème relic finish with parchment scratchplate, Knaggs mixes new and old for something a bit different. The dual-P-90 configuration, with traditional 628mm (24.7-inch) scale and 22-fret neck, offers a boutique take on an LP Special format, offering premium hardware from Kluson and TonePros. Myriad options including 10 finishes, four scratchplates, plus four single/humbucker/P-90 pickup configurations. The garage guitar for those who drive a Ferrari.

PRICE: APPROX £2,399 WEB: WWW.KNAGGSGUITARS.COM

CONTEMPORARY CLASSICS

These modern electrics combine cutting-edge specs with classy outlines

Words Dave Burrluck



TRINITY BY RELISH

Here's a different take on the workhorse. Modernist Swiss-based Relish hooked up with Cor-Tek in Indonesia to produce this hugely affordable 24-fret bolt-on guitar with a major difference: you can swap out its pickups in seconds. You no longer need to take different guitars to gigs to cover your heavy rock or jazz tunes: just take the one and swap its pickups – so easy you could do it between songs! The patented pickup-swapping concept is gaining ground, with Cream T Guitars adopting it and offering a number of its own-brand pickups and others to swap.

PRICE: £599 **WEB: [HTTP://RELISH.SWISS](http://relish.swiss)**



CORT G300 PRO

Cort is the house brand of Indonesia's Cor-Tek and its own designs are very on-trend, using roasted maple necks and 'boards with a compound 305mm to 406mm radius (12- to 16-inch) and stainless-steel frets. While the rest of the G Series uses its own-brand pickups (such as this issue's G290 FAT II), the G300 packs a classic Seymour Duncan pairing: JB (bridge) and Jazz (neck). Along with an excellent vibrato system that includes rear-locking tuners, there's some tricky wiring on the five-way lever switch to offer hum-cancelling single-coil mixes.

PRICE: £799 **WEB: [WWW.CORTGUITARS.COM](http://www.cortguitars.com)**



FENDER PLAYER PLUS STRATOCASTER

An offshoot of the huge-selling Mexican-made Player series, the Player Plus mini-range includes this Strat, an HSS version, a Telecaster and a Nashville Tele (featured in our Modified Traditional round-up later on). They expand the Player spec with features such as Noiseless pickups, upgraded bridges, 305mm (12-inch) 'board radiuses, with quite heavily rolled edges, and augmented switching. Think American Ultra but made in Mexico and for considerably less money. You also get a gigbag, and the Strat comes in four colours.

PRICE: £939 **WEB: [WWW.FENDER.COM](http://www.fender.com)**



IBANEZ AZ2204N

The AZ concept pulls back Ibanez's RG style into something a little more classic but still very performance-aimed. This Japanese-made AZ2204N is a superb example of a nicely refined 'SuperStrat' with a roasted maple neck, heavily shaped heel, stainless-steel frets on a compound 228mm to 305mm (8.9- to 12-inch) rosewood 'board, and Gotoh vibrato with locking tuners. The HSS trio of Seymour Duncan Fortunas includes the Alter switching, which combines the middle and neck pickups in series or adds that with the full bridge humbucker.

PRICE: FROM £1,819 **WEB: [WWW.IBANEZ.COM](http://www.ibanez.com)**



PRS S2 CUSTOM 24

With a slightly more pared-back visual, PRS's S2 line bridges the gap between the high-end Core range and Indonesian SE guitars, almost tailor-made for the gigging musician. The hardware and pickups are the same as you'll find on the SE guitars, but the S2's are made alongside the Core USA models – and feel it, too. The scarf-jointed mahogany neck comes with the fast Pattern Thin profile, while the 85/15 'S' pickups cover a lot of ground and, via a pull switch on the tone control, offer highly credible single-coil voices. In tune and gig-ready.

PRICE: £1,929 **WEB: [WWW.PRSGUITARS.COM](http://www.prsguitars.com)**



CHARVEL MJ DK24 HSH 2PT E

Charvel may have a reputation for being a tool for heavier styles, but many of its latest designs fall into a more classic, very versatile camp, such as this 'Made in Japan' DK. The mahogany body is lightly satin finished but everything else is about performance: a graphite-reinforced wenge neck with compound 305mm to 406mm (12- to 16-inch) radius, and a 24-fret 'streaky' ebony 'board paired with Gotoh 510 vibrato with locking tuners. The trio of pickups are Seymour Duncan Classics: Full Shred (bridge), Alnico Pro II (neck) and SSL-6 (middle).

PRICE: £2,299 **WEB: [WWW.CHARVEL.COM](http://www.charvel.com)**



HOW LOW IS TOO LOW?

What defines workhorse quality – and how affordably can it be found in stock guitars?

Words Dave Burrluck

It's impossible to put a finite quality label on what you might call a workhorse guitar because we're all different.

We probably all have different ideas on what we can, or want, to spend on an instrument. But what we do know is that the ever increasing quality of guitars from numerous brands' start-up ranges continues to surprise us.

An obvious example is PRS's new Indonesian-made SE Silver Sky, which is a third of the price of the USA-made model. When I was reviewing the SE earlier this year, it stayed on a stand for the whole period I had with the guitar. The USA model always went back in its gigbag, carefully dusted, after it had done its job. I'd been working on a recording and used the SE for all the rhythm parts and some slide guitar overdubs. The USA guitar – due to the short supply – arrived a little later and I immediately went to re-record the ideas and parts. But I sent off the song with 90 per cent SE. Needless to say, I didn't adjust anything on either guitar. It's a very vivid example of a great guitar, irrespective of its price. In fact, I think I preferred the SE's slightly hotter voice to the USA model, not to mention that the SE model is a lot less precious.

But while the £895 SE might be considerably less expensive than the

guitar it apes, it's hardly cheap, is it? On an earlier recording project I needed to double a clean guitar part that my songwriting mate had recorded with his Fender American Pro Tele. I was writing about the 25th anniversary of the UK brand Vintage at the time and had a perfectly serviceable T-style V75 on review (priced at £419 at the time, including a gigbag) that I thought I'd give a try. It wasn't until sometime later when I was mixing the track that I remembered I'd meant to restring my own 1969 Fender Tele and redo the part. I never bothered.

Those of us who get out and gig, however, have more to consider. Low-cost guitars have to use lower-cost components – the basic materials, hardware, pickups and controls – otherwise they wouldn't be so low in price. Would you want to trust that £419 Vintage on a string of live dates up and down the country? My gigging experiences over the years say no, but my experience of new guitars today is way more positive than it was a decade or more ago. Competition is fierce and, well, those pickups and parts are on a different level today; they have to be. If I'm honest, the only thing stopping me from using a guitar like that is past experience, rather than the actual guitar itself.

“Low-cost guitars have to use lower-cost components... [but] those pickups and parts are on a different level today”

A lot about a higher-value, higher-quality instrument, then, is insurance, based on prior good and bad experiences. And let's not forget snobbery, too – either your own or that of your peer group. I've certainly gigged a lot with an S-style Vintage V6. Yes, I changed the scratchplate and removed the logo, but aside from a little bit of fettling that's all. People often ask me, 'What's that guitar?' To which I ask them, 'Does it sound good?' It does... until someone guesses it's a 'Made in Hurry' cheapo-caster. And although the sound hasn't changed, their perception has: it can't be any good 'cos it's cheap.

Then again, there's also an inverted snobbery to consider: you don't need an expensive guitar to sound great, it's all in the fingers. Only people who can't play use expensive guitars...

History Lesson

Turn back the clock a few decades and most of us only had one guitar, or maybe a couple. It wasn't a case of having a workhorse; it was the only 'horse in town. Many pros also toured with a similar paucity of instruments, often maintained on the road by any local repairer. I remember getting a panicked call on a Saturday evening from a local guitarist who's keystone tuner button on his Les Paul Goldtop had parted company with the tuner. He was setting up for a gig, couldn't tune his guitar and didn't have a spare. Luckily, I had a non-matching tuner in my fledgling bitsbox and I managed to fix his guitar just minutes before he was due on stage. As far as I know, the guitar still has that odd tuner in place.

Today, I'll bet few of us would set off for even a low-level local gig without a spare, let alone a whole tour. Even



At a third of the price of its US counterpart, PRS's SE Silver Sky is a very attractive proposition

2020's Vintage V75-SVB cost just £400 but capably stepped up for a recording project

workhorses need a backup, and chances are it'll be a cheaper date, but if you're employed and your No 1 goes down, you really need to make sure your understudy is up to the job. It's all very well thinking that your cheapo no-name S-style is fine "as a spare", but when you need to use it for a lot of the set after you've broken a string (or worse) on your main workhorse... Well, many of us have been there I'm sure and it's really not fun.

Another thing many of us never thought about 20 years or so ago was the value of the guitars that we were (ab)using. I don't remember whether that Les Paul Goldtop was a 70s Deluxe or – God forbid! – something from an earlier decade. My tuner change would have helped to devalue that, for sure, but did anyone think like that back in the day?

Today, a guitar's value is going to have an effect on its workhorse status, certainly if resale is on your radar, and many might have a now-vintage instrument that is just too risky to take out, even if it sounds amazing and is a great player. Here, again, a more affordable 'beater' that you don't have any emotional attachment to is far from a foolish idea.

One way to side-step this issue is to only gig a relic, but you don't need me to tell you that those with Fender or Gibson on the headstock don't come cheap – nor do many aged guitars at a boutique level – and many of the low-end copycat brands are far from authentic looking. Of course, if that doesn't bother you, then our friends at Vintage will have you well covered, as our review of the V65 in this issue attests. **G**

This Epiphone 1959 Les Paul Standard Outfit in Aged Lemon Burst is much more compelling than affordable guitars of the past. Spec'd for retailer Andertons and priced at £749, the first batch sold out fast – though more are on the way later in the year, we're told



DO-IT-ALL SEMIS

Semi-acoustics built to deliver vintage-style tone on the modern stage

Words Stuart Williams



EPIPHONE CASINO

A couple of years after its launch in 1962, the Casino's place in pop and rock history was cemented thanks to a few chaps from Liverpool. It stands out here as it's actually a fully-hollow body, making it a brilliant contender for clean/medium drive sounds (though heavier players may want to stuff that body to avoid feedback). The tones come from a duo of chrome-covered P-90s and regular two volume/two tone controls/three-way switching, and the look is completed by parallelogram inlays, trapeze tailpiece and this stunning Vintage Sunburst finish.

PRICE: £649 WEB: WWW.EPIPHONE.COM



IBANEZ AS113-BS

Ibanez has a strong pedigree when it comes to semi-acoustics. Packing a spruce top with flamed maple back and sides alongside a nyatoh/maple neck and bound ebony 'board, the AS113 is also equipped with a Gibraltar Artist bridge and Ibanez Quik Change III tailpiece. The Super 58 humbuckers are the same models found in the Japanese-made AS2000, and the AS113 similarly features the traditional four-control and three-way switching format, along with Ibanez's Tri-Switch. A seriously versatile jazz/blues semi – and a looker, too!

PRICE: £829 WEB: WWW.IBANEZ.COM



GRETSCH G5655T ELECTROMATIC CENTER BLOCK JR

With the introduction of the Streamliner series, Gretsch's Electromatic range has been given a new lease of life. This single-cut has everything we want from a modern Gretsch, with raunchy rock 'n' roll and stellar indie/Americana tones on tap. There's a feedback-busting chambered spruce centre block, Adjusto-Matic bridge (anchored for stability), Bigsby B70, and a pair of Black Top Broad'Tron humbuckers with individual and master volume/tone knobs, the former including a treble bleed circuit to maintain your high-end at lower volumes.

PRICE: £839 WEB: WWW.GRETSCHGUITARS.COM



VOX BOBCAT V90 BIGSBY

As well as making revered amps, Vox has turned its hand periodically to the electric guitar itself. The standard Bobcat V90 recalls the European pawn-shop guitars of the 60s with its abundant white plastic and binding, trapeze tailpiece and semi-hollow design (Vox produced these guitars in Italy during that period). This Bigsby-equipped model takes a stealthier visual approach, featuring a weight-relieved centre block for modern gain settings while managing feedback, and soapbar pickups with rod magnets that deliver Fender-like clarity and punch.

PRICE: £1,399 WEB: WWW.VOXAMPS.COM



YAMAHA SA2200

Handmade in Yamaha's Japanese factory, the SA2200 is an all-purpose semi. From the sycamore body wood through to the black-tie-function appearance thanks to that gold hardware, flame top, ebony 'board and mother-of-pearl inlays – this is a lavish affair. The Yamaha Alnico V pickups have plenty of mileage, with a coil-split on each that will take you from polite canapés to roaring can-you-plays. A classy alternative to the obvious benchmark semi for those who want high-end playability and tone from something outside of the norm.

PRICE: £1,799 WEB: [HTTP://UK.YAMAHA.COM](http://UK.YAMAHA.COM)



GIBSON ES-335 JIM JAMES

Not all signatures are niche, as My Morning Jacket frontman Jim James's ES-335 proves. Jim set himself a brief to draw people to the guitar before his name, and we think the combo of mid-output Gibson T-Type humbuckers, triple-ply maple/poplar/maple body construction and antique-looking walnut finish makes this one a great proposition. The tune-o-matic is an ABR-1 with a lightweight aluminium stoptail, while the tuners are Kluson Wafflebacks. The only 'signature' giveaways are on the (removable) truss rod cover and headstock rear.

PRICE: £3,099 WEB: WWW.GIBSON.COM

MODIFIED TRADITIONAL

Why not combine the classic with the progressive with these toneful neo-trad electrics?

Words Jamie Dickson



EPIPHONE 1959 LES PAUL STANDARD OUTFIT

Epiphone has really upped its game in the past couple of years and this very cool variant on the classic '59 LP formula is one of the nicest Epis we've seen. Made exclusively for the UK retailer Andertons (with free UK delivery, plus international shipping available), it has 50s-style wiring, CTS pots, Gibson USA Burstbucker pickups, a hand-rolled fingerboard and '59 neck profile, and that pretty Aged Lemon Burst finish. Even if you are fortunate enough to own a Custom Shop R9, this would still make a superb gigging tool that feels and sounds great.

PRICE: £749 WEB: WWW.ANDERTONS.CO.UK



FENDER PLAYER PLUS NASHVILLE TELECASTER

The Nashville Telecaster, which puts a Strat pickup 'twixt neck and bridge single coils, has been part of Fender's range for quite a few years now – and with such a versatile blend of classic tones, it's not hard to see why. The latest Player Plus version really does elevate that to another level. For south of a grand you get studio-friendly Noiseless pickups with extra tones available through a push-pull tone control that activates in-series pickup combinations for those chunkier, humbucker-like voices. Hard to think of a more flexible friend.

PRICE: £979 WEB: WWW.FENDER.COM



HARMONY JUPITER

The Harmony brand has been resurrected relatively recently and, for an American-built instrument, really deserves to be on your radar, not least because they play very nicely and offer some very compelling retro-modern tones and styling. The single-cut Jupiter is arguably the most conventional of the range and is attractively spec'd with a nitro-finished, genuine-mahogany body and neck, 305mm (12-inch) radius ebony 'board, plus custom gold foil humbuckers that balance cut with heft very nicely. It also comes in a premium-quality case by Mono.

PRICE: £1,299 WEB: WWW.HARMONY.CO



IBANEZ AZS2200 PRESTIGE

Like a Tele that moved to Japan and embraced new ideas, the AZS2200 is an addictively playable electric that has such a useful range of tones. Its tonal heart is the combination of a Seymour Duncan Magic Touch-mini humbucker at the neck and Alnico II Pro Custom single coil at the bridge. Extra tones are unlocked via the dyna-MIX5 system with Alter Switch, which offers several ways to combine and voice the two pickups' coils. Roasted maple neck, Super All Access neck joint, Luminlay side dots and a hard case round out a formidable package.

PRICE: FROM £1,819 WEB: WWW.IBANEZ.COM



PRS S2 MCCARTY 594 THINLINE

Looking for workhorse affordability but high-end build and sonics? The S2 McCarty 594 Thinline is a fine place to look. Built in the same Maryland factory as PRS's most prestigious guitars, the S2 cuts out some of the frills while keeping many of the best bits of the 594 package. With an all-mahogany body and neck, and vintage-output 58/15 'S' humbuckers that are tuned for definition and bite in the bridge but a wider than usual range of frequencies in the neck, this 594 will do classic rock, blues and more so capably.

PRICE: £1,829 WEB: WWW.PRSGUITARS.COM



GRETSCH G6228TG PLAYERS EDITION JET BT WITH BIGSBY

The idea behind the Players Edition series was to subtly modernise much-loved platforms. The single-cut Jet gets that treatment in spades here, starting with its Broad'Tron BT65 pickups, a more PAF-like version of the Filter'Tron, designed by pickup guru Tim Shaw; Gretsch says the new pickups offer "powerful mids... and an exceptionally clear, smooth high-end". With a chambered mahogany body and String-Thru Bigsby B7GP vibrato, for easy restringing, never has tradition and modernity married up so well. Tops two grand but streets cheaper.

PRICE: £2,639 WEB: WWW.GRETSCHGUITARS.COM



LOW SIDE OF HIGH END

We often think of workhorse electrics as budget-conscious choices, but is there a case for buying no-frills models from high-end makers instead?

Words Jamie Dickson

There's so much choice for players looking for do-it-all electrics at an affordable price. But a workhorse guitar should be at your side for a long time, right at the centre of your musical life. Looked at from that perspective, it's not the craziest idea to consider paying a little more to buy a no-frills model from a high-end maker. While the law of diminishing returns applies to boutique brands – where you have to pay a fair whack to achieve incremental improvements over mainstream production models – it tends to be the case that high-end makers take extra care over tonewood selection and all the little details, from rolled-in fingerboard edges to pickup choices.

Given that a workhorse electric is the kind of guitar that might in time pay for itself through gigs, or at least offset some of its asking price in time, choosing a guitar that is totally sorted straight out of the case might be worth the extra

investment if it means the guitar is oh-so-easy to play and always delivers the sonic goods. This concept of a high-end workhorse is clearly something that premium makers consider viable: top-flight luthiers such as Nik Huber offer simpler guitars such as the Krautster, which combine premium build quality with a down-to-business feature set.

In a quest to settle the question of whether your next workhorse should really be a thoroughbred that doesn't mind some hard graft, we spoke to John Priest at Peach Guitars, one of the largest guitar stores in Britain, which stocks everything from entry-level Squier Strats to serious exotica from the world's finest luthiers. So, what's his view from the showroom on the pros and cons of a high-end workhorse?

"Well, obviously the biggest difference when you're looking at brands like Knaggs or Patrick James Eggle or Suhr, or any of those higher-end companies, is the supreme build quality and quality

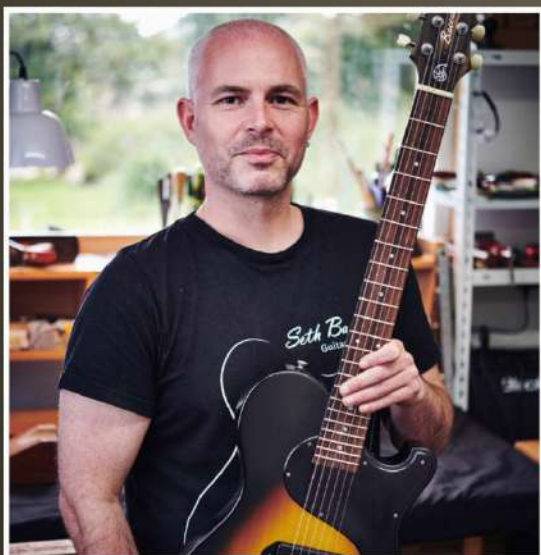
parts on the guitar from the get go," John reflects. "So you don't need to go, 'Oh, well, I'm going to buy a PRS SE – but then maybe I want to change the nut or maybe I want to change the tuners to locking tuners or something like that.' If you go with high-end brands like the ones I mentioned, even on their stripped-down models, everything is ready to go straight away.

"On the other hand, there's an argument that with something like a PRS SE Custom 24 you could change the tuners and the nut on it and you're only talking about spending £150 – but that will equate to a massive, massive upgrade on what's a really fantastic guitar to start with. But, obviously, if you want to just go into a shop and walk out with a guitar and gig it that night, guitars from Knaggs or Suhr or any of those guys are going to do it. Because with those sorts of brands, even on their simpler guitars, they do try to tweak them to get as much out of them as possible," he says.

AIM HIGH

Luthier Seth Baccus on why no-one regrets buying quality in the end

"If the idea of finding a number one guitar that stays with you and becomes a lifelong friend appeals to you," high-end British luthier Seth Baccus reflects, "then it might be worth focusing your resources into one really good guitar. There are so many wonderful guitars and guitar makers to be found out there right now – we are truly spoilt for choice. You may not have the aesthetic desire or deep pockets for what one might traditionally think of as a high-end or boutique instrument, but most higher-end makers offer a no-frills, more 'stripped back' model or two, some of which can still be custom-spec'd.



"It can be a good way of buying a really great guitar that is built to last but perhaps with some choices to keep things simpler, build-wise, and therefore more accessible, price-wise. Choosing a satin finish flat-top and forgoing the flamed maple high-gloss carved top, for example, will make the guitar much more affordable but without negatively impacting the tone, versatility or playability. If a high-end maker or company is building at a high level, they will usually apply that same base level of quality to any guitar they build, regardless of cosmetic specifications. Good wood, good hardware and good build quality usually make for a keeper."



This Patrick James Eggle electric has real 'grassroots' cred as it's made from wood reclaimed from the bar of the Two Pigs music venue in Corsham, Wiltshire

“The brand the pros ask for is Suhr. It’s a workhorse and a tool – what those professional gigs are all about”

Since John is working in a store that sells thousands of instruments a year, we ask if he notices any trends among the choices that professional players make when buying a mainstay electric for their gigs and sessions?

“The brand that the pros we deal with ask for, pretty much most of the time, is Suhr – a Strat-style Suhr or a Suhr version of a Tele. That is the route that they often seem to go down. Okay, a guitar like that does tip the two grand mark: you’re talking about two and a half, £2,600... That sort of level. But they are really good, versatile guitars. If we sell an HSS Suhr to a guy who plays in an orchestra pit or something like that, they’ve got silent single-coil systems, fantastic tuning stability, lightweight bodies, you know? Okay, it might not have as much style and vibe as your favourite pre-CBS Strat, but blimmin’ hell it’s a workhorse and a tool, which is what those professional gigs are all about – your job is to play music for people to enjoy, not push yourself into the limelight, so I can see why we get pro customers coming in and asking to try those sorts of guitars.”

But what about the rest of us? If you’re playing pubs rather than the West End, and have a more limited budget, is there anything priced more keenly that offers something like the same all-rounder potential and great tone?

“Well, you might want to look at a maker like Fender and their American Performer range,” John suggests, referring to the lowest-tier, USA-made Fender series. “If you look at those guitars, something like an HSS Strat from that range is a perfect workhorse. Some people might think, ‘Oh, it’s too 80s or Iron Maiden...’ But an HSS Strat has still

got to be one of the most versatile guitars going. So if you get a good American Performer and it’s set up well, it’s a really great workhorse – you’ve got 22 frets, a decent trem and all that sort of stuff.”

Vintage Classics

In the past, touring pros would often turn to pawn shop finds while touring to source classic instruments to use as mainstay guitars, a method used by everyone from XTC’s Dave Gregory to Rory Gallagher. Mike Campbell of Tom Petty’s Heartbreakers recalls finding his main-squeeze Firebird in such a way.

“I had a day off on the Fleetwood Mac tour and I went to a pawn shop. I saw this guitar up on the wall and I said, ‘How much is that?’ And they said ‘\$600.’ I said, ‘Let me see it.’ And they said, ‘Well, you wouldn’t want that one.

It’s been repaired.’ The back of the neck had been broken, so I said, ‘Let me see it anyway.’ It did have a big tear in the back of the head, but it had been repaired really well and it played really good.

“I gave them my credit card, but it didn’t go through. They came back and said, ‘Your card didn’t work...’ And I said, ‘Well, I’ve got \$500 on me. Will you take 500 for it?’ And they did so I ended up playing it for the rest of the tour – and I’m using it with The Dirty Knobs now as my main guitar. It just proves that you don’t have to spend thousands and thousands of dollars to get a good instrument, you know?”

While bargains like that might be hard to find, a well-sorted player’s grade Gibson or Fender from the late 60s might also be a higher-end workhorse option. **G** www.peachguitars.com





ONE TO RULE THEM ALL

Buying an electric guitar that's going to be your mainstay for stage and studio requires careful decision making. Jim Tuerk of online marketplace Reverb.com helps us navigate the choices

Words Jamie Dickson

Like a car that we know we're going to cover a lot of motorway miles in, we need to know that a guitar we're buying to be our mainstay workhorse electric for all kinds of musical scenarios is going to last the distance, perform well and get us from A to B in comfort and even a little style. But what section of the guitar market offers the best potential for finding a guitar that blends quality with utility? And how much do we need to spend to meet the brief?

Who better to answer such questions than Jim Tuerk of online marketplace Reverb.com, which specialises in musical instruments and has thousands of guitars listed from sellers all over the world at any one time. Due to this, Reverb staff have a really interesting handle on what's in the market, what offers great value and what models stand the test of time. With all that in mind, we picked Jim Tuerk's mind about the decisions that matter when buying a do-it-all electric.

Are there any guitars known to offer high owner satisfaction over time?

"To me, the highest owner satisfaction occurs with instruments that are good-

quality and those that are priced well. And that's a pretty broad bucket when you think about it. But in my view, I would be looking at mid-tier guitars, and when I say mid-tier guitars, I'm looking at a guitar that's somewhere between £1,000 and £2,500. Anything over £2,500 has heightened expectations that are going to be really hard to meet. If I'm spending that much on an instrument, it had better play itself [laughs].

"So if we stay within that 'sweet spot' price-band, I'd be looking at some PRS instruments, I'd be looking at mid-tier Fenders, for example. That would be something like the American Performer series, even the American Professional range. In used guitars that might also include American Standard instruments

"The price differential between a new guitar and a used guitar at the premium end of the market is pretty solid"

and the old AVRI series of vintage reissues, which are fantastic instruments. When it comes to used guitars, I love looking at the 90s and early 2000s as a target range because they're not vintage guitars, so they don't carry that perceived premium price most of the time. You can find really good deals in those years on great-quality instruments that were built well and will stand the test of time."

If we were buying a workhorse electric, we'd probably want something with solid resale value in case our needs changed and we wanted to reinvest. What kinds of guitars hold their value best?

"Well, it's hard to talk about broad trends because the way that a piece of gear retains its value, even within a brand, can vary pretty wildly. Let's talk about a brand like Fender. If you take one of their more budget model guitars like something from the Player Series... guitars like that are not going to retain as much value when sold used as something from the Custom Shop. And the reason for that is scarcity of inventory [namely, relatively fewer Custom Shop instruments are made, so less are available in the market]. Fender just

JIM'S GEMS

Reverb.com's Jim Tuerk picks workhorse electrics offering plenty of tone, playability and performance for the money

Tackle-It-All Tele

"The Fender American Performer Telecaster Hum immediately comes to mind. The Telecaster is the original Swiss Army knife – surprisingly versatile in the hands of rockers, pickers and even funk players. This particular model features a neck humbucker, which can give you a thicker sound, but you can also use it as a traditional single-coil at the push of a button."



Jack-Of-All-Jazzmasters

"Consider the Squier J Masics Jazzmaster as the jack of all trades. Like all Jazzmasters, this one is an open palette, begging to be modded and turned into a player's personal dream guitar. Unlike other Jazzmasters, it's affordable, so you don't have to worry about ruining its value when customising it. Add your favourite bridge, swap pickups, futz with the electronics, and make it your own."



'Pickup Truck' Electric

"My recommendation for what I like to think of as a 'pickup truck' option is the Sterling By Music Man Mariposa. It has a striking body shape, but it's built for anything. As anyone who knows Omar Rodríguez-López's playing, this signature model of his can be taken in any direction. Dual humbuckers, locking tuners, a no-fuss, down-only whammy bar. Simple and affordable yet there's nothing standard about it."



released a reissue of the George Harrison Rosewood Telecaster featured in *Get Back* et cetera. Big demand for that product but limited stock. So that guitar is already selling for more than what it sold for new because of that scarcity in supply.

“And so when you look at a brand like Fender, to take just one example, you can see different product categories feeding different trends. But there are few brands that we look at on Reverb where the average brand-new price versus the average used price of products by that brand is relatively close. We’d look at that as a very healthy brand in terms of holding its value, where you can maintain a lot more of your equity when you’re buying brand-new. A great example is PRS. PRS is, again, a premium product. So you could say that, generally speaking, the price differential between a new guitar and a used guitar at the premium end of the guitar market is pretty solid.”

What guitar makers do you feel punch above their weight in terms of bang-for-buck workhorse guitars?

“I think Reverend punches way above its weight as a brand. You can get a guitar from Reverend for a really



A mid-tier instrument such as this Fender Player Plus Nashville Telecaster offers the best of both worlds: good quality at a reasonable price

Guitar For All Seasons

“Something a little more non-traditional would be the Reverend Double Agent, with a striking offset shape unique to Reverend. The Railhammer pickup combination of a P-90 and humbucker gives a wide range of sonic options. Plus you get the signature Reverend Bass Contour knob and treble bleed circuit, locking tuners and a no-fuss whammy bar. It’s the Renaissance Man of guitars.”



reasonable price. They have great pickup offerings, too: P-90s, humbuckers... The Railhammer pickups are just fantastic as well. You get the Bass Contour and treble bleed circuit [on many models]. Most of the time you get a whammy bar. These are things that allow you to really take the guitar and throw the sound in different ways. Definitely not a one-trick pony. I find the Reverends to be affordable, simple, versatile, but nothing about them is ‘standard’. It’s not a Strat, it is not an SG, it is not a Les Paul. It is its own thing, and it does so many of those things so well for the price point that they would be at the top of my list in terms of guitars punching above their weight.”

The quality of lower-priced guitars has gone up and up over the years. Do you think the lines are being blurred between such guitars and ‘pro-grade’ instruments?

“I think that it is getting blurred to a certain extent, for sure. To go way back,

think about ‘department store’ guitars – early Kays and Teiscos and things like that didn’t even have a trust rod, right? I think that there was a totally different quality standard of beginner guitars back in the 50s, 60s and 70s. But today, in global production, we have [high-precision] CNC machines that allow us to have much better entry-level guitars. And to that point, there’s really no reason for anyone to buy a ‘toy’ guitar any more.

“That said, I’ve spent a lot of time in a tour van over the years. I still gig and I’d be really scared to bring an entry-level guitar into a gig without having a tech nearby because of the quality of parts – not because of the brand – because I’m about to play three hours on a guitar and I want to make sure that it’s not going to break. In that case, I do think that there is a threshold [in baseline price and build quality] in order for me to take a guitar on tour and be confident with it.” **G**

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BRAD PITT



ADAMS

As a new album takes its place on the shelves of record stores and online download emporia alike, one question hangs in the air like a recently twanged E chord. What exactly has made Bryan Adams so joyful that he would be moved to title his new release *So Happy It Hurts*?

Words David Mead

Just a few moments into our conversation and the reason for the pure unbridled joy relating to the new record becomes perfectly clear. Having been off the road for the longest time since he turned professional, Bryan Adams' time in the solitary confinement imposed by the pandemic is drawing to a close and a world tour is in the offing once again. In fact, it was when an easing of restrictions looked imminent that he immersed himself in songwriting

and took to the studio – practically single-handed, as it turns out – to record an album that positively shines with the bright light of optimism. It's a fun, back-to-basics rock 'n' roll affair that is bound to set pulses racing in stadiums across the globe when the tour kicks off later this year.

But first things first. We've always wondered whether the opening lyrics to the monster hit *Summer Of '69* were truly autobiographical... Mr Adams?

You famously sing about buying your first real six-string at a five and dime. Is that true?

“I bought an imitation Les Paul at a five and dime store in Ottawa, Canada in 1971. Before that I had an imitation Strat that I bought in Reading, England in 1970. It felt real at the time to have a Les Paul, even though I’m a massive Ritchie Blackmore fan – still am – I was heavily into Humble Pie’s *Rockin’ The Fillmore* album at the time, and both Peter Frampton and Steve Marriot were on Les Pauls. It’s rock guitar heaven, that album.”

What age were you when your musical journey first began?

“There was always music in the house when my father was there; he listened to classical and opera all the time. But, for me, it was probably listening to music in my parents’ Chevy Corvair

in the early 60s, but it’s hard to say. I wanted to be a drummer initially, my mates and I were obsessed with Led Zep and, as luck would have it, one of them had a drum kit, which got regular use before and after school.”

What attracted you to the guitar?

“It wasn’t my first choice. My parents wouldn’t have a drum kit in the house, and one Christmas my father bought me a flamenco guitar... that’s how I think he imagined directing any potential musical career. Nevertheless, I got into the guitar even though the Spanish guitar is a very hard instrument to play, the fretboard was wide and nylon strings were difficult to master for a nine year old. Interestingly, though, he did take me to see proper flamenco in Seville, Spain when I was about eight or nine.”

Right: Though he denies being a collector, Bryan treasures this stunning 50s Gibson ES-295 alongside a Martin D-18 that once belonged to Johnny Cash

Below: From his dollar-store copy of the early 70s to hitting his stride with the real thing in ’83 in support of third album, *Cuts Like A Knife*

What sort of music influenced you to begin with?

“Guitar-based rock. Basically, if your hair was long and the guitars were loud, I was into it. But I also loved raunchy voices: Janis Joplin, The Beatles, Joe Cocker, The Who, Led Zep, Humble Pie... the list is endless.”

Were you in bands at school?

“I left school at age 15 to be in a band. There was nothing in school for me, although I did attend an ‘electronic music’ class before I left. That could have been the best class I’d ever taken in school. It was around the same time that Stevie Wonder’s *Songs In The Key Of Life* [1976] came out and that inspired me to take up singing. Walking to school trying to sing and hit those Stevie notes was how I started to feel like I might have a voice. It wasn’t even close, but it did give me the confidence to audition for bands. And every audition I went for as a singer, I got.”

How did you learn to write songs?

“Good question. Like anything, you get better at it the more you do it, but in the beginning I credit having a good co-writer, Jim Vallance, for being my professor. The first day we met, we wrote a song together. Prior to meeting Jim, I was 17 and had bought a piano and was teaching myself to play. During that year I drove everyone out of the house with my awful playing. But I found a few chords that sounded good together, like *Straight From The Heart*, which was written on that piano.”

What was the first step towards turning professional?

“Once I left the bar circuit, I started to get the odd gig here and there thanks to a keyboard player named Robbie King. He hired me to sing backups and that led to getting some studio work and learning to work with groups of singers. Occasionally, I would get a solo studio gig, and that really helped pay the rent.”

What do you consider to be your first real big break in the music business?

“I suppose leaving school was the break, but it was kind of out of necessity. I’d been living with my mother at the time, and she was working two or three jobs trying to pay the rent and basically there wasn’t anything in the fridge, so I had to get out there and start working.”

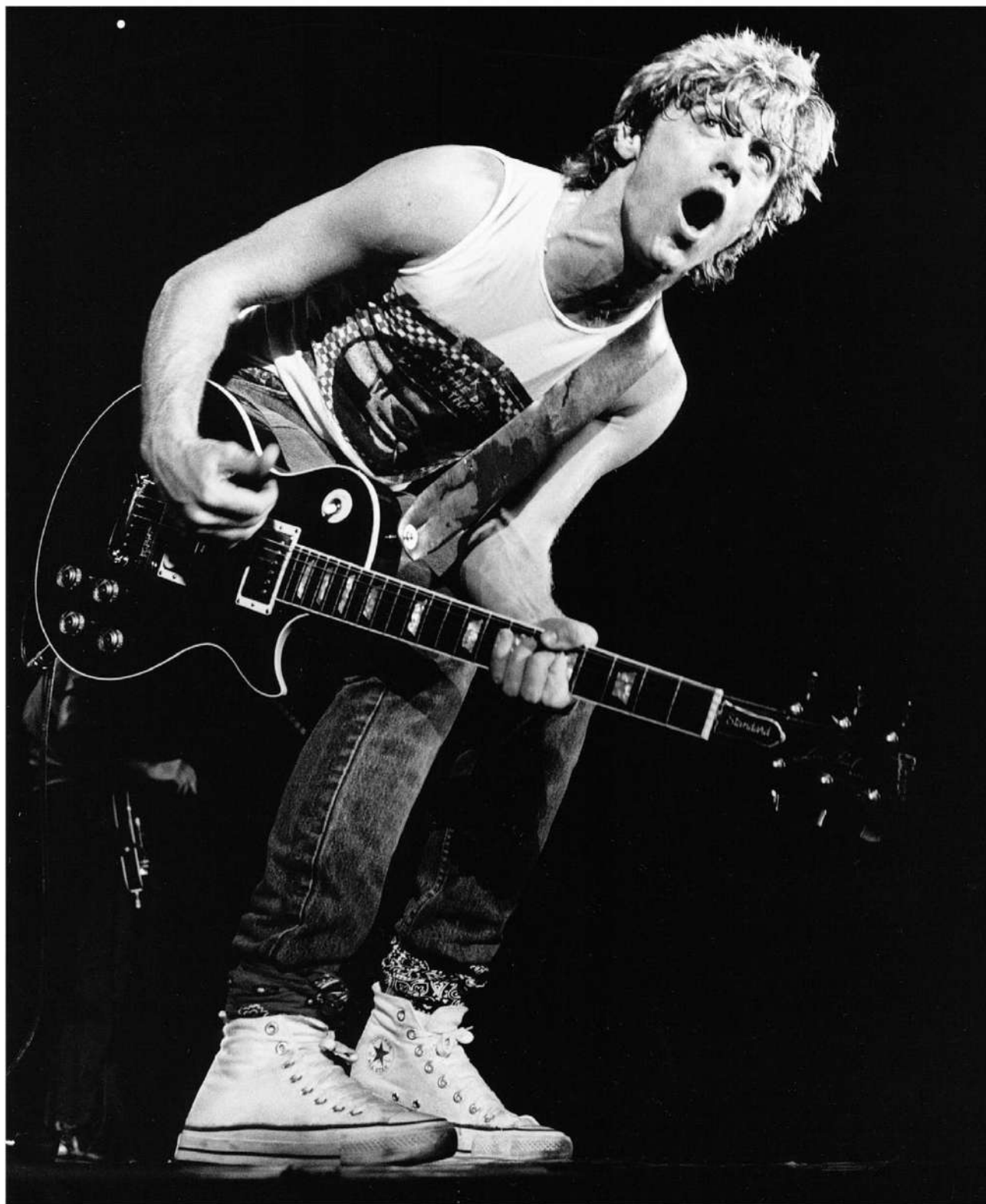
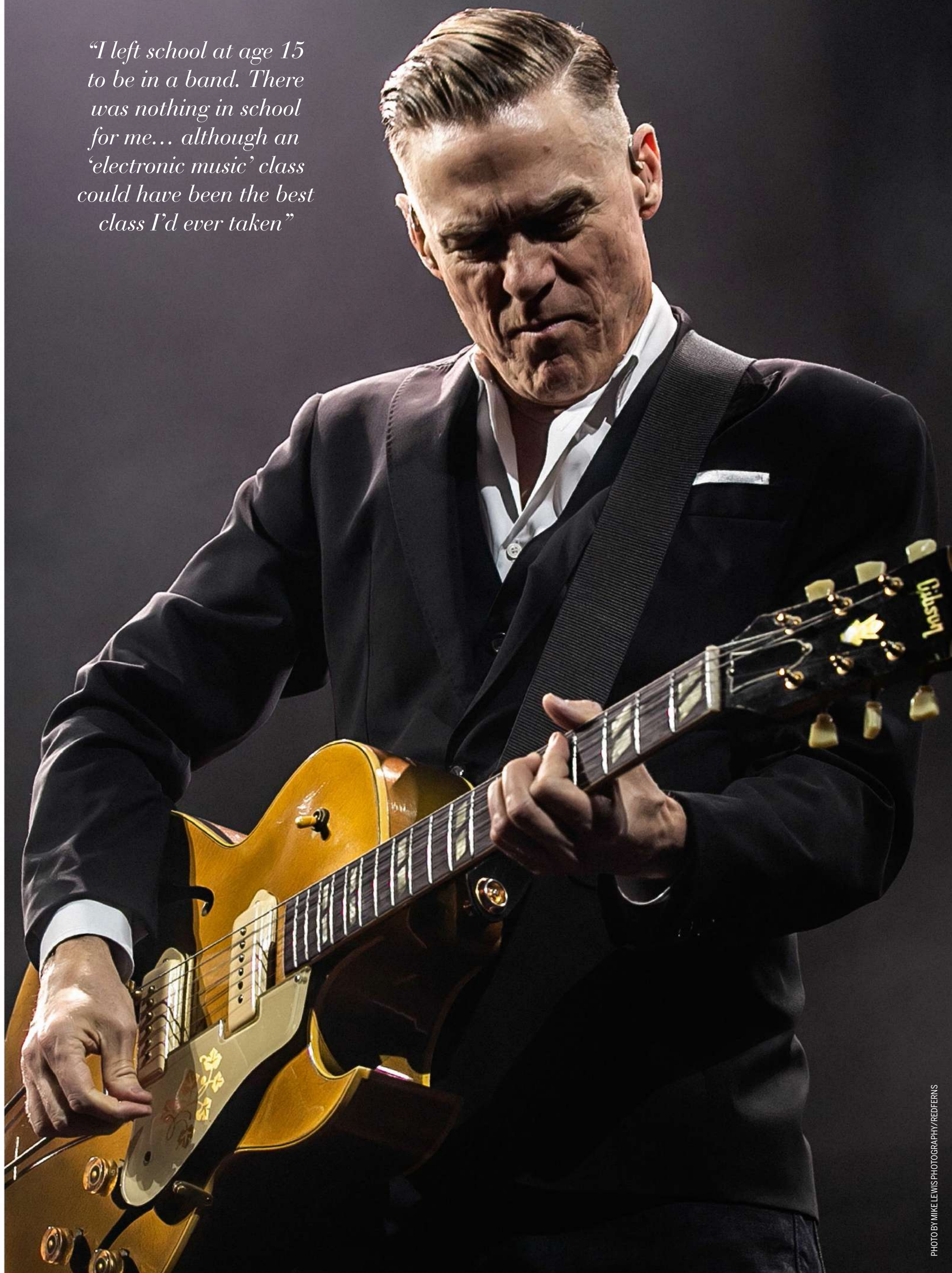


PHOTO BY CHRIS WALTER/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

*“I left school at age 15
to be in a band. There
was nothing in school
for me... although an
‘electronic music’ class
could have been the best
class I’d ever taken”*



How did the first album come about?

“That was a collection of the first songs that Vallance and I had written. When I listen to it now, it’s fun but disjointed. We didn’t really have a direction, just some good-sounding songs. It wasn’t until I took the songs on the road that things started to come together and the second album of songs sounded more cohesive. I love my second album, *You Want It You Got It* – recorded and mixed in two weeks.”

Many songwriters tell us they have an old acoustic hanging around the house that is their ‘old faithful’ for songwriting. Would this be true in your case?

“Not really. I’m okay with whatever I can get my hands on.”

Everything I Do... was a massive hit for you. Do you still enjoy performing it live?

“Very much so, it’s a beautiful song. I look forward to singing all of my songs; it’s exciting to look down at the setlist and see what’s next.”

What has been the most unexpected career highlight for you?

“There are so many, but I have to be honest, paying the rent from doing what I love is my main one. But there are the Wembley Stadium gigs, Madison Square Gardens, singing with Tina [Turner], working with Mutt [Lange], writing with Michael Kamen, getting nominated for Oscars together. It’s been a good run.”

Are you a guitar collector?

“Not really, but I have some nice guitars. My most prized guitar is a D-18 Martin acoustic guitar that once belonged to Johnny Cash.”

You play in big venues all over the world. Do you ever miss the ‘romance’ of playing small clubs and bars?

“I often think about the *Bare Bones* tour I did [in 2010], which was an acoustic tour with Gary Breit on piano and myself. We played small theatres around the world, it was so much fun. So yes, I’m into the small venues, too.”

“I was working with Mutt Lange over the internet... Getting an email from Mutt was always good”

New album track *On The Road* pays tribute to Bryan’s lifelong love of taking his music out on tour to the people

The new album was created in lockdown – what were your experiences during this period of being involuntarily grounded?

“The biggest drag was not being able to get my band together, so I ended up playing most of the instruments on the album, including the drums. That was great fun. Keith Scott is, of course, playing many of the guitar solos on the album, but we were working over the internet.”

The songs on the new album are, in the main, very upbeat – did they come easily?

“Thanks, yes, they did. I had a lot of ideas kicking around so I would sit down and make a roadmap for a song on guitar, add some drums and bass and see how it felt in its simplest form. If it made it past that I’d keep working on it. I was working with Mutt Lange over the internet on a bunch of songs. I would send him a song idea, he’d send back a structure of a song, and we’d back and forth it until it sounded right. Getting an email from Mutt was always good.”

What gear did you take with you into the studio?

“I bought myself a Ludwig drum kit, something I’d wanted to do since I was a kid. I had my Gibson ES-295, a Vox AC30, two Fender Stratocasters – my trusty Cherry Red 1964 and a Ritchie Blackmore model that Keith [Scott] had given me – a Fender Jazz and a Fender Precision bass, a Custom Shop Gibson Les Paul and a Hammond B3. There are, of course, other instruments like a piano and percussion, too.”

Are you looking forward to getting back out on the road?

“[As the song says...] *Getting back on the road – is all I’ve ever known/ It was written in the stars – one night stands, guitars and bars/ On the road again – since I can’t remember when/ It’s back to the music – where I know I can lose it...*” **G**



So Happy It Hurts is out on BMG Records. The UK tour starts at the Royal Albert Hall on 9 May www.bryanadams.com

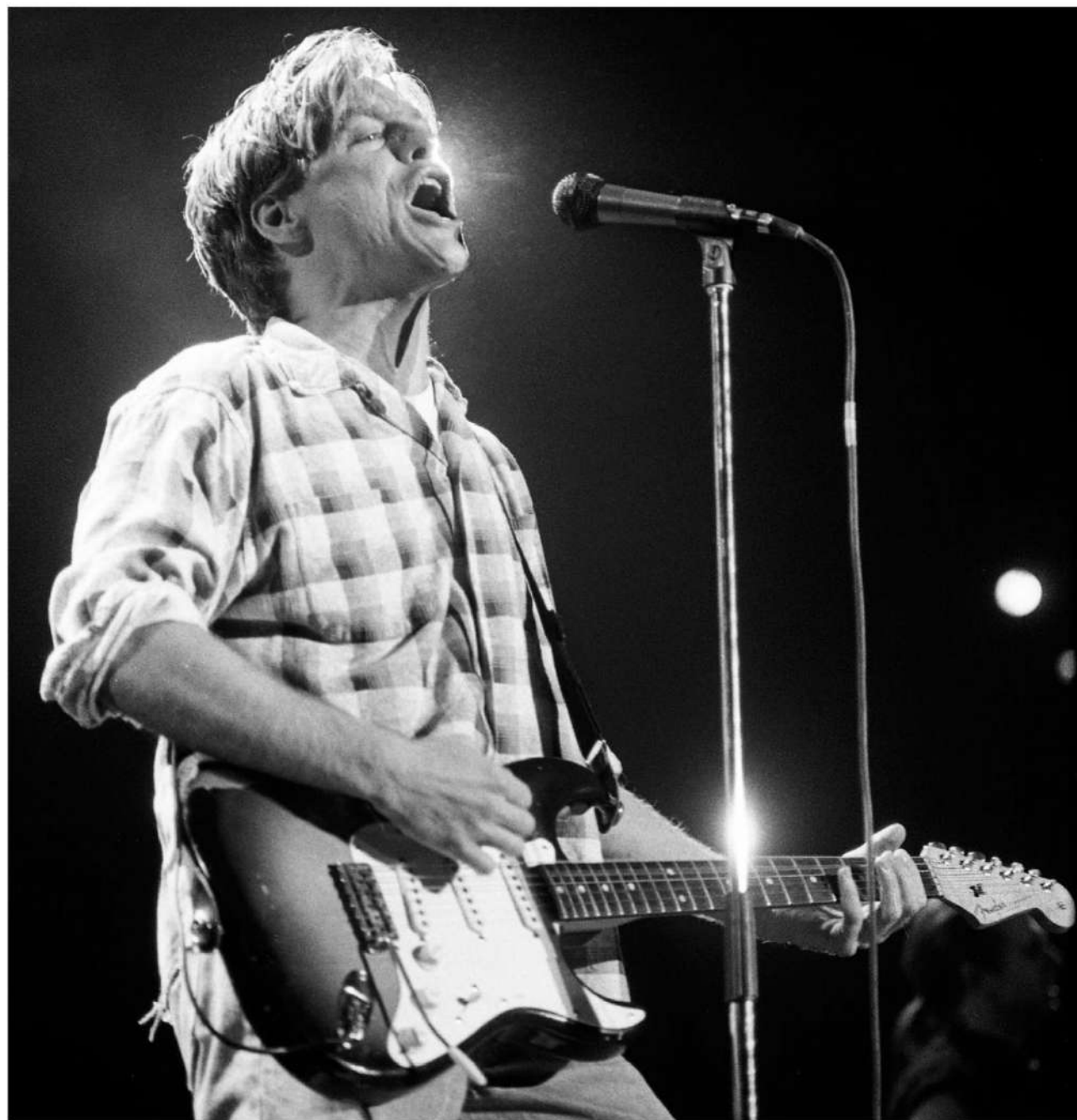


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What's In A Number?

A new range of electric guitars from a builder of renowned British acoustics? Indeed... but if anyone can cross the hollow-to-solidbody divide it's Canterbury's Alister Atkin

Words Neville Marten Photography Olly Curtis





ATKIN THE FIFTY-TWO & THE FIFTY-FOUR

£2,999 EACH

CONTACT **Atkin Guitars** PHONE **01227 719933** WEB www.atkinguitars.com

What You Need To Know

- 1** **Atkin? Don't I know that name?**
You certainly do. Alister Atkin and his team in Canterbury, Kent, have been crafting superb remakes of various pre-war acoustics from the two best-known American guitar makers of the era. He's recently decided to do the same with electric guitars – and Alister rarely gets it wrong.
- 2** **Do we need another copy?**
Maybe the question should be: is there enough room in an already crowded market for more instruments based around the two most famous 50s guitar shapes? The answer will depend on whether the Atkin models catch on. He certainly sells enough acoustics so only time will tell. And they are not carbon copies; there are plenty of personal touches here, too.
- 3** **These instruments look aged...**
They are. Alister has developed his method of distressing guitars so they look as though they were created decades ago. People love his pre-aged acoustics and, while relic-style guitars have their detractors, those who love the concept will appreciate the attention to detail that he and his team have brought to these.

Anyone who has played one of Atkin Guitars' reinventions of pre-war-style acoustics may be surprised to discover that the Kent-based company has decided to set its sights on instruments of a different nature as well as from a different era. It doesn't take a genius to see where Atkin drew his influences from for this pair of solidbody, bolt-on neck, single-coil electrics. But rather than slavishly ape Leo Fender's first two six-string milestones, Atkin has brought his own guitar-building knowledge and love of playing electrics to the table here.

"We've been wanting to get into electrics for a while," Atkin says, "and although there

are already lots of boutique makers doing amazing vintage-correct builds, we wanted to produce a modern, player-friendly version with all the vintage vibe but none of the unfriendly spec of the originals."

With that in mind we have a pair of familiar-looking guitars with one or two surprises up their sleeves. To kick off, the bodies are neither ash nor alder, the timbers usually preferred for these styles of guitar. Plus Alister is keeping an eye out for ways to keep on the right side of environmental issues.

"Yes, we see this as an opportunity to explore more sustainable woods," he says. "So the main body wood we are using is



The thin-skin nitro lacquer is covered in checking, and The Fifty-Two's bridge pickup sits in an aged bridge housing



1. Hardware is by Gotoh, including the Atkin-stamped steel saddles. Wiring is standard '54 style with no tone control on the bridge pickup

2. The Fifty-Two's wiring is post-'67 style with neck, both or bridge pickup selections on tap. Note the drop-sided ashtray T-style bridge plate

THE RIVALS

Obvious rivals for both Atkins guitars are the instruments that originated their species. Try the Fender Custom Shop 1951 Heavy Relic Telecaster (around £3,999) if you need 'that' name on the headstock, in highly aged nitro over swamp ash with a one-piece maple neck. Similarly, the CS Heavy Relic Strat (around £3,999) with alder body and classic Strat appointments will be many players' top choice.

A great Strat alternative is PRS's Silver Sky (around £2,620), John Mayer's signature that features '63-style single-coil pickups, an upgraded vintage-style vibrato, 22 frets on a 184mm (7.25-inch) radius maple 'board and an alder body. It comes in a range of beautiful finishes, too.

G&L makes superlative S- and T-types. Designed by Leo Fender himself, the Fullerton Deluxe ASAT Classic Alnico (£1,299) comes in swamp ash (with belly cut) and sports a Modern Classic maple neck with 22 medium jumbo frets. Pickups are Leo's own design (refined by Paul Cagon), and the guitar features brass bridge saddles and a bone nut.

obeche. Fingerboards are capped with 3mm veneers of either maple, English sycamore, or rosewood, which also means we can take advantage of our off-cut stock of backs and sides from the acoustics we make. We save everything we can to use at a later date. We can get swamp ash or alder if a customer really wants it, but we are currently loving the obeche."

Atkin has really got into the artificial ageing of his guitars, so it made absolute sense to carry the process over to The Fifty-Two and The Fifty-Four. To that end, the bodies have received a light coating of nitrocellulose, the Fifty-Two in authentic-looking butterscotch and the Fifty-Four a two-tone sunburst. On the Fifty-Four the lacquer has slightly sunk into the two-piece obeche body's centre join, while the Fifty-Two would appear to be a single lump. However, the lacquer checking is as authentic as any we've seen. Both instruments' maple necks come with an attractive light flame, and each features a veneer fingerboard of the same timber – meaning there's no walnut skunk stripe down the back. The necks feature no crazing at all, but Alister stresses the finish on these is as thin as possible, so they'll probably wear naturally in no time at all.

Obeche being notable for its strength, rigidity and lightness means that these instruments feel featherweight compared with some of the hefty guitars we've seen lately – even Custom Shop ones. Both feature Atkin's 'access heel' design for improved top-end reach.

We applaud the use of obeche as a body wood... with its light weight and higher sustainability

Alister decided to make the pickguards in-house in order to control their vintage accuracy. Hence The Fifty-Two features a nitro-lacquered single-ply black 'guard, and The Fifty-Four a heavily aged single-ply white vinyl one, its edges lightly hand-finished to look worn and vintage.

All the metal hardware including the bridge/tailpieces, tuners and so on, are by Gotoh of Japan. The Fifty-Two features a 'drop-sided' T-style bridge plate and pickup housing, which makes string damping a trifle easier. The bridge is also stamped with the company's name and carries three of Gotoh's intonation compensated brass saddles. Likewise, The Fifty-Four's bridge is classic S-style, with six-screw mounting, steel vibrato block and Atkin-stamped bent steel saddles. Here the Gotoh tuners are of the locking variety, and all hardware is suitably aged.

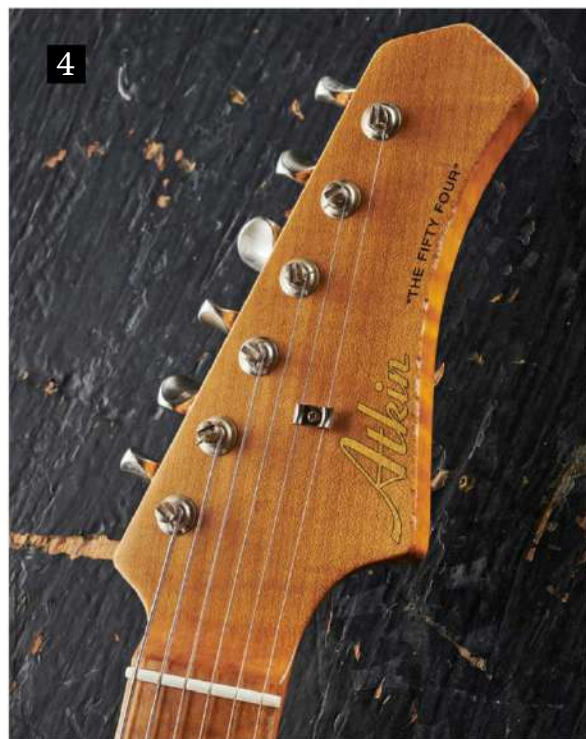
After experimenting with other manufacturers' pickups, it was decided to bring that operation in-house as well. Both pickup models here have been designed from the ground up to be vintage output, and voiced to sound like the best of each original model's breed.



3

3. The Fifty-Four's pickups are hand-wound in-house and aim to sound vintage in both tone and output. The pickguard is Atkin-made, too, and is aged white vinyl

4. Tuners look like regular Gotoh vintage style but are actually locking. Note the single string tree, gold and black Atkin decal, and personalised headstock design



4

Lastly, the company has designed its own headstock. There's always potential here to wreck an otherwise great-looking guitar. On his acoustics, Alister really nailed it with his pyramid-top design, and for the electrics he's kept an angular outline that we think works well and should become familiar once these instruments are regularly seen around.

Feel & Sounds

The first thing one notices on picking up either guitar is its incredible lightness in weight. Next to this reviewer's own medium-to-lightweight Tele and Strat, each one feels like a feather on a strap. It's actually a really lovely feeling and, for any of you who are 'of a certain age' (as is this reviewer), this might prove to be a pleasant surprise.

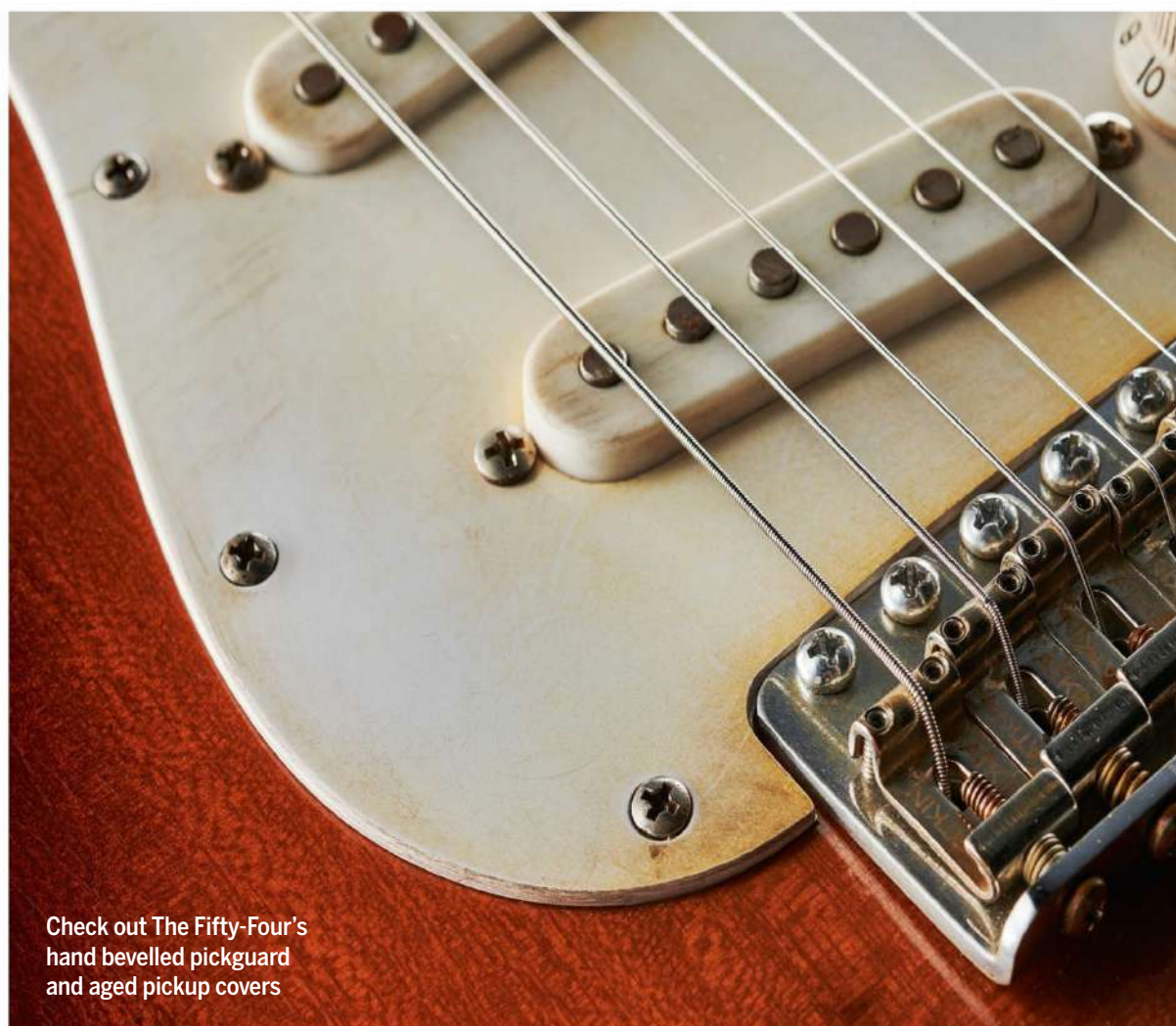
The two necks are all but identical in size and therefore feel. Each comes with 22 medium-fine but tall frets on a 254mm (10-inch) radius fingerboard, so offers much of an early original's feel but with the type of bending and vibrato facility found on more modern instruments.

The necks are neither too slim nor too fat. Both measure 21mm at the 1st fret and 24mm at the 12th; they're perfect medium C-shaped handfuls with not too much shoulder – hence feeling fulsome but in no way 'clubby'. In fact, both are shallower than this reviewer's own Custom Shop Strat and Tele. Strung with D'Addario 0.010 to 0.046 strings as standard, they feel lighter under the fingers, if anything, with the tall frets providing enough purchase to make bends and vibrato seem natural and fuss-free on the relatively flat fingerboard. The dressed-away heels do make upper-fret control marginally easier, too.

Luckily with the CS Tele and Strat on hand to compare sounds, it's going to be interesting to see how the obeche bodies on both the Atkins stand up to the swamp ash and alder of the Fenders. Output-wise, there's not that much in it, the Fenders perhaps pushing our Blues Junior harder into the front-end but likely as not due to the Fenders' pickups being set closer to the strings (a personal preference). Sonically, both guitars are definitely



Both Atkins have 22 tall and narrow frets on a 254mm (10-inch) radius fingerboard



Check out The Fifty-Four's hand bevelled pickguard and aged pickup covers

more vintage-sounding than the Fenders, too, which both have marginally hotter pickups – Fat '60s on the Strat and Custom Shop Hand Wound on the Tele. But neither Atkin is a weakling; in fact, the difference is more in The Fifty-Two and Fifty-Four's clarity, with the latter's in-between sounds noticeably more twangy, and The Fifty-Two also displaying greater clarity than the Tele across all switch selections.

Many would prefer the more 'authentic' sound of the Atkin instruments, since these particular Fenders were chosen specifically for their darker and less overtly 50s sounds. Indeed, it's hard to imagine how any hardened S or T fan would find them wanting in any department.

Verdict

Alister Atkin never does anything half-heartedly. His acoustics have genuinely broken the barrier of not being one of the 'big names' but being accepted as superlative instruments in their own right. He and his team have clearly taken that same approach with the new electrics. Yes, they are obviously derived from two of the




most famous electric guitar designs ever, and yet they are most definitely imbued with a character of their own, not merely copied from Fullerton’s finest.

That said, these are not as modernised as other Fender derivatives such as Anderson, Charvel and Suhr, but with their beautifully aged finishes, fine frets and vintage voices, they are more of a direct alternative than most models from the aforementioned brands.

5. Both guitars’ necks feature 3mm laminated maple fingerboards, also lightly aged

Both [vintage-output] pickups are voiced to sound like the best of each original model’s breed

We applaud the use of obeche as a body wood in these new models. It seems to impart no distinct tone of its own, but it’s super-light weight and higher sustainability than the ever-decreasing stocks of swamp ash, for instance, make it a particularly fine choice, and one that other makers are turning to, also.

Finally, it seems that even faithful ‘brand loyalists’ are beginning to see there is actually quality and innovation to be had from the benches of smaller makers with a much lower output. We know that Atkin’s acoustic dealers can’t wait to get their hands on these and the other models Alister has in the pipeline, and that in itself should give those looking for a boutique S- or T-style guitar the confidence to go out and try one. Do so and we’re pretty sure you’ll not be disappointed. 



ATKIN THE FIFTY-TWO

PRICE: £2,999 (inc case)
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Single-cutaway, solidbody electric
BODY: Obeche
NECK: Maple, lightly flamed with medium C vintage profile
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Lightly flamed 3mm maple veneer, 254mm (10") radius
FRETS: 22, medium fine, tall profile
HARDWARE: Gotoh ‘drop-sided’ T-type bridge/tailpiece and pickup housing, Gotoh vintage 6-a-side tuners and strap buttons, lacquered black pickguard
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 55.5mm
ELECTRICS: Atkin T-style bridge and neck pickup, CTS 250k pots, Sprague orange drop capacitor, Switchcraft jack, CRL 3-way pickup selector
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.9/6.4
OPTIONS: Call for options
RANGE OPTIONS: Call for options
LEFT-HANDERS: Not yet
FINISH: Aged butterscotch nitro-cellulose, plus a range of vintage and special finishes to come



PROS Great aged finish; ultra-light weight; authentic tones and feel

CONS Some players might not be ready to pay £3k for a T-type without Fender on the headstock



ATKIN THE FIFTY-FOUR

PRICE: £2,999 (inc case)
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Double-cutaway, solidbody electric
BODY: Obeche (2-piece)
NECK: Maple, lightly flamed with medium C vintage profile
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Lightly flamed 3mm maple veneer, 254mm (10") radius
FRETS: 22, medium fine, tall profile
HARDWARE: Gotoh 6-screw vintage S-type bridge/tailpiece, Gotoh vintage 6-a-side tuners and strap buttons, aged, single-ply white nylon pickguard
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 56mm
ELECTRICS: Atkin S-style bridge, middle and neck pickups, CTS 250k pots, Sprague orange drop capacitors, Switchcraft jack, CRL 5-way pickup selector
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.3/7.275
OPTIONS: Call for options
RANGE OPTIONS: Call for options
LEFT-HANDERS: Not yet
FINISH: Aged two-tone sunburst nitro-cellulose, plus a range of vintage and special finishes to come



PROS Great aged finish; ultra-light weight; authentic tones and feel

CONS Some players might not be ready to pay £3k for an S-type without Fender on the headstock

”

Guess who just got back today?

Them wild-eyed boys that'd been away
Haven't changed, had much to say
But man, I still think them cats are crazy

- Sir Phil Lynott

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Changing Tack

We catch up with Alister Atkin to find out why this acoustic maker went electric, and how an April Fool's joke proved to be a surprisingly successful proposition...

Words Neville Marten

After being so successful with acoustics, in the shift to making electrics why opt for these two ubiquitous model styles?

"During lockdown I found myself looking at various S- and T-type models with a mind to buying one. After spending a lot of time looking I decided that we might as well just make some for ourselves. And with the success of our aged acoustics [including The Forty Three below], I also knew we could really do the finish justice."

You've gone for 22 relatively fine frets on a medium-radius 'board. They are 'capped' maple, too. What was the reasoning here?

"22 frets is just one of those modern specs that we felt other makers weren't offering with the vintage vibe. The narrow tall frets provide ease of string bending, while still providing the right look. We've always loved the aesthetic of the veneer rosewood 'boards, so once the method was established with our first S-type, we soon decided to standardise on it. It's certainly not as quick and straightforward as using slab fingerboards, but it's just cool."

Tell us about your choice of woods...

"The main body wood we're using is obeche. It's fast growing and one of the more sustainable woods out there, it's a good weight and works really well as a guitar wood. Most of our necks will be maple or English sycamore, and we'll use maple or rosewood veneer fingerboards; these finish at about 3mm, so it means we are using a minimum of the exotic timbers."

Your headstocks are always attractive and angular. How did you come up with these designs?

"It was clear to me straight away that we need to have our own headstock for these guitars. Coming up with our own design took a while. We've had success with our acoustic headstock and I knew I wanted to give a nod to that so there would be some Atkin DNA going on. There are so many variations of the originals and some are so close, I wanted ours to stand out so it didn't look quite like the others – so when you see the silhouette you know it's something new. After about four tweaks we arrived at this, and I'm really happy with it. It's also going to work well on the future models we have in mind."

What about the ageing process here?

"It's actually very similar to the [process we use with] acoustics, but there are a few different things going on here. We use the same nitro that we have mixed for us by a UK manufacturer. We wanted to start by getting as close to the originals as possible. We have a few friends with great guitar collections, so we borrowed those. We've been developing the aged finish for about 12 years now and we keep learning as we go. I often find that other makers go a little heavy on this stuff, but when you see the originals they often don't look as old and knackered as you would imagine. The original necks usually have so little lacquer on them that they are almost down to the bare wood along the playing surface, so we use stains and a small amount of nitro to make them feel and look aged."

"For the most part we're trying to make this thing feel like an old guitar that's been looked after. Occasionally, for a bit of fun we go a bit crazy with it and give them more of the Rory Gallagher look. I think there is room for all of that with electrics. But I did want to start by understanding what the best examples of the originals were all about."



Atkin has branched out into the electric sphere, but "acoustics will always be the mothership", says Alister



The Forty Three, inspired by Gibson's early 40s J-45, has a timeless tone

“Our customers know we care deeply about getting it right and we put all of our time into making that happen”

What about the pickguards? Do you make or source those?

“We make all of our pickguards and shielding plates in-house. This means that we can get into major geek territory and we can process material to vintage-appropriate thicknesses. It also allows us to make custom shapes when we need to. By keeping it in-house we can be in complete control of the quality.”

What about the hardware?

“The hardware is all manufactured by Gotoh in Japan who we’ve been working with for years with the acoustics. They offer some of the best-quality hardware that’s available. We’re in the position where we can have all the bridges ‘Atkin’-branded, which is also really cool.”

You design and make the pickups in-house. How did that come about?

“We knew we should either use a UK boutique maker or dive in ourselves. And with the enthusiasm and geekiness already in-house, we decided to take the plunge. The feedback so far has been very encouraging! We already had a laser cutter in-house, which does a fantastic job of cutting the vulcanised fibre flatwork. This also gives us control over all the minor details and the all-important Atkin logo. We also invested in a good winding machine suitable for hand-winding in a production setting.”

Are the pickups vintage-voiced or did you have an idea of a specific or different sound in your head – such as a higher output, perhaps?

“The review guitars have Alnico V bevelled magnets and Heavy Formvar enamelled wire. They’re scatter-wound to a vintage



output. The polepieces are staggered to provide good string-to-string balance on a modern 10-inch radius. No dull D strings or ‘Stratitis’ of the G string to be had here.”

Do you make the electrics alongside the acoustic guitars?

“Yes, we do – they all come out of the same workshop. We’ve just bought a new CNC for the electrics. Currently, some staff are taking a bit of time out each week to work on electrics. Once we get our process planned we can then work on scaling it up. We’re going to start with two electrics a week and see where it takes us.”

Do you think the electrics might outstrip the acoustics, or do you see them happily co-existing (as with Gibson)?

“Acoustics will always be the mothership, but I could easily see this becoming incredibly busy. We will scale up when we need to. We build 10 acoustics per week at the moment, so we may end up at a similar amount of electrics.”

Speaking of which, do you intend on branching out into the ‘humbucking’ side of things?

“The first humbucking project will be our Eighty-Five power S-type. We built two last year for an April Fool’s gag and they were very popular. We used a Bare Knuckle in one and a DiMarzio in the other. It started as a laugh, but it ended up a serious project.

We did grow up in the 80s watching all the big-hair shredders, so this is a little bit of a guilty pleasure guitar. I’m sure we will venture into the humbucker world at some point, though.”

Any offsets on the horizon?

“This is going to be our next project. We want to design our own shapes for this. There is so much fun to be had here and I think we could do this really well bringing in our knowledge from vintage instruments. There’s also some ultra-cool finishes to be explored.”

What can your guitars provide that other makers of such instruments aren’t already?

“The main thing to shout about is they have a vintage vibe while being player friendly. I also think that ‘Made in England’ is having a real revival, plus all of our customers around the world know that we care deeply about getting it right and we put all of our time into making that happen.”

Are you anticipating similar success with the electrics as you have enjoyed with the acoustics?

“This is really early days. We’ve just scratched the surface of what’s possible for our electrics. So far all of our dealers are jumping up and down to get hold of some, so we’re trying to get ourselves into the position where we can supply them.” **G**





Classic Comfort

Kauffmann unearths a lost European guitar that was first choice for certain big names of the 60s. Never heard of it?
You have now

Words Dave Burrluck
Photography Olly Curtis



KAUFFMANN COZY TL & TM £2,349 & £2,599

CONTACT **Sound Affects** PHONE **01695 570023** WEB **www.kauffmannsguitarstore.com**

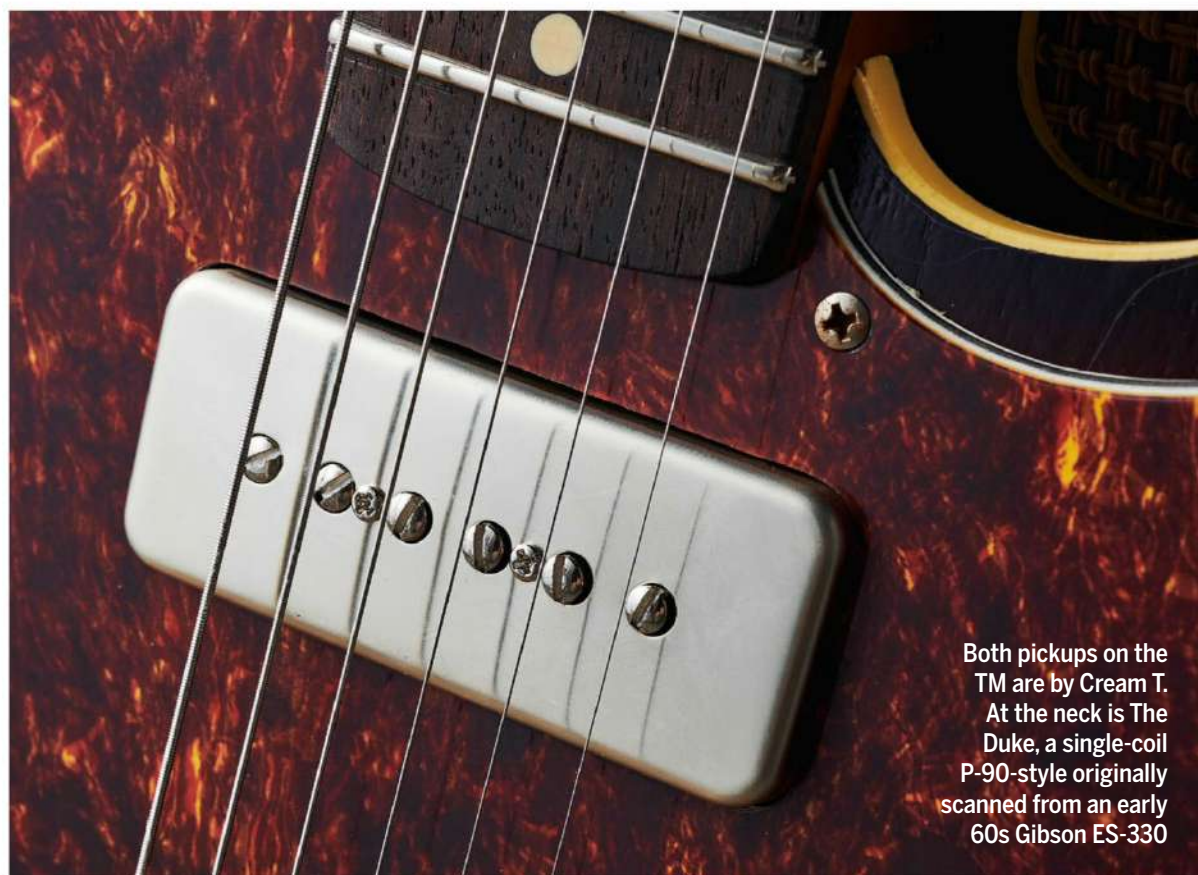
What You Need To Know

- 1 What's going on here?**
 The Cozy is the first original design from Netherlands guitar builder Kauffmann Guitars whose owner, Albert Deinum, has been building guitars for the past few years. To augment the launch of the guitar last year, Albert and co-owner Paul van Bree thought it might be fun to invent a fictitious backstory for the guitar they've called 'Cozy'. Head over to their website to enjoy that tall tale!
- 2 It looks a bit like Novo's Serus...**
 Yes, as we discuss with Kauffmann's Paul van Bree later on, Dennis Fano's style has been a big influence here, but the Cozy has a smaller body than the Serus. Similar to Novo's style, the Cozy is offered as one body shape but with five different bridge/pickup combinations.
- 3 Who's going to play one?**
 If you like the offset style and enjoy old and vintage electrics, not least Fenders from the 50s and 60s, the Cozy could be right up your street. A European new 'old' guitar.

Head to Kauffmann's website and you'll find a tongue-in-cheek fictional backstory to the Kauffmann Cozy involving a guitar builder named Cosette Gemuttlich, who was born in 1942, and a European castle. But the real enterprise is highly indicative of how guitar making worldwide has changed and continues to do so. There's little doubt, for example, that the original Fender

Jazzmaster offset is continuing to have an increasing influence on new designs, especially married to a mix 'n' match approach to hardware and pickup styles.

Two and a half decades ago, bashed-up relic guitars were entering the mainstream market. Today, factories all around the world are bashing up their finishes, although many still throw up their arms in horror despite it being such an



Both pickups on the TM are by Cream T. At the neck is The Duke, a single-coil P-90-style originally scanned from an early 60s Gibson ES-330



established style now. Many of these new old-looking guitars don't originate in factories, however – more like small workshops or sheds. And just as the digital revolution has democratised music making, the relative affordability of CNC milling machines and associated CAD programmes – once exclusive to large guitar-making concerns – means that even one-person operations can produce necks and bodies with great consistency, limited only by imagination.

So if the style of Kauffmann's Cozy is very much of the moment, then we suspect that's not the only thing you'll remember if you're lucky enough to get your hands on one of these. First, there's that enlarged body shape, which looks rather familiar and certainly recalls Novo's Serus – not least the upper horn and the control area of the large scratchplate. As we discover talking to Kauffmann's Paul van Bree elsewhere in this feature, Dennis Fano and his Novo brand have indeed provided strong inspiration.

But the Cozy is no clone and you can see some of Rickenbacker's Combo in here along perhaps with a little non-reverse Firebird, there's obviously some offset Jazzmaster inspiration, and even a touch of more exotic 60s designs such as Wurlitzer's Wildcat or something Framus or Valco might have created six decades ago. And when we say enlarged,

A new guitar that feels and sounds like an old one... We'd give either Cozy model house room

in terms of the outline, at 480mm long by 370mm wide (around 19 by 14.5 inches) it's more like a slightly wider Jazzmaster than a Stratocaster. But whatever the actual influences, imagined or otherwise, the Cozy recalls exactly the sort of thing you may have found on your travels to a pawn shop or old-fashioned dusty music store. And that illusion is very much the point.

It's a clever – though not unique – design in that by simply swapping bridges and pickups while retaining the body style and large scratchplate, five versions are available. The Cozy TL we have on review, for example, uses a Tele-style bridge; our TM swaps that for a tune-o-matic and stud tailpiece. The CB uses a cutdown 'short' Tele-style bridge typically paired with Lollartrons, TV Jones or Lindy Fralin Twang Masters. The JM follows the vibrato style of the Fender offset with dual soapbar single coils, while the VB celebrates the Bigsby vibrato.

Plenty of colours are offered, too, and ageing levels, but if our two samples are

1. Both Cozy models use the same enlarged Fender-style headstock, which suits the larger offset body. In typical boutique style, the logos look nicely classic. Perhaps rather oddly, neither guitar has a serial number

2. The Cozy TL centres on this classic bridge, here with Gotoh 'In-Tune' compensated brass saddles. The pickup is Kauffmann's own-design XL single coil

THE RIVALS

Offset style is having an increasing impact on new guitar design. Here in the UK, larger makers such as Gordon Smith with its Gatsby (from £1,299) and PJD with the St John (from £1,950) are rather fine examples. While they don't offer relic versions, plenty of others do. Elsewhere in this issue, for example, Vintage's rather-good-for-the money V65V (£429) is now available in a pair of 'distressed' finishes, illustrating just how the small-'shop boutique builders are influencing the 'high street'.

Bunting Guitars from Israel has its offset Melody Queen (from \$3,450), which uses European spruce for its offset body with thin nitro, often aged, finishing and choice of single coil or mini-humbuckers. Vuorensaku Guitars, made in Finland by Saku Vuori, offers the T Family collection, which includes an appealing offset in bashed-up rock 'n' roll style. The tip of the iceberg!

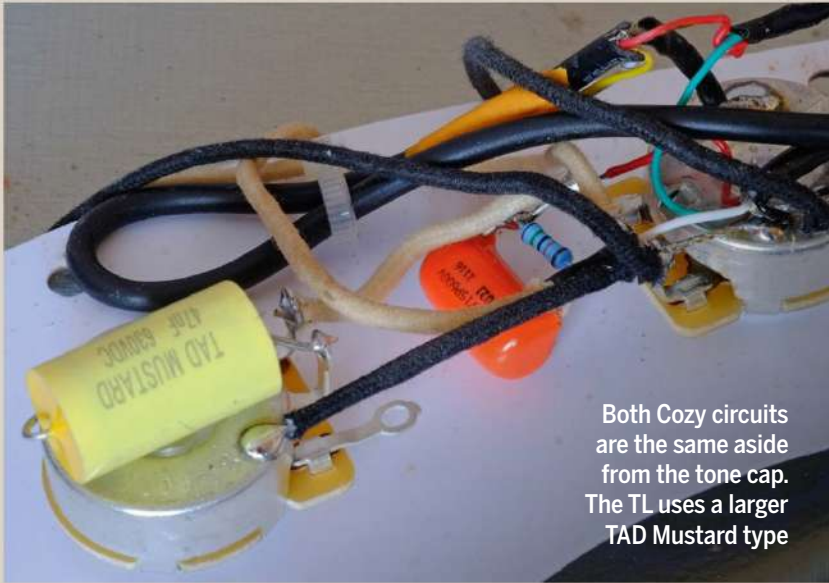
UNDER THE HOOD

There are boutique-level wiring looms inside the Cozy

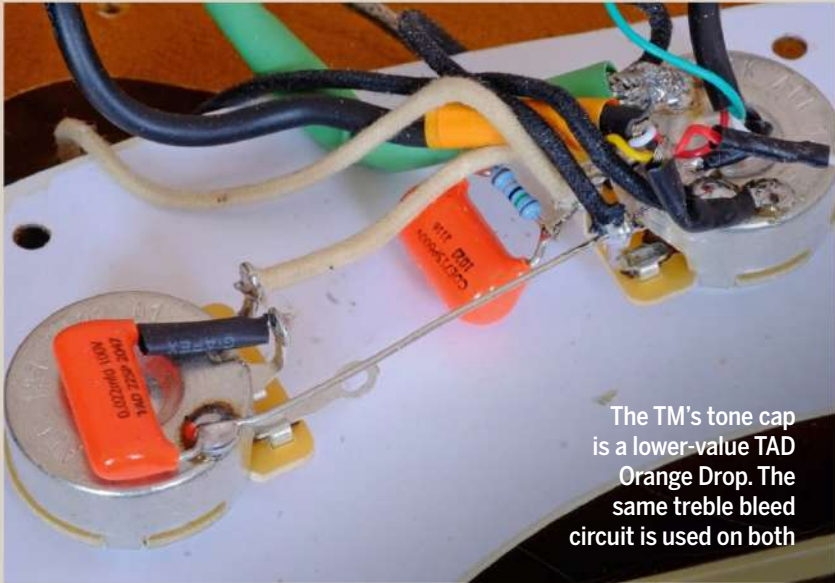
You can't really go wrong with a simple circuit using quality components, and that's exactly what we have here. Pots are CTS 500k, the volume with a treble bleed circuit consisting of a 150k resistor and a .001 microfarads Tube Amp Doctor (TAD) Sprague/Orange Drop cap wired in parallel. The tone cap on the TL is

a large .047 microfarads 'Mustard' type, a "replica of the authentic Film-to-Foil Alu/PE design of the 60s Mullard/Philips capacitors", says TAD. The TM model uses another Sprague/Orange Drop cap, this time valued at .022 microfarads. The volume and tone are wired modern-style using cloth covered push-back wire. Nicely done.

The TL's Kauffmann flush-pole bridge pickup at the bridge measures 9.42kohms, while the Cream T Banger & Mash at the neck reads around 7.28k at output. The TM's Cream T Banger at the bridge reads around 8.34kohms and The Duke P90-style single coil measures 8.04k. Rather like the guitars themselves, it's all classic stuff – simple and effective.



Both Cozy circuits are the same aside from the tone cap. The TL uses a larger TAD Mustard type



The TM's tone cap is a lower-value TAD Orange Drop. The same treble bleed circuit is used on both

- 3. Both guitars are a simple drive with a three-way toggle pickup selector, master volume and master tone
- 4. Unlike the double-bound Cozy TM, the TL's neck here and surrounding area get a little more shaping and chamfering

anything to go by it's the finishing that might get Kauffmann's guitars another reputation. Relics or distressed guitars are one thing, but not only do both our review samples look well used, they also have a rustic charm with the very thin nitro sprayed over the bodies, which themselves aren't grain filled. Moving on, what we have here are a pair of rather appealing boutique beauties that we found very engrossing. Both use

paulownia for their solidbodies, except with weights around the 2.7kg (6lb) mark you'd be forgiven for thinking they might be quite heavily chambered. While our TM is slab-bodied due to its double binding, the TL has the usual contour sculpturing plus a chamfered heel and contouring behind the treble cutaway – sort of shred-guitar style. The rustic nature of the body finishing is in stark contrast to the rest of the build. Both necks are a deep caramel brown quarter-sawn roasted maple that looks superb and feels it, too. The necks are effectively unfinished, aside from rubbing in a proprietary solution that slightly greys and ages the wood. The rosewood fingerboards are deep milk chocolate coloured with 'clay' dots and tidy fretwork from Dunlop 6150-sized wire, the edges worn-in rather than over rounded. They play very well indeed and have a beautiful ring. They feel very alive. Hardware on both is by Gotoh (aged, of course), nuts are Graph Tech Tusq, and our review models use both Kauffmann's own-design or the UK's Cream T pickups. **Feel & Sounds** These guitars don't disappoint in any regard. They're light in weight with a superb seated or strapped-on feel, good setups, and a neck shape that's quite a full-shouldered C – approximately 21.8mm deep at the 1st fret and 24.2mm by the 12th.



Both our review samples have a rustic charm with the very thin nitro sprayed over the bodies

To say they sound as old as they look is pretty spot on. But what does that mean? For one, there's character in abundance. The TM comes across as a little more 'Gibson'; it's a little darker and softer than our reference PJD Corey Standard, which has similar Cream T pickups albeit with a through-string bridge and chambered light ash body. There's a very smoky character, edgy early electric blues from the bridge with Kenny Burrell-like jazz/blues from The Duke at the neck. But wind up your amp a little and it's almost early Les Paul with less thickness perhaps, a nod to a good SG but with no lack of depth. The note separation impresses, so even with a gnarly overdrive or fuzz, big chords don't turn to mush. There's clarity but not at the expense of over-egged treble.

Thinking we might have found a real roots-rock and blues-jazz machine in the TM, we swap to the TL and the difference is marked. But in a good way. It's up there with the best 50s Teles this writer has ever played, and none of those has the TL's

THE NEW WOOD WORLD

"Guitar woods they are a-changing," sang Bob Dylan. Well, he would have done if he was a guitar maker...

Gibson and Fender wrote the solidbody recipes that have been used for decades. The former used high-grade mahogany with or without a maple top; Fender's wood choice was more utility, primarily light ash and then alder. Six or seven decades on things are changing – and fast.

Read through our reviews recently and you might have seen PRS's SE Silver Sky, which swaps the time-honoured bolt-on body wood, alder, for poplar – once deemed a 'cheap' alternative. Here in the UK there are new builds in progress from Seth Baccus and Cream T that use obeche, again known as a light 'cheap' wood if you were a woodworker back in the 70s.

Kauffmann has chosen paulownia for its builds and this is becoming an increasingly-used wood seen as a cheaper and sustainable substitute for lightweight American swamp ash, which is under threat and therefore harder to source and now expensive. As we report, paulownia is certainly light in weight and has also been associated with cheaper guitars, although plenty of higher-end makers are using it, not least Nik Huber and John



Kauffmann is far from the only guitar maker using paulownia for its bodies

Suhr. Fender used it with a spruce top facing on the Brad Paisley Road Worn Telecaster and stated, "As a tone wood, paulownia's high strength-to-weight ratio yields a featherweight, non-fatiguing instrument body with excellent projection and a distinctive tone. The result is a more acoustic-sounding guitar due to its lightweight foundation."

Known as the 'other' balsa, paulownia is one of the fastest-growing trees in the world and has plenty of history in instrument making, particularly in Japan where it's known as kiri and is used for koto soundboards.



secret weapon: the Cream T Banger & Mash, which suits this platform perfectly. It's a unique-looking and clear-sounding humbucker with bell-like percussion. Old Fender to the TM's old Gibson? That's about the size of it.

But there must be something we don't like... Erm, no. If you're into older guitars, you'll feel at home here, except these play superbly and there are no issues to consider.

Verdict

If Kauffmann's intention was to create a new guitar that feels and sounds like an old one, it's certainly achieved it. We'd give either Cozy house room: aside from the engaging light weight and great feel, there are some stellar sounds here all in the low-output classic vein. Not for the first time we'd struggle to pick our favourite, although the TL just wins – not least because that the Cream T Banger & Mash sounds absolutely superb on this platform. Neither guitar feels precious, either. These are players' guitars through and through.

Obviously, not everyone will get the finish style, but if you're into vibe-y old guitars, none of that matters. It's part of the appeal and that's what – for the right player – the Cozy has in abundance.

5. Originally designed for Keith Richards, this unique 'double Tele neck' humbucker not only looks distinctive but sounds it, too



KAUFFMANN COZY TL

PRICE: £2,349 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Netherlands
TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Paulowina
NECK: Quarter-sawn roasted maple, rounded C profile, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42.89mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 'clay' dot inlays, 254mm (10") radius
FRETS: 21, medium (Dunlop 6150)
HARDWARE: Gotoh bridge with 3x 'In-Tune' brass saddles, Gotoh SD91 vintage Kluson-style tuners – aged nickel plating
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54.5mm
ELECTRICS: Kauffmann XL single coil (bridge), Cream T Banger & Mash humbucker (neck), 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume and tone control
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.72/5.98
OPTIONS: The base price is approximately £2,199. Upcharges here are the Kauffmann/Cream T pickup set. Other options include double bound body, sparkle finish, paisley finish, colour-matched headstock, Amber and other pickups (all £POA)
RANGE OPTIONS: CB, JM and VB versions – see website for details
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Aged Inca Silver (as reviewed) from wide range of colour options – aged gloss nitro (body); satin nitro (neck)



PROS Original offset style; pickup and hardware quality; light weight; overall vibe and mojo with sounds to match

CONS Not everyone will enjoy those finishes...



KAUFFMANN COZY TM

PRICE: £2,599 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Netherlands
TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Double-bound paulowina
NECK: Quarter-sawn roasted maple, rounded C profile, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42.92mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 'clay' dot inlays, 254mm (10") radius
FRETS: 21, medium (Dunlop 6150)
HARDWARE: Gotoh tune-o-matic-style bridge with lightweight aluminium stud tailpiece, Gotoh SD91 vintage Kluson-style tuners – aged nickel plating
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: Cream T BFG Banger humbucker (bridge), Cream T The Duke P90 single coil (neck), 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume and tone control
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.8/6.16
OPTIONS: The base price is approx. £2,399. Upcharges here are the double-bound body. Other options, sparkle finish, paisley finish, colour-matched headstock, Lollar Imperial and Cream T Whiskerbucker pickups
RANGE OPTIONS: See Kauffmann TL
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Aged 3 Tone Sunburst (as reviewed) from wide range of colour options – aged gloss nitro (body); satin nitro (neck)



PROS Ditto the TL model's strengths, but with a different bridge setup and pickups, this TM takes a nod more towards old Gibson style

CONS Again, we have to mention those finishes

Acoustic Guitars



22679 - Adam Black O-3 - Left Hand
22680 - Adam Black S-2 - Natural Left Hand
20599 - Art & Lutherie Roadhouse Parlour, D. Blue
23012 - Atkin D37 Dreadnought Acoustic Sunburst
18341 - Atkin Essential D Dreadnought Acoustic
23183 - Atkin Essential D Dreadnought Secondhand
23184 - Atkin Historic Series The White Rice
18703 - Atkin OM37 Relic Handmade Acoustic
18340 - Atkin The Forty-Three J43, Aged Finish
23025 - Blueridge BR160A Dreadnought Acoustic
22873 - Blueridge Dreadnought (GP52201)
21716 - Blueridge 000 Acoustic Guitar (GR52202)
18269 - Breedlove Guitar Acoustic Strings
21922 - Brunswick BFL200 Left Handed Natural
13906 - Cort AD810-OPAD Series Acoustic Guitar
23114 - Cort AD810E AD Black
22106 - The Cort AF510M Mahogany
12332 - Faith FKM Mercury
23127 - Faith FKM Mercury, Pre-Owned
19662 - Faith FKNCD - Naked Neptune
19265 - Fender CD-60 Dread V3 DS Model
21535 - Fender Redondo Player Electro, Bronze
18950 - Yairi YBR2 Baritone Acoustic Guitar
22459 - Kios Full Carbon Acoustic Travel Guitar
21494 - Larrivee C-03R-TE Tommy Emmanuel
23092 - Larrivee C-03R-TE Tommy Emmanuel
23186 - Levin LA45F Acoustic Folk Guitar
23188 - Levin LA65D Acoustic Dreadnought Guitar
16829 - Maestro Vera K-CSB-A 14-Fret 00, Used
13064 - Martin D18 Dreadnought
16760 - Martin D28
22749 - Martin D28L Left-handed Acoustic Guitar
6008 - Martin D35 Dreadnought, Natural
5013 - Martin D41 Dreadnought, Natural
23203 - Martin D42 Acoustic Guitar
21788 - Martin D45
7115 - Martin LX1 Little Martin
6007 - Martin OM21 Orchestra, Natural
19126 - Martin OM28 Reimagined
15310 - Martin 00015M Mahogany Acoustic
6009 - Martin 00018 standard Series Acoustic
13824 - Martin 00028EC Eric Clapton, Natural
10230 - Seagull S6 Original
18418 - Seagull S6 Original QIT
15480 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR O
17054 - Tanglewood DBT SFCE BW Discovery Exotic
13291 - Tanglewood TPERLS
22894 - Tanglewood TW OT2 Super Folk Acoustic
15784 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR D Acoustic
13290 - Tanglewood TWJDS Dreadnought Acoustic
19462 - Tanglewood TWJPS Parlour Acoustic Guitar
4329 - Taylor 310 Acoustic Guitar in Natural
23167 - Taylor Academy 12 Left-Handed Secondhand
23057 - Terada Acoustic Guitar, Secondhand
13271 - Vintage VTG100 Travel Guitar in Natural

Electro Acoustic Guitars



18798 - Faith FVMBB Blood Moon Venus LEFT/H
15344 - Faith Nomad Mini Neptune
21838 - Faith PJE Legacy Earth Out/Electro FG1 HCE
19673 - Fender Am. Acoustasonic Strat, Sunburst
23107 - Fender FSR Malibu Player, Surf Green
23108 - Fender FSR Malibu Player, Shell Pink
20373 - Fender Newporter Player, Champagne
23053 - Fender Newporter Player, Pink
19259 - Fender Newporter Player, Ice Blue Satin
21535 - Fender Redondo Player Electro, Bronze
23247 - Godin A6 Ultra A6 Cognac Burst, Used
18939 - Godin A6 Ultra A6 Natural SG
22914 - Godin Multiac Nylon Encore Natural SG
23036 - Guild M-240E Concert Shaped Electro, Nat
22761 - Guild OM-140 LCE Natural Left Handed
23037 - Guild OM-240E Orchestra Electro, Nat
23027 - Guild OM-260CE Deluxe Burl Electro
19801 - Yairi BM65CE Electro Acoustic Guitar
19070 - Kios T_A Acoustic Travel
19069 - Kios F_DAE Deluxe Electro Acoustic
19065 - Kios T_AE Electro Acoustic Travel
19064 - Kios F_AE Electro Acoustic
22589 - Lag HyWbe THV20DCE Electro Acoustic
19691 - Larrivee D03 Electro Acoustic
22969 - Larrivee L03 Mahogany Recording Series
23094 - Larrivee OM40 Koa Special Legacy Ltd
22937 - Larrivee OMV40R Legacy Series
22987 - Larrivee OMM03-MH-M Recording Series
23093 - Larrivee P03E Electro Acoustic Parlour
23185 - Levin LA25TE Junior Jumbo with Fishman
23187 - Levin LA45FCE Electro Acoustic
23189 - Levin LA65DCE Electro Acoustic
23191 - Levin LA85DCE Electro Acoustic Guitar
23190 - Levin LA85FCE Electro Acoustic Guitar
22408 - Maestro Custom Raffles (IR CSB C)
19524 - Maestro Custom Series Raffles KO-CSB-A
22460 - Maestro Custom Raffles WE CSB A
22458 - Maestro Custom Rosetta IR Dreadnought
18265 - Maestro Custom Series Singa, FM-CSB-A
22382 - Maestro Custom Vera Electro Acoustic
22409 - Maestro Custom Raffles 000 IR-CSB
18266 - Maestro Victoria KO-CSB-A Custom Series
19528 - Maestro Double Top Series Raffles IRCSBD
19525 - Maestro Original Series Singa WE-CSB-C
22384 - Maestro Private Coll. Vera MO-CSB-NX
19531 - Maestro Special Build Trad. Series D-CO
0000 - Martin - 28 Models In Stock Now
21974 - Northwood M70 14 Fret 000 Electro Acoustic
18167 - Northwood M80 OMV Cutaway Acoustic
17418 - Northwood Auditorium Electro Acoustic Guitar
19339 - Ovation 1771V-1GC Glen Campbell Legend
19341 - Ovation 2771STR-MB Main Street
19347 - Ovation C2078AXP-KOA Exoticwood Elite
22952 - Ovation CE4412 12-String Mid-Depth Black
23046 - Ovation CE44LX Lefty Celebrity Elite Plus
19346 - Ovation CS24 Celebrity Standard, Nat
23233 - Ovation Celeb Trad Plus E CS24P-FMYR
19338 - Ovation 1771STG-ES
22360 - Ozark Hawaiian Guitar
23079 - Parker P8EN Electro Acoustic Guitar Used
14914 - PJ Eggle Linville Electro Acoustic
20163 - Daddario Planet Waves 10FT Guitar Lead
0000 - RainSong - 16 Models In Stock Now
23135 - Rick Turner Renaissance Deuce Deluxe
22934 - Seagull Coastline Spruce QIT, Used
19950 - S & P Woodland Cedar Dreadnought, Lefty
19547 - Tanglewood DBT PE HR Electro-Acoustic
15494 - Tanglewood DBT SFCE PW
22482 - Tanglewood DBT SFCE AEB Exotic Ebony
15869 - Tanglewood Discovery DBT SFCE OV
15866 - Tanglewood TSR 2 Masterdesign Electro
22893 - Tanglewood TW OT2E Super Folk Electro
22888 - Tanglewood TWOT4VCE, Nat Dist. Satin
18366 - Tanglewood TW E Mini Koa
23103 - Tanglewood TW4 BLB Barossa Red Gloss
23104 - Tanglewood TW4 BLW Whitsunday White
22161 - Tanglewood TW4E Antique Violin Burst
22968 - Tanglewood TW4 E AVB LH Left-handed
22156 - Tanglewood TW4 E VC KOA Electro Acoustic
22990 - Tanglewood TW4 E VC KOA Electro, Used
14943 - Tanglewood TW40SD VS
15832 - Tanglewood TW40PD Sundance Delta Parlour
18213 - Tanglewood TW4 E Koa Winterleaf
22723 - Tanglewood TW5E KOA Dreadnought Cutaway
15481 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR D E
16524 - Tanglewood TWCR OE Crossroads
19548 - Tanglewood TWR2 SFCE Electro Acoustic
22785 - Traveler Guitars Ultra Light Nylon
18789 - Vintage LVEC501N Dreadnought, Satin Nat.
18790 - Vintage VGE800N Gemini P. Brett Baritone
21936 - Yairi YFL55 CE BVS
23169 - Yamaha CPX700 II 12-String Electro Used
19602 - Yamaha LLTA TransAcoustic Vintage Tint
19165 - Yamaha SLG200NW Silent Guitar, Nylon
15619 - Yamaha SLG200S Steel Silent Guitar Nat

Classical Guitars



4985 - Asturias Standard Model Classical Guitar
21769 - Breedlove Solo Concert Nylon CE
23030 - Cordoba C4-CE Outaway Electro Classical
23100 - Cordoba C5-CE Lefty
23032 - Cordoba GK Studio Ltd Electro-Acoustic
22771 - Cordoba Protégé C1M 1/2 Size
22770 - Cordoba C1M 1/4 Size Classical Guitar
23098 - Cordoba C1M 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
22769 - Cordoba C1M Full Size Classical Guitar
21880 - Fender ESC80 Classical Guitar
17847 - Hiscox LA-GCL-L-B/S Artist Large Classical
17846 - Hiscox LA-GCL-M-B/S Medium Hard Case
7365 - Jose Ferrer 3/4 Size Classical
18946 - Yairi CE1 Electro Classical Guitar
23121 - Yairi CE1 Electro Classical Guitar Used
18947 - Yairi YC6 NS Classical Guitar
23020 - Line6 Variax 300 Nylon, Secondhand
21034 - Martin 000C12-16E Nylon Guitar
0000 - Mendieta - 25 Models In Stock Now
22854 - Ovation CS24C-4G Celebrity Classic Nylon
22738 - Raimundo 146 Classical Guitar
22754 - Raimundo 660E Electro Acoustic Classical
0000 - Ramirez - 9 Models In Stock Now
15290 - Stagg C430 3/4 Classical Guitar, Black
15289 - Stagg C430 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
15292 - Stagg C430 3/4 Size Classical Guitar Red
17106 - Stagg C440M Classical Guitar
19470 - Stagg SCL50 3/4N Pack, Natural
22785 - Traveler Guitars Ultra Light Nylon
14755 - Yamaha SLG200N Silent Guitar, Nylon, Nat
19165 - Yamaha SLG200NW Silent Guitar, Nylon

Ukuleles



19899 - Aloha Concert with Engraved Soundhole
19901 - Aloha Shiny Model Concert In Mahogany
20532 - Ashbury AU-15B Baritone Uke (GR35048B)
20533 - Ashbury AUJ-10 Concert Resonator Ukulele
19887 - Austin Naupaka All Mahogany Soprano
19872 - Austin Naupaka Soprano Ukulele With Bag
19675 - B & M UB2 Barjo Uke Open Back
19698 - B&M Uke Bass Mahogany BMUKB1
16227 - Baton Rouge UR4S Soprano Ukulele
18052 - Baton Rouge UR51S Soprano Ukulele
22887 - Baton Rouge VX1/B8 Eight String Baritone
18975 - Breedlove Lu'au Concert Nat Shadow E Uke
19915 - Elvis Hanauma Mahogany Soprano
19913 - Elvis Hawaii Student Soprano Mahogany
19873 - Factory Prototype Concert Ukulele
19881 - Factory Prototype Concert Ukulele
19894 - Factory Prototype Concert Layered Headstock
19917 - Factory Prototype Funky Top Concert Uke
19897 - Factory Prototype Reverse Headstock Concert
21529 - Fender Fullerton Stratocaster Uke, Black
21530 - Fender Fullerton Strat Uke Sunburst
20278 - Fender Fullerton Tele® Uke Black
20438 - Fishman AG0-UKE Passive Ukulele (Narrow)
19869 - Giannini Custom Concert Uke. Spruce Top
19880 - Giannini Custom Concert Ukulele
20218 - Gold Tone Little Gem Uke Barjo in Amethyst
16458 - Iberica SC Classic Sop Uke, Solid Acacia
19306 - Kai KS10 10 Series Soprano Uke, Mahogany
16794 - Kala KA-15S-S Satin Spruce Soprano
18524 - Kiwaya KSU1L Long Neck Soprano Uke
22721 - Kiwaya KTU1 Mahogany Student Tenor Uke
19071 - KLOS Acoustic Ukulele (UKE_A)
19073 - KLOS Deluxe Acoustic Ukulele (UKE_DAE)
19072 - KLOS Acoustic Ukulele (UKE_AE)
22456 - Kios Full Carbon Electro Acoustic Uke
22310 - Kios Full Carbon Uke
0000 - Levin - 30 Models In Stock Now
16835 - Maestro Island Series Concert UC-IR-SB-C
22386 - Maestro Island Tenor Ukulele UT-KO-CSB-K
13084 - Magic Fluke M80 Maple Uke Barjo, Hwood
14867 - Magic Fluke Timber Electric Bass
23248 - Mahalo MR1 Soprano Ukulele, Red
19885 - Malibu 21s Soprano Ukulele With Bag
12224 - Martin C1K Koa Concert Ukulele
23194 - Martin OXK Concert Ukulele
10909 - Martin OXK Soprano Ukulele
0000 - Huge Stock - Ohana, Pila & Tanglewood

12 Strings



18730 - Cort Natural Glossy MR710F, 12-String
22845 - Eko Ranger XII VR EQ Natural 12
22846 - Eko Ranger XII VR Honey Burst
18916 - Faith FKV12 Naked Venus 12-String
23151 - Gretsch G5422G-12 Electromatic
19715 - Martin D-X2E 12 String Guitar
21559 - RainSong BI-WS3000 12-String
21560 - RainSong CO-WS3000 12-String
21564 - RainSong V-DR3000X 12-String, Natural
23169 - Yamaha CPX700 II Electro Used

Acoustic Amplification



5712 - AER Alpha - 40W, 1x8"
5193 - AER Alpha Plus - 50W, 1x8"
18514 - AER Compact 60 Mk 4
5710 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Hardwood - 60W, 1x8"
15913 - AER Tommy Emmanuel Sig. Compact 60
5707 - AER Compact Classic Pro - 60W, 1x8"
5708 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Mobile - 60W, 1x8"
22776 - AER Compact Slope 60 4
4945 - AER Compact XL - 200W, 2x8"
9028 - AER Domino 3 200w Watt Acoustic Amp
22788 - Acus One For Strings 5T
22871 - Acus One For Strings 8
15917 - Boss Acoustic Singer Live Acoustic Amp
15918 - Boss Acoustic Singer Pro Acoustic Amp
22851 - Boss Acoustic Singer Live LT Acoustic Amp
21540 - Fender Acoustasonic 15 Acoustic Amp
16480 - Fender Acoustic 100 Acoustic Amp Combo
21579 - Fender Acoustic Junior GO, Dark Brown
13956 - Marshall AS50D - 50W, 2x8"
19481 - Orange Crush Acoustic 30
4976 - Roland AC3330W - 1x5"
9358 - Roland AC33, Rosewood
13029 - Roland Cube Street EX Stereo Amplifier
14371 - MOBILEAC Acoustic Chorus, Portable Amp
5618 - Roland Mobile Cube (2.5W+2.5W, 4x2)
13831 - Udo Roessner Da Capo 75
10937 - Yamaha THR5A Acoustic Amp

Travel Guitars



21763 - Breedlove Pursuit Companion CE Travel
22105 - Cort AD Mini 3/4 Size Guitar
15344 - Faith Nomad Mini Neptune
21122 - Fender Nylon Competition Stripe Strap Silver
21125 - Fender Weightless Monogram Strap White
19070 - Kios T_A Acoustic Travel
19066 - Kios T_DAE Deluxe Electro Acoustic
19065 - Kios T_AE Electro Acoustic Travel
22459 - Kios Full Carbon Acoustic Travel Guitar
22025 - LAG Travel KAE Travel Guitar
19489 - Martin DJR-10E Jnr Electro-Acoustic
16261 - Martin DJR Dreadnought Junior
7115 - Martin LX1 Little Martin
7320 - Martin LX1E, Electro Travel Guitar
19458 - Martin LX1 FE Electro Acoustic Guitar
18366 - Tanglewood TW E Mini Koa
13271 - Vintage VTG100 Travel Guitar in Natural
19165 - Yamaha SLG200NW Silent Guitar, Nylon

Electro Acoustic Guitars



19299 - Ashbury Gazouki, Guitar Body, GR33024
21766 - Breedlove Arista Concert Nat Shadow CE
21765 - Breedlove Organic Series Sign Concertina
21850 - Breedlove Organic Series Wildwood Concert
21763 - Breedlove Pursuit Companion CE Travel
22519 - Breedlove Pursuit Concert CE
15886 - Breedlove Stage Black Magic Concert Used
13911 - Cort AF510EOP Electro Acoustic Guitar
23263 - Cort GA-MY Bevel Electro Acoustic Guitar
23264 - Cort GA-PF Bevel Electro Acoustic Guitar
23262 - Cort SFX-Myrtlewood Brown Gloss
23261 - Cort SFX-Myrtlewood Natural
19448 - Eastman AC508CE Electro Acoustic, Used
22850 - Eko Ranger VI VR Acoustic 6-String, Nat
22848 - Eko Ranger VI VR Eq Electro Acoustic
22849 - Eko Ranger VI VR Eq Electro Acoustic
22733 - Faith FECVL Eclipse Venus Electro Lefty
12358 - Faith FKV Venus Concert Outaway/Electro
19542 - Faith FNBCEHG HiGloss Baritone Neptune
22507 - Faith FNCEBMB Blood Moon Neptune
19136 - Faith FPNECG Nexus Neptune El. Cognac
22728 - Faith FPVCG Nexus Venus Cut/E Cognac
22726 - Faith FPVCKL Nexus Venus Cop Black Lefty
21881 - Faith FVBLM Blue Moon Venus Outaway

Tenor & Baritone Guitars



20534 - Ashbury AT-14 Tenor Guitar, Spruce Top
8851 - Ashbury AT24 Tenor Guitar
20688 - D'Addario EJ66 Tenor Guitar Strings
19542 - Faith FNBCEHG HiGloss Baritone Neptune
18950 - Yairi YBR2 Baritone Acoustic Guitar
18790 - Vintage VGE800N Gemini P. Brett Baritone

The Illusionists

How did the Kauffmann Cozy come about?
We talk to one of the co-conspirators, Paul van Bree

Words Dave Burrluck

When did Kauffmann's Guitar Store start making its own-brand guitars?

"Albert [Deinum, Kauffmann Guitars owner] started building guitars around 2014. He was always tinkering with guitars and he had the guitar store by that time, but he wasn't always busy so he started to use the spare hours to build his own guitars. He built a couple of them and people bought them, so he built some more – and that's how it started."

Those were primarily T- and S-style guitars. When did you consider doing your own design?

"I think we started off with the whole idea about three years ago: why not try to create an all-original model? We had some ideas for an offset model – we actually built two or three – but it wasn't too good-looking

"Dennis Fano is a huge inspiration to us and we borrowed from [the look of] early Rickenbacker models"

and the body was too small, so we decided we needed a different approach. We started drawing other stuff and looked for some different inspiration. Then we decided we're not that good at drawing! We're not designers, we're guitarists.

"So we got some help from Eric Smid of Smitty Guitars. Eric lives about 15km from us – he's a regular in our store and we've sold some of his guitars – and he said he could help us. He put one of his design guys on it and came up with some improvements to the designs we had. I think that was about a year and a half ago. Then around June of 2021 we started to build some prototypes. That's when we came up with the idea of having one body shape and one scale length but with different bridge and pickup configurations so we could build five different guitars all based on the same idea and same model."



Kauffmann Guitars owner, Albert Deinum, does a final check on a Cozy model



Team member Milan works on the electronics

Why did you decide to use paulownia for the bodies of your guitars?

"For two reasons, really. Firstly, paulownia is readily available, it's not scarce, it grows in Europe. We liked that idea and, secondly, the wood is really light. Because it's a fairly big guitar... I mean, if you get the wrong piece of even swamp ash with a body this size you'd be walking around with the weight of a Les Paul around your neck, and that wasn't something we wanted.

"We built one of each of the five different models and had them in our store for a couple of months, July and August 2021, and we listened to all the comments our customers had. We found people liked the way the guitar felt; it's light and it fits right in your lap. In fact, one of our customers came in and after playing the guitars said, 'You should call it Cozy because it feels so snug when you have it in your lap... it's almost like a little blanket.' So that's where the name comes from."

How do you handle the production?

"First of all, we had Eric design the body. He made the first prototypes and he said, 'Well, I can do the CNC work for you on the body and on the necks.' We get the two components from him and then we do the

finishing prep, Albert sprays the bodies, and we do the relicing and ageing and all the final assembly and setup here in our store."

The Cozy design bears some similarity to Dennis Fano's Novo Serus. Is this purely a coincidence?

"Dennis Fano is a huge inspiration to us. We were a Novo dealer until they decided to sell direct so the whole idea of having one basic body shape and using different pickup/bridge configurations was seriously inspired by Novo. We do think a little differently, but the idea as far as we're concerned definitely came from Novo. Cozy, like Novo's Serus, is an offset guitar, but if you actually compare the two bodies the Novo is quite a bit bigger, is way more offset and has less deep body contours, so it's actually quite a different design altogether. We also borrowed heavily from the early Rickenbacker models, at least in the way they looked."

It feels like a guitar you can throw in the back of your car to go and gig, it doesn't feel precious. We've described the finishes as being rather rustic...

"[Laughs] Well, that's not quite what we wanted to achieve, but Albert sprays a



Albert and Paul van Bree get 'Cozy' with the new guitars at Kauffmann's Guitar Store in the Netherlands

very thin layer of paint. The idea is simply that we want to give the guitar as much resonance as possible and the less lacquer you use, the more that is enhanced. The second thing is that every guitar looks individual: no two guitars are exactly alike. You see, a lot of feedback we get from our customers when they look at brand-new production guitars in this price range is that they feel very 'factory' and, of course, that's where they were made, but they can lack that mojo, that personality. As I said, each Cozy is like a piece of its own and we've found that our customers really like that. More and more players seem to want something that's unique, individual: it'll become *their* guitar. This gives them a quick start to achieve that. That's really the story."

Speaking of which, you've created a whole fictitious story about the 'history' of Cozy. This issue of *Guitarist* actually happens to go on sale on 1 April...

"[Laughs] April Fool's Day! That's amazing. We had so much fun creating that story."

Why did you do it?


"You know, people come out with a guitar and give all the specs and say they have the perfect guitar. Well, we do that, too, but

we also thought it would be nice to have a different story as well. If you look at the whole story of the late-50s and early 60s guitars – the guitars that people pay, like, a zillion for right now – what's really the story behind those? Why are these guitars so great? Why are they so expensive? Well, is it because they're limited? Is it because they're all so good? No, they're not all good. There were some very good ones, and most of them are decent, but they were just guitars way back then. But part of the reason people like them so much is because there is a story attached.

"We asked ourselves, 'If [Cozy] had been designed in the early 60s, what would its story have been? Why wouldn't the guitar have been a success like the Telecaster or the Les Paul? Why would this guitar not have made it?' Then we started to come up with different theories. We were just having a beer and talking about it and we came up with the idea of, well, they only made a few, the first ones got destroyed and then the builder kinda gave up on it. Then we said, 'Well, why can't the builder be a she?'"

"One thing led to another and we thought, 'Why don't we make a movie of its 'history'? Our friends at MusaFilms came up with the idea of making two short documentaries,

one with the imaginary story, the other one with the real story. They came up with the whole thing of the castle Château d'Hérouville where Cozy is found – which, of course, is a real recording studio just north of Paris. That bit is all true! So we started mixing our fiction with reality. We now have people coming into the store who have seen the films [which you can watch on the Kauffman website] and they want to play the guitar!

"But, importantly, too, we also asked ourselves, 'Why is everyone so big on America when it comes to guitars?' Of course, they were the pioneers not just of the guitars, but the rock, pop, blues scenes all have huge roots in the States. But if we keep saying that, we miss out on all the great stuff that's being made in Europe. There's a great British pop culture, but also a great European guitar culture, I believe. People like Patrick James Eggle or PJD Guitars, for example, who are just starting manufacturing in England. I mean, how cool is that? So it's also a way of saying let's be a little more proud of what we're doing in Europe. Let's create our own culture and our own tales and magic stories about these guitars. Our story was just a fun way of doing that." 

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T7E Baby

A stompbox emulation of a classic Binson Echorec

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

The Foxgear T7E Baby is designed as a direct emulation of a Binson Echorec, the Italian echo unit that used a rotating magnetic drum rather than tape. Among others, the Binson range included the Echorec Baby and the T7E Echorec 2, which was used by David Gilmour from 1968 up to 1977. Foxgear pedals are made in China, but the company has its roots in Italy where it is part of a family that includes the boutique Gurus and Baroni-Lab brands. The T7E Baby is, in fact, based on the Gurus Echosex 2 T7E, losing that pedal's integral valve but with pretty much the same functionality at a much lower price.

Offering both mono and stereo operation, the pedal is a practical size for pedalboards while still accommodating

two footswitches. To get your head around its controls it's necessary to understand the original Binson, which had a recording head plus four playback heads around the edge of the drum, selected singly or in combination. The 12-position switch for selecting the options is seen again here, with red LEDs indicating which are active.

There are three working modes – Echo, Rep and Swell. Echo offers one echo tap for the selected head combination, and Rep (Repeats) adds feedback (adjusted using the Length Of Swell knob) to the selected head combination. The third mode, Swell, applies feedback to all four heads, effectively delivering a reverb-like wash of sound. If either of the other two modes are selected, this third mode can be brought in using the Swell footswitch.

SOUNDS

The Motor Adj button adjusts the delay time. While the original machine had a maximum delay time somewhere just above 300ms, the maximum here runs to 880ms for more versatility. The sound of the repeats is true to your input tone, but the trail dissipates and blends nicely as it fades, not unlike a good BBD analogue delay. You can make that more radical with the Tone knob, moving away from the warmer, cleaner sound towards thinner, distorted and more percussive repeats as the trail progresses. The Tone knob is very interactive with the Length Of Swell knob – so the two have to be balanced to stop the repeats taking off into self-oscillation – but find the sweet spot and you can dial in settings with a long cloud of echoes.

01. RED LEDS

Each LED represents one of the four heads illustrating which is active as set by the 12-way rotary switch above

02. MODE SELECTOR

This selects either a single repeat (Echo), multiple repeats for the active heads (Rep) or multiple repeats for all four heads (Swell)

03. SWELL FOOTSWITCH

This overrides the setting on the Mode switch and directly engages Swell mode

04. LENGTH OF SWELL KNOB

This is the feedback knob for the Rep and Swell modes, effectively setting the number of repeats

05. AGE OF DAMAGE KNOB

Dial in modulation here – it replicates the wobbly sound of a machine that's out of kilter due to a rubber spinning wheel that could become oval over time

06. TOP SURFACE

The backlit acrylic surface and the lettering style are stylistic nods to the vintage Binson units



Tech Spec

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Echo pedal

FEATURES: True Bypass assisted by relay, 86ms to 880ms delay time (Head 1 86-200, Head 2 172-422, Head 3 258-625, Head 4 334-882), footswitchable Swell mode

CONTROLS: Repeat Tone, Age Of Damage, Motor Adj, Volume, Length Of Swell, Head combinations switch, Mode selector switch (Echo/Rep/Swell), Bypass footswitch, Swell footswitch

CONNECTIONS:

Standard inputs (L&R), standard outputs (L&R)

POWER: 9V-12V DC adaptor 140 ma (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 127 (w) x 95 (d) x 50mm (h)

Guitarist
CHOICE

9/10

Modulation can be added with the Age Of Damage knob, which replicates the effect of worn mechanical parts in an original machine that resulted in an irregular speed of the main drum. It goes from a really subtle sonic shift to more obvious pitch variation.

Selecting a single head and using feedback can give you all the standard delays you'd get from a regular delay pedal, starting from just into slapback territory up to that maximum of 880ms. But it's the multi-tap head combinations that make this pedal special. Those combination settings comprise five with two heads, two with three, and one featuring all four. As the heads are equidistantly spaced you can set musical intervals. If head four is a quarter-note, the other three would be

16th, eighth and dotted eighth notes. There are plenty of potential uses for all of them setting up a pattern of repeats, but we particularly liked programs 6 and 7 with respectively an eighth/dotted eighth and a dotted eighth/quarter-note, which were great for the rhythmic delay styles U2 is known for. Regardless of the 12-way switch position, the Swell setting is always there like a second preset you can engage at any time, providing an alternative ambience as the feedback from four heads creates a distinctive and expansive sonic wash.

VERDICT

A refurbished T7E in full working condition at £5k-plus (not to mention maintenance costs) is way out of reach for most of us, so a pedal such as this is

a very attractive alternative indeed. It's compact and boasts a control surface that can replicate the original's operation yet goes beyond its remit.

Does it do the Binson sound justice? Well, we didn't have an original unit for an AB test so we couldn't assess quite how close the repeats sounded to an original, but does it really matter? Basically, the repeats here work great with guitar sound, and this is an excellent pedal in its own right, chock-full of gorgeous vintage-style echo variations. **G**

PROS Echorec functionality; multi-tap echos; tonal adjustment for repeats; compact size; stereo operation; footswitchable swell

CONS Head selector knob is a bit wobbly; tricky to balance Tone with Length Of Swell

TC ELECTRONIC

SCF Gold

TC's very first pedal returns with practical updates

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

TC Electronic is a well-established company with products covering studio and guitar, but the company started out in 1976 with just a single effects pedal – the Stereo Chorus Flanger (SCF), which has now been made available as the SCF Gold to celebrate its 45th anniversary.

While the new pedal pays tribute to the original, it takes advantage of more modern technology, notably a new op-amp in the preamp stage, a standard nine-volt DC power socket replacing the hardwired transformer, and a larger, more easily seen LED. While it may boast more headroom, improved low-frequency response and a wider dynamic range, it is said to stay true to the original sound, still incorporating the essential Bucket Brigade Device circuit design.

What the pedal offers is a triumvirate of effects – chorus, flanger and pitch modulation – selected by a front-panel toggle switch and delivered in either mono or stereo from a mono input. You get adjustable modulation speed from one sweep every 10 seconds to 10 sweeps

a second, and a Width knob to determine how wide the sweep is. An Intensity knob differs in its function depending on the selected mode. In addition, there's a small Input Gain knob that sets the gain for the whole pedal – bypassed and engaged – so you can't set it to bring in a kicked-in boost, but it does give you extra gain in your overall chain.

The chorus here has plenty of range, with the Intensity knob controlling the wet/dry balance and determining whether you want a subtle or strong chorus effect. At about 3 on the dial, it matched our vintage Boss CE-2 pretty closely. It's great in mono, but it offers a lovely spaciousness if you can use it in stereo. The flanging sound is equally rich. The Intensity knob adjusts the regeneration, adding emphasis by ramping up the hollow metallic flavour. When in Pitch Modulation mode, you can actually access a combination of chorus and pitch vibrato, which can come across like a rotary speaker effect. The Intensity knob determines the blend of the two effects, offering plenty of hybrid modulation to explore.



VERDICT

A welcome return for a classic and very classy-sounding pedal, now with everything in place to slot into the modern pedalboard. **G**

PROS Three effects in one pedal; stereo capability; ease of use; quiet operation; adjustable input gain

CONS Not a lot

ALSO TRY...



WAMPLER

Terraform £279

This does more besides flanger and chorus; it actually features 11 different modulation and filter effects. It can have mono or stereo output, has eight onboard presets plus a tap tempo footswitch.



TC ELECTRONIC

The Dreamscape £109

On a tighter budget? TC also has this John Petrucci signature pedal that features mono and stereo operation and offers chorus, flanger and vibrato. It also supports TC's TonePrint facility.



EMPRESS EFFECTS

Nebulus £249

If you don't need stereo operation, the Nebulus provides chorus, vibrato and flanger effects in mono with three variations on each. It also features eight presets, scrolled through by footswitch.

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Stereo chorus, pitch modulator and flanger pedal

FEATURES:

Buffered bypass

CONTROLS: Speed, Width, Intensity, Mode switch (Chorus/Pitch Modulation/Flanger), Input Gain, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input, standard outputs L (mono) & R

POWER: 9V DC adaptor 150ma (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 95 (w) x 124 (d) x 49mm (h)



9/10



ROUND-UP

Maestro pedals

The historic brand is back with a new family of effects

Words

Trevor Curwen

Photography

Olly Curtis

Maestro is back. The brand that may just have kickstarted the stompbox revolution in the 1960s has been resurrected by parent company Gibson. We're talking, of course, about Keef's use of the FZ-1 fuzz on *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction* that spawned a whole fuzz pedal industry – and Maestro also had other classics in its roster, such as the PS-1 phase shifter and the Echoplex tape echo boxes.

The brand is now back with five pedals: the Fuzz-Tone FZ-M, Discover Delay, Comet Chorus, Ranger Overdrive and Invader

Distortion. All five are weighty, solidly built analogue pedals that can run from an adaptor or a battery (accessed by loosening four screws and easing off the bottom plate), and each follows the same three-knob format, featuring a three-colour Maestro bugles logo that lights up when the pedal is active. You also get two-in-one functionality courtesy of a toggle switch that selects an alternative version of the effect – for instance, on the two not reviewed here, the Distortion pedal has a switchable gate, and the Chorus pedal toggles chorus and a rotary speaker-like effect.



MAESTRO

Fuzz-Tone FZ-M £139

There could be no resurrection of the Maestro brand without a nod to the FZ-1, and the FZ-M is its natural successor 60 years on. The Classic mode is based on vintage Maestro pedals, and as you turn up the Attack knob you get a saturated fuzz with a scooped lower midrange and a bright nasally punch, which can be tempered with the Tone knob, which rolls back the trebly rasp from a fully clockwise position. It's an instantly familiar sound – you'll be tempted to hit that *Satisfaction* riff as soon as you hear it.

Modern mode offers a fuller, fatter fuzz tone that puts back the lower mids Classic was lacking if you have the Tone knob left of centre. Still, you can lose that by rolling it clockwise, ultimately reaching strident in-yer-face fuzz. While the sloping top is a nice feature, we'd have been happier – from a 'board space point of view – if the pedals had been a tad more compact. **G**

VERDICT

A versatile fuzzbox that gives a legacy sound and adds practical alternatives



MAESTRO

Discoverer Delay £149

The Discoverer is an analogue delay pedal featuring BBD chips and offers a typical delay range from 20ms to 600ms. Tonally, to our ears, the repeats sit just right – solidly matching your dry tone but exhibiting a pleasing dissolution as they diminish in volume. The Sustain knob turns up the feedback and has plenty of practical range, allowing you to dial in a very long trail of repeats before you hit the spot where self-oscillation sets in.

Flicking up the toggle switch brings in rich and mesmeric modulation, which envelopes the sound with some fairly obvious pitch variations, not unlike a rotary speaker. That won't suit all users, so there is a pair of easily tweaked set-and-forget trim pots inside the pedal to adjust the rate and width, allowing you to tone things down for a subtler experience or to tailor a stronger effect. **G**

VERDICT

A simple but great-sounding delay with optional swirly modulation



MAESTRO

Ranger Overdrive £139

Plenty of overdrive pedals have switchable variations to increase versatility, and the Ranger follows this trend. The lower position of the toggle switch is where the lightest and most transparent drive options are, offering something you may wish to keep engaged as an integral contribution to your tone. Natural and open, the sound is not wholly overdriven as there is some clean signal mixed in with it. This means you can retain some clarity while adding just a hair of dirt or progress through just-breaking-up sounds to mild amp-like raunch.

The Tone knob operates as a low-pass filter, meaning it adjusts brightness for enhancement or to complement your amp sound, and there's extra via the volume knob to build in a boost. The Hi setting loses the clean element for a gainier, more compressed sound with increased aggression in the upper mids. **G**

VERDICT

Two sounds but both good – a lone Ranger could sort all your drive needs

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Fuzz pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Attack (Fuzz), Tone, Level, Modern/Classic switch, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9-12V DC adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 84 (w) x 126 (d) x 60mm (h)

Guitarist
CHOICE

9/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Delay pedal

FEATURES: True bypass, 20 to 600ms delay range,

CONTROLS: Delay, Mix, Sustain, Mod On/Off switch, Bypass footswitch, internal trim pots for modulation rate and width

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9-12V DC adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 84 (w) x 126 (d) x 60mm (h)

Guitarist
CHOICE

9/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Drive pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Gain, Level, Tone, Hi/Lo switch, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9-12V DC adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 84 (w) x 126 (d) x 60mm (h)

Guitarist
CHOICE

9/10



Longtermers

A few months' gigging, recording and everything that goes with it – welcome to *Guitarist's* longterm test report

What's The Best
Way To Record
Great Tone?

with Jamie Dickson



Writer

JAMIE DICKSON
Guitarist, Editor-in-chief



This month, Jamie begins his shootout test of mic versus modelling versus loadbox in the home studio. The aim is to capture great guitar tone as easily and flexibly as possible – and he starts the old-fashioned way with a single dynamic mic

A few issues back in 479 I set out to do a shootout test of the best way to get electric guitar tone down on recordings in a home studio. A few years ago, mic'ing things up the old-fashioned way was still your main option. These days, however, the boom in modelling devices that emulate authentic amp tones as well as reactive load boxes – posh attenuators married to Impulse Response technology – offer the guitarist some excellent new ways to record great guitar sounds in a small studio.

In order to conduct a longterm shootout test on the pros and cons of each approach, I assembled a pile of cutting-edge gear including a Two Notes Audio Engineering Torpedo Captor X reactive loadbox and a Neural DSP Quad Cortex digital modelling/profiling floorboard. I've also got some other nice gear from profiling amp pioneers Kemper and British valve amplifier supremos Laney to try out, too.

But it all starts with the thing all the others are trying to sound like: a good valve amp,

"It all starts with the thing all the others are trying to sound like..."

some spring reverb and a decent mic. The amp will be my 40-watt Dr Z 2x10 combo and the mic of choice is a single Shure Beta 57A, which Shure describes as "a premium instrument mic ideally suited for the professional musician looking to mic up many types of amplified and acoustic instruments such as guitar amps, acoustic guitar, saxophone, snare drum and brass. It can also be used by vocal artists." So it comes from the same lineage as the old reliable SM57 but in a slightly evolved form. The Shure will be running into my PreSonus Audiobox iTwo interface and recorded on Presonus' Studio One DAW software.

Location, Location

Before I get started I have a discussion with *Guitarist's* videographer and long-time sound engineer Martin Holmes about using mic placement to sculpt tone. Below, in summarised form, are some of the tips we discussed that you may also find useful.



Reactive loadboxes like the one above are a useful alternative to the traditional mic-and-amp setup on the facing page

Good mic placement can help you control two main aspects of your sound: brightness and bass response. Let's start with top-end first. In the middle of your amp's speaker is the centre dome. Placing the mic directly in front of this yields the brightest tone. Moving the mic to one side – aka 'off-axis' – makes the resulting recorded tone darker. The further off-axis you move the mic, the darker the sound gets. So far, so simple.

With a typical dynamic mic, you might ordinarily start by positioning it so it's pointing to the spot where the edge of the centre dome meets the innermost area of the speaker cone – very slightly off-axis, in other words – then move it further out if you want to darken the tone further. A neat refinement of this technique can be positioning the mic further off axis but then *angling* the mic to point back towards the dome rather than be squarely 90 degrees to the speaker. Subtler control over top-end can be achieved that way if rough positioning fails to achieve the desired result.

Next, it's time to turn our attention to bass frequencies. Microphones are, to varying degrees, subject to a phenomenon called 'proximity effect'. In simple terms, the nearer you position the mic to the speaker, the more bass response you'll get in the recorded

sound from the mic. So if you like a good amount of bottom-end and prefer not to alter your preferred EQ on the amp, try moving the mic closer to the speaker. It's worth noting, however, that mics react differently to proximity effect according to their design.

Ribbon mics can be a great choice for recording electric guitar but are highly susceptible to proximity effect – so to avoid them delivering overly bassy tones, you might want to position them a good 10 inches back from the speaker. A standard dynamic mic such as a Shure SM57 will generally need to come in a bit closer, almost touching the grille cloth in some cases. Condenser mics, by contrast, are typically more sensitive than either ribbon mics or dynamic mics but are less susceptible to proximity effect – so you'll have a freer hand to position them wherever they sound best, including positioned well away from the amp to capture the 'room sound' while a dynamic or ribbon mic is positioned closer to the speaker to capture the core sound of your amp.

Enough of the subtleties, however; the main thing you need to know is that a mic positioned nearer the centre-axis of the speaker yields brighter tones, while increasing proximity will yield fuller bass. The rest is up to your ears and personal taste.

Digital devices, such as the Neural DSP Quad Cortex below, have the advantage of being quicker to set up than old-school mic rigs



“Getting up to fiddle with the amp or mic entails freeing myself from a tangle of cables”



Rattle And Hum

Back in the home studio, it's time to put the theories to the test. I put up the Shure in front of the Dr Z and start trying to get a tone. With a 2x10 and an opaque grille cloth, it's actually a little hard to determine where the centre of the speakers is – I'll only need to mic one of them, of course, but it would be good to know where that might be! A quick inspection round the open back of the combo gives a fair idea and from there on in, it's time to get the earphones on to hear what kind of sound we're getting.

Unfortunately, my Dr Z has never been the quietest of amps and its two greatest tonal assets – its vibey spring reverb and valve-driven tremolo – have quite noisy circuits, despite the amp having been repaired not too long ago by an experienced tech. On stage, the slight hum generated by the reverb and tremolo circuits is not an issue, but it's much more intrusive during recording. But I'm going to press on and accept it as part of the natural character of what I'm doing here – one of the ways in which recording with a real mic differs from using a modelling amp, for good or ill.

The first test I'd like to set up is recording a solo fingerstyle piece on electric guitar using clean or near-clean tones and the kinds of effects my valve amp can deliver, then try to emulate or better those tones using first a reactive loadbox and lastly the Quad Cortex



“The tones I’ve recorded the old-fashioned way have character and grain and interest”

profiler. But this first recording with the mic should hopefully set the standard to beat.

Setting up a new track on Studio One, I take my first pass, using a modded American Vintage '52 reissue Telecaster. I like the tone I'm hearing, but I'm a bit puzzled by how high I'm having to turn up the input on the PreSonus audio interface to get respectable levels. I get the mic positioning pretty right first time, but just to emphasise low-end a little more I push the mic tighter up against the grille. This highlights one of the minor irritations of using an old-fashioned mic-and-amp method. My computer is only a few paces from the amp, but getting up to fiddle with the amp or the mic entails freeing myself from my headphones and the guitar cable itself – which both seem to tangle around me like vines if I so much as swivel in my chair a bit. And no sooner have I made the adjustment, sat back down, strapped

the guitar on and replaced my headphones than I find I need a little more reverb on the amp – and so it goes. Workflow-wise, it's all a bit cumbersome and you can see why in pro studios there's an engineer to sort this stuff out while the musicians concentrate on playing. It's hardly a big problem, but the back and forth is a bit irksome.

Puzzled by the low-ish recording levels I'm still getting, I turn the amp up further and get something like the right levels in the DAW – but now I'm thinking the tone maybe sounds a touch thin. But then, in a classic face-palm moment, I realise why – the volume knob on the Tele is only half way up! I then immediately deafen myself by winding it up to full and strumming a chord... Definitely no lack of signal now. Time to adjust all the settings again, cursing my schoolboy error. With the levels all sorted at last, it's time to do a proper take. That, at least, is simple enough and I get it down with no errors. Listening back, however, I realise with a sinking feeling that the background hum of the tremolo circuit pulsing away really is a bit much for this instrumental piece; it's gone beyond characterful and is now just intrusive. Reluctantly, I conclude that the answer may be to use a good digital reverb, either in the amp's effects loop or on a plug-in on the

DAW, and a nice quiet tremolo pedal, rather than the noisy valve driven-circuits on the amp. That runs counter to what I hoped the mic-and-amp method should be about, but there it is. The buzzes would be fine on a Link Wray-style surf guitar piece or a garage rock number, but the more serene style of the piece I'm aiming for really does call out for something a bit more pristine.

It's been a tangly, fiddly session all round, but I can see that the main argument in favour of recording things the old-fashioned way holds good: the tones I've recorded have character and grain and interest. But fine-tuning those elements has proven laborious and a bit of a faff. Chefs talk about the importance of *mise en place* – basically setting up the ergonomics of your workzone for maximum efficiency. To be fair, my studio's 'mis' is pretty poor at the moment so that does account for a fair amount of the extra fiddling I've gone through to achieve something relatively simple this time.

Tune in next time to learn how I get on with the reactive load box method instead, and learn if I can finally nail the tone I'm after with good old mic-and-amp alone. If you're interested, I'll share the comparative recordings when I've finished the whole longterm test. Until next time. **G**

Prices: £1,599 (Neural DSP Quad Cortex), £429 (Two Notes Torpedo Captor X), £124 (Shure Beta 57A) **Studio Sessions** Not yet **Gigged:** N/A



ZACH MYERS

The Shinedown guitarist declares his love for Rickenbackers and not one but two amazing deals on some Gibson acoustics

What was the first serious guitar you bought with your own money?

"A 70s Thinline Tele in black. My dad bought me my first couple of guitars, but the first one that I spent a decent amount of money on was that black Thinline '72 Tele. I've always loved semi-hollow guitars, that's always been a thing for me. My signature [PRS SE] model for almost the last 10 years has been a hollowbody and I don't know... an f-hole in any guitar will get me. I don't know why. They're light and they play great and they play good acoustically, which is another factor that I really love. But that black Tele. I don't know, there was something about it that made me really want it – and I wasn't really a Tele guy. That was the first Telecaster that I ever owned, actually. I still have it."

In addition to his PRS signatures, Shinedown's Zach Myers has around 230 guitars and counting in his collection

What was the last guitar you bought and why?

"I just bought a Gibson Mike Ness signature model, a Tom Murphy aged Gibson Les Paul, because ever since I was a kid I've loved Social Distortion. I grew up watching [Mike] play that guitar and when they decided to do a limited run of it, I was like, 'I have to get this.' Gibson gave me a pretty good deal on it, so I bought it. I've always wanted that guitar, so I have the closest thing to getting it, I guess."

"I own about seven or eight Les Pauls. A couple of Holy Grail ones, I guess people would say. I like them, but I don't know if I would ever really play them on stage. I love them in the studio, I love the tones. I love sitting around the house and playing them, but playing them live? I don't know. Also, I'll be honest, they look weird on me! Back in 2010, I brought a '59 on tour and I look back at pictures of it and I'm like, 'Man, I look really weird playing this. This doesn't look like me.'"

What's the most incredible find or bargain you had when buying guitars?

"I have these two old Gibsons – I think one's a '38 and one's a '44 or '45. The '38 I paid about \$400 through a buddy of mine and it needed work. He worked at a guitar store and called me in the morning, right when they opened, to say, 'Hey man, this guy came in here with his great-grandfather's guitar. He wanted cash for it. All we had was 400 bucks in the drawer for cash. If you come up here and replace this \$400, we'll just act like this guitar never came in.' And that's what I did. The back was split and I sent it to a buddy of mine who's a Gibson-certified [repairer] and it plays like brand-new. Then the other one, the '44, which is more like a Southern Jumbo, I think I paid \$800 for that. It was the same situation, same buddy at the guitar store was like, 'Hey, man, this guy's up here. He wants this in cash and we don't have this much cash. Come up here and buy it from him.' And that's what I did."

What's the strongest case of buyer's remorse you've ever had when buying gear?

"I bought a Custom Shop Strat one time and I really liked it, but I didn't love the way it played, I loved the way it looked. I spent five or six grand on it, but I sold it."

Have you ever sold gear that you now intensely regret letting go?

"A couple when I was younger, when I was first starting out. My dad used to go to pawn shops all the time. Pre-internet pawn-shop guitar shopping was one of the most fun things you could do because a lot of the time people didn't know what they had – and once there was a '68/'69 Marshall stack with salt and pepper [grille cloth]. My dad bought it for \$700 and I sold it... I sold it because it didn't have reverb!"

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"I would say, don't follow trends unless you're looking to invest your money and you're just buying stuff to keep and



PHOTO BY SANJAY PARIKH MEDIA



PHOTO BY SANJAY PARIKH MEDIA

that's going to appreciate. Buy what you feel and what you like. Some traditionalists are going to freak out, but I don't plug electric guitars in when I'm buying; I never have. We're in a society now where there's enough pickups out there that if I like the way a guitar feels and plays acoustically, I can put anything in it. Any major guitar purchase I've ever done, I've never plugged it in – other than maybe I'll have the employee plug it in just to make sure it works and make sure the switches aren't dirty or anything like that. Follow your heart, follow your feel, and don't buy the cool thing. And also, if you buy a vintage guitar and it doesn't have the original case, just haggle down as much as you can. That's my other tip."

When was the last time you stopped to stare in a guitar shop window – or visited online – and what were you looking at?

"Online, I'm constantly looking at 335s, 345s and 355s on Reverb, but the last guitar that I just stopped and stared at was actually my first Rickenbacker, a Midnight Purple 330. They only made around 40 of those and I've always wanted a Rickenbacker. Anyone who knows me knows that I'm obsessed with Tom Petty and always have been my entire life. As well as anybody who played Rickenbackers, George Harrison, John Lennon... you know? I have around 230 guitars and I've never had a Rickenbacker. I was at The House Of Guitars in Rochester, New York, and I saw it and I had to get it. It's an amazing guitar."

If forced to make a choice, would you rather buy a really good guitar and a cheap amp or a cheap guitar and a top-notch amp?

"Nice guitar, cheap amp. I was at the Dallas [International Guitar Festival] one time and there was this amp company called Kendrick and they had made an amp, a combo with 12- and 10-[inch speakers together in the cab]. In my

"Some traditionalists are going to freak out, but I don't plug electric guitars in when I'm buying"

head I'm like, 'This is going to be atrocious.' I played it and, to me, it was atrocious and I left the booth. I came back about 30 minutes later because I realised I left my jacket in there and somebody was playing through the amp, and it sounded incredible. It was Eric Johnson. So, you know, I think the tone is more in your hands. So I'm going to say get a good guitar that's going to stay in tune and then you'll figure the amp thing out later."

If you could use only humbuckers or single coils for the rest of your career, which would you choose and why?

"For clean purposes I would want a single coil and then I'd figure out how to make it sound bigger if I needed to. You know, there's something about a Tele slamming through a high-gain amp that sounds incredible."

What's your favourite guitar shop?

"I have a few. One is in Dublin, Ireland, called Some Neck Guitars. I really love that one. The House Of Guitars in Rochester is always fun just because there's so much stuff. And then Killer Vintage in either Dallas or St Louis – there's two of them." [DM]

Zach brings plenty of fire to his live performances, but you're unlikely to see him bring any of his several Les Pauls to the stage. "They look weird on me!" he says



Shinedown's new album, *Planet Zero*, is released on 22 April via PLG UK Frontline

www.shinedown.com



Back Talk (Part 2)

Last time, Zilla Cabs' Paul Gough discussed the two big players of backboard design: open and closed backs. Time to look at three-piece and oval-ported options

In the not-so-distant future, I aim to explain the basics of porting a cab, but before we get to that point I do need to touch on it here because we're going to talk about the oval-ported back. I sometimes feel the word 'ported' may suggest a hint of secret sauce, and since the science here also applies to open-back cabs as well, I often say the oval-ported back is – for the most part – a pretty-looking open back, rather than a close connection to a truly ported cab as its name may suggest.

Ports on the rear of cabs have been around for as long as speakers have been placed in boxes. They were used to 'tune' the response of a cabinet using a specific speaker to give a more desired overall sound. As far as I'm aware, oval ports on the rear of guitar cabinets first started appearing back in the 1970s, namely on Dumble amps and since then on many other brands.

An open-back cab – and, similarly, a ported cab – will act in many ways as what is referred to as a Helmholtz resonator, which is an item that allows air resonance in a cavity. Imagine blowing over the hole of a

liquid-filled bottle. We've all seen and heard how the amount of liquid in the bottle will change the overall pitch produced (though this isn't actually a single pitch, more of an envelope containing a band of frequencies). This is mostly down to the size and shape of the cavity changing as the liquid displaces the air inside. I hope you can see how this is analogous to the open-back cabinet, where the inside of the cabinet is similar to the main part of the bottle, and the neck and opening can be thought of as similar to the size of the open-back panel (the open part of the cabinet).

Now, in a resonator such as the bottle, the length and diameter of the neck, as well as the size and shape of the resonating cavity, will determine the band of frequencies that are amplified or attenuated, and this is similar in a speaker cabinet. The main differences are that the proportions of the cabinet's cavity (like the main part of the bottle) and the open back (the neck and open end of the bottle) are much more similar to a tumbler glass than an old Coke bottle. Why did I just make you read all of that? Well, I want to illustrate


how, although the size and shape of any opening on a cab will affect the sound, the proportion of an open-back cab and oval port are far more closely linked than the ports in a ported cab, and therefore calling an oval-ported back a pretty-looking open back is probably quite fair.

Now, onto the three-piece back. As its name suggests, this is a back panel that's made up of three pieces, which allows the cab to function as a closed back when all three panels are in place but as an open back when the middle panel is removed. Compared with the oval-ported back, what I have to say here is fairly short and sweet, but a cabinet with a three-piece back will possess nearly all the same characteristics as if it were solely open or closed. The only

"Imagine blowing over the hole of a liquid-filled bottle... This is analogous to the open-back cab"



real difference is that, with a three-piece back, the bracing will usually focus on eliminating any vibration on the middle panel, rather than stiffening the panel (like in the 4x12 mentioned in the previous article), therefore making the closed-back function more like a closed-back cab without a centre post. This results in a slightly less focused response but adds a lot of versatility. The need to stiffen the baffle above other qualities tends to be for players who are trying to recreate the sound of a larger cab, say, a 2x12 that sounds closer to a 4x12. In this situation, versatility from a cab tends not to be as essential as it would to someone looking for an array of sounds more subtle than your average half-stack.

The thing to take away from this discussion on back panels is that although each one carries a function, and there is often a compromise, it's one of the largest determining factors in how a cab sounds and how well it will suit your needs. 



Zilla Cabs' oval-ported vertical 2x12 is loaded with a pair of Celestion M Creambacks speakers



An oval-ported Compact 2x10 with a pair of G10 Creambacks



This custom oval-ported 1x12 has a Celestion Vintage 30 speaker onboard

ROCK 'N' ROLLERS

What is it with vintage-style vibratos? Can't get enough or can't get in tune? You can't rock without the roll(ers), suggests Dave Burrluck

Some years ago I was asked why I played a PRS guitar. "Because it plays and stays in tune," was my reply. Over three decades later, while many makers have been influenced and inspired by PRS, not all have paid attention. There are a colossal number of guitars that leave factories all over the world that don't play – let alone stay – in tune. Most, but certainly not all, have vibratos often based on designs that date back to the 50s.

Two of my favourites, Fender's offset Jazzmaster/Jaguar type and the good ol' Bigsby, might appear very different, and while in design they are, in function they're very similar. Both are two-piece designs in that, unlike the futuristic Stratocaster vibrato, they have a separate bridge in front of the vibrato mechanism. It means that the Bigsby vibrato tailpiece, in its various styles,

"The main things that affect your vibrato function are friction and geometry"

can crop up in lots of different settings, from a slab solidbody to a full-size jazz archtop. The Fender offset vibrato requires routing a sizable hole under the vibrato assembly, which means it shows up on solid or semi-solid designs. I can't ever remember seeing one on an archtop... although I'm sure some mad modder has had a go.

And yet both styles have another commonality: tuning stability issues. For the at-home player, or even home recordist, some basic TLC will usually cure those. But for the gigging musician, well, there's no place for failure. Writing



Various tune-o-matic-style bridges, including a pair of roller saddle types in the foreground

about Gretsch's Streamliner G2622T-P90 in my Longtermers article is a case in point. I thought I'd got everything stable, tuning-wise, until I turned up for a hectic band rehearsal where we had to run through a lot of songs in a short time after a long lockdown lay-off. While the Gretsch impressed my bandmates with its style and sound, after going a bit Neil Young in one solo I was so out of tune we had to stop. And I really thought I'd sorted the problem.

Investigation

The main things that affect how well your vibrato will function are friction and geometry. As to the former, you're looking for smooth, friction-free nut and saddle grooves, just as you would with any non-vibrato guitar. Of course, attaching the strings correctly is a must, although with a Bigsby – or indeed an offset vibrato – the

amount the string actually moves at the nut is really small. Locking tuners can help when you're restringing but really aren't necessary: keep wraps around the post to a minimum and it makes sense to lock the string around the post. Obviously, strings need to be stretched properly, too.

If all of that is ship-shape, then the main culprit is invariably the bridge itself, and this is reflected by the different styles that'll accompany your Bigsby. The most common is simply a tune-o-matic style, as with our Gretsch, which slightly rocks forward and back as you depress the vibrato arm then let it go or pull it back. So long as there's no friction at the saddles you should be good to go, but, as I found, the tuning can still drift more than you'd like.

I suspected the problem was that – as well as the bridge rocking – the saddles themselves were moving very slightly when you depress the arm and not quite coming back in the same place when you let the arm go and full string tension is restored. Compare a basic bridge like this (simply stamped B-2) with something like a TonePros AVR-II and you'll see the difference: the saddles are held firmly in place. It's the same with a Gotoh 'Nashville' style that I also had in the bitsbox – there's zero saddle movement. To test my theory, I simply slackened the strings and swapped to the Gotoh bridge, which obviously has the same large (6mm diameter) slot-head posts. Without doing any additional setup chores, the improvement in tuning stability was very noticeable.



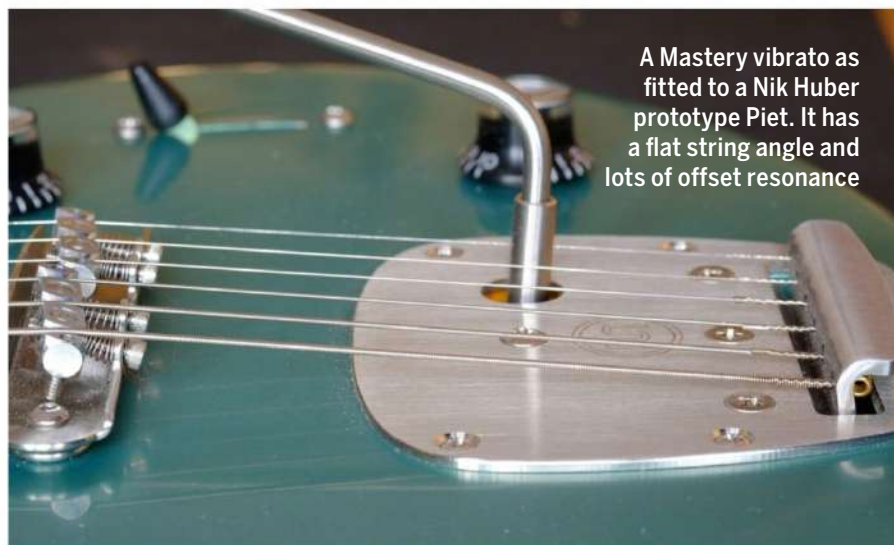
We went with this type for our troublesome Gretsch model



With the new roller saddle bridge, our Gretsch finally plays, and stays, in tune



With the simple mods
sorted, the Gretsch plays
like a different guitar



A Mastery vibrato as fitted to a Nik Huber prototype Piet. It has a flat string angle and lots of offset resonance



Note the steeper back angle and firmer feel with this offset vibrato setup

Get Rolling

Another solution that doesn't mean I've got to renotch and smooth the saddles on the Gotoh bridge is to use a roller saddle tune-o-matic, which should, in theory, be friction-free. There's a very nice one from ABM, but at a cost of around £90 that's far from a cheap fix. As ever, StewMac has a good selection that includes the TonePros TP6R tune-o-matic (approx. £70), which is still costly but can, of course, be locked to its posts. Schaller's Roller Bridge is typically high quality (from around £45) and the rollers sit on threads so you can adjust the individual string spacing.

StewMac's own Golden Age-brand roller saddle tune-o-matic is used to great effect by Gordon Smith on its offset Gatsby, which played beautifully in tune and was very stable when we tested it last year. It's more affordable, too (from £32). Finally, StewMac also offers the chunky Locking Roller bridge (from £32), which is the same bridge that Taylor has long used on its T3/B. As the name implies, each saddle can be locked in place, it's quite modern in style, and the one I have is around 25 per cent heavier than a standard tune-o-matic.

Obviously, some of these bridges are available via other suppliers, not least in the UK. You can try Amazon, too, if you like – that Locking Roller bridge seems to

“A roller saddle tune-o-matic type should, in theory, be friction-free”

be available under various brand names at different price points and quite possibly different specifications. Choices!

I then remembered WD Music UK who has been a Mod Squad saviour countless times, not least with its quick service. The company has its own-brand roller saddle bridge (stamped BH-1993), which you'll also see under different brand names, but it's one I've used before and seems a more suitable candidate at around £25. I ordered one up, adding a couple of pots I needed so I went above £30 threshold and qualified for free postage. It all helps. The following morning I had the new bridge.

It's certainly a tidy part, the alloy rollers are free turning (although I did just add a little light oil) and the saddles themselves needed no shaping or smoothing. Again, I just slackened off the strings and loaded it on. At this stage I didn't fit new strings, I just doubled-checked the string height and set the intonation – again, a breeze. Measured with a gauge, the saddle radius is bang on 305mm (12 inches), which matches

the fingerboard radius. Even though the strings are well stretched, you'll need to do that process again so everything beds in. Finally, the guitar is doing what it should and interestingly that bridge now barely rocks: those rollers are the only things that are moving. The pitch stability is excellent and I really don't understand why Gretsch doesn't fit this bridge as standard. A simple fix that completely changes your experience with a guitar.

Offset style

Elsewhere in this issue we evaluate Vintage's latest distressed offset, the V65V (see page 32 for the review). Whatever you think of its tattered appearance, here's a guitar that came out perfectly in tune, even after shipping in a far from substantial box. So we've switched to an offset vibrato, but we have what appears to be the exact same roller bridge now retrofitted to our Gretsch. There's a theme emerging...

The issue here is not one of friction but geometry. And when I say 'issue', it's actually part of the fun with this style – and as it's a bolt-on it's easy to experiment with. The flatter the angle of the strings from the bridge to the tailpiece, the more you'll hear those resonances as the strings vibrate behind the bridge. This is a key part of the offset sound for some but horrible for others. There's a plinkier, more banjo-like response, too, and there might simply not be enough down pressure to hold the strings in the saddles, especially if you have quite a vigorous right-hand technique. As supplied, the V65V sits very much in that lower back-angle camp.

To increase that angle we need to raise the bridge and increase the neck pitch with a simple neck shim. To tighten things up further you could also increase your string gauge – although that will probably mean some work to widen the nut grooves – but the neat thing about 'tuning' the guitar in this fashion is that you can experiment with a firmer conventional feel or that more resonating, slacker feel in a totally reversible way. **G**



With the neck shimmed and the bridge raised in height, the feel of our Vintage V65V is firmed and the strings stay put in the roller saddles. A very simple fix



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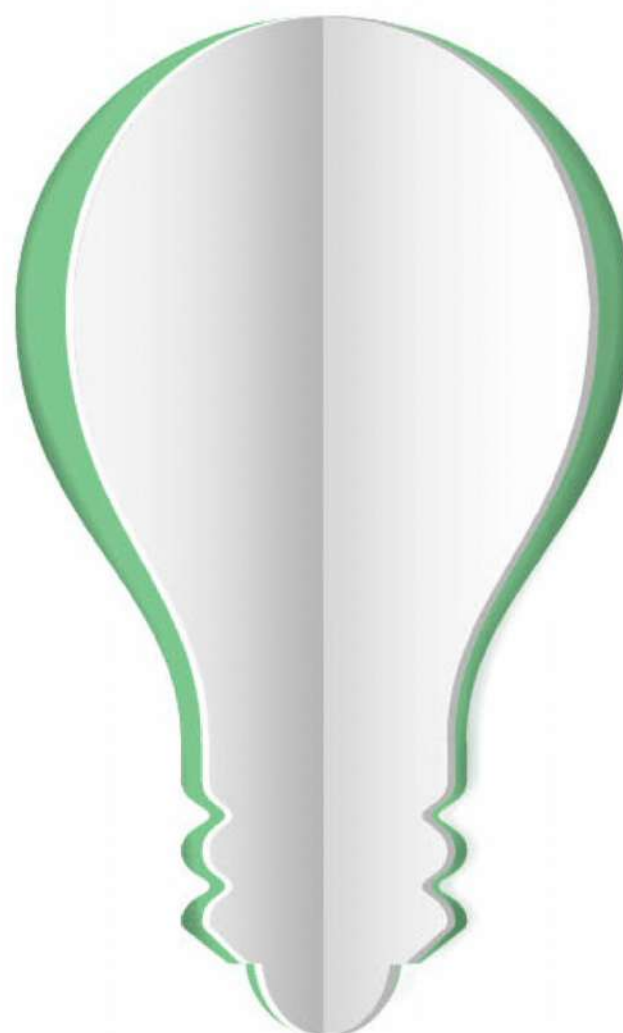
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GAME PLAN

Is a PRS SE Starla a good candidate for a spot of modding?
Why not, reckons Dave Burrluck



When it comes to upgrades, start with the basics and really assess any differences in sound

Q Having tried some of the mods you've written about in The Mod Squad, mainly pickup changes and basic setups, for my next challenge I'm looking to upgrade my relatively new PRS SE Starla Stoptail to see if I can make a good guitar better. What's your advice?

John, via email


A Firstly, I think you've made a good choice. The SE Starla Stoptail is a good lightweight single-cut guitar that is really quite a blank canvas in many ways. It's not trying to be a slab-bodied Les Paul, like a Special, and with its simple dual-humbucker, three-way lever switch, master volume and tone – all mounted on that large scratchplate – pickup swaps and improved wiring, and so on, are all easy to do. We featured it back in The Mod Squad in issues 457 and 458 to try exactly that.

Priced at £649 for 2022 (although you're likely to find it cheaper in-store), the SE Starla is slightly more expensive than the start-up PRS SE, the Standard at £590. Also, for this year there's just a single colour: black with a tortoiseshell scratchplate, although older stock might include Antique White and Frost Blue Metallic from 2020 and Power Blue from 2021.

Many SE owners like to simply replace the obvious parts with higher-grade components, and that's certainly one route to take. The PRS Guitars forum is full of tales of such upgrades and is a great place to engage with other modders. You could also use the SE not only to hone your modding skills but to listen and learn how upgrades affect the sound, and even the playability, of a guitar. For example, the SE Starla ships with 0.009 to 0.042 strings. Try going up a gauge, which may require a little nut work, perhaps a slight truss rod tweak, and then slightly adjusting the intonation. This might seem like basic stuff, but it's one of the foundations from which to learn. Get used to the slightly stiffer feel and then decide if there are any advantages or disadvantages.

Another obvious mod is to swap out the pickups, but that can be quite a costly venture. Before you do that, I'd seriously suggest replacing the existing wiring with top-quality pots, a switch and a tone cap, which won't cost you a lot and allows you to hone your skills. Will it make the guitar sound better? Well, there's another exercise to learn from. Either way, you'd then have a pro-level wiring loom that isn't going to impair any new pickups you might fancy trying down the line.

Modding a new guitar is a big no-no for many, but not all of us want to take a risk on a well-used 'whatever', which might have less obvious issues, not least in the neck and fret departments. There's little doubt that PRS's SE-range models are some of the best budget instruments out there, as the latest SE Silver Sky has proved. Personally, however, I'd strongly suggest you live with the guitar as is for a while and really ask yourself the question: what's wrong with it, what don't you like?

For example, on our loaner SE Starla Stoptail, the appeal of the full-face scratchplate meant that after buying another scratchplate from PRS, I loaded in a set of PRS 58/15 'buckers and a similar circuit with coil-splits on the switched tone control. I added a TonePros bridge and locking studs for the tailpiece so I can just capo then slacken the strings, undo the locking studs and remove the tailpiece with the strings still attached. It's then a simple job to unscrew the original scratchplate and screw the new one in place, which is all a no-solder zone as I'd fitted Radioshop Pickups' volume controls with screw terminals. Just one way of using the style of the guitar to influence your modding – all in a totally reversible manner when PRS asks for it back! 

*That should give you something to think about till our next issue.
In the meantime, if you have any modding questions, or suggestions, drop us a line – The Mod Squad.*

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Huw Price's *Nitty* Gritty

Restoration expert Huw explores why PAFs remain the most revered of all pickups

Patent Applied For Pickups (Part 1)

Back in the 1950s, single-coil pickup noise was a big issue for players and all the major guitar manufacturers were aware of it. Gibson employee Seth Lover had adapted a well-proven humbucking circuit for the power supply choke in his GA-90 amp design and realised the same idea could be used to make a humbucking pickup. Ted McCarty gave Seth the go-ahead in 1954, and by the following year he had a working prototype with a plain cover and flat slugs.

Seth considered P-90-style adjustable polepieces unnecessary but relented when Gibson's marketing team argued it would give them a good selling point. Others were working on noise-free pickups, too, with Les Paul's guitar tech, Tom Doyle, reporting Les using a hum-cancelling dummy coil in the 1940s and winding his own stacked humbuckers. Meanwhile, in Cairo, Illinois, Ray Butts was developing a humbucker that would become the Gretsch Filter'Tron.

The first Gibson humbuckers appeared on steel guitars in 1956, but the PAF and Filter'Tron were officially launched at the 1957 Summer NAMM Show. They weren't actually the first humbucking pickups, however. Armond Knoblauch devised a stacked humbucking pickup for Baldwin electric pianos in 1938, and Clarence Russell received a patent for a double-coil horseshoe pickup in 1939. Vega also used a similar design in the late 1930s.

The patents Seth Lover and Ray Butts applied for were eventually granted on the basis of their adjacent coil arrangement. Ray applied for his on 22 January 1957, while Seth Lover filed on 22 June 1955. Seth's patent – No 2,896,491 – was eventually issued on 28 July 1959, but Ray received his a month earlier. While waiting for a patent number, Gibson attached 'Patent Applied For' water slide decals on the baseplates on all but the earliest examples – and thus the PAF nickname was born.

This decal lasted until late 1962, long after the patent had been granted. When Gibson eventually began applying 'Patent Number' decals, the number actually referred to the patent for Les Paul's trapeze tailpiece. In brief, Patent Number pickups had shorter magnets and more closely matched coils, but during the transition period PAFs and Patent Number pickups sometimes ended up with incorrect decals.

Since the 1950s, the vast majority of humbucking pickups have been configured just like PAF and Filter'Tron units. However, the humbuckers that Gibson made between 1956 and around 1962 have a very specific set of features, materials

The PAF decal lasted until late 1962, long after the patent had been granted

and manufacturing anomalies that set them apart from their contemporaries. To explain what makes PAFs so different, we need to analyse the constituent parts and their complex interaction.

Bobbin Types

PAF coils are wound onto plastic bobbins moulded from cellulose acetate butyrate (CAB). Each PAF has two bobbins, with non-adjustable steel slugs in one and fillister head screws in the other. These bobbins were originally black, but cream coloured bobbins started appearing in early 1959 due to supply issues.

Since all PAF pickups were fitted with metal covers, guitar players only became aware of the issue when removing covers became fashionable. PAFs with mixed black and cream bobbins are called 'zebras' and those with two cream coils are known variously as 'double white', 'double cream' and 'full cream'. Cream bobbins lasted until late 1960 and double whites are the rarest and most collectable PAFs of them all. It has been suggested that double whites sound hotter than other PAFs, but in the unlikely event that's actually true, the bobbin colour itself has no effect on the output.

M-69 pickup rings were also moulded from butyrate, and if you're trying to establish whether rings and bobbins are



Gibson's marketing staff wanted screw poles instead of slugs, on one coil of the PAF, as a selling point



In pride of place on an original 'Burst, such as the one above, the PAF is a tonal touchstone that powered landmark recordings by Clapton, Free and other celebrated acts

1. The round-shouldered look of the covers of original PAFs has been something pickup makers have sought to emulate more closely as time goes by

2. The product of supply-chain irregularities, some PAFs have a so-called 'double white' bobbin configuration

The absence of potting allows PAFs to behave a bit like mics and capture more of a guitar's acoustic qualities

butyrate, you can try the 'scratch and sniff' test if you're feeling brave. Why brave? Because the real thing has an unmistakable aroma of vomit...

On The Wire

Gibson used AWG 42 wire insulated with a plain enamel coating. The insulation layer's thickness has a bearing on the size of the coil and the length of wire needed for any given number of turns. A thicker coating results in fatter coils with a greater length of wire and therefore a higher DC resistance (DCR).

The company also chose Geo-Stevens, Meteor and Leeson winding machines that were most likely designed for transformer manufacture but later adapted for pickup making. Each of these machines produced coils with slightly different shapes, sizes and tightness. Consequently, coils wound on these machines all sound slightly different. It is also known that Gibson's pickup makers didn't use an auto-stop, so coils were wound until the bobbin looked full and placed in a container for

later assembly. These inconsistencies in the winding process were compounded when slug and screw coils were paired up randomly. Any PAF could end up with coils wound on various machines that were closely matched, miles apart or anywhere in between. This partly explains why vintage PAFs vary from around 7kohms to 9k in terms of DC resistance and have such a wide spectrum of tonal characteristics.

Pre-CBS Fender pickups were famously 'hand wound', with a randomly 'scattered' wire distribution that equates to a clearer and brighter tone. For vintage-accurate single-coil tone, this is regarded as preferable to the uniformity that typifies machine-wound coils. But PAFs also tend to sound very clear and bright, and the coils don't have a machine-wound appearance. There are a couple of reasons for this. The coil's 'start wire' was soldered to a thicker leadout wire that was fed through the bottom of the bobbin. This thicker wire was wrapped around the bobbin then taped down, and it would disrupt the winding to cause unevenness in the coil. In addition, Gibson's heavily used machines weren't actually designed for wrapping such thin wire, so there was always some unevenness in the wraps. As a result, PAF coils ended up having scatter-wound characteristics despite being machine-wound.

Another key factor is that Gibson didn't wax pot pickup coils during the PAF era. Instead, the coils were simply wrapped with tape before the covers were attached. This absence of potting allows PAFs to behave a bit like microphones and capture more of a guitar's acoustic qualities. They also have an extra layer of 'air' frequencies that provides added transparency and harmonic complexity, but at high gain and volume some PAFs do squeal.

Magnetic Personalities

Although Gibson company records reveal it has always ordered rough cast Alnico II, Gibson's own analysis of vintage magnets revealed a higher incidence of Alnico III in its small sample batch. It has also been suggested that Alnico III was most common in 1957 and 1958, with Alnico II and V showing up more often from 1959 to the early 1960s. Whatever the grade, Gibson called this the M55 magnet.

While P-90s have two magnets, PAFs only have one and they're not identical. P-90 magnets need to make good physical contact with the central steel keeper bar, so they're only ground flat on one side. Some of the very early PAFs had P-90 magnets, but Gibson began grinding both sides flat for a snug fit with the slugs and the keeper bar under the screw coil. Even so, P-90





The output of PAFs can vary widely – these examples on Bernie Marsden's 'Beast' are pretty hot and aggressive

The earliest PAF units had brushed stainless-steel covers, but these were soon changed to a nickel-silver material

magnets have occasionally been seen in PAFs throughout the vintage era.

In terms of size, P-90 and PAF magnets were initially 2½ inches by ½-inch by ⅛-inch, but during late 1959 Gibson began using shorter 2 5/16-inch magnets designated the M56. Magnets can be oriented or unoriented, and the latter provides a weaker magnetic field. Alnico II, III and IV magnets tended to be unoriented, and while Alnico V came in both forms, unoriented was more common before 1960.

John Grundy of ThroBak Pickups maintains that Gibson batch-charged magnets in-house and this resulted in magnets that were unevenly charged and

less stable. Complicating matters further for would-be PAF replica builders, the Alnico grades of today aren't necessarily the same as they were in the 1950s – irrespective of the numbers.

Metal Magic

The metal parts used in PAF construction include the baseplate, slugs, pole screws, keeper bar, bobbin screws and cover. Most serious PAF replica makers agree that some of these parts influence PAF tone. The baseplates were formed from German silver and the bobbin screws were (usually) brass, so those parts are non-magnetic and have no sonic effect.

In contrast, the screws, slugs and keeper bar are all steel, and analysis by Electric City Pickups, ThroBak and other pickup makers has revealed that the steel Gibson used had a very low carbon content with a correspondingly sweet and rounded tone. PAF-style pickups made with higher carbon content steel parts can sound brighter and harsher.

The earliest PAF units had brushed stainless-steel covers, but these were soon changed to a nickel-silver material and they have distinctive corners and dimples around the screw holes. Seth Lover intended PAF covers to be as sonically transparent as possible, so they're quite thin and have just a very slight softening effect on the upper midrange.

The covers were nickel-plated without a copper layer underneath. The gold plating was done straight over the nickel plating, which means the gold often wears off to expose the nickel. You will generally find that gold-plated vintage parts are cheaper than their nickel-plated equivalents. This gives you the option of buying gold hardware and rubbing the gold off with a Brasso pad.

Speaking of which, we've just scratched the surface of PAF pickups this month, so check in next issue when we'll be talking tone and discussing how to make your PAF replicas sound more like the real thing. **G**

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Rod Brakes' Classic Gear

These Deluxe semi-hollow electrics exhibited the full artistry of Roger Rossmeisl

Rickenbacker 360/365/370/375 Capris

Appearing in 1958, Rickenbacker's Capri series of semi-hollowbody electrics comprises short- and long-scale models. Both follow the 300 series of model number designation. In the short-scale camp we have the 310, 315, 320 and 325; and in the long-scale camp we have the 330, 335, 340 and 345, along with the 360, 365, 370 and 375. Respectively, that's three styles of Rick: short-scale, standard long-scale, and Deluxe long-scale.

Each sequence of four ascending model numbers in each style denotes the guitars' essential specs, in order as follows: two pickups, no vibrato; two pickups with vibrato; three pickups, no vibrato; and three pickups with vibrato. Hence, for example, a 325 has three pickups and a vibrato, a 330 has two pickups and no vibrato, and a 365 has two pickups and a vibrato.

This time around, we're taking a look at the Deluxe long-scale models 360, 365, 370 and 375. In this line of guitars, designer Roger Rossmeisl was able to apply his full artistry to the iconic Rickenbacker Capri. Notable features include large triangular fretboard markers along with body and neck binding (the standard long-scale models 330, 335, 340 and 345 have dot markers and are unbound). Larger-bodied, single-cutaway equivalents of both standard and Deluxe lines were also developed in 1958 (models 330F to 375F).

Within months of long-scale Capris being released in 1958, the controls changed from two switches (pickup selector and tone) and two knobs (volume and tone) to the more

familiar layout of one pickup selector switch and four knobs comprising independent pickup volume and tone. At the same time, a split-level pickguard was introduced.

A smaller fifth 'blend' knob was added in 1961 that further expanded the choice of available sound following the introduction of the Rick-O-Sound stereo jack on Deluxe models 360, 365, 370 and 375 the previous year. Though many guitarists continued to plug in to the mono jack exclusively, the stereo Rick-O-Sound feature remains a standard appointment to this day.

1961 was a big year for the long-scale double-cutaway Capris. A second truss rod was added and the body depth thinned from two to one-and-a-half inches.

Notable features include large triangular fretboard markers, along with body and neck binding

Simultaneously, the horns and headstock were widened, and the instruments' waist was lowered. This iconic design soon helped define Rickenbacker as one of the world's leading electric guitar builders. While 330, 335, 340 and 345 models retained this body shape, in 1964 the Deluxe 360, 365, 370 and 375 models were revamped to include a rounded top. Meanwhile, soundhole binding appeared along with fancy chequerboard back binding a couple of months later. Deluxe models continued to be available on special order in the early 60s flat/bound top style and are denoted by an 'OS' suffix, meaning 'Old Style'.

Standard finishes included a natural option known as Mapleglo and Fireglo – Rickenbacker's famous cherry red sunburst that superseded earlier two-tone brown sunbursts in 1959. Opaque colour options were introduced throughout the latter part of the 60s and included Jetglo (black), Azureglo and Burgundyglo.

In 1970, 24-fret fingerboards became standard, while the most significant change yet in terms of sound occurred when the classic 'toaster' lower-output single coils were replaced by fuller-sounding Hi-gain single-coil pickups. **G**

The Evolution of the Rickenbacker Capri models

Spring 1958

21 frets; 2" depth; 'toaster' pickups; single-layer pickguard; 2x cooker knobs; 2x switches

Summer 1958

Split level pickguard; 4x cooker knobs; 1x switch; natural and two-tone brown finishes

Late 1958

Autumnglo(w) with brown sunburst finish

Early 1959

Fireglo(w) with cherry red sunburst finish

1960

Kauffman Vib-Rola replaced by Ac'cent vibratos; Rick-O-Sound jack

1961

Large horns; lower waist; 1½" depth; wider headstock; blend knob; dual truss rods

1964

Unbound rounded tops; chequerboard back binding; bound soundhole; KK knobs

Late 60s

New finishes: Jetglo (1966); Azureglo (1967); Burgundyglo (1968)

1970

24 frets; Hi-gain pickups

2022

300 Series 360 and W Series 360W models available



This 360 features a rounded top as seen from '64 and a cherry sunburst Fireglo finish. Note the smaller blend knob

1959 Rickenbacker 365 Capri

1. SERIAL NUMBER

First digit (2) denotes number of pickups, followed by V (vibrato), then three digits (production number)

2. BODY

Two-inch depth; unbound 6 1/8-inch slash soundhole; solid glued-on back; non-contoured edges; vibrato recess; bound top and back; Autumn-glo sunburst finish front and back

3. NECK

Glued-on; 24 3/4-inch scale; three-piece (maple/walnut/maple) with walnut headstock sides; 21 frets; bound rosewood fretboard with large triangular markers; shaded finish

4. HARDWARE

Kauffman Vib-Rola; Kluson Deluxe tuners; adjustable bridge with six adjustable saddles

5. PLASTICS

Split-level gold lucite pickguard; gold lucite truss rod cover with black Rickenbacker logo; four 'cooker' knobs

6. ELECTRONICS

Dual 'toaster' single-coil pickups; three-way pickup selector switch; independent pickup volume and tone pots; side-mounted standard mono output jack

Guitarist would like to thank Martin Kelly and Paul Kelly, creators of *Rickenbacker Guitars: Out Of The Frying Pan Into The Fireglo* (Phantom Books) <https://phantombooks.com>



David Davidson's *Vintage Icons*

Beginning life in '58, this ultra-rare solidbody finally left the factory some five years later

1963 Gibson Explorer



Original Explorers from the late 50s feature gold-plated hardware whereas this '63 model sports period-correct nickel-plated hardware

This is a 1958/1963 Gibson Explorer. I've just come on the heels of delivering Big Ed [a 1958 Gibson Explorer] to Gibson. I delivered it by hand. [Edison] 'Big Ed' Thompson was a well-known blues guitarist. In 1958, he and his brother acquired matching guitars – Ed got an Explorer and his brother got a left-handed Flying V, which is one of a kind. I have it here at Well Strung Guitars. When Big Ed died [in 1993], Rick Vito from Fleetwood Mac bought both guitars and kept them together. They went from Rick Vito to a guy I know, and I bought them as a pair about four and a half years ago. They've always stayed together, and I had a deal in place to sell them to a client who wound up only being able to take the V. Meanwhile, Gibson was waiting in the wings, and they bought the Big Ed Explorer. They flew me out last week to deliver the guitar by hand. It was next to me in a seat all the way there.

"While I was in Tennessee, I picked up this Explorer of mine, which I bought from Alan Rogan [guitar tech of Pete Townshend] when he was still alive. It left the factory in 1963 with a 1958 serial number – an '8' prefix followed by four digits. This, too, is a pretty amazing guitar. It's 100 per cent original and has never been compromised in any way.

"Gibson's late-50s 'modernistic' guitars comprised the Futura, the Flying V and the Moderne. But the Moderne never made its way out to the public; at least I have no reason to believe one exists. The Futura became the Explorer. It had a narrower waist and they expanded it, while the original split-headstock design was changed to the 'hockey stick' profile we see here. Gibson released the Explorer and

Flying V models in '58, but they had trouble selling them and so they were abandoned by the following year. Later on, they started assembling what they had left just to get rid of them. They made 19 Explorers in '58 and a few in '59. Then in '63 there were less than a couple dozen more put together, mostly with '58 serial numbers. Gibson don't have concrete records of these early 60s Explorers, but it appears they made 22. The Flying V was formally reintroduced in the late 60s, but the Explorer didn't reappear until the mid-70s.

"The biggest differences between the original run of late-50s and these early 60s Explorers are that most of the later guitars no longer have gold-plated hardware. And they

"An Explorer doesn't sound like any other guitar... They're thick-and chunky-sounding"

did away with the six separate tuners in place of specially made six-on-a-strip tuners that don't fit any other guitar. People might think, 'That's probably a B-25-12 [Gibson 12-string flat-top] set,' but it's not. Unfortunately, it was slightly oversized, so they ended up having to grind the end off so it wouldn't hang over the edge of the headstock.

"They also moved the end strap button upwards away from the jack plate, which makes it a little more balanced. Unlike the Flying V, the Explorers aren't very light guitars; they're generally around the 8.5lb area. It's a much more substantial piece of wood. The neck profile of this guitar is a typical chunky '58 Gibson profile, and it's

got the smaller frets [larger frets appeared in 1959]. Like the late-50s guitars, this has a korina body.

"So, late-50s guitars have gold-plated hardware, but when Gibson got around to getting rid of the rest of the bodies and necks and shipping these guitars out, they used the cheapest components. They no longer used the [Kluson] Deluxe tuners; they used the standard strip tuners with white plastic kidney bean buttons like you see on a Les Paul Junior. Interestingly, the pickguard has one less screw in the pickguard. It's a three-layer white/black/white plastic 'guard. Also, it has a white switch tip, rather than an antiqued switch tip. Like other Gibsons of the era it has the metal cap 'reflector' knobs and nickel-plated hardware with a nylon bridge saddle. Everything else aside from the body and neck is typically '63. The pots are dated to '63 and there are no broken solder joints anywhere in the guitar.

"It's got patent number sticker pickups that have a very biting sound. It's funny because there were PAF pickups in Big Ed, but this Explorer sounds equally as good. The bridge pickup in Big Ed was maybe a little hotter. This guitar sounds absolutely amazing when it's plugged in. To me, an Explorer doesn't sound like any other guitar. They don't sound like Les Pauls. It's somewhat like a Flying V, but it has more bottom-end. They're thick- and chunky-sounding. I think that's why a lot of metal players love them. Sure, they look funky, but they also sound deep and rich." **[RB]**

Vintage guitar veteran David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York
www.wellstrungguitars.com / info@wellstrungguitars.com / 001 (516) 221-0563

Assembled in 1963, this
korina-body Explorer
began life in 1958



PHOTOS BY PAIGE DAVIDSON

Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks

Albert Collins brought flurries to economical phrasing with great effect

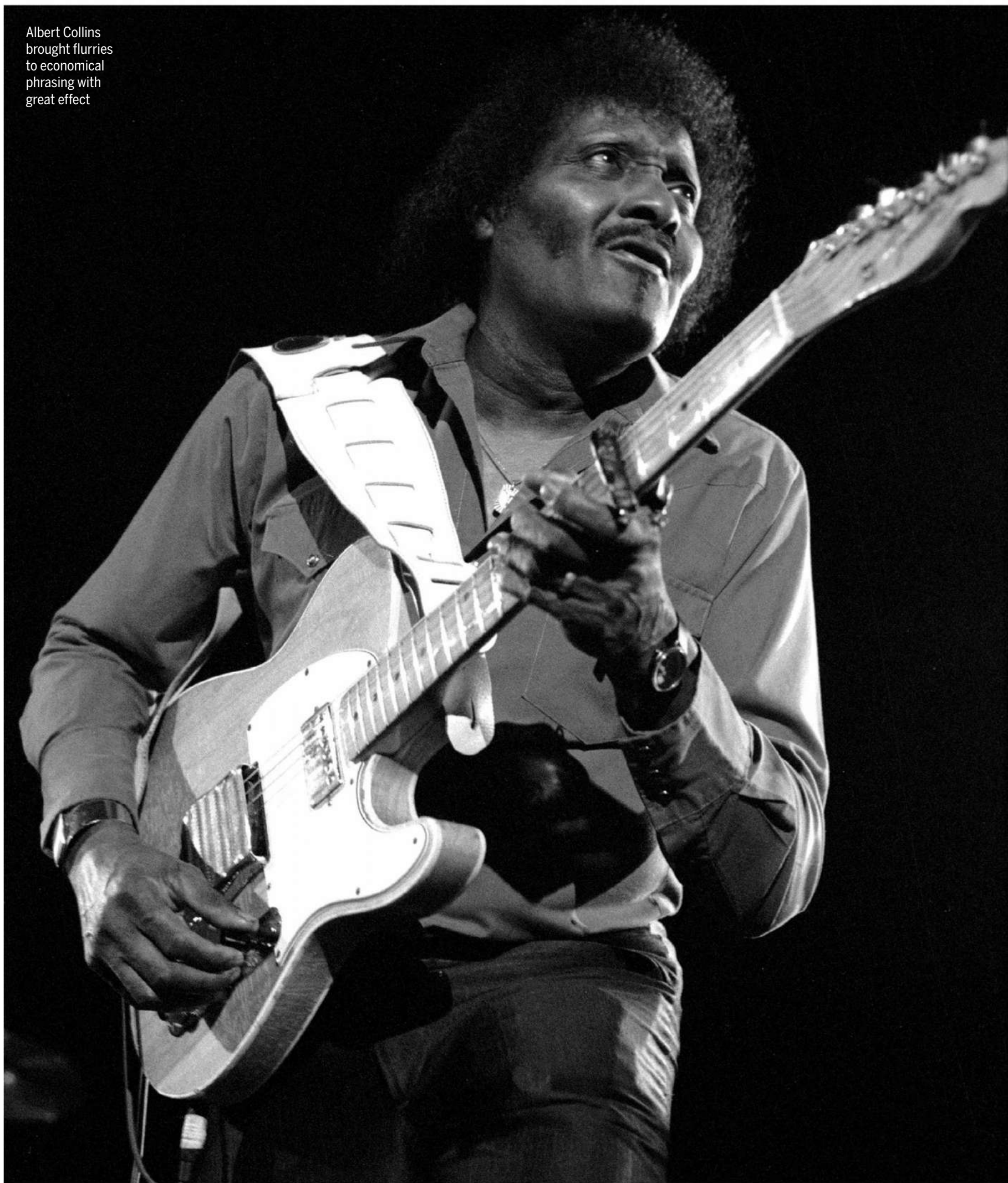


PHOTO BY TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES



Keep It Simple (Part 1)

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Knaggs Choptank & Vox AC15 C1
Difficulty ★★★★★ | 10 mins per example

WE'VE ALL HEARD THE 'LESS IS MORE' ADAGE... I'm not sure that's exactly what I'm saying in this month's Headlines, but I am certainly looking to make more with less. The physical experience of playing can sometimes deceive us, even though we can hear what we're playing (on most gigs, I would hope!). Recording and listening back is something I've recommended quite a few times in these pages – and here's another situation where listening back without a guitar in your hands might help you develop the sort of style you hope to hear when you pick one up.

Once we've achieved a certain amount of fluency and expertise, it can be hard to

think and feel as a listener outside of the world of scales, patterns and runs. This isn't because we're desperate to show off our chops necessarily, but out of a sense of duty to make something happen and keep it interesting. Time also goes by more slowly when we're soloing, especially when nervous or unsure, so it's always worth listening back with the pressure off. I've found this a good way to evaluate details such as vibrato and bends, too.

In more practical terms, I'm deliberately limiting what I do here to shape 1 of the C minor pentatonic, usually with any E_b pushed or pulled slightly sharp, as this is quite a 'major' 12-bar progression. I'm

also resisting any flash stuff with not too many runs quicker than an eighth note/quaver. Hopefully, this contributes a bit more excitement to those little moments where it does happen. I've gone with four separate phrases, rather than a whole solo, including an alternative first phrase inspired by the bass part.

Hope you enjoy and see you in for Part 2 next issue when I'll be going for something more complex... **G**



Richard Barrett's album, *Colours* (complete with backing tracks), is available now from www.richardbarrettguitar.com

Example 1

TAKING A DELIBERATELY MINIMALIST APPROACH, with long held bends between some staccato accents, this is one of two passes I took at a 'first phrase'. Sometimes taking a sparse approach such as this can be more attention-grabbing than a flurry of notes, especially if there's been a big build up – and you're good and loud! You'll want to be confident and precise about bends and pitching. We're talking about the right kind of attention here.

Example 1 musical notation. It shows a 12-bar progression in 4/4 time, tempo 106. The notation includes a treble clef and a guitar staff with fret numbers (8, 11, 10, 12) and bends (PB, BD, BU). The bass staff shows the corresponding fret numbers (8, 11, 10, 12). The notation is minimalist, focusing on long held bends and staccato accents.

Example 2

IN THIS SECOND PHRASE, things are a bit more regular and rhythmic; we want to feel like this is going somewhere, after all. However, after the little rapid skip from E_b to C in bar 3, I'm just holding the root before leaving a bar or so of space before the next phrase, in this case Example 3. I don't generally demonstrate leaving space (that would make this job easy, wouldn't it?), but this seemed like a good time to 'take a breath'.

Example 2 musical notation. It shows a 12-bar progression in 4/4 time, tempo 106. The notation includes a treble clef and a guitar staff with fret numbers (10, 8, 10, 8, 10, 12, 8, 10, 8, 10, 10) and bends (PB, BD, BU). The bass staff shows the corresponding fret numbers (10, 8, 10, 8, 10, 12, 8, 10, 8, 10, 10). The notation is more rhythmic and regular than Example 1, with staccato accents and long held bends.

Example 3

THE D AT THE BEGINNING OF BAR 1 is, of course, from outside the C minor pentatonic, but it's such a good fit over the G that it was impossible to resist. Pretty quickly, I'm back to the E \flat on the 11th fret, which is pushed slightly sharp. You may notice, however, that I needn't have done so, as E \flat is the dominant 7th of the F chord, which happens here. I still like the 'blues-bend' vibe of it, though.

Example 4

THE PREVIOUS THREE EXAMPLES can be put together to make a solo, but here is an alternative take over the first four bars. I've gone with another simple melody inspired by the bass line and lifted directly from the C minor pentatonic. For a flamboyant touch, I've introduced a slide down the bottom E and really dug in on those low notes. You could easily go into Example 2 here without it sounding edited together.

Hear It Here

ALBERT KING

THE DEFINITIVE ALBERT KING



Thanks to this being a compilation, there is ample opportunity to check out a variety of backing bands and styles, including a funky 1974 version of *Crosscut Saw*. Elsewhere, check out his phrasing over the very major sounding I-IV-V progressions on *Don't Throw Your Love On Me So Strong*, *The Sky Is Crying* and *I'll Play the Blues For You (Pt 1)*, a minor blues that features a more modern production, but the same principles apply.

ALBERT COLLINS

TRUCKIN' WITH ALBERT COLLINS



Recorded at the tail end of the 60s, it's interesting to hear Albert Collins' surprisingly driven tone and confident rhythmic phrasing, leaving lots of spaces. Like Albert King, the guitar is not in standard tuning, but this leads to some interesting phrases that are still perfectly possible in regular EADGBE. Check out the major blues of *Frosty*, the economical phrasing with surprising flurries in *Thaw Out*, and finally the major blues shuffle of *Snow-Cone II*.

LONNIE MACK

GLAD I'M IN THE BAND



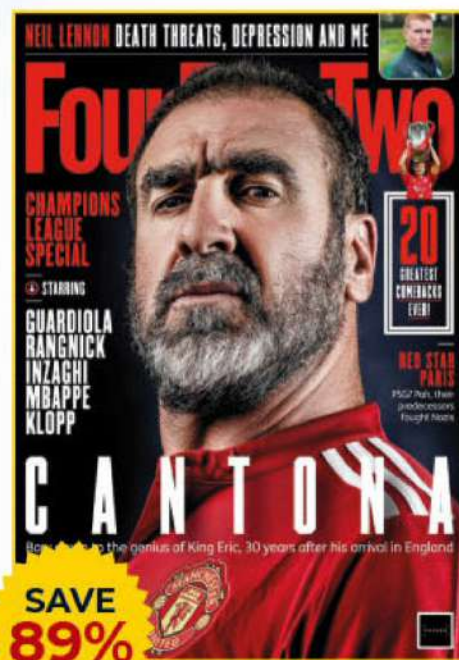
On this 1969 album you will soon hear that Lonnie Mack certainly knew how to get the most out of the pentatonic and was comfortable over major chords. Hear his excellent phrasing on *Save Your Money*, not running up and down scales but managing to come up with some memorable phrases. Things get a little more heated on *Memphis* and *Too Much Trouble*, but there are still plenty of ideas here that are well worth borrowing.



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