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SHINEDOWN

BRENT SMITH AND ZACH MYERS TALK EXCLUSIVELY TO GI



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WELCOME TO ISSUE

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WELCOME TO GUITAR INTERACTIVE ISSUE 113...

Editor
// Jonathan Graham

With more #1 rock radio hits than almost any band this millennium and a reputation for selling out arenas across the globe, Shinedown could easily coast on their successes. But as frontman Brent Smith tells us, “We’re always waiting for something

to kick us in the ass. We can’t lie back too much and enjoy the success.” Fresh off a triumphant return to Download Festival—and ahead of a special Smith & Myers acoustic show in the UK—Brent and guitarist Zach Myers sit down with Guitar Interactive to discuss what keeps them fired up, the stories behind brand new tracks like “365,” “Dance Kid Dance,” and “Killing Fields,” and why staying connected to their fans will always be the band’s top priority.

Also in this issue, we catch up with Wisconsin’s own Jared James Nichols—a towering presence on today’s blues-rock scene, known as much for his electrifying live shows as his unmistakable guitar skills. As he sets out on another major UK tour (with a few surprises promised along the way), Jared talks to us about the secrets behind that mysterious new Gibson, fatherhood, and his unrelenting passion for BLUESPOWER!.

Plus, we’ve packed this issue with the latest guitars, amps, pedals, and accessories making waves right now. Whether you’re a guitar veteran or just getting started, there’s plenty here to spark some six-string inspiration.

We hope you enjoy.

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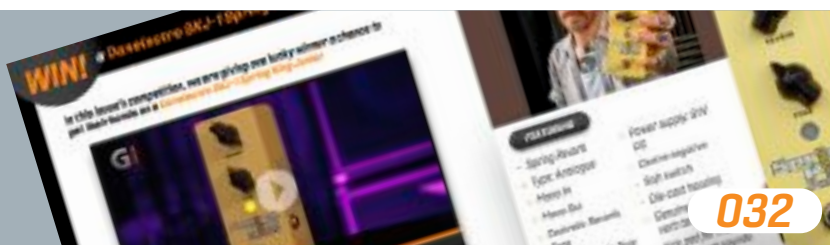
The Wisconsin-born Bluesman reveals all about that mysterious new Gibson he's been playing, fatherhood—and a whole lot of BLUESPOWER!



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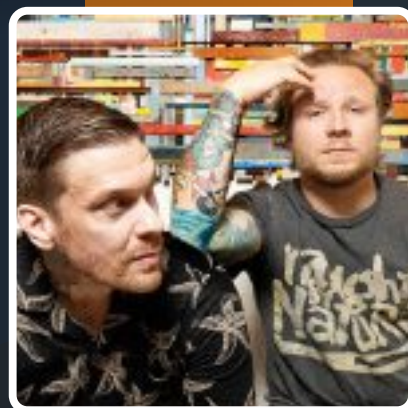
When you've sold millions of albums, notched more #1 rock radio hits than almost any other band this millennium, and sold out more arenas than there are countries, you might think Shinedown would be content to sit back and coast on their achievements. But that's never been their style. As Brent Smith puts it, "We're always waiting for something to kick us in the ass. We can't lie back too much and enjoy the success." For Brent, Zach Myers, and the rest of the band, it's not about trophies or charts—it's about staying connected to the fans. That's always been the priority, and the quality of their latest tracks—"365," "Dance Kid Dance," and July's "Killing Fields"—proves it.

Fresh from a triumphant return to the Download Festival stage and just ahead of a rare UK Smith & Myers acoustic show, Guitar Interactive's Jonathan Graham caught up with Brent and Zach to talk about what keeps them fired up, the stories behind the new music, and why Shinedown remain as motivated as ever.

Wisconsin-born Jared James Nichols has been one of the most exciting names in the blues-rock scene for over a decade now. With a string of incredible albums under his belt and a guitar tone as big as the man himself—he's a big lad—there's only one thing better than hearing his records, and that's catching him performing live.

As he sets out on another major UK tour at the end of the year, with some promised surprises in store, Guitar Interactive sits down with JJN to talk about that mysterious new Gibson he's been playing, fatherhood, and a whole lot of BLUESPOWER!

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SMITH & MYERS



When you've sold millions of albums, notched more #1 rock radio hits than almost any other band this millennium, and sold out more arenas than there are countries, you might think Shinedown would be content to sit back and coast on their achievements. But that's never been their style. As Brent Smith puts it, "We're always waiting for something to kick us in the ass. We can't lie back too much and enjoy the success." For Brent, Zach Myers, and the rest of the band, it's not about trophies or charts—it's about staying connected to the fans. That's always been the priority, and the quality of their latest tracks—"365," "Dance Kid Dance," and July's "Killing Fields"—proves it. ▶

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"We're always excited to play," Zach Myers says, sounding closer to a guitarist excited to be heading out on his first tour than a guy with a career's worth of gold records. That's not just a line. If there's a thread that ties the Shinedown story together, it's this insistence on staying connected. There are bands who talk about their fans, and

then there's Shinedown. "I always say we have the greatest job ever," Brent Smith says. "If you're an actor, you make a movie, but you don't get to be in every theater. We get to perform these songs live—some people are hearing them for the first time. My favorite part after Download was seeing people tag us in videos of themselves crying; I reposted all of them from the Shinedown account. Seeing that reaction—'Dammit, Shinedown, you made me cry'—I love that. That's what music does. There were so many great bands that day, so to get that response felt incredible. For us, it's always been about authenticity. We never go into a writing session thinking about awards—we write because



Brent Smith & Zach Myers - Interview

“WE’RE ALWAYS WAITING FOR SOMETHING TO KICK US IN THE ASS. WE CAN’T LIE BACK TOO MUCH AND ENJOY THE SUCCESS.”



we have something to say. Our audience keeps growing, and we take that seriously. We’re never going to phone it in.”

It doesn’t matter how many hits you’ve got—someone’s always ready to ask if you’re still “real.” The joke is, Shinedown hear it too. “Dance Kid Dance,” their recent single, isn’t just another big riff; it’s a shot back at every critic who ever questioned whether this band still knows how to rock.

“Yeah, it was,” Zach Myers grins. “People wondered if we still play rock music. We play all kinds of music. There are always critics, but we love to take the piss out of people—in good fun. ‘Dance Kid Dance’ was written for us because we wanted a song like that with a wicked breakdown. We wanted to play it live.”

That attitude runs through everything Shinedown are doing now. The band have always been unafraid of concepts—those big, sweeping album narratives—but ▶

lately, they're flipping the script. This time around, the rule is: forget the rulebook.

"It's a completely different process," Brent says. "Usually, everything is ready at once—album, artwork, singles. This time, we changed it on purpose. You can only follow a formula for so long, and we did it the same way for seven albums. This one isn't a concept record. The first two songs represent who we are right now. The next two tracks will build on that; it's more a collection, reflecting where we are now. The album should be announced late fall—around November—and, fingers crossed, released March 26th."

Call it creative freedom. Or maybe just

the sound of a band who's done worrying about what's expected.

Something funny happens when you've been around long enough. Suddenly, the songs you wrote as a hungry upstart are connecting with fans who hadn't even started grade school when your debut dropped. Ask Brent Smith how that feels and he gets both nostalgic and blunt.

"I'm not sure we're there yet," he says, when the idea of generational legacy comes up. "I think bands like Deftones, Creed, and especially Limp Bizkit are experiencing that now. Maybe Nickelback, too. In 2028, it'll be the 20th anniversary of The Sound of Madness, and this year ▶



"I WANT TO SEE IF I CAN GET RICK BEATO TO COME OUT OF RETIREMENT AND WRITE ANOTHER SONG WITH US. I REALLY HOPE WE CAN MAKE THAT HAPPEN."

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marks 22 years since *Leave a Whisper*. I honestly forget about that first record sometimes. I haven't listened to it in a while. It was our first, and I think about where I was back then compared to now. There's that classic thing: you have your whole life to make your first record, and if it's successful, only six months to make your second."

This isn't some "glory days" nostalgia. It's more like a reminder that for Shinedown, every year on the road, every crowd, every post-show social media flood is a fresh start.

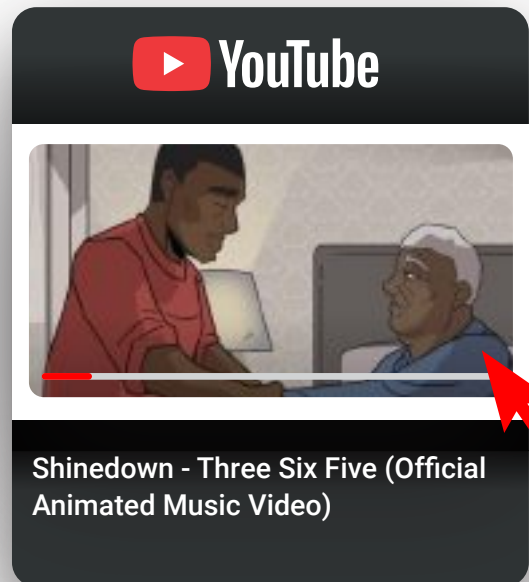
If there's one band that can still make Shinedown feel like kids in the crowd, it's Def Leppard. When the subject of "365" comes up—a track that nods unapologetically to the Sheffield legends—Zach doesn't even bother to play it cool.

"It's not a Rockman, but it's a similar chorus sound," he says, a little sheepish. "We actually played it for Def Leppard recently. I thought we might end up co-writing with them. They said, 'Don't worry.' All of us are huge Def Leppard fans. We just saw them at a festival—played the second night after they played the first. We're hoping to tour with them next year. They

couldn't have been nicer. The four of us even went together to watch their show, which never happens. Joe Elliott came up on stage—amazing. We felt like teenagers again. We posted a video of all of us singing along. As bands go, there aren't many better than Def Leppard.”

One reason Shinedown hasn't slipped into self-parody? They never stop being fans—or students. You see it in the way they talk about working with Rick Beato, the producer and YouTube sage who's quietly become a sort of rock and roll confessor for the band.

“Yeah, a couple of times,” Brent recalls, when the subject of Beato comes up. “He doesn't really write much anymore—he's focused on YouTube these days. But he's a very educated guy, and if you watch his channel, you can tell he knows what he's talking about. That's why he gets so many great guests; people know he'll ask interesting questions. There are always questions artists wish interviewers would ask, and Rick actually does it. He's built a fan-base who loves those stories, including me. The last clip I saw was about the drummer from Counting Crows not wanting to play 'Mr. Jones.' T Bone Burnett brought in someone else to do it. Those stories are great. Our old A&R, Steve Robertson, still



talks to Rick a lot. I just got Rick's new number—I haven't called him yet, but I'd love to. Honestly, I want to see if I can get him to come out of retirement and write another song with us. I really hope we can make that happen.

We did 'Stranger Inside,' 'In Memory,' and he produced 'All I Ever Wanted' on the first album. We also did 'Son of Sam' for the Sound of Madness deluxe edition. We wrote together a few times, but some songs never saw the light of day. The most famous was probably 'Lost in the Crowd' from the first record, which he talked about on his YouTube channel.” ▶

“WE NEVER GO INTO A WRITING SESSION THINKING ABOUT AWARDS—WE WRITE BECAUSE WE HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY.”

Every great band has that moment when they finally stop chasing trends and start sounding like themselves. For Brent, that moment was as much about letting go as it was about holding on.

“My favorite thing about this band, besides what the songs mean to people, is that we have our own voice,” he says. “I’ve never heard anyone say we sound like another band. I can do that with a hundred other bands, but not with us. That’s what I’m most proud of—we’re just Shine-down. When you hear his voice, you know it’s us. When we started, there were so many active rock bands, but we’ve come a long way, and we can cross genres. That’s how we set ourselves apart.

Early on, there was pressure to chase what was hot, so I tried different styles to get the band noticed. But Rob Cavallo helped me find my voice during *The Sound of Madness*. Craig Kallman at Atlantic gave Rob a stack of CDs, and one was *Leave a Whisper*. Rob listened, met with me,



“GREENY WASN’T FOR ME. GUITARS LET YOU KNOW
THINK THAT GUITAR ENDED UP, IN ONE THOUSAND
WHO LOVE

and said, ‘We need to figure out who you really are—stop trying to sound like someone else.’ He gave me the confidence to be myself.”

What happened next was less revelation, more liberation. “It felt like an animal let out of its cage. That was a defining record for us—learning how to really make a record. Rob and Doug McKean (God rest his soul), who engineered a lot of our stuff, always reminded us that it’s about the songs. That’s why they wanted to work with us. And people don’t realize—that record took a year to make, and it was expensive.”



If Brent is the philosopher, Zach is the zen gunslinger. For all the talk about chops and technique, his only real “secret” is refusing to play anyone’s game but his own.

“I’ve always tried to be myself on guitar,” Zach says, matter-of-fact. “In this band, I’m not the lead singer—my voice is the guitar, especially live. On the records, Eric and I trade guitar parts. I make the part my own by playing for the song. ➤

W WHEN THEY’RE FOR YOU. AND—TRUTH BE TOLD—I
 ND PERCENT WITHOUT A DOUBT, WITH THE PERSON
 S IT THE MOST.”



It's never about me—I'm a team player. I'm from Memphis, so there's always a bit of blues in my playing. I'm glad people can recognize my style. Playing for the song is a lost art these days. There are so many talented players online, but having your own voice and writing songs is the most important thing. I don't want to be the fastest—I want to say something with the instrument."

Brent, never shy about giving his band-mate props, jumps in: "He also has to be really diverse live, because our records

have so many layers. He has to figure out how to be three or four people live—playing acoustic and electric, using an EBow, and singing at the same time."

Zach cracks up. "There's a lot going on. People think those guitars are on tracks—they're not. That's all me."

Every few years, some scene gatekeeper gets riled up about backing tracks and authenticity. Shinedown's answer is as practical as it is unpretentious.

“We run string tracks, but that’s about it,” Zach shrugs. “People debate it all the time, but honestly—who cares? Queen did it. If you can’t do the show without tracks, maybe don’t do it. If you stopped our string tracks, the show would sound almost the same—you’d just notice the strings missing. When we make these records, they’re a big piece of art. ‘Second Chance’ needs the orchestra. As for guitars—trust me, I’m playing them live. I wouldn’t bother with three guitars and an EBow on a track. The challenge is fun.”

If you want to know how weirdly wonderful rock stardom can get, ask Brent about the day WWE superstar Kane (Glenn Jacobs) handed him the key to his hometown of Knoxville, Tennessee.

“Yeah, WWE has been great. Kane gave me the key to my hometown of Knoxville, Tennessee!” Brent laughs.

Zach paints the scene: “Kane—the wrestler—is mayor of Knoxville. We surprised Brent with a FaceTime from Glenn Jacobs (Kane). I texted our security guy, ‘I’m go-

ing to ask him something ridiculous.’ He told me not to ask Kane to come out to his theme music, but I did anyway. Kane agreed, so there’s a video online of him coming out to his music—fire and all—giving Brent the key to the city. The key was made by my high school’s wood shop. It was so cool.”

And where do things stand with the pair’s acoustic alter-ego project, Smith & Myers?

“Absolutely. There will be more Smith & Myers,” Brent promises. “Right now, there’s a lot of Shinedown activity, but Smith & Myers will always be a project for us.”

The bottom line is, Shinedown may be arena giants, but they’re allergic to autopilot. For every sold-out show, there’s a story about a fan who got through a bad night because of their music—and that’s what keeps them hungry, humble, and never—ever—phoning it in.

Shinedown’s new single “Killing Fields” is out now.



For more information,
visit shinedown.com

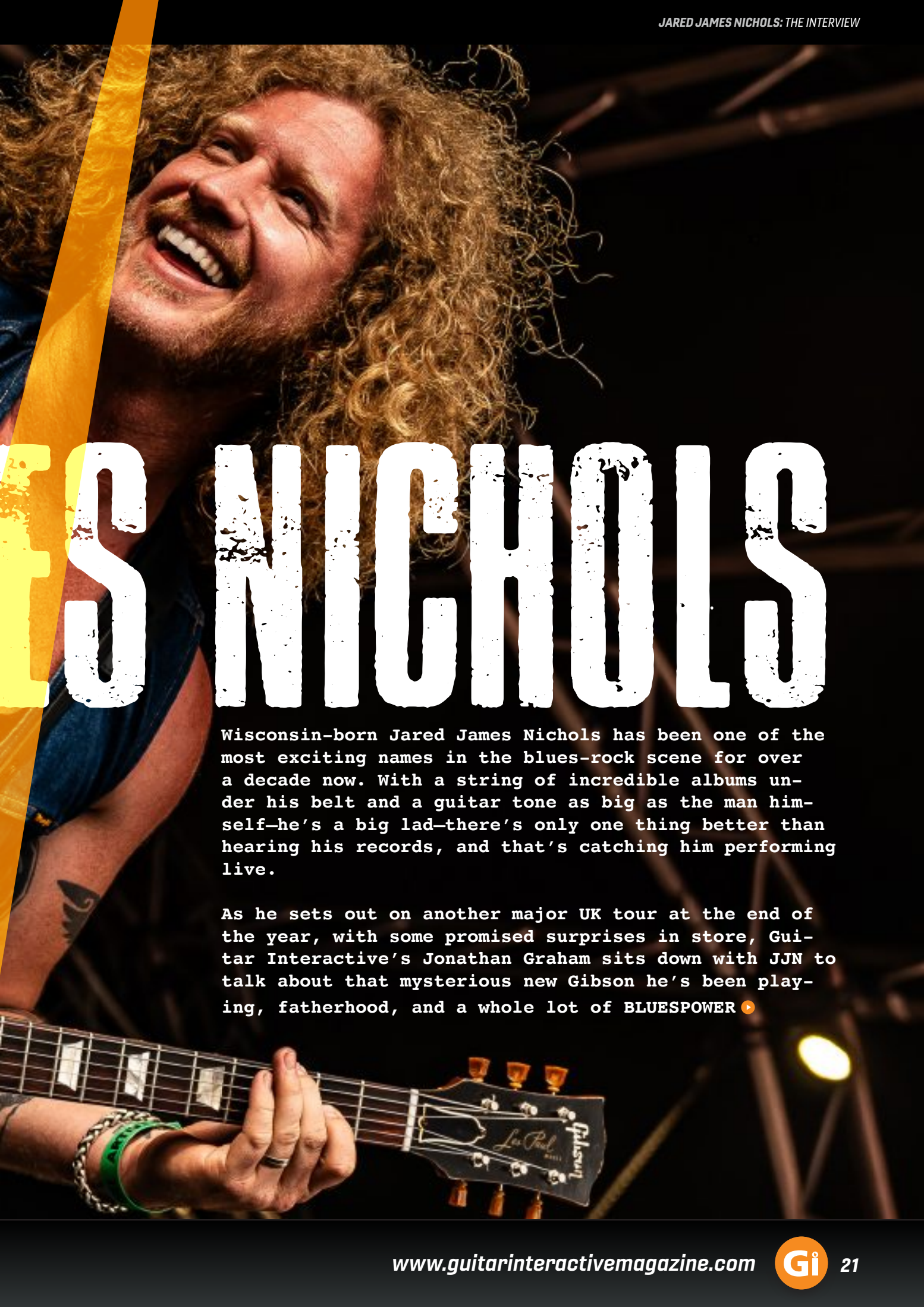


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As he sets out on another major UK tour at the end of the year, with some promised surprises in store, Guitar Interactive's Jonathan Graham sits down with JJN to talk about that mysterious new Gibson he's been playing, fatherhood, and a whole lot of BLUESPOWER ▶

FIRST things first—congratulations. You joked you’ve got “dad tone” now. Did you actually feel your playing change?

Thanks, brother. Yeah—immediately. The second he came out, I was like, “Man, my tone just got way more old school.” I’m literally in the guest bedroom while the baby naps thinking, “I’m a dad, dude. I got dad tone.” It’s funny, but it’s real.

New baby at home, then straight back on the road with Joe Perry—

how are you balancing the two? Has your schedule taken a hit?

In a lot of ways, yeah—but in the best way. It put me in a headspace of, “Okay, everything’s for keeps now.” I remember the first time I got him to sleep by myself—I grabbed a guitar and started playing really quiet, and he shuffled and I’m like, “Stay asleep, stay asleep!” (laughs) My schedule’s changed, but here’s the twist: I used to come home from tour complaining I barely slept. Then last week on the road with Joe, I got six, seven hours a night and felt amazing. That’s dad math for you.

What surprised you most about sharing a stage and a bus with Joe Perry?

The joy. He’s well into his seventies and was so excited to pick up a guitar and play every night. There were moments with slide where he was just going for it and I’m thinking, “Damn, I hope I have that same spark when I’m that age.” That’s the fountain of



“When the old guard—Billy Gibbons, Zakk Wylde, Buddy—look you in the eye and say, ‘We see you. Keep going,’ you go, ‘I’m never stopping.’”



youth—playing. Same thing when I was hanging with Buddy Guy a few weeks ago—he’s almost ninety, pouring cognac and telling me how he broke into Earl Hooker’s place in ‘57 because Earl stole his wah. Sounds like a tall tale, but with those guys it’s always true. And the advice from all of them is the same: don’t stop.

Joe’s like, “I can’t believe I’m still out here doing this.” You get beat up, you feel like the deck’s stacked—but you keep pushing. When the old guard—Billy Gibbons, Zakk Wylde, Buddy—look you in the eye and say, “We see you. Keep going,” you go, “I’m never stopping.”

You’re bringing the show back to the U.K. soon. Where are you headed, and what can people expect?

We’re running and gunning—Glasgow, Manchester, Nottingham, the usual suspects, and a few I’ve never hit before. We wrap in London with a very cool thing tied to the Gibson Garage—announcement soon. It’s 10 shows across 11 days, and I’m coming with a bag of new tricks: new songs, new energy. I can’t wait to unveil it.

Speaking of new songs, you added something new into a set the other night. Could we hear a new album very soon?

Oh yeah! New music will be out by the time I’m in the U.K.—not the whole record, but you’ll have things to spin. The record’s done. I never stopped writing after the last one, and lately we’ve been sprinkling new tunes into the set. The reaction’s been killer. Last album, we cut live in ▶

“Some folks think it’s the ugliest guitar they’ve ever seen. Sit with it, play it, feel it. It’s badass.”

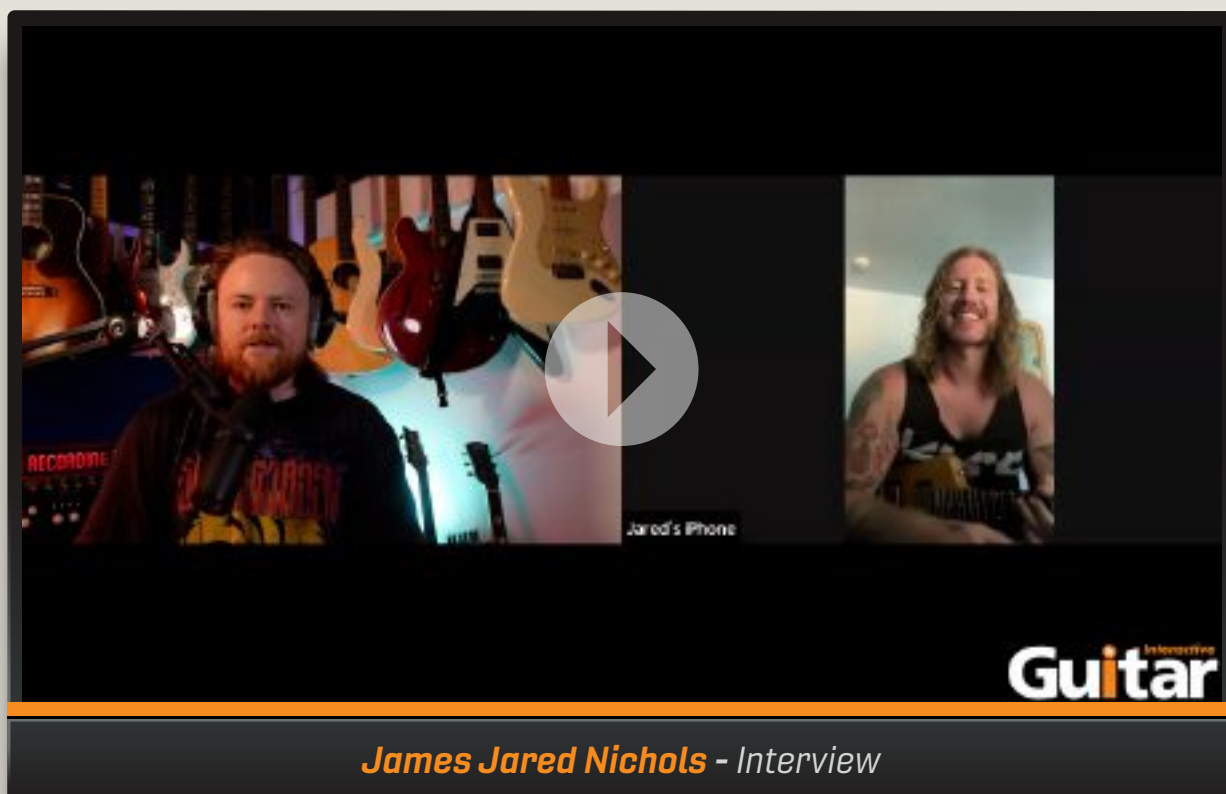
one room, all the energy. Moving forward, it’s that same spirit but with even more focus on songs—hooks and riffs that translate for me and the crowd.

Let’s get to the spaceship on your lap—the Futura. For readers who might now be familiar with the model, what’s the story?

(laughs) Check this out. I’m a Les Paul guy to the bone. But my neighbors Lzzy Hale and Joe Hottinger have a ton of Explorers, so I borrowed one—then a korina one—

and realized the shape just sits right on my 6’5” frame. César at Gibson handed me his own Murphy Lab korina Explorer prototype from 2019. That lit me up. I started looking at photos of the 1957 Futura prototype—like a cracked-out Explorer, funky proportions, split headstock that people mistake for a Dean. If you look up the patent drawings, it’s right there.

Then at the Custom Shop I saw a photo with an Explorer up front and a Futura lurking behind it. They told me it was a ▶





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“I’m obsessing over right-hand articulation—where I hit the string, how I shape the attack.”

light—about seven pounds fully dressed. I went the extra mile on parts: original ‘50s plastics where I could, original Explorer knobs and switch tips, a ‘50s truss-rod cover, period-correct hardware. I could’ve left it stock—it was already gorgeous—but I wanted it to feel like a late-’50s piece that slipped through time. Then I took it on the road and beat on it. Joe Bonamassa saw it and goes, “Damn. Congratulations—you’ve got the only one.”

Did it change how you play?

Totally. A korina body with humbuckers punches. First big chord I hit, it

was like dropping a bigger engine in the car—whoa, I better learn to control this. It made me a little more unhinged in a good way—wilder animal. Some folks think it’s the ugliest guitar they’ve ever seen. Sit with it, play it, feel it. It’s badass.

What are you working on right now with your guitar playing?

prototype they were figuring out. Weeks later, I played a Gibson event and said, “I’ll do it, but I want to buy that guitar.” Lo and behold, they put it together for me. It’s the only completed one out there.

Give us the spec sheet—and what you changed.

One-piece korina body, Brazilian board, brand-new Series II PAFs. It’s insanely

I'm obsessing over right-hand articulation—where I hit the string, how I shape the attack. On the Joe Perry run I had one pedal on the floor: a Tube Screamer. That's it. Joe's techs kept asking, "Where's your board?" I'm like, "I'm not using one. I'm using my ears and my hands." I love some Klon sounds, but the way I use the gain adds white noise. The Screamer doesn't. If I can make it sing clean, when I click the Screamer it's heaven. It's like a voice—from a whisper to a scream.

You mentioned hearing an isolated "Comfortably Numb" solo recently. Did that reinforce the less-is-more approach?

Zakk Wylde sent it to me. We've all heard that solo a million times, but soloed up you hear the touch. That connection is everything. I can play an Axe-Fx through a powered cab and it can sound cool, but per-

sonally? I want that tactile danger of guitar-into-amp. That's the thrill.

In your view, what are the fundamentals of being a great blues-rock guitarist?

First, a voice. Bending, vibrato, touch, feel—that's the blues DNA. As a kid I'd hear Robin Trower or Stevie or Albert King play three notes and it sounded like them. I'd play the same three and it didn't land. You can't fake the time it takes. Second, tone—not some one-true tone, but the palette you own. Commit to it. Third, phrasing. We recycle a lot as guitar players, but great phrasing makes the simplest idea speak thirty different ways. And last, belief—whether it's a slow burn or a heavy riff, you have to own it. That part can't be taught either. You dig until it's yours.

Do you remember the moment it first "clicked" for you onstage?

Totally. My mom used to take me to blues jams. I didn't know anything—my reference for "the blues" was The Moody Blues. (laughs) I went home, did my homework, ▶




Jared James Nichols - Skin 'n Bone
(Official Music Video)

"I want a guitar to feel like a voice. If I can control it from a whisper to a scream with my hands, I'm good. The rest is details—I'm just going to keep doing what the legends told me: don't stop."



discovered SRV, Buddy, Otis Rush, B.B. King. About a year later they called me for a slow blues and suddenly I could say what I wanted. I could do the snappy Stevie licks and feel in control. I was like 16. That feeling is addictive. You keep raising your own bar.

Players hit ruts. What's your practical playbook for getting unstuck?

Five quick hitters. One: Audit your left hand. Can you bend to pitch and hold it? Can you do slow, medium, fast, and crazy vibrato on command? Two: Make the right hand sing. Play the same lick three times and change only pick attack. If it doesn't sound different, keep digging. Three: Play over changes. In a slow blues in C, can you find the root, major third, fifth, flat seventh for the I (C), IV (F), and V (G)? Get your ear and fretboard talking. Four: Flip your tone. If you're swimming in reverb and delay, go dry and clean. If you're always clean, add some hair. Get uncomfortable. Five: Jam with humans. Ten minutes with a drummer beats hours alone. If you truly can't, pick backing tracks that challenge you, not the easy ones. And remember: sometimes the fix is stripping it all back.

You're working very closely with Gibson. Fans loved the story of your vintage Les Paul "Dorothy." Is there any chance of a signature or limited run?

A hundred percent chance. I'm not here to burst bubbles, but there's a lot of cool stuff happening at Gibson weekly. They're not

afraid to make bold guitars right now, and there are things in the pipeline—including Dorothy—that people are going to freak over. There are some slammers on that list.

Dream collabs—past and present. Who are you jumping onstage with?

If we're time-traveling, take me to the late '60s/early '70s U.K.—Cream, Hendrix, Leslie West. On the heavier side, Pantera, classic Ozzy. Modern day, I'd love to go toe-to-toe with Marcus King, hang with Blackberry Smoke, Gov't Mule, and my Dutch friends DeWolff. I just spent a week with Chris Robinson—I'd love to jam with The Black Crowes. And me and Lzzy (Hale) have traded lyrics and jammed—we almost jumped on a couple of shows together, but schedules clashed. It'll happen.

Your sets nod to heroes but you also champion underrated players. Give us a solo—or two—we should study.

Leslie West is criminally under-talked about. Mountain's golden era—late '69 to '72—Climbing!, Nantucket Sleighride, Flowers of Evil—that's some of the sickest blues-rock tone and playing ever recorded. Find the New Year's Eve 1970–71 Fillmore West live recording. It's the best document of West and Mountain I've heard. And Robin Trower—people reduce it to "Strat plus Uni-Vibe equals Hendrix," but there's so much more. The articulation and feel are nuts. The bigger point: slow down and really listen. We rush too much.

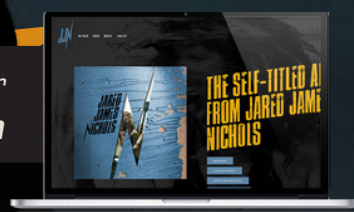
Last one—when you pick up a new guitar these days, what's the number one priority you need it to fulfill?

I want a guitar to feel like a voice. If I can control it from a whisper to a scream with my hands, I'm good. The rest is details—

I'm just going to keep doing what the legends told me: don't stop.



For more information on Jared's new music and tour dates, visit jaredjamesnichols.com



THE COMPETITION

*With each new edition of **Guitar Interactive Magazine** comes the chance of winning a fantastic prize in our free to enter competition.*

YOUR CHANCES TO WIN

YOUR CHANCE TO WIN



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ENTER

Good Luck!

THE REVIEWS

*At **Guitar Interactive**, we pride ourselves on bringing you in-depth reviews and demonstrations for only the best products the world of guitar and audio electronics has to offer.*

If it's in Gi, then it's gear we'd buy! All of our written reviews and breakdowns are accompanied by a detailed video — so you can see and hear for yourself if it's right for you.

GUITARS, AMPS AND EFFECTS

PRODUCT RECOMMENDED
Gi
PRODUCT RECOMMENDED



PR*S* 40th Anniversary Custom 24 Satin Li

To celebrate four decades of the iconic Custom 24, PRS has rolled out a special 40th Anniversary turner. Decked out with all the premium specs you'd expect, from a carved maple top to the all about classic PRS vibes with a stealthy satin finish. Only 500 are being made worldwide, more.

WHEN you think of Paul Reed Smith guitars, you think style, performance, and innovation, and their 40th Anniversary Custom 24 Satin is a perfect example of why they have that well-earned reputation. Limited to just 500 pieces worldwide and available in five finishes, this guitar is equal parts celebration and showpiece.

The first thing you'll notice is the mango top—yes, mango, not the usual flame maple—which

brings its own striking, wavy figuring under a luxurious satin finish. The Cobalt Smokeburst version is especially eye-catching, set off by painted binding that frames the body like a piece of art. Sure, the satin can pick up fingerprints, but honestly, it just means you've been enjoying it.

Up at the headstock, PRS keeps things classic but adds thoughtful upgrades: the new Phase 3 locking tuners have oversized vintage-style ▶



PR*S* 40th Anniversary Custom 24 Satin Limited Edition

imited Edition

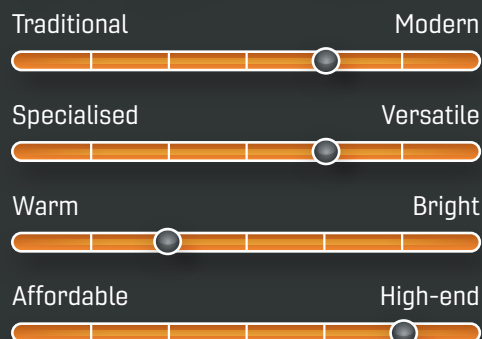
rsary Satin Limited Edition—and it's a real head-
ever-popular Pattern Thin neck, this Custom 24 is
and **Nick Jennison** gets his hands on one to tell us



PRS 40th Anniversary Custom 24 Satin Limited Edition

MSRP: (UK) £5399 | (US) \$5400

The Breakdown



For fans of

- » PRS excellence
- » Anniversary models
- » Satin finishes

For more information, please visit:

prsguitars.com





Yes, there's a premium price tag here, but that's expected for a limited edition flagship with this level of detail and unique appointments.

buttons, open-gear backs, and brass posts that are both good-looking and lightweight. You also get a commemorative 40th anniversary truss rod cover and the PRS pre-factory eagle inlay—a subtle nod to the occasion. The proprietary non-slip nut and the third-generation PRS tremolo system mean tuning stays stable, even with expressive whammy use.

The neck is PRS's wide-thin carve—fast and comfortable, but with a bit more substance than shredder-style necks. It's topped with an ebony fretboard, which feels slick and responds beautifully to bends and vibrato. The 10-inch radius, large frets, and the standard 25-inch PRS scale make this a neck you'll feel at home on straight away. ▶

MOOER

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amp models



3rd Party
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APP  



Effect Module
Stacking



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& 10 metronomes



Built-in digital
tuner



60 second
loop



MOOER
Cloud

The setup from the factory is excellent—low action, buzz-free, and ready to play.

Electronics on this model are all about refinement and versatility. The new DMO (Dynamic, Musical, Open) pickups make their debut here. Built with Alnico II magnets, they deliver vintage warmth with extra clarity and a sparkling top end. The bridge clocks in around 8.5k output, giving you plenty of punch without getting harsh. Whether clean or driven, these pickups are articulate, responsive, and musical. The five-way switch covers all the core PRS tones—full humbucker, single-coil splits, and combinations. While some of the middle positions may seem a bit similar, the included super switch means you can easily tweak things if you want your own custom setup.

Inside, the electronics are top-tier: CTS pots, a large tone capacitor, and a cap-only treble bleed circuit that keeps your highs intact

as you roll off the volume. Everything feels solid and built to last.

Plugged in, the Custom 24 Satin shines across styles. Cleans are lively and full, chords ring with detail, and it holds its own on high-gain settings with tight, controlled low end and plenty of cut. The new DMO pickups respond brilliantly to your touch, making subtle changes in picking and volume instantly audible.

Yes, there's a premium price tag here, but that's expected for a limited edition flagship with this level of detail and unique appointments. For collectors, PRS fans, or anyone looking for a guitar that's genuinely a cut above, the 40th Anniversary Custom 24 Satin is more than just a special release—it's a serious player's instrument that's ready to inspire for years to come.





Manson Meta Series MBM-2H-Sustainiac

When it comes to boundary-pushing guitars, Manson's Meta Series MBM-2H-Sustainiac is a fan of Matt Bellamy's mad scientist approach to sound. This model takes things up a notch with feedback, all wrapped up in a flashy red sparkle finish. **Nick Jennison** dives into this futuristic

WHEN Matt Bellamy puts his name on a guitar, you know to expect something a little bit out of the ordinary. Manson's custom builds for the Muse frontman have long been coveted for their futuristic features and stage-ready flair, but their price tags keep them out of reach for most players. That's what makes the Meta Series MBM-2H Sustainiac so compelling: it

brings Bellamy's signature innovation and playability into a more accessible realm, thanks to a collaboration between Manson Guitar Works and Cort.

The MBM-2H greets you with a dazzling Red Sparkle finish—bold enough to turn heads, but refined enough not to overwhelm. It's a guitar that looks as good under stage lights as it **▶**



Manson Meta Series MBM-2H-Sustainiac Red Sparkle

c Red Sparkle

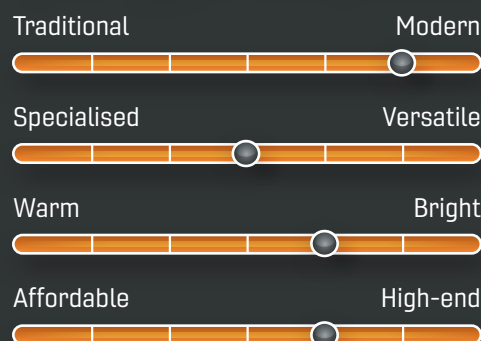
ed Sparkle is hard to ignore—especially if you're a
with a Sustainiac pickup for endless notes and wild
tic, Muse-approved axe.



Manson Meta Series MBM-2H-Sustainiac Red Sparkle

MSRP: (UK) £899 | (US) \$988

The Breakdown



For fans of

- » Manson quality
- » Matt Bellamy
- » Really long notes

For more information, please visit:

mansonguitarworks.com



The factory setup is very playable right out of the gate, and making further adjustments is straightforward.

does in your living room. Cort's build quality is impressive, with a solid feel and a setup that's ready to go straight out of the box. This is a guitar meant to be played, not just admired.

The real headline, of course, is the Sustainiac neck pickup. It's a game-changer: at the flick

of a switch, you get infinite sustain, making it easy to conjure soaring notes or feedback-laden textures that would usually require a stack of amps and careful mic placement. A three-way mini-toggle lets you choose between a pure fundamental note, upper harmonics, or a blend—opening up a world of cinematic sounds and new creative territory. ▶



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Instrument
and Mic In



6.35mm
Balanced Out



MOOER F4
Wireless Footswitch

In short, the Manson Meta Series MBM-2H Sustainiac doesn't just capture the spirit of Bellamy's famed custom guitars—it democratises it.

When the Sustainiac isn't active, it pulls double duty as a neck pickup, offering a clear, warm tone that's great for clean playing, even if it isn't the most aggressive option for overdriven lines.

At the bridge, you get a Manson-designed humbucker that delivers thick, midrange-focused punch—ideal for distorted riffs and leads. While there's no coil-split here (a missed opportunity for extra clean sounds), the pickup's focus and power feel purpose-built for modern rock. The middle position blends both pickups for a nice mix of character and bite, making it easy to find a sweet spot for rhythm work or more nuanced lead lines.

One of the guitar's most playful features is the momentary kill button, sitting right on the upper bout. It's not just for show: this little button lets you get creative with stutter effects and percussive playing, a nod to Bellamy's own stage antics and a genuinely useful tool for anyone interested in experimenting with their sound.

Hardware is thoughtfully chosen for real-world playability. The two-piece TOM-style bridge, complete with thumbscrew

adjustment, makes it easy to tweak action and intonation. The factory setup is very playable right out of the gate, and making further adjustments is straightforward.

All of this would be impressive enough, but the real surprise is the price. Coming in under £1,000, the MBM-2H Sustainiac puts creative, pro-level features within reach of players who would never dream of affording a true Manson custom. It isn't a guitar aimed at vintage purists, but for anyone interested in pushing their music into new territory—especially Muse fans or those drawn to experimental, expressive playing—it's an inspiring and genuinely fun instrument.

In short, the Manson Meta Series MBM-2H Sustainiac doesn't just capture the spirit of Bellamy's famed custom guitars—it democratises it. You get bold looks, innovative electronics, and player-focused hardware, all at a price that's hard to argue with. If you're looking for a guitar that will spark creativity and keep you coming back for more, this one absolutely deserves a spot on your radar.





Cort X700 Mutility II Tactical Gray

Looking for a modern shred machine that doesn't shy away from versatility? The Cort X700 Mutility II doesn't have the long history of a Les Paul or Strat, it stands out as a genuine contender for anyone after a forward-thinking, versatile guitar. Born from Cort's collaboration with modern virtuoso Hedras Ramos, this model is built with the needs of contemporary players in mind—and does so at a price that's impressively reasonable.

WHILE the Cort X700 Mutility II doesn't have the long history of a Les Paul or Strat, it stands out as a genuine contender for anyone after a forward-thinking, versatile guitar. Born from Cort's collaboration with modern virtuoso Hedras Ramos, this model is built with the needs of contemporary players in mind—and does so at a price that's impressively reasonable.

Right away, the X700 Mutility II grabs your attention with its tactical grey or military beige finish and bold, sculpted body. It's got a five-piece roasted maple neck, finished in smooth satin and reinforced with dual carbon inserts for stability—ideal for players who like to experiment with tunings or demand solid reliability on stage. The neck and headstock are one continuous piece, a premium detail not often seen at this price. ▶



***Cort** X700 Mutility II Tactical Gray*

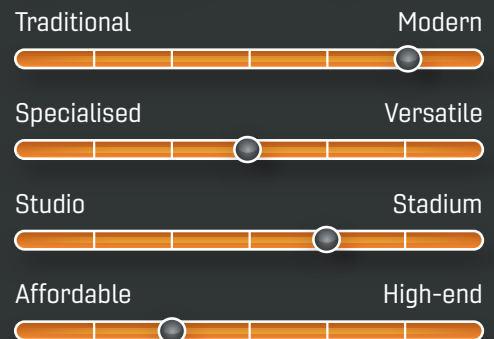
Mutality II in Tactical Gray brings headless ergo-
 speed and tone sculpting. Lightweight, sleek, and
 for the full experience. **Nick Jennison** reviews.



Cort X700 Mutality II Tactical Gray

MSRP: (UK) £877 | (US) \$1399

The Breakdown



For fans of

- » Metal Machines
- » 7—String guitars
- » Fishman Fluence Pups

For more information, please visit:

cortguitars.com





The multi-scale design here is subtle—25.5” on the bass side and 25” on the treble, anchored by a neutral zero fret. The feel is natural and comfortable, even if you’re used to standard frets, but it brings clear benefits for string tension and intonation. Large, polished frets make for easy bends and slick playability. The maple-capped fretboard features glow-in-the-dark offset dot markers—handy for dark stages without being flashy. The heel is deeply scalloped, making high fret access completely effortless.

The headstock matches the body finish and sports Cort’s updated logo, while the truss rod access is tucked away at the neck joint for a tidy look. Cort’s locking tuners with short posts make for smooth tuning and improved nut pressure, ensuring tuning stability whether you’re digging in or changing things up on the fly.

Electronics are where the X700 Mutility II really shows off. You get a set of Fishman Fluence Open Core Modern humbuckers in a bold red finish with blade magnets. The push-pull tone pot lets you flip between active and passive voices, and the five-way blade switch unlocks a total of eight distinct, genuinely usable tones. Whether you’re chasing modern metal, fusion, or just want a clean, split-coil sound for funk, this guitar delivers. Every voice is clear and musical—there’s no filler here.

Whether you're chasing modern metal, fusion, or just want a clean, split-coil sound for funk, this guitar delivers. Every voice is clear and musical—there's no filler here.



Each string has its own bridge and saddle, giving you full control over intonation and action for precise setup. Some players say this design improves string separation; whether you notice it or not, it's a welcome detail for anyone particular about their playing dynamics.

The overall feel of the guitar is impressive: fast and comfortable for modern styles, but with enough neck mass to satisfy players who like something to grip. Build quality is high, which is no surprise considering Cort's Indonesian factory has been earning a solid reputation in recent years.

While the X700 Mutility II probably won't be your first choice for jazz or blues, it

can handle those sounds if you need it to. Where it shines is in the world of modern genres—metal, fusion, funk, prog, and beyond. If you want a single guitar that can adapt to a wide variety of situations, this model absolutely fits the bill, and it does so without draining your wallet.

In short, the Cort X700 Mutility II is a modern, versatile workhorse with real player-first design. It's thoughtfully built, packed with tones, and comfortable in the hand. For today's guitarist, it's a serious contender that offers a lot more than the price tag might suggest.



Vintage 30th Anniversary V100

Can you believe that Vintage Guitars are now 30 years old? Masterminded by one of guitar contribution juggernaut JHS, the upstart guitar company were “disrupting” the industry before we had 30-year-old Vintage guitars, which would make them “vintage Vintage Guitars guitars.” **Nick** 30th Anniversary V100.

WHILE the list of players associated with iconic single-cut guitars reads like a who’s who of rock royalty, it’s easy to see why the Les Paul-style silhouette never really falls out of favour. There’s an unmistakable allure to a guitar that blends luxury and muscle—something the Vintage V100 30th Anniversary captures with impressive poise. Vintage Guitars has been challenging the status quo for three decades

now. That’s no small feat, especially in a world where established names and vintage pedigree often overshadow anything “affordable.”

Of course, if you’re familiar with the Vintage story, the V100 Lemon Drop will need no introduction—a budget-friendly nod to the legendary “Greeny” that did more than just disrupt, it genuinely earned the respect of players who’d never previously looked ➤



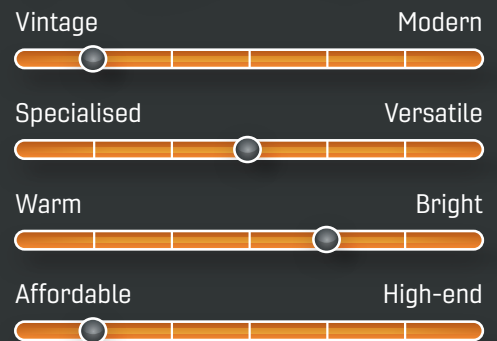
gear's true MVPs, Trev Wilkinson and British distributors were calling people "disruptors". There are now **Jennison** tells us more as he reviews Vintage's



Vintage 30th Anniversary V100

MSRP: (UK) £549 | (US) \$749

The Breakdown



For fans of

- » "Custom" singlecuts
- » Fantastic PAF tones on a budget
- » Bold finishes...

For more information, please visit:

jhs.co.uk



outside of Michigan for their burst fix. Now, Vintage is marking thirty years with the V100 30th Anniversary, and the result is a guitar that looks, feels, and—crucially—sounds every bit the part.

What sets the 30th Anniversary model apart is its dedication to “the real thing.” We’re talking about a two-piece mahogany body, a full carved maple cap topped with a flame veneer, and a set-in mahogany neck. The fretboard is honest-to-goodness rosewood—no composites, no synthetic shortcuts. Even at this price

point, those choices matter, because while you can always upgrade pickups or pots, you can’t change the fundamental character of the wood.

Specs-wise, it’s everything you’d expect from a classic LP-style singlecut: 24.75” scale, 22 frets, and a 12” radius that’s inviting whether you’re riding out big blues bends or attacking crunchy riffs. The offset heel, often reserved for pricier instruments, gives surprisingly good access to the upper frets—something that giggling players will notice straight away.



The hardware package is all Wilkinson and all gold—plenty of bling but more importantly, plenty of stability. CTS pots and a GraphTech NuBone nut round out a spec sheet that’s more reminiscent of boutique builds than budget fare. The real stars, though, are the Wilkinson Platinum Series humbuckers. These PAF-inspired pickups are the heart of the V100’s tone: think classic midrange snarl with just enough bite in the bridge and that beautiful “glint” in the middle position. Both neck and bridge positions are loaded with fat, punchy response but never get lost or muddy, retaining the sort of character you want in a great singlecut.

What about playability? The V100 30th Anniversary offers what many would call an “old-school” feel. The neck is substantial but never 

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The amazing Pignose 7100 is a battery-powered mini guitar amp that boasts a great cruchy/bluesy overdrive circuit and can also sound clean. Designed as a backstage practice amp, it has gained fame as a studio-quality pre amp, also a boutique-sounding blues harp amp, a great dirty guitar amp and even a cool vintage vocal effects box.

Pignose

www.pignoseamps.com





If someone handed you the V100 30th Anniversary and told you it cost three times as much, you'd believe it, right up until you saw the price tag.

cumbersome, and the low fret profile is perfect for expressive vibrato and sustained bends. It's not built for the modern shred crowd, but for players who want to dig in—be it gritty classic rock, blues, or melodic hard rock—it offers everything you need.

And then there's the value. In an era where genuine singlecuts with comparable features can easily command prices north of £3,000, the V100 30th Anniversary delivers its premium looks, authentic feel, and impressive hardware for less than a fifth of that cost. There's no sense here that you're paying for flash over substance; it's a workhorse that's ready for the stage right out of the box.

The Vintage V100 30th Anniversary is more than just a commemorative release. It's a reminder that you don't have to mortgage your future to own an instrument with soul, character, and staying power. For players chasing classic tones and timeless style—without the boutique price tag—this guitar stands as one of the most compelling options in today's market. If someone handed you the V100 30th Anniversary and told you it cost three times as much, you'd believe it, right up until you saw the price tag.



Mooer GTRS SL810

Part of Mooer's ever-growing smart-guitar ecosystem, the Mooer GTRS SL810 is an instrument with connectivity, and app integration, making it as much a tech gadget as a guitar. Whether you're just looking for creative potential under the hood. **Nick Jennison** tells us more.

WHILE the world of “smart” guitars—or smart tech in general—is filled with bold promises, the Mooer GTRS SL-810 stands out as a genuine step forward when it comes to six-string features. It has something special going on under the hood (which we'll get to), but fundamentally—and arguably most importantly—it's a modern, good-looking guitar that feels reassuringly solid in your hands. The

contemporary headstock, six locking tuners, and roller string tree all offer reliable tuning and give the instrument a premium touch, especially for a guitar costing way under £1000. Out of the box, the action on the one I had in the studio was a bit stiff, but a quick setup easily gets it playing smoothly.

Plugged into a traditional amp, the SL-810 performs just like you'd hope: articulate, dynamic, and comfortable across everything ▶



Mooer GTRS SL810

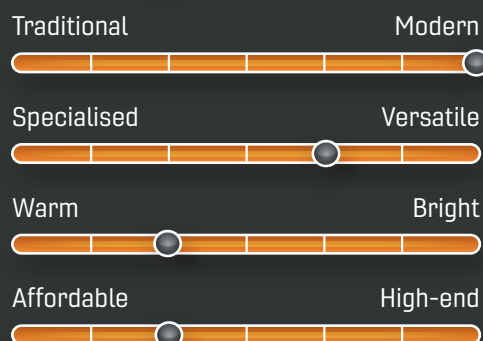
ent packed with built-in digital effects, wireless con-
nec-ting at home or taking it to the stage, there's a ton



Moer GTRS SL810

MSRP: (UK) £615 | (US) \$799

The Breakdown



For fans of

- » Smart Guitars
- » Built-in effects
- » Change from \$1000

For more information, please visit:

gtrs.tech



The Mooer GTRS SL-810 is more than just a clever piece of tech. It's a solid, playable guitar with a genuinely creative toolkit inside.

from clean funk to heavier blues and rock. It feels like a proper guitar, not just a technology showcase, and that's a big part of its appeal.

But where the SL-810 really makes its mark is with its built-in digital power. Mooer has packed in a rechargeable battery, onboard amp and effects models, and a Bluetooth

app that opens up a huge range of sounds. You can shape your tones on the fly—change amps, rearrange your signal chain, and, most impressively, assign a different modeled guitar or pickup sound to every switch position. Want a Les Paul neck, a Strat bridge, and something wild in the middle? It's all possible, and you can switch seamlessly between modeled and passive tones. ▶



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Played by John Lennon

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61

Whether you're learning, teaching, recording, or performing, this instrument puts a remarkable amount of power and flexibility right at your fingertips.

There is a touch of latency when using some of the modeling features, but it's minimal—even picky players won't be thrown off.

Practice and recording features are where this guitar quietly shines. It's got a tuner, chord library, metronome, drum machine, looper, and direct USB recording. Bluetooth streaming means you can play along with backing tracks straight from your phone, making this an all-in-one solution whether you're practicing at home, heading to a lesson, or tracking ideas.

This versatility means the SL-810 fits just about anyone's setup. Students and hobbyists can practice and experiment with a massive range of tones. Teachers will appreciate being able to bring consistent sounds between lessons. And if you gig, it's a reliable backup that can get you through a show—even if your main rig

goes down. Just plug it straight into the PA and pick your favorite preset.

If there's room for improvement, it's mostly for the gearheads: support for custom impulse responses would be welcome, and the factory setup could be a little better. But considering everything packed in for the price, these are minor gripes.

The Mooer GTRS SL-810 is more than just a clever piece of tech. It's a solid, playable guitar with a genuinely creative toolkit inside. Whether you're learning, teaching, recording, or performing, this instrument puts a remarkable amount of power and flexibility right at your fingertips. If this is the direction smart guitars are heading, it's easy to get excited for what comes next.



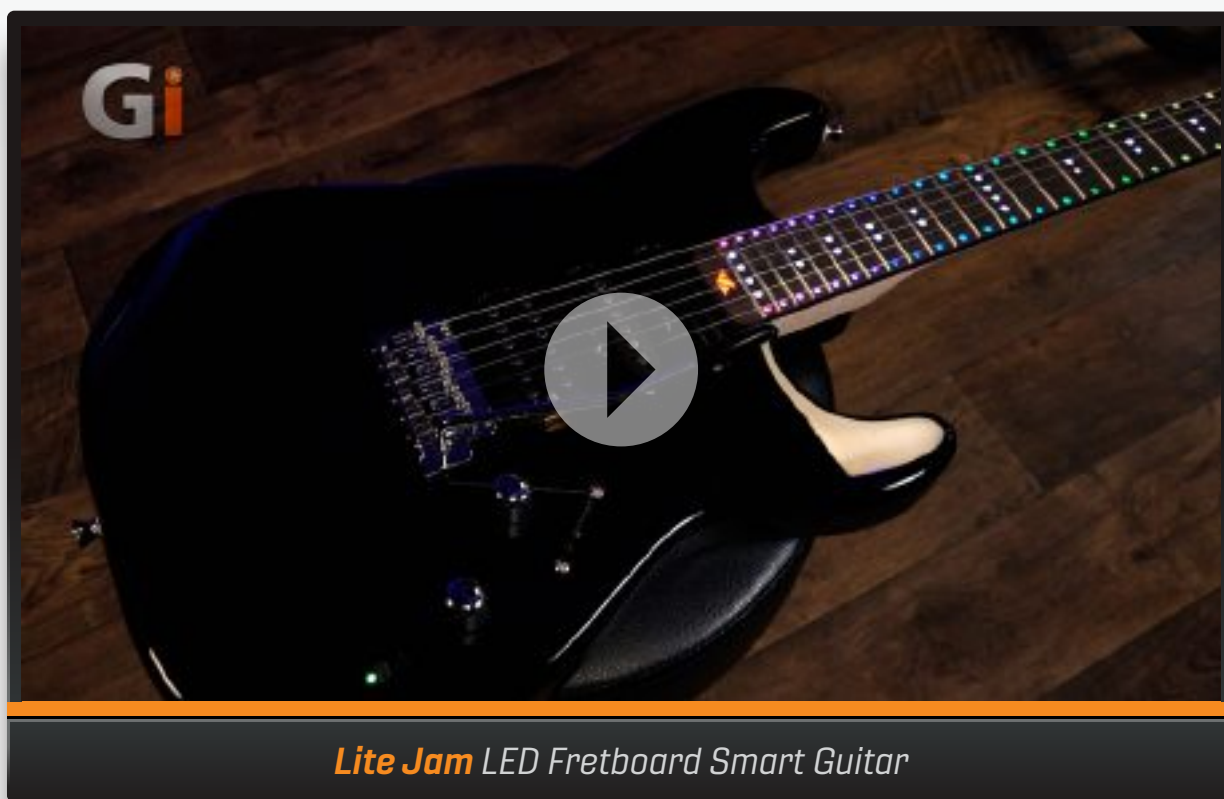


Lite Jam LED Fretboard Smart Guitar

Practice just got a whole lot brighter—literally. The Lite Jam LED Fretboard Smart Guitar uses a built-in LED system to light up the fretboard in real-time, perfect for beginners or anyone looking to sharpen their skills with a bit of tech. It also features a built-in preamp, and you've got a modern learning tool that actually looks cool. **Nick Jennison** Review

WHEN you hear “guitar with a light-up fretboard,” you might picture a clunky practice tool or a novelty instrument destined for the closet. But the Lite Jam sets out to prove you wrong. Still in its Kickstarter phase, this guitar brings together traditional design and clever technology to create something both familiar and refreshingly modern—especially for beginners.

Let's start with how it feels. The Lite Jam ditches the toy look for a classic S-style body, a real rosewood fretboard, and a maple neck with a smooth satin finish. It sports a full 24 frets, and the attention to comfort is clear: no sharp fret ends, a nicely contoured neck, and a solid, balanced feel whether you're standing or sitting. There's even a proper truss rod, which is surprisingly rare on tech-heavy ➤



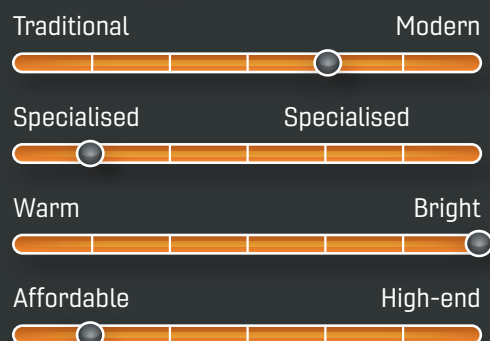
uses a light-up fretboard to guide your playing
n magic. Add in wireless features and an onboard
WS



Lite Jam LED Fretboard Smart Guitar

MSRP: (UK) £TBC | (US) \$479

The Breakdown



For fans of

- » Flashing lights
- » Innovative learning
- » Standing out on stage

For more information, please visit:

litejam.com



beginner guitars. In short, it actually feels like a guitar you'd want to pick up and play.

Now, onto what makes the Light Jam special—the light-up fretboard and its app. Connecting via Bluetooth, the app offers three modes: scales, chords, and performance. Scale mode lights up root notes and intervals, letting you see shapes and patterns as you play. Chord mode takes it a step further, highlighting finger positions with different colors and letting you build custom chords if you're feeling creative. Performance mode turns your fretboard into a mini light show, which is a surefire way to stand out on stage or just have some fun at home. The app itself is intuitive and beginner-friendly—no tech headaches here.

But the big question: does it sound and play like a real guitar? Yes. The bridge humbucker is a standout—punchy, articulate, and impressively low-noise, even with all the electronics on board. The other pickups do pick up a bit of hum, likely due to the lighting system, but unless you're chasing the purest single-coil tones, it's nothing dramatic. The neck pickup, a blade-style humbucker, is less lively than a classic single coil, partly because it sits further back to make room for the large Light Jam logo. Still, for the price, the overall pickup selection covers a lot of ground.

One detail I appreciate: the electronics for the lights are kept separate from the standard guitar wiring. That means if you want to swap pickups or tweak hardware, you won't have to wrestle with a mess of extra wires. Maintenance and upgrades are straightfor-



ward—a rare perk for a tech-forward beginner guitar.

Speaking of hardware, the two-point tremolo bridge is a welcome surprise. While it doesn't have locking tuners (expected at this price), it handles light vibrato and chord shimmer without throwing your tuning out, as long as you're not dive-bombing Van Halen-style. The materials throughout are impressive for a sub-£300 guitar, especially with the Kickstarter pricing.

But honestly, even seasoned players could have some fun here, either as a unique stage guitar or an affordable backup with a twist.



Aesthetically, the Light Jam comes in black or white, both with a slick, stage-friendly look. The one thing that might divide opinions is the oversized logo at the end of the fretboard. It gives off a bit of a “learning tool” vibe—nothing a bit of tape can’t fix if you want a cleaner look.

So, who’s it for? Beginners will get the most value—the interactive lights and instant feedback take the stress out of learning chords and scales. But honestly, even seasoned players could have some fun here, ei-

ther as a unique stage guitar or an affordable backup with a twist.

Bottom line: The Light Jam delivers on its promise of making learning guitar more engaging, without sacrificing the feel or playability of a real instrument. If you’re just starting out, or if you want a fresh way to stay inspired, it’s a great bet. Finally, a smart guitar that plays—and looks—the part.



Mooer F15i Li Intelligent Amplifier

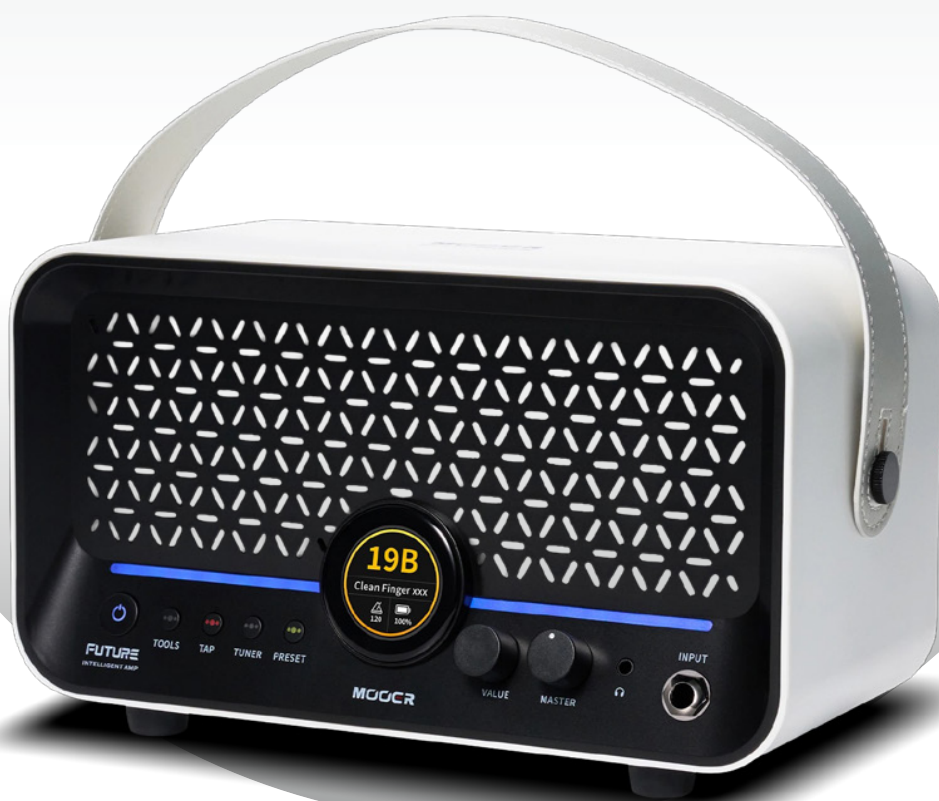
Nick Jennison reviews a portable and powerful little amp, packed with “smarts.” The Mooer F15i Li packs Bluetooth, and battery power into a super-compact combo. With tons of amp voices, onboard effects, and a built-in looper, this little amp punches way above its weight.

THE Mooer F-15i Li isn't your average battery-powered practice amp. It's small enough to fit on your desk or in a backpack, but packed with features you'd expect to see on something much bigger—and a lot more expensive.

The “Li” stands for lithium-ion, and that rechargeable battery is the real heart of the F-15i Li. No power cable required. Whether you're jamming in the living room, taking

it to a lesson, or playing in the park, you're never tied down by needing an outlet. Mooer's made this amp truly portable, and it still feels like real, quality gear.

The touchscreen is genuinely easy to use—just swipe and tap your way through amp models, effects, drum loops, and a built-in looper. For those who love deep editing, the Mooer iAmp app steps it up. Connect with Bluetooth, and you can build out your signal



F15i Li Intelligent Amplifier squeezes modelling, effects, and an intuitive app for deep control, this 9.

chain visually, rearrange effects, tweak settings, and dive into a growing library of user-shared presets. You're not just stuck with factory sounds—you can explore, create, and share your own.

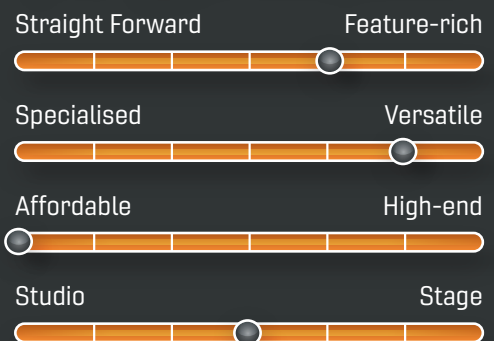
What really impresses is the sound. The F-15i Li's onboard speakers are lively and dynamic, and the amp models cover a lot of ground—everything from clean, classic tones to full-throated lead sounds like the “Cali Mark 3” preset. If you want even more depth and clarity, just plug into ➤



Mooer F15i Li Intelligent Amplifier

MSRP: (UK) £169 | (US) \$209

The Breakdown



For fans of

- » 12-string jangle;
- » '60s “unusual” guitars;
- » John Lennon

For more information, please visit:

mooeraudio.com



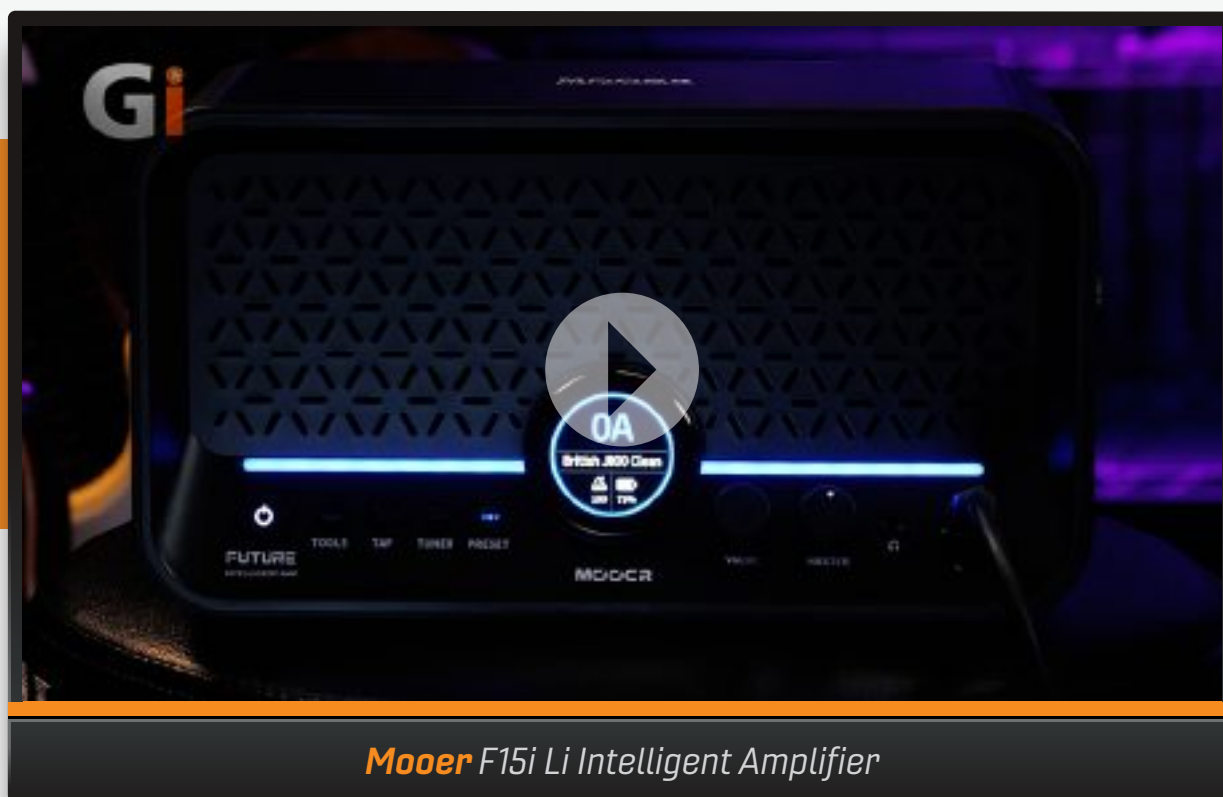
...and is built for real guitarists who want portability and flexibility without sacrificing tone

headphones or monitors with the line out. For such a compact amp, it really holds its own, whether you're practicing quietly at home or tracking quick ideas in a project studio.

The F-15i Li is loaded with genuinely useful practice tools. Drum loops across various styles make it way more inspiring than a metronome, and the built-in looper works smoothly, letting you layer parts and get creative. There's a tuner built in as well, ac-

cessible both from the amp and the app. And if you want to jam to your favorite songs, Bluetooth streaming is ready to go.

You're not limited to practice, either. There's USB out for recording straight into your DAW, a mixer section for balancing guitar and backing tracks, and an optional Bluetooth footswitch if you want hands-free control at a rehearsal or even a small gig. The F-15i Li is as comfortable on a desktop as it is in a gig bag.



Mooer F15i Li Intelligent Amplifier



Design-wise, Moorer keeps things clean and compact. The amp looks sharp enough for any living space and won't clutter up your setup. It's the kind of amp you can actually leave out and use every day, not just stash away between sessions.

The Moorer F-15i Li is the rare small amp that doesn't ask you to compromise. It's packed with smart features, sounds great for

its size, and is built for real guitarists who want portability and flexibility without sacrificing tone. If you're looking for an amp that will actually make you want to pick up your guitar and play—wherever you are—this one deserves a spot on your shortlist. Moorer has raised the bar for what a battery-powered practice amp can do.



Fishman AirLock GT

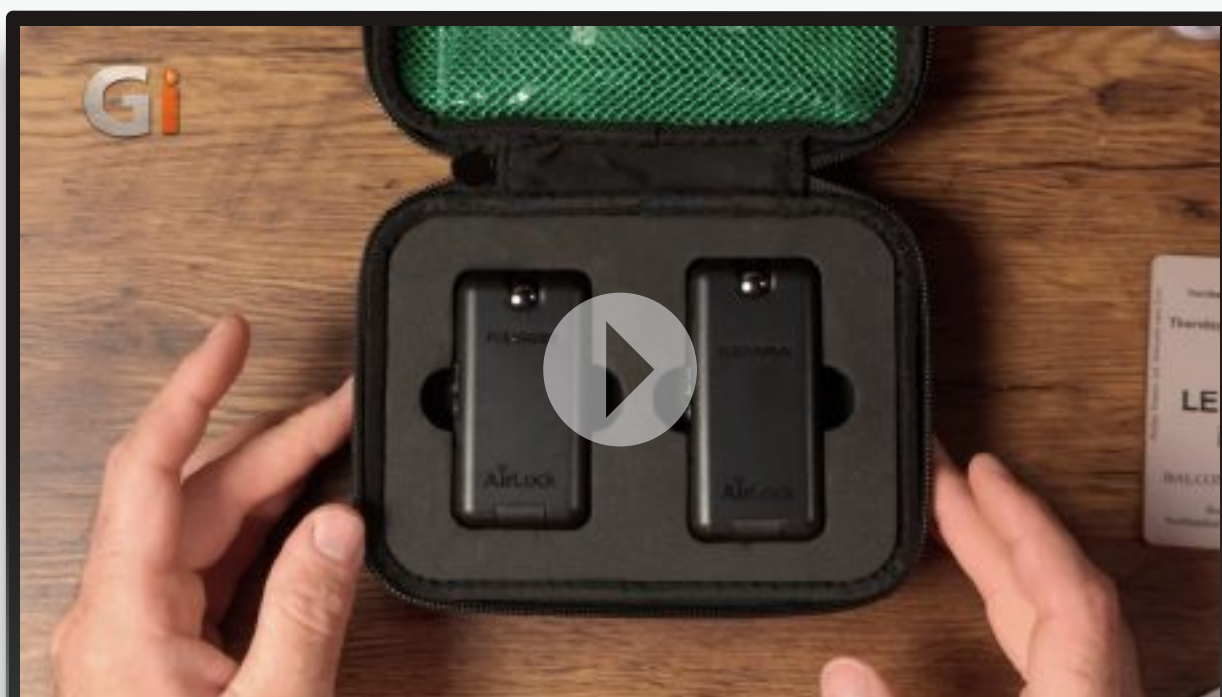
If you've ever wanted to ditch the cable and still keep your tones pristine, Fishman's AirLock GT has your need. With USB-C charging, direct recording, and ultra-low latency, it's built for modern gigs and still delivers that cable tone, that's not simulated. Too good to be true? **Nick Jennison** tells us more.

WHEN it comes to wireless systems for guitar, most bug-style units are all about convenience—but rarely about total trust. Fishman's Airlock GT changes that equation, offering pro-level reliability in a form factor that fits in your pocket and won't weigh down your gig bag.

Let's start with the build. The Airlock GT comes as a transmitter and receiver, both made from tough ABS plastic with fully

swiveling ¼" jacks. Whether you're playing a Strat, Tele, or anything else, it's designed to fit—and feel—secure. Pairing is automatic, but you've got a manual button for backup, and it all travels safely in the included hard-shell case.

Specs-wise, the Airlock GT genuinely impresses. Operating on 2.4 GHz with 40 auto-switching channels, it's designed to keep your signal clean, even in busy venues. ▶



Mooer F15i Li Intelligent Amplifier

GT wireless system might be exactly what you
gigging and recording and boasts delivers true analog



Fishman AirLock GT

MSRP: (UK) £429 | (US) \$319

The Breakdown

Straight Forward Feature-rich



Specialised Versatile



Affordable High-end



Studio Stage



For fans of

- » Going wireless
- » Transparent tone
- » Plug-and-play convenience

For more information, please visit:

fishman.com



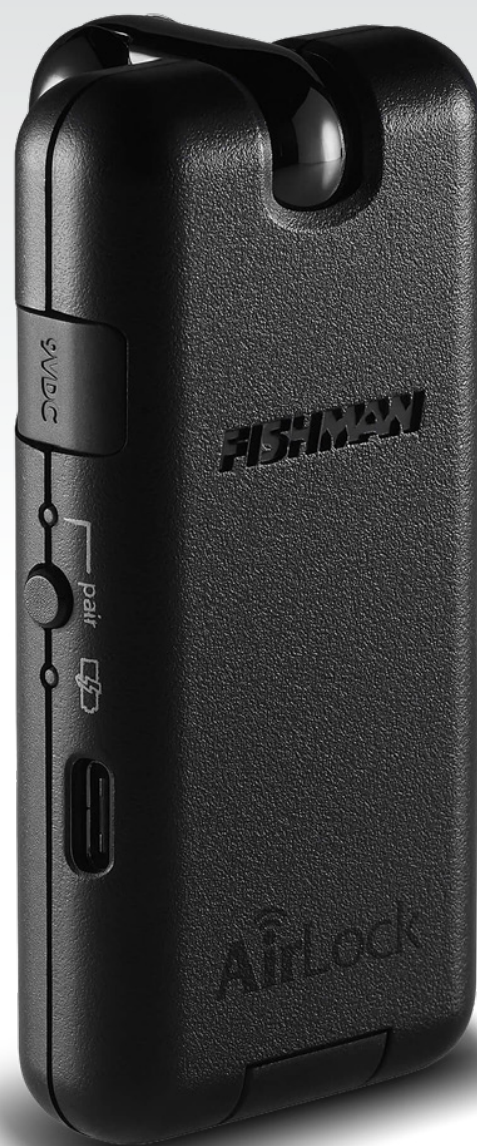
If you've tried wireless before and found it lacking, the Airlock GT just might change your mind.

Latency is just 3 ms by default—quick enough that you'll never notice it—and if you need extra protection in high-interference environments, you can push that up to 4.9 ms with a simple switch. Range is about 120 feet, and Fishman's "Spin Range" tech means you don't need a clear line of sight; your signal stays solid, even if someone walks between your guitar and pedalboard.

Fishman also thought about tone. The Airlock GT is sonically transparent—tests show that your sound, whether clean or with heavy gain, comes through exactly as intended. If you like the character of longer cables, the Cable Tone switch lets you mimic 3, 5, or 10-meter leads, giving just a hint of that familiar high-end roll-off.

Power is handled with modern convenience. Both units use USB-C charging, but you can swap out the batteries yourself for longer life. The receiver also runs off a standard 9V pedal power supply, making it easy to keep it on your board. A standout feature: the receiver doubles as a USB audio interface. Plug it into your laptop or phone and record your guitar in high quality—no extra interface needed. Fishman even includes color-coded labels to keep things organised if you're running multiple systems.

Fit and compatibility are solid, too. Whether I plugged in a PRS Silver Sky, a vintage Tele, or something with hot Fishman Fluence





pickups, the Airlock GT handled it with zero fuss, and the swiveling jack made for a snug connection every time.

In short, the Fishman Airlock GT is a real step forward for guitarists who want the freedom of wireless without worrying about dropouts, tone loss, or complicated setups. It offers the rock-solid



performance of a rack system with the grab-and-go simplicity of a bug. Add in USB recording and a pedalboard-friendly footprint, and it's genuinely hard to find fault here.

If you've tried wireless before and found it lacking, the Airlock GT just might change your mind. It's smart, reliable, and designed for real musicians who don't want to compromise.



Sadowsky MetroExpress 21Fret Hybrid P

Sadowsky basses are renowned for their playability and tonal flexibility, and the 21 Fret Hybrid PJ is a modern, pro-level package. With a blend of classic Precision and Jazz pickups, a sleek Olympic White finish, and a sleek Olym for serious bassists who want it all. **Nick Jennison** lays down the low end and shares his ve

MADE in Germany with a chambered American red alder body and maple neck/Morado (Pau Ferro) board, this 21-fret P/J carries Sadowsky's P-style neck and J-style bridge pickups, active electronics with true bypass and Vintage Tone Control, light open-gear tuners and the Quick String Release bridge—target weight under 8.9 lb (4.0 kg). Nick Jennison reviews.

While Sadowsky basses have built a reputation among top-tier pros for their craftsmanship and unmistakable sound, the Metro Express 21 Fret Hybrid PJ takes that high-end pedigree and makes it refreshingly accessible. This isn't just a watered-down version—made in China with Warwick's oversight and Roger Sadowsky's stamp of approval, it manages to bring genuine Sadowsky quality to a price point that's far easier on the wallet. ▶



PJ Bass

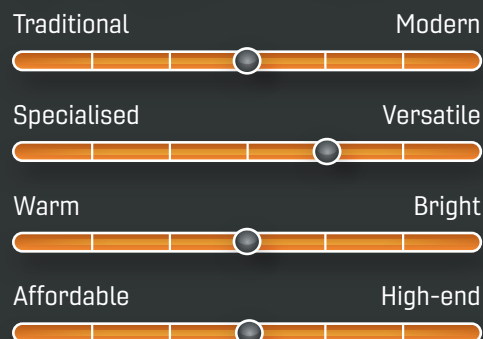
Hybrid PJ Bass brings those legendary features into a classic White finish, and premium hardware, it's made to predict



Sadowsky MetroExpress 21Fret Hybrid PJ Bass

MSRP: (UK) £899 | (US) \$1110

The Breakdown

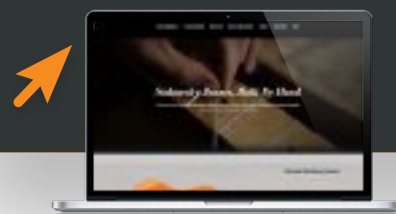


For fans of

- » Classic PJ tones
- » Powerful EQ
- » Value for money

For more information, please visit:

sadowskybass.com



A close-up photograph of a Sadowsky bass guitar. The body is a light cream color, and the neck is a roasted maple with a satin finish. The fretboard is also roasted maple with subtle pearloid markers. The bridge is a white metal open-gear design. The pickups are black Sadowsky models. The control knobs are black with white indicator lines. The body is finished in a champagne sparkle. The neck is finished in a champagne sparkle. The fretboard is finished in a champagne sparkle. The bridge is a white metal open-gear design. The pickups are black Sadowsky models. The control knobs are black with white indicator lines.

In practice, this bass is as versatile as they come.

Right away, the roasted maple neck and fretboard stand out—not just visually, but in how smooth and comfortable they feel. The modern J-style neck carve is fast and inviting, with a satin finish that encourages you to play for hours. The fretwork is seriously impressive: beautifully crowned and rounded, with no sharp edges anywhere, and subtle pearloid markers for a classy look. Lightweight open-gear tuners keep tuning stable and help balance the bass, and the nut is perfectly cut—details you wouldn't always expect at this price.

The Okoume body, finished in an eye-catching champagne sparkle, keeps things lightweight but still delivers plenty of resonance and sustain. It's a less common choice for a J-style bass, but one Sadowsky uses even on its custom models, and it works well here. ▶

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If you're looking for a truly versatile bass that delivers real Sadowsky quality without the boutique price tag, the Metro Express 21 Fret Hybrid PJ is a standout choice.

Electronics-wise, the hybrid PJ pickup setup—split P in the middle, noiseless J at the bridge—gives you all the flexibility you'd expect. Whether you're after deep, thumping lows, articulate fingerstyle clarity, or something punchy and aggressive with a pick, it's all in there. The onboard preamp provides a generous boost to both bass and treble, and there's a lot of range to dial in. If you want to go passive, just pull up the bass control and the preamp is out of the circuit. My only real wish is for a passive tone knob, especially for that classic P-bass roll-off, but the overall sound palette is broad enough that I rarely missed it.

In practice, this bass is as versatile as they come. Solo the J pickup for those Jaco-style runs, switch to the P for fat rock or punk lines, or blend them for just the right mix of punch and clarity. It takes to slap, fingerstyle, pick, or even drop-tuning with ease, and never sounds thin or muddy. Out of the box, the setup is on point—low action, great intonation, and easy playability all the way up to the 21st fret. Adjusting the neck is simple too, thanks to the handy Music Man-style truss rod wheel.

Really, the only clue to its price is the discreet “Made in China” stamp on the back of the headstock. In every other respect—looks,



feel, and especially sound—this could pass for a much more expensive instrument. If you handed it to someone blindfolded, they'd be hard-pressed to spot the difference.

If you're looking for a truly versatile bass that delivers real Sadowsky quality without the boutique price tag, the Metro Express 21 Fret Hybrid PJ is a standout choice. It's equally at home in the studio, on stage, or just in your living room, and for many players, it could easily be the only bass you ever need. Highly recommended.





Cleartone Electric and Acoustic Guitar S

When it comes to getting the most out of your guitar, strings make a bigger difference than you think. Cleartone's electric and acoustic strings aim to boost both tone and feel. **Nick Jennison** puts Cleartone's electric and acoustic Hybrid Acoustic set that mixes different alloys for a more balanced response—to find out if they're worth the

MOST guitarists get pretty attached to their strings of choice, and I'll admit I'm usually the same. But Cleartone's approach to treated strings caught my attention, and after putting them through their paces, I found more than a few reasons to look twice.

Cleartone makes their strings from start to finish in their Utah facility—no outsourc-

ing, no shortcuts. Instead of just adding a coating to generic strings, everything is built in-house. The result is a string that feels solid and avoids the brittle or "over-processed" sensation you sometimes get with other coated brands.

One of Cleartone's big claims is 36% more volume compared to traditional strings. While it's tricky to measure that number



strings

most players expect—and Cleartone's treated sets to the test—including their unique EQ Hybrid live up to the hype.

Of course, if you're happy with standard gauges, Cleartone covers those too, for both electric and acoustic.

exactly, I noticed a real difference after stringing up a Mexican Strat with their 10s. There's extra output and a brightness that adds a bit of liveliness without changing the character of your guitar. In a band mix, that extra presence is more than just marketing—it genuinely helps you cut through.

Feel matters just as much as sound, and Cleartone has managed a happy medium here. Their treated strings are smoother than uncoated sets, making slides and bends a little easier, but there's still enough grip to keep things comfortable and familiar. Even if you're usually a die-hard uncoated fan, these won't feel foreign under your fingers.

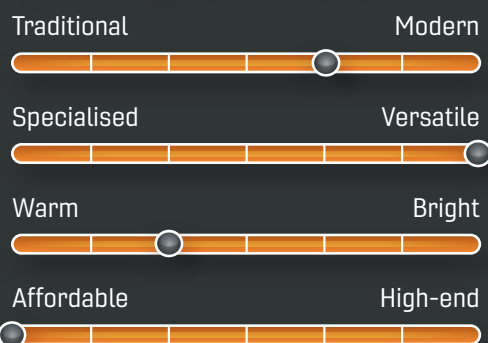
The real standout for me is Cleartone's EQ Hybrid Acoustic set. They use different materials for each string—copper bronze for the low E, phosphor bronze for the A and D, and 80/20 bronze for the G. When I strung these up on my workhorse Cort Gold acoustic, the difference in balance was obvious. Each string seemed to sit just right in the mix, smoothing out the unevenness that can sometimes come with single-material sets. It's a clever solution and genuinely makes the guitar more expressive. ▶



Cleartone Electric and Acoustic Guitar Strings

MSRP: Check website for accurate pricing

The Breakdown



For fans of

- » Long-lasting tone
- » Great feel
- » Affordability

For more information, please visit:

cleartonestrings.com





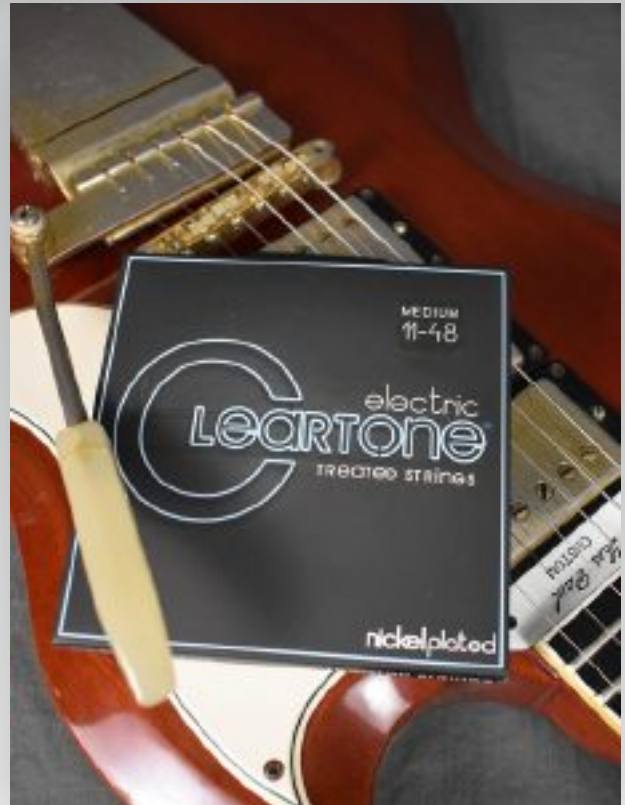
Customisation is another area where Cleartone shines. They let you build your own custom sets—something you don't see often, especially with treated strings. For players who obsess over string gauge combinations or just want something that fits their particular playing style, this is a welcome option. Of course, if you're happy with standard gauges, Cleartone covers those too, for both electric and acoustic.

To sum it up: Cleartone brings something new to the table with their USA-made, in-house strings. You get increased presence and clarity, a feel that strikes a nice balance



Cleartone Electric and Acoustic Guitar Strings

If you're looking for a way to freshen up your tone, or just want to try something outside your usual routine, Cleartone is absolutely worth a shot.



between coated and uncoated, and real innovation with their EQ Hybrid Acoustic set. Add in the ability to customise your gauges, and there's a lot here for any player looking to upgrade their sound or feel.

If you're looking for a way to freshen up your tone, or just want to try something outside your usual routine, Cleartone is absolutely worth a shot.



Strings Direct is the UK's specialist guitar strings store, supplying guitarists and musicians since '97. stringsdirect.co.uk/cleartone

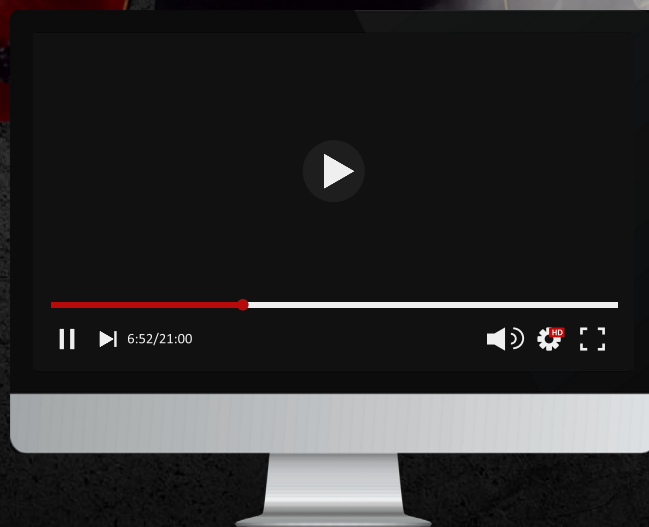
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