

Guitarist

THE GUITAR MAGAZINE

ISSUE 389

www.guitarist.co.uk £5.75 January 2015

Gibson *Les Paul 100* 2015 MODELS

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The most **radical** Les Pauls yet?

*Read our
verdict inside*

INTERVIEWED
**JACKSON
BROWNE**
TALKS GUITARS!
p48

ARTIST INTERVIEWS

JOE
PERRY

THURSTON
MOORE

NILS
LOFGREN

REVIEWED MESA/BOOGIE MARK FIVE: 25 MINI HEAD • CAPARISON DELLINGER-M3 MJR & C2 ANG-QE
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Next issue on sale... 9 January 2015

Printed in the UK by William Gibbons on behalf of Future.

Distributed in the UK by Seymour Distribution Ltd, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT Tel 0207 429 4000
Overseas distribution by Seymour International

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Subscriptions and back issues 0844 848 2852 guitarist@myfavouritemagazines.co.uk

Subscribe online at www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk



Print: 20,931

Digital: 4,116

The ABC combined print and digital circulation for Jan-Dec 2013 is:

25,047

A member of the Audited Bureau of Circulations

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Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR).
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Easy Does It



For many of us, the first guitar we ever played was a generic (and probably horrible) acoustic that was a torment to play. And yet somehow we learned to fret simple chords and maybe a riff or two, beginning a lifelong love affair with the guitar.

That's why it's interesting that Gibson says the bold design tweaks to its Les Paul range this year (see our review on p86) are partly to encourage well-heeled newcomers to play one. The idea is that features such as the G Force tuning system offer easier-than-ever access to music. It's a praiseworthy concept and I hope they're right.

All the same, part of me still has a perverse soft spot for those unyielding beginner's guitars that made you really work for it. I'll always remember the day – after weeks of trying – when my fingers finally became strong enough to hold a chord down cleanly on my budget Hohner acoustic, and the feeling of delighted astonishment that somehow I was now in the club that went with it.

Anyway, before I actually mouth the words 'Bah Humbug', I'll shut up and, along with the rest of the *Guitarist* team, simply wish every one of you a very happy Christmas indeed. Have a wonderful time and see you all in the New Year.

Jamie Dickson **Editor**

Behind The Scenes

This month, we have learned many surprising things during the making of the issue. We learned, for example, that an adult sperm whale can fatally wound prey as large as a four-metre mako shark using a focussed beam of 250-decibel sound. Who knew? We also discovered that the good people at **Tiny Rebel** brewery make exceedingly good beer, such as their tangy and feisty **F.U.B.A.R. IPA**. We thank them heartily for adding to our festive cheer.



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MINE!

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I MEANT
GUYS!!!

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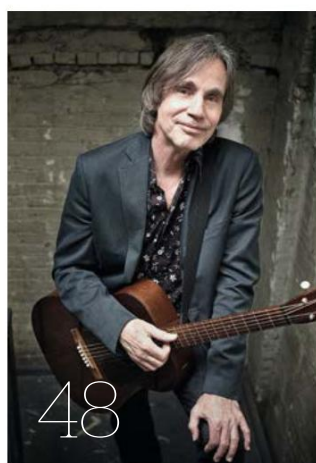
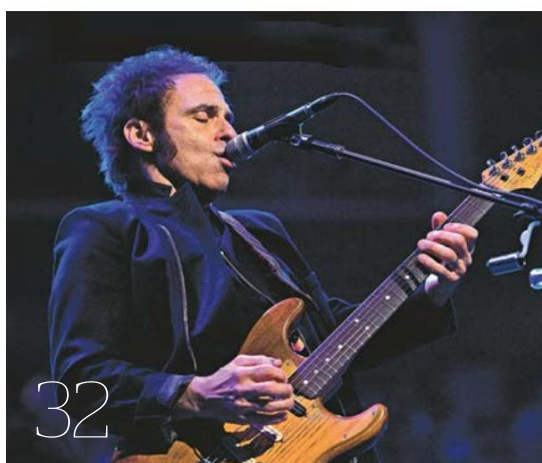
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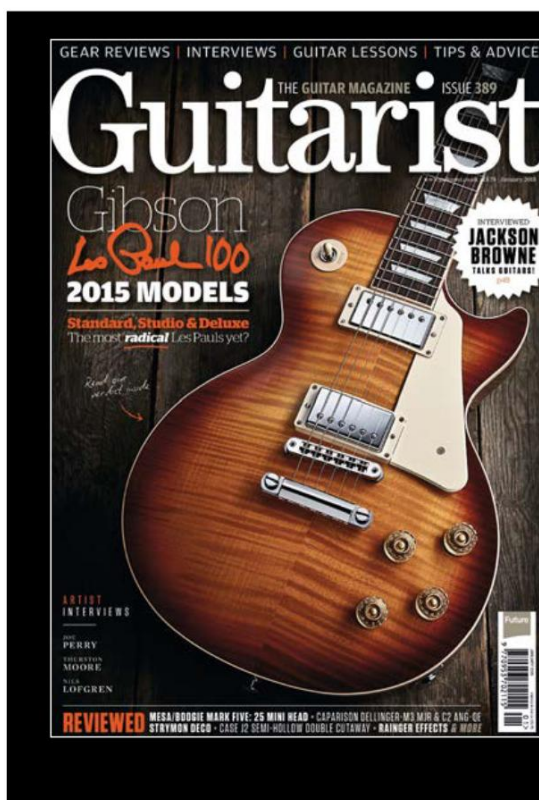


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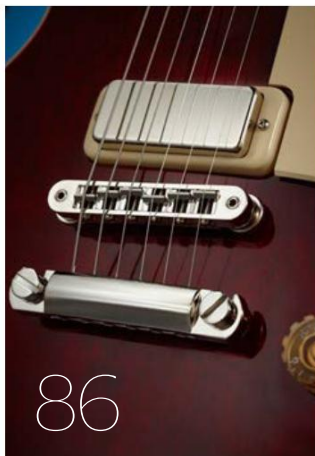
Paul Shook Up

Gibson's new 2015 electrics are packed with radical new features and departures from the brand's classic spec. We investigate the innovation that shaped Gibson's golden era, and on p86 put a trio of 2015 Les Pauls under the microscope

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New gear this month

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VIDEOS



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How to watch

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FIRST ▶ PLAY



**CAPARISON
DELLINGER-M3 MJR**
£2,299

WHAT IS IT? High-end signature solidbody with a bolt-on neck



CAPARISON C2 ANG-QE
£1,099

WHAT IS IT? Double-cut solidbody with a set-in neck

SHRED OF HEAVEN

A high-end shred machine and a wolf in sheep's clothing that offer something a little different for the discerning rocker...

WORDS **DARRAN CHARLES**
PHOTOGRAPHY **SIMON LEES**

Caparison Guitars was formed almost 20 years ago by former members of the Japanese division of Charvel/Jackson: a company responsible for some of the most iconic rock guitars of the late-80s and -90s. Since then, Caparison has remained true to that heritage and continued its journey as a shred and metal-friendly guitar brand, on its way attracting a number of high-profile artists such as Mattias IA Eklundh and Killswitch Engage's Joel Stroetzel to its ever-growing endorsee list.

In 2011, a UK manufacturer, Caparison Guitar Company, was formed after it acquired the business from its Japanese owners Kyowa Shokai Ltd. The services of chief designer Itaru Kanno were retained and normal service resumed, with each finished guitar still



VIDEO DEMO



<http://bit.ly/guitarist389>

Caparison Dellinger-M3 MJR & C2 ANG-QE **FIRST ▶ PLAY**





receiving a final seal of approval from Itaru who, according to Caparison's Gabriel Östreich, "personally sets each guitar up and even applies some of the custom finish options himself".

Caparison today is still focused on producing high-end rock and metal guitars, and the Dellinger-M3 MJR (the signature guitar of Symphony X guitarist Michael Romeo) showcases that particular facet of the company's product line. However, as is the case with many high-end manufacturers (as we see with PRS's S2 series), concessions have been made to the vast market of guitarists who want high-end products but with middle-of-the-road prices, hence the introduction of the C2 series from which this ANG-QE (a stripped-down version of its Angelus model) hails.

Past Blast

With its 80s double-cut shred guitar appearance, the M3 MJR is a faithful nod to the production team's past, and indeed the plain unadorned maple neck brings to mind the Jackson Phil Collen signature model, while the black hardware – contrasting the White Gloss body finish – reminds us of Iron

1 The DiMarzio pickups offer the ultimate in saturated lead tones, but engage that volume and the guitar's versatility also becomes apparent

2 The MJR features the iconic and menacing 'devil's tail' headstock

3 These early-edition Floyd Rose vibratos have been around for over two decades, and still the design holds strong. It's stable and responsive





3

The MJR sounds tonally rich before it's even plugged in, with the snappy maple neck intimating its sonic character

Maiden's Adrian Smith's Jackson. The comparisons end here, though, because the M3 MJR has its own distinct identity and sound, not least with its composite mahogany/maple/mahogany body construction (the composite-tonewood body being a feature of the high-end Caparisons) and that trademark 'devil's tail' headstock. It's comfortably contoured, as its appearance suggests, but a lot of design attention has clearly been given over to ensuring playability at the higher end of the fretboard: an elegant four-bolt neck joint with smooth recess (similar to the Stephen's Extended Cutaway on Washburns) ensures smooth access to this area.

As for the ANG-QE, the obvious inspiration for the body styling lies with PRS, though it's far from a direct copy. The arched, quilted maple-veneered maple top is expertly carved, and though there is a significant price difference between the two guitars, the construction is once again of the highest quality. The black chrome bridge and tuners offer a very classy look that balances nicely with the still very modern-looking EMG active pickups, whereas the cream neck binding gestures towards its Gibson influence that's enhanced by its 24.75-inch scale and set neck.

Feel & Sounds

Caparison's claim that master builder Itaru does the final inspection on each guitar stands up to scrutiny, as the fretwork and overall setup on both guitars is close to perfection, which is what you would expect from guitars in this price range.

Somewhat unusually for a solidbody rock guitar, the MJR sounds tonally rich before it's even plugged in, with the snappy maple neck already intimating its sonic character. The neck itself is simply wonderful: a medium-size 'D' shape with a healthy set of shoulders, that encourages fast movement up and down the neck and Gilmour-esque thumb-over-the-top bends in equal measure.

The MJR comes loaded with DiMarzio pickups, and once the volume is fully engaged they drive the amp with some venom, providing enough saturated gain to handle even the most pronounced shredding styles. The maple neck ensures a crispness and pleasantly bright quality that just about offers some dynamic responsiveness that is generally lost with high-gain pickups. However, the sonic trick up this guitar's sleeve lies in the diversity of sounds offered by simply rolling off the volume: with a slight roll-off you can go



4



5

4 The ANG is loaded with active EMGs – the pickups of choice for many metal players

5 In contrast to the MJR, the ANG has a more traditional three-side headstock, in keeping with the guitar's classic styling

6 There are no composite tonewood bodies on the C2 series: a classic mahogany body with quilted veneer-topped maple helps bring down production costs



What sets apart the ANG is the ability to deliver pretty brutal metal sounds from a small package

from saturated shred to sultry rock, with hardly a dip in perceived volume.

80s-influenced rock guitars have seen quite a resurgence of late, and by far one of their most welcome features is the early-edition Floyd Rose, which is present here on the MJR. To us, it is a far more stable bridge than its more modern slim-line offspring and protects tuning from the severest of whammy abuse. The slightly recessed unit and under-plate cutaway here also provide a platform for some serious upward motion, if required.

The ANG is no slouch either, and it balances very nicely. The neck is a much slimmer affair than the MJR, but is still more of a comfortable 'C' shape than, for example, an Ibanez Wizard profile. Strung with 0.010s, we have a low action without fret buzz, but it would happily take a set of 0.009s with equal aplomb.

With EMGs onboard, the promise of high-output metal is achieved plugged in. As with the MJR, the amp is immediately driven to soaking wet levels of drive that often found us reaching for the gain control. However, that temptation was negated by the rather brutal, throaty and mid-rich Metallica-style sound produced as you start palm-muting powerchords. The guitar practically demands





that metal is performed upon it, and does it so well that it's almost churlish of us to criticise its performance in other musical genres. That said, rolling off the volume again cleans up the guitar very nicely; but in order to achieve lower-gain rock sounds some very accurate volume control positioning is required.

Verdict

There is currently a surfeit of mainstream and boutique builders offering stripped-down versions of their core range aimed at the guitarist armed with around £1,200 and looking to secure a top-quality 'pro' guitar but without the custom and sometimes 'unnecessary' aesthetic adornments. What sets apart the ANG from its rivals is the ability to deliver some pretty brutal metal sounds from a very small package. It's not the most sonically versatile instrument you'll ever play, but it's a superb, unashamedly metal guitar.

As for the MJR, if you're in the market for a high-end rock guitar then this should definitely be on your radar. The build quality is first-class, and that stunning neck alone makes the asking price more palatable. These are happy days indeed for the modern shredder. **G**



Caparison Dellinger-M3 MJR

PRICE: £2,299 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Japan
TYPE: Solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany/maple/mahogany
NECK: Oil-finished maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Schaller R2 locking nut/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Maple, 350-400mm (13.8-15.75") compound radius
FRETS: 24, jumbo
HARDWARE: Schaller S-FRT II with special corrosion-resistant screws, Gotoh SG381-07 H.A.P. tuners
ELECTRICS: DiMarzio Tone Zone (neck), DiMarzio X2N (bridge), 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 3.5/7.7
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: The Dellinger starts around £1,899, depending on spec
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: White Gloss (as reviewed)
Caparison Guitar Company
www.caparisonguitars.com



GUITARIST RATING	★★★★★
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: A high-end signature axe with serious shredding credentials



Caparison C2 ANG-QE

PRICE: £1,099 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Japan
TYPE: Solidbody electric
BODY: Maple top with quilted maple veneer, mahogany back
NECK: 3-piece maple, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 628mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound rosewood, 400mm (15.75") radius
FRETS: 24, jumbo
HARDWARE: Black chrome-plated Gotoh GE103B-T bridge, Gotoh GE101Z-T tailpiece
ELECTRICS: EMG 85 (neck), EMG 81 (bridge), 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume and tone, master volume
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 3.7/8.1
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: ANG-E without quilted maple veneer costs £979
FINISHES: Trans Red (as reviewed), Trans Blue, Trans Black



GUITARIST RATING	★★★★★
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: An aesthetically pleasing metal guitar that packs quite an aggressive punch

FIRST ▶ PLAY



MESA/BOOGIE MARK FIVE: 25
£1,379

WHAT IS IT? A reduced version of
Mesa's awesome Mark V

MARK OF QUALITY

Mesa proves it's still the big noise
in mini amps...

WORDS **NICK GUPPY**
PHOTOGRAPHY **GAVIN ROBERTS**

Mesa Engineering's original amplifier – the notorious Boogie – redefined guitar tone way back in the early 70s. With a full-on, 100-watt power stage and a high-efficiency Altec loudspeaker crammed into a tiny practice amp cabinet, the Boogie could, and frequently did, make 4x12 stacks look overblown and underpowered. Ever since, as Mesa has continued to develop the Mark II, III, IV and V amps, the original concept of the giant-killing small amp has remained unchanged. Not only is Mesa the originator of this paradigm, it continues to do it better than anyone else. Hot on the heels of the stunning Recto-Verb 25 we reviewed a few months ago comes a reduced version of the Mark V flagship, appropriately called the Mark Five: 25.

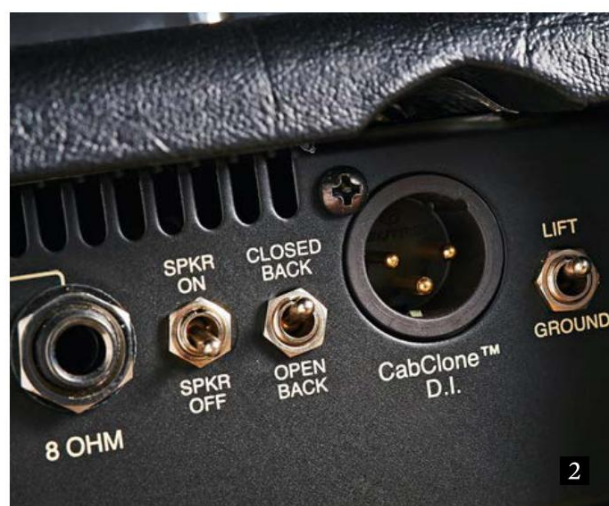
Currently available in head format, the Mark Five: 25 is unmistakably Boogie: beautifully designed, with microscopic attention to detail. The CNC-fabricated woodwork is super-clean, with perfectly defined edges, angles and curves. The heavy black vinyl is so neatly fitted it looks as if it's been sprayed on.





<http://bit.ly/guitarist389>





Inside the precision-cut and folded fan-cooled aluminium chassis, the electronics follow Mesa's conventional layout, with front-panel controls hand-wired to a densely-packed printed circuit board. Mesa's boards have a distinctive and pleasing look: in the past, many were hand-drawn and lettered by Randall Smith himself, with a unique layout style and the odd choice comment silk-screened in between component numbers – often referring to music Smith was listening to at the time! The Mark Five: 25's PCB has been laid out using CAD, but still has several quirks, which are part of Mesa's secret sonic recipe.

Both channels have three very different voicings, totalling six basic sounds that cover

every possible need, from fat 'blackface'-inspired cleans to full-on metal. Lurking in there are very close approximations of the original Mark I and the coveted Mark IIC. Both channels have identical rotary controls for gain, EQ and volume, with an increased range on the upper channel's mid knob acting as a variable boost.

The power output can be pre-set for each channel, to either 10 or 25 watts. Then there's the five-band graphic EQ, a key part of the Boogie magic for many users. This can be pre-set to on, off or footswitchable modes, using the included two-button plain aluminium footswitch – a small nod to the past.

1 Miniature marvel: it's a tight fit but Mesa has crammed a complex six-valve preamp and a valve-powered reverb spring into a fan-cooled chassis that's smaller than many lunchbox amps

2 Mesa's superb CabClone speaker-emulated output is one of the best we've ever used

3 The graphic EQ uses expensive toroidal inductors, like those used in high-end studio outboard equipment. It's a core element of the Boogie magic





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On the rear panel, there are two level controls for the spring reverb, that is valve powered and transformer coupled, with the spring tank itself recessed into a cut-out in the bottom of the cabinet. There are effects loop send and returns, too; best of all, Mesa has included a built-in CabClone speaker-emulated direct out, with speaker on/off, cabinet size and ground lift switches. It all adds up to a seriously powerful tone platform with versatility and quality to satisfy almost any player.

Sounds

The Mark Five: 25 has remarkably low hum and hiss levels, even at more extreme gain settings. Both channels offer a staggering quality of overdrive and tone, from shimmering cleans to the pushed bluesy 'Fat' voice and a fabulous touch-sensitive crunch sound that's good enough to record an entire album with. The lead channel's three voices cover any soloing need, from classic 80s Mark IIC rock to the Xtreme mode's

devastating metal vibe when teamed with the graphic EQ. The CabClone circuit is the icing on the cake, providing some of the best 'mic'd up' sounds we've heard, while the reverb is lush, sweet and noise-free – a real triumph, considering how close the spring is to the mains transformer.

Verdict

It may look like a toy, but make no mistake, Mesa's Mark Five: 25 is a serious professional tool that is as hard as nails beneath its beautiful exterior. It's ridiculously loud, combined with the specially designed 1x12 extension cab, and sounds like a million dollars, making the retail price seem like good value for money.

And, yes, it's expensive, but like all Boogie equipment, you get what you pay for and then some. It's hardly surprising, then, that the Mark Five: 25's only serious competitor is the similarly awesome Mesa Recto-Verb 25 we reviewed recently. Other small amp builders take note – the bar just got raised. **G**



Mesa/Boogie Mark Five: 25

PRICE: £1,379

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: All-valve preamp and power amp, with solid-state rectifier

OUTPUT: 25 watts or 10 watts RMS, switchable for either channel

VALVES: 6x 12AX7, 2x EL84

DIMENSIONS: 210 (h) x 360 (w) x 230mm (d)

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 7/16

CABINET: Birch ply, jointed corners

CHANNELS: 2, each with 3

voice settings

CONTROLS: Gain, bass, mid and treble, presence and 2x master volume

FOOTSWITCH: 2-button footswitch selects channels and toggles the graphic EQ

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Spring reverb, CabClone speaker-emulated line out with ground lift, cab size and speaker on/off switches, half-power switching selectable for each channel, 5-band graphic EQ selectable on/off or switched per channel. Series effects loop, headphone socket

OPTIONS: Choice of coloured vinyl and solid wood finishes, contact distributor for details

RANGE OPTIONS: The complementary straight and angled 1x12 cabs cost £429

Westside Distribution

0844 326 2000

www.mesaboogie.com



GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★	
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: Mesa's latest amps are among its best ever – this one is a compact killer

FIRST ▶ PLAY



**CASE J2 SEMI-HOLLOW
DOUBLE CUTAWAY**
£3,500

WHAT IS IT? Double-cut semi-hollow electric





<http://bit.ly/guitarist389>

SPECIAL CASE

Looking for a world-class semi-acoustic? Head for Kent...

WORDS **DAVE BURRLUCK**

PHOTOGRAPHY **SIMON LEES**

It's been a while, five years to be precise, since we featured the work of Kent-based maker Jon Case, known for his stylised, modern designs that have the endearing quality of appearing new yet strangely familiar. Back then, we featured the J1, an offset reimagined version of the Les Paul that has subsequently found favour with Brit pickup maker Tim Mills, who, let's face it, knows a thing or two about guitars and how they should sound.

Is there a mythical 'crossroads' for guitar makers, we wonder as we run our hands over this J2 for the first time. Jon's instruments have always been impeccably crafted, with an ultra-clean design – no doubt the experience of his previous graphic designer profession coming into play. But what seems to have happened over the past few years is that his craft has been doused in vibe and class. Previous J2s have been single-cuts, and the offset design meant the upper shoulder looked, perhaps, a little large. But this double-cut version has, to our eyes, a much more classic appearance and feel.

Like many independent makers, Jon's semi vision is smaller than the iconic ES-335 – approximately 14.25 inches wide – but it's a little larger than, for example, the Gibson ES-339 or ES-390. Depth is more akin to an ES-335: 1.75 inches at the cleanly grained ivoroid-bound edge, although the top and back are less arched – partly due to the construction method. Gibson's tops and backs are contoured to shape in huge presses; Jon uses thinner laminations, over hand-carved formers, pulled to shape in a vacuum press.

Modernistic flourishes abound, from the stylised f-holes, through to the short but efficient back-angled headstock and the wave





inlays with matching fingerboard end; it might not attract the blinkered traditionalist, but it certainly hangs together very well.

Classed as a 'comfy C' profile, the neck is shaped beautifully with plenty of depth – 21mm at the 1st fret and 23.3mm at the 12th. The shoulders are especially well carved, seeming to give our hand the impression that the neck is smaller than it actually is. The ebony fingerboard's edge binding is nicely rounded, the big frets impeccably domed and polished, likewise the bone nut. And even under a magnifying lupe we can't find any gaps or filler around those classy inlays. In fact, we can't fault this build in any way.

Unlike some makers, who want to re-invent the tonal wheel, Jon sticks to the classic semi set-up with dual Bare Knuckle 'buckers and the standard Gibson-like 'vintage' wiring, the

output jack placed on a metal 'football' plate on the guitar's side.

Feel & Sounds

With a lovely, light but purposeful weight, the J2 is perfectly balanced when played seated and fits the player well – unlike an ES-335, that in this position can not only feel unbalanced but also rather big.

The mahogany centre-block is definitely going to play its part sound-wise, but acoustically it has good volume with that slightly honky push that seems to be a part of the tune-o-matic/stud tailpiece setup. What is immediately obvious is not only the instrument's stability in terms of tuning but also its very precise intonation – ideal if you're using more complex chord voicings higher up the fingerboard.

1 The all-laminate construction is unusual for a small custom maker. The veneers are glued together, laid over formers hand carved by Jon Case and pulled into shape on a vacuum press

2 These Bare Knuckle Rebel Yells might seem a bit 'rock' but work well in this resonant setting

3 Along with this classic bridge and tailpiece combo, Jon Case offers the excellent Pigtail adjustable wrapover one-piece bridge: your choice

4 Case uses mahogany with spruce facings top and bottom carved to match the contour of the top and back



<http://bit.ly/guitarist389>

With a little more poke than you might expect, especially on the hot bridge pickup, the J2 sounds slightly darker than any of our reference semis, but that produces some thick, warm voices, especially with a little volume roll-off. It's a little less snappy than the archetypal ES-335, and certainly an original '68 that we had to compare with, but with a slightly different amp EQ it's not far off. But this isn't an ES-335 clone, and its slightly thicker voice, especially into a crunchy amp, reveals that touch-sensitive, juicy tone that is older-style Robben Ford, or smooth-as-you-like Larry Carlton. It's perfectly capable of some classic rock raunch, too, especially from the bridge pickup, while almost Kossoff-like wailing leads ooze from the neck pickup. Coil-splits might help to broaden the palette, but additional specs such as these are easy with this multi-option build. As it is, it's an astonishingly good, woody, resonant thinline semi.

Verdict

A UK build isn't always the first choice when we consider that high-end luxury purchase. But we have a good number of world-class makers that really do challenge more desirable USA brands. Jon Case is one of them. Yes, £3,500 is a considerable outlay, but for a semi-custom build of this quality, made by one man, not in a factory, it's not over-priced. If off-the-shelf doesn't do it for you, Jon Case can help. 

With a lovely, light but purposeful weight, the J2 is perfectly balanced when played seated

Case J2 Semi-Hollow Double Cutaway

PRICE: £3,500 (inc case)

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Double-cutaway semi-solid thinline electric

BODY: Mahogany back and sides with bookmatched figured maple top – all laminate. Mahogany centre-block

NECK: One-piece mahogany, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 628mm (24.75")

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound ebony, m-o-p 'wave' inlays, 305mm (12") fingerboard radius

FRETS: 22, jumbo (Dunlop 6100)

HARDWARE: Kluson tune-o-matic-style bridge and stud tailpiece, Grover Deluxe Keystone tuners

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm

ELECTRICS: Two Bare Knuckle covered Rebel Yell humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, volume and tone for each pickup

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 2.95/6.5

OPTIONS: As a semi-custom guitar, numerous tweaks can be made, like neck dimensions, 'board radius and material, pickups, one-piece bridge – all no cost. Upcharges for gold hardware, multiple bindings, etc

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Tobacco Burst (as reviewed) gloss nitrocellulose

Case Guitars

01843 847229

www.caseguitars.co.uk



GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★	
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: Simply a superb modern semi-solid that any serious player should investigate



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FEEL IT.



th•mann
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Frontend

Don't miss it! Must-see guitar goings-on for the coming weeks...



NAMM 2015

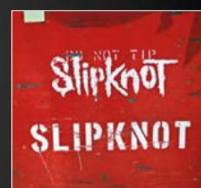
22-25 January 2015, Anaheim, CA

The most important event in the music-industry calendar is almost upon us. For the likes of us, it's a mind-blowing gallivant around a huge show floor, attempting to cover 1,500-plus exhibitors showing off more than 5,000 music brands. More importantly for *Guitarist* readers, by following our footsteps on MusicRadar.com, you'll have the inside track on what's going to be filling our pages and possibly your rehearsal room in the new year. We're expecting the trends we picked out in last issue's Gear Of The Year feature to continue – so that means more digital innovation, plenty of semi-hollow and hollowbody guitars, portable powerful amps and, as ever, a few weird and wonderful surprises along the way. Check out issue 392 for our show review.



Nils Lofgren Tour
8-26 January 2015, various UK venues
Springsteen's redoubtable six-string sideman embarks on a 16-date tour of the UK, focusing on his own solo catalogue. It's a rare opportunity to see him on these shores; read more on p32, and see nilslofgren.com for more information.

Kenny Wayne Shepherd Tour
10-15 April 2015, various UK venues
Fresh from rave reviews for his October tour, Kenny has confirmed a further five dates in the UK. The blues-rockers will bring a star-studded band, including Chris Layton and vocalist Noah Hunt. See www.kennywayneshepherd.com for more.



Slipknot Tour
14-27 January 2015
Tickets are still available for Slipknot's 10-date Prepare For Hell UK arena tour in January. The masked metal behemoths will showcase their acclaimed new album, *.5: The Gray Chapter*, and will be supported by Korn. See www.slipknot1.com for ticket details.

Tommy Emmanuel
13-23 January 2015
Australian fingerstyle phenomenon Tommy Emmanuel touches down in the UK for an eight-date tour in January. If you've never seen him, don't miss out on a night of incredible virtuoso acoustic fretmanship. See www.tommyemmanuel.com for info.



Round-up: Multi-purpose multi-effects

One box, many sounds – it's an enduring fascination for guitarists. So here are some recent examples of great multi-effects units, built with different uses in mind...



1 TC-Helicon VoiceLive 3

£669

www.tchelicon.com

This high-end floor pedal is aimed squarely at players who want to control the effects for their guitar and vocal signals from one place. It stores up to 500 user-programmable presets, made up of effects blocks for each signal path, has a range of different routing options and 45 minutes of looping time, and offers top-quality effects, including vocal harmony, vocoding and amp simulation.

We said: "Offers total control over vocal and guitar sounds for the singing guitarist"

2 Line 6 AMPLIFi FX100

£229

www.uk.line6.com

The AMPLIFi FX100 is a floor-based amp and effects modeller, which streams music via

Bluetooth from an Apple device so you can play along with it, using either editable guitar tone presets or a ready-matched tone from Line 6's online community. A fine practice tool, it can also be used in a live context through an amp or PA system.

We said: "A fine idea for jamming along to your favourite songs, and a practical portable item for onstage use"

3 Fractal Axe-Fx II XL

€2,599

www.fractalaudio.com

The Axe-Fx II's growing list of pro endorseees cements its position as the touring guitarist's go-to choice for simulated guitar tones. The unit stores presets, which are built from entire signal chains, and the results very closely approach those achievable in a pro recording studio. The XL version offers greater practicality and improved storage.

We said: "Accurate-sounding modelled amps and effects with a

high degree of flexibility in sound creation, routing and control"

4 T-Rex SoulMate

£459

www.t-rex-effects.com

The SoulMate is a hybrid of multi-effects and stompboxes, aiming for the best of both worlds by combining five T-Rex effects – overdrive, distortion, delay, reverb and boost – inside a single enclosure, with a built-in tuner and effects loop. With hardy construction and great tones for gigging blues and classic-rock players, this could be all the effects you need.

We said: "When weighed up against a similarly stocked 'board, the price looks attractive"

5 Boss GT-001

£275

www.roland.co.uk

The GT-001 is designed for the home recording studio rather than the stage, and packs the

COSM sounds found in Boss's gig-tested GT range into a small, stylish box. As well as a huge choice of effects and amps, there's a guitar-to-MIDI function and an XLR In for recording acoustics and vocals.

We said: "Your perfect companion for computer recording and practice"

6 Tech 21 Fly Rig 5

£299

www.tech21nyc.com

The robust, yet lightweight and portable Fly Rig 5 is designed to provide effects and amp simulation in one unit, to be plugged into either an amp or directly into a PA. The Plexi section provides distortion and boost; the SansAmp provides level, drive, EQ and reverb; and the DLA is a tap-tempo delay effect.

We said: "Slip one into your guitar case, and you'll always be covered for sound. The Fly Rig is a potential lifesaver"

PRS PRIVATE STOCK MODELS



Available exclusively from the PRS Private Stock team, the new Private Stock Models are the culmination of our experience studying guitar building and making musical instruments. Specified by Paul Reed Smith, these instruments are built with unparalleled attention to detail using the highest quality materials and designs that PRS offers. They are heirloom quality instruments with remarkable tone and playability. Find out more at, prsguitars.com/privatestock.



Shown from left to right - McCarty, Brent Mason, McCarty Singlecut and Violin II (featured). Private Stock models not shown include our line of artist signature acoustics and the Gary Grainger signature bass.

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PRS PAUL
REED
SMITH
GUITARS



Yuletide Loog

Get the kids started on the guitar this Christmas with the three-string Loog

Loog Guitars is the brainchild of Rafael Atijas, who started the company via a Kickstarter campaign in 2011. Its diminutive three-string instruments, tuned to an open-G chord (D-G-B from low to high), are designed to offer an entry point into playing guitar for younger children, who can get on with the important business of making music while their hands are still too small to get to grips with traditional-sized beginners' instruments. It comes in easy-to-

assemble kit form (though its single lipstick pickup and electronics are ready to go), meaning children can build the guitar before they play it.

Clearly inspired by mail-order guitars of the 1960s, the Electric Loog comes in one of five classic colours evoking that decade. It costs £169, including delivery, from www.letthekidsrock.com, and there's also an acoustic model, the Loog II, with nylon strings, priced at £135. See the website for demos.

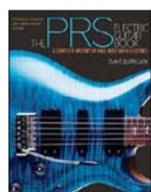


The Loog: a Christmas gift that keeps giving

Guitarist Books The pick of the best guitar tomes

The PRS Electric Guitar Book

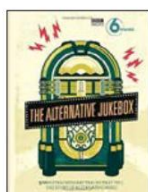
Dave Burrluck
Backbeat Books £25



This 30th anniversary edition of the definitive book on Paul Reed Smith guitars, by *Guitarist's* own Dave Burrluck, has been fully revised and updated to include the latest goings-on in the manufacturer's fast-moving history. Recent diversity in the company's lines, such as the inclusion of Floyd Rose vibratos, the introduction of the Starla and Mira along with chambered and semi-hollow models, seven-strings, new pickup designs and, of course, the S2 models, are all covered, as you'd expect. But viewed as a whole, it's the restless innovation of company founder Paul Reed Smith that the book is ultimately cataloguing – a 30-year success story that shows no signs of slowing down.

BBC Radio 6 Music's Alternative Jukebox

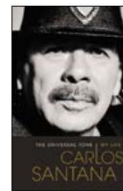
Various authors
Octopus Books £20



This Christmas stocking filler is an attempt by the curators of BBC Radio's 6 Music to present a list of 500 tracks that define the umbrella term 'alternative music'. The station's current presenters explain their picks in a chronological format, beginning with the "firestarters" who broadened pop musicians' horizons and paved the way for future experimentation. The book bullseyes all the accepted 'alt' classics, as you'd expect, but also includes a wide range of experimental tracks that may have slipped under the radar. It falls short of being a guide to the really obscure underbelly of experimental music, but it'll undoubtedly be a handy reference for the next time you're searching Spotify.

The Universal Tone

Carlos Santana
Orion Books £20



Perhaps we're a little biased here, but there have been some cracking reads among the recent spate of autobiographies from famous guitarists. Unflinching accounts from Slash, Keith Richards, Eric Clapton and Buddy Guy, to name just a few, have all earned themselves a sizeable readership outside of guitar-enthusiast circles, and Carlos Santana's story is poised to do the same. Carlos has rubbed shoulders with many of the greats of the musical and political world, but refreshingly, he's not beyond self criticism; and his fascination with spirituality, mixed with the love of music and discipline he's developed from a young age, have helped him to forge a storytelling style that's as unique and honest as the best of his guitar solos.



A gorgeous ES-345 from our Ultimate Guitar Collection

The Art Of Noise

Guitarist's photography now available in luxury prints for your home and rehearsal room

Over the years, *Guitarist's* team of talented photographers have built up an archive of guitar photography that's among the finest and most varied collections anywhere in the world. But instead of keeping it to ourselves to occasionally flick through and drool over, we've teamed up with leading photo library Photos.com by Getty Images to offer an exclusive selection of framed prints and canvases to adorn your walls.

This carefully curated collection of some of the most rare, iconic and to-die-for guitar images we've captured over the years isn't available to buy anywhere else. We've included gems both vintage and modern, as

well as historically important guitars used by famous players, such as Rory Gallagher's 1961 Fender Stratocaster. This stunning selection will be updated regularly to ensure that the finest shots we capture are added to the roster.

We're also offering readers of *Guitarist* and our sister magazines *Total Guitar*, *Guitar Techniques* and *Guitarist Presents: Acoustic* a discount off any order: just quote the code GUITAR20 when you've chosen the print or prints you want, and you'll receive 20 per cent off the purchase price.

Visit www.photos.com and search for *Guitarist* – The Ultimate Guitar Collection to browse the stunning range for yourself.



"One of the finest guitar straps in the world"

Guitarist Magazine

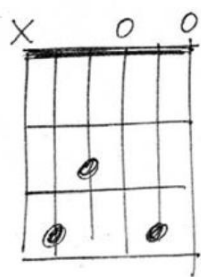
www.heistercamp.co.uk

Substitute

Tired of using the same old chord shapes?
These substitutions will freshen up your playing in seconds.

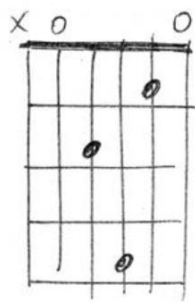
This Issue: Added Ninths

These four chords will fit together into a progression in the key of C major, but do try experimenting with them. We're starting with Cadd9, made by modifying the good old open C major chord



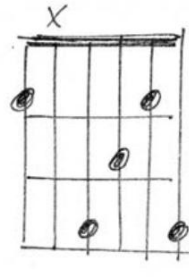
Cadd9

You can also add the ninth to minor chords (the added note is the same in either case). Adding a B note to an A chord gives Aadd9, so adding a B note to an A minor chord gives Amadd9!



Amadd9

That Amadd9 is potentially movable as a barre chord, but you'll need quite flexible hands. This one is easier to move up and down the neck. Use your thumb to fret the bottom note, or omit it altogether if you prefer.



Fadd9

This one is slightly more unusual, but still fits the bill. It's a modified version of a classic open G major campfire chord. We don't need the 5th string here, so make sure you block it off with the finger you use on the 6th string.



Gadd9

And also...

HANDY VERBS

DigiTech has released the Polara Stereo Reverb pedal, offering seven reverb types in a compact stompbox. Room, hall, spring, plate, modulated, reverse and halo effects are shaped by level, decay and liveliness controls. The Polara has a US SRP of \$187. See www.digitech.com for more info.

BLUE FALCON

Gretsch has added to its Professional Collection with the limited-edition G6136T Falcon Limited Crème De Marine. With late-50s styling, two High Sensitive Filter Trons, a Bigsby and gold hardware offsetting the subtle soft blue finish, it's another class act. Sigh... The SRP is £3,130; see www.gretschguitars.com for more information.

READY TO FLY

Blackstar has released the Fly 3, a tiny (136mm high, 171mm wide and 101mm deep) three-watt mini combo with two channels, digital 'tape' delay and Blackstar's ISF tone shaping feature. Available for a mere £49.99, it sounds as if it could be the ideal partner for that new electric-guitar shaped Christmas present by the tree.

Guitarist Picks

Highlights from last issue



Electrics

McPherson
Nomad
£1,995

"World-class... We've rarely played a better UK custom guitar"



Acoustics

Nineboys Tonk
Bros Parlour
£399

"Affordable Brit-made electro that has undeniable mojo"



Amps

BluGuitar Amp1
£589

"The Amp1 will do for pedal amps what the iPad did for tablets – watch out!"



Effects

AmpTweaker
SwirlPool
£209

"An inspired deviation from standard tremolo pedals"



Misc

Boss VE-2 Vocal
Harmonist
£175

"Easy vocal enhancement and harmonies for singing guitarists"

And Finally...

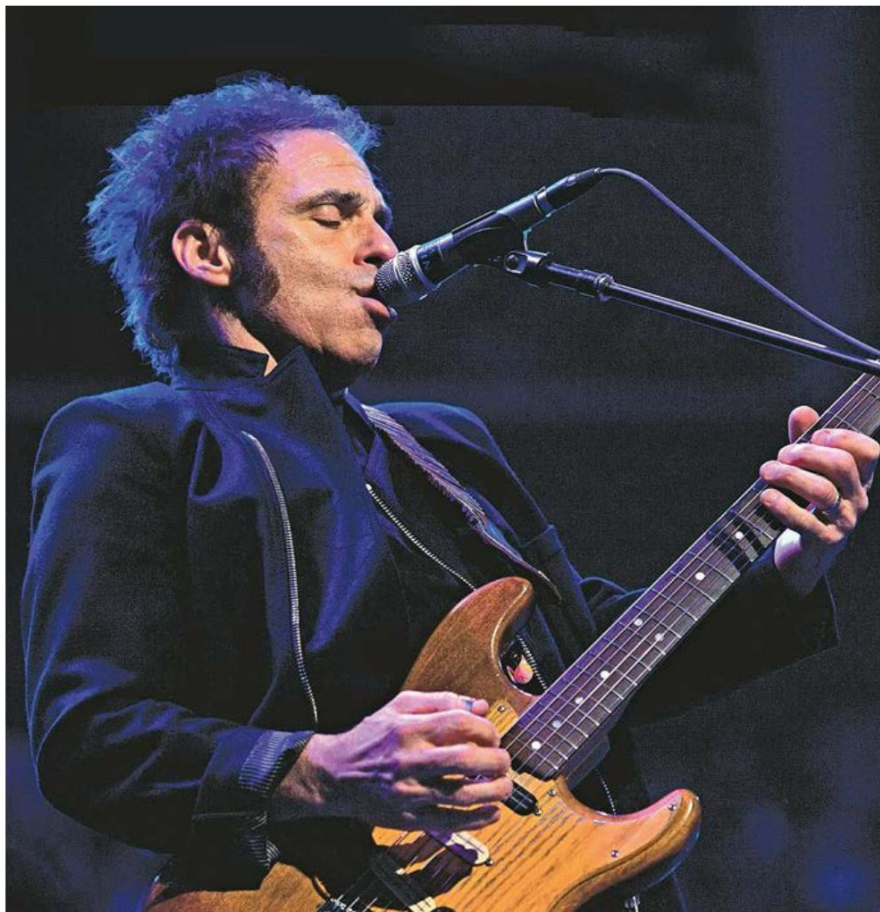
TIN PAN ALLEY
WC2
DENMARK STREET • LONDON

Is Denmark Street's Heritage Under Threat? London's Denmark Street is synonymous with British popular music. It was the home of music publishing from the 1920s, earning it the nickname **Tin Pan Alley**, and has since hosted recording facilities such as Regent Sound Studios, star-studded hang-outs such as **La Gioconda café** and live venues including the **12 Bar Club** – as well as being home to

the capital's largest collection of guitar retailers. Proposed demolition work and plans to develop the area have prompted concerns among campaigners that the area's heritage and its existing businesses, in particular the 12 Bar Club, are under threat. An **online petition calling for the Council and English Heritage** to save Tin Pan Alley and the 12 Bar venue currently stands at more than **15,000 signatures**. To find out more about the petition and to register your support, visit www.change.org/p/head-of-democratic-services-don-t-bin-tin-pan-alley.



BRAD WHITFORD OF AEROSMITH WAILS ON HIS EX-DC PLAYING THROUGH A SERIES OF 3 MONKEYS STACKS FOR AN INCREDIBLE TONE



Nils Lofgren

The A-list sideman has scored hits with everyone from Neil Young to Bruce Springsteen. But did Nils get nil in the...

10 Questions We Ask Everyone

1 WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST GUITAR AND WHEN DID YOU GET IT?

"My first real official guitar was a Fender Telecaster, probably in '64 or '65. Before that, I had some \$15 guitar that my parents got me from Sears and Roebuck, but it almost couldn't be called an instrument. For me, it was either get a Tele, because Jeff Beck played one, or get a Strat, because Hendrix did. I went with the Tele, and eventually moved over to the Strat."

2 THE BUILDING'S BURNING DOWN – WHAT GUITAR FROM YOUR COLLECTION WOULD YOU SAVE?

"That's a rough one, but probably the Martin D-18 that Neil Young loaned me to make *After The Gold Rush*. Mostly, I was playing piano on that album, but one day, we were gonna do *Tell Me Why* and Neil wanted it played on two acoustics sat across

from each other. I didn't own one – so he handed me this D-18, and gave it to me at the end. It doesn't leave the home."

3 WHAT'S THE OLDEST GUITAR YOU HAVE?

"I've got an old, beat-up Gibson L-10 from the 20s. But a number of years back – this was on the Magic Tour with The E Street Band – I went to a great guitar exchange in Chicago and I found two little gut-string parlour guitars in an alligator case. One was from the 1930s, the other was made in 1897."

4 WHAT ASPECT OF PLAYING GUITAR WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE BETTER AT?

"[laughs] There's no aspect I *wouldn't* like to be better at! Y'know, there's fingerpicking, but just everything about it. The more I learn, the more I feel like a beginner. But

it's not a race anymore for me. I play well enough to get up and sing for people and to have it mean something."

5 WHAT'S THE WORST THING THAT'S EVER HAPPENED TO YOU ON STAGE?

"A couple of times, when I did the backflip off the trampoline, I didn't make it around and almost cracked my head open. Sometimes, my feet have gone out from under me and I've slid across the stage on my rear end. A couple of years ago, at the New Orleans Jazz Festival, I fell backwards over a monitor and tore my rotator cuffs."

6 WHAT SONG WOULD YOU PLAY ON ACOUSTIC AROUND THE CAMPFIRE?

"I'd probably start with *Long May You Run* by Neil Young. We got to do that on MTV Unplugged, and it was one of the songs on my album *The Loner: Nils Sings Neil*."

7 WHEN DID YOU LAST CHANGE YOUR OWN STRINGS?

"When I'm at home, there's no staff here, nobody on call. It's very grassroots. If I need a guitar fixed, I'll take it down the road, but changing strings is something I still do. I changed them last month."

8 WHAT ARE YOU DOING FIVE MINUTES BEFORE YOU GO ON STAGE...

"I'll ask people to leave – except working personnel, and my wife. I'll warm up my voice and try to play a little piece on the lever harp, which is an unusual instrument for me and a challenging thing to do. I'll be still. Breathe. Get my head in the game."

9 ...AND FIVE MINUTES AFTER?

"It's a hectic time. I call it 'the next set'. I come off, and I'm usually soaking wet from sweating. I'll grab a bunch of Sharpies, go out to the merch table, sign CDs and T-shirts for an hour or so – and I encourage the venue to keep the bar open, because people are standing in line."

10 IS THERE A GUITAR OR PIECE OF GEAR THAT YOU REGRET LETTING GO?

"In the 60s, I had a trade-off with Roy Buchanan. I traded one of my guitars for this double-cut Les Paul from the 50s: wood-finish with an eye painted in the middle. It was a treasured guitar. I loaned it to my best friend, and some guys came to his apartment – who knows what kind of deal went bad, but they broke it into a million pieces and destroyed it." [HY]

Nils Lofgren's *Face The Music* is out now. See www.nilslofgren.com for details.



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DR-22WL



DR-44WL



- ▶ Direct, encrypted wi-fi connection between the recorder and your smartphone or tablet computer
- ▶ The free DR CONTROL app allows you to remote control the recorder and check the recorded material
- ▶ Send your recordings wirelessly from your smartphone
- ▶ Numerous automatic functions can make recording easier
- ▶ Record simultaneously in WAV and MP3 format or with different level settings
- ▶ High resolution (WAV/BWF up to 96 kHz and 24 bit or MP3 up to 320 Kbit/s)
- ▶ Use practice functions, overdubs and a reverb effect
- ▶ Simple scene dial for instant setup on the DR-22WL
- ▶ 4 tracks with mixer and bounce feature on the DR-44WL

DR-22WL



DR-44WL

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Feedback

Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor. Drop us a line at guitarist@futurenet.com – you might even win a prize!

Star letter



KORG

Each issue's Star Letter wins a Korg Pandora Stomp – an ingenious compact multi-effects with a wealth of options that's worth £119! www.korg.co.uk



PLANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

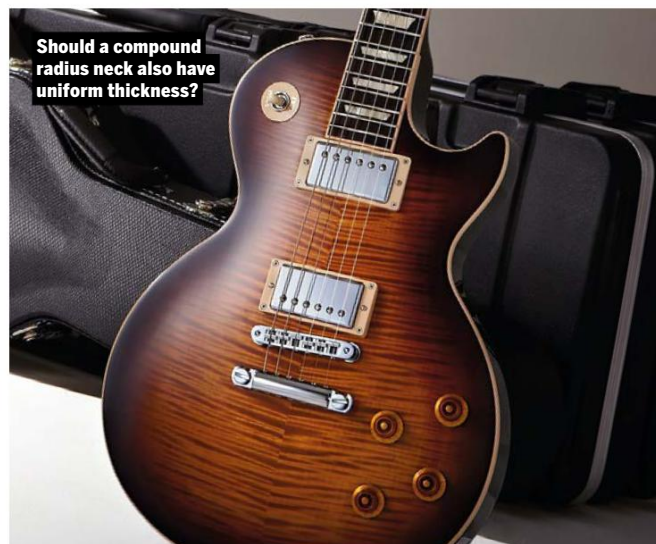
Christmas 2014 is a major milestone for me as it will be exactly 60 years since I received my first guitar for a Christmas present as an 11-year-old in 1954. The guitar was unbranded but was the same type as those pictured in Andy Babiuk's *Beatles Gear Book* as George's first guitars [a Resonet Futurama], and you could park a car under the strings at the 12th fret.

I was born in London and migrated to Sydney in 1966 and the guitar has been with me at all times. I have played from London pubs to the Sydney Opera House to the backs of trucks in the Aussie Outback, and I have played in a semi-professional capacity for 50-plus of those 60 years (music never quite paid enough to fully survive on). I am now at that age where I realise that the more I learn the less I know and I am still hoping to someday learn how to play the darn thing!

Musicians I have played in bands with over the years are lifelong friends, and we still get together every week and play (we are all pensioners) and we still gig when offered, although these days mostly for charity. Through the guitar I have seen things, done things, been to places and made memories that non-musicians probably will never experience. When it's time to jump to our coda, the guitar and I will be able to look back on a bloody good time.

Phil Taylor, via email

Congratulations on six decades with a guitar in your hand, Phil. What's most gratifying about hearing your story is that it's further proof, if any were needed, the guitar never stops revealing its subtleties and mysteries to those that love playing. Truly it's a lifelong source of solace, excitement and satisfaction.



Should a compound radius neck also have uniform thickness?

KEEP IT IN PROPORTION

Dear *Guitarist*, I read with great interest Mick Taylor's response to John Talman's question (Q&A, issue 387) about compound radius fretboards. The explanation that Mick provided highlighted two factors: that compound radius fretboards make playing chords more comfortable, while also alleviating string choking when bending notes. But for me, as a luthier, the main rationale for compound radius fretboards is based on an entirely different factor: the need to maintain a consistent thickness of the fretboard throughout its length. Because the fretboard on a guitar get wider towards the bridge, the radius of the fretboard must also increase in proportion to the width if the fretboard is to be kept the same thickness along its entire length.

Consider the alternative: if the fretboard has a single radius throughout its length then as the fretboard becomes wider towards the bridge then the thickness of the fretboard will increase along its centreline (assuming that the thickness at

its edges is to be maintained).

This thickening of the fretboard has implications for string action, which should increase anyway as you progress up the fretboard, raising the string height above the body of the guitar and hence the height of the saddle.

For both playability and appearance – not withstanding the ease of set up – I build my guitars with compound radius fretboards so that the thickness of the fretboard along its edges, and along its centreline, is kept consistent throughout its length. The surface of the compound radius fretboard is that of a truncated cone and means that the saddle and hence the strings can be set lower in relation to the body of the guitar.

Derek Hall, via email

CHEAP IS CHEERFUL

I confess to being an out-and-out snob when it comes to guitars and amps. If it wasn't built in the USA in the dim and distant past and/or breathed upon by some ancient guitar guru in a wooden shed in the bayou, I'm really not interested. But then here's the reality.



Some cheaper guitars can be serious, well-sorted instruments

This is a hangover from the days when 'pattern' or copy guitars as they're now better known were unplayable. This is no longer the case. Many Asian examples are really outstanding while a disappointingly significant number of high-end US examples are, in reality, quite ordinary or even disappointing and unacceptably poor in my view.

Recently I've started doing some gigs and there's nothing like playing live to A) sharpen your focus and improve your technique, B) properly learn the material, Nigel, and C) learn to take the gear you know is going to sound good, be versatile across a number of genres and not let you down. Therefore my go-to kit is now a T-style Warmoth 'parts-caster' with Gibson humbuckers, an Indonesian-built Adam Black jazz arch top with Seymour Duncan Antiquity P-90s (brilliant pickups) and a no-name Strat-alike, which cost £120 and to which I have done nothing apart from put a set of 0.010s on. All handle brilliantly and sound great – subject to operator input of course!

Okay, I do still have a weakness for classic US-built guitars, especially Gibson archtops. Thing is though, I tend to leave the ES-345 and (real) Strat at home these days. You've got to play what works, not be a slave to the headstock logo!

Nigel Whiting, via email

We've said it many times in recent years, Nigel – there's no flies on most entry level instruments these days. And if you happen to gel with a guitar, don't let anyone tell you it's not good enough. They're called instruments for a reason: looked at objectively they're a precision-built interface between your musical creativity and the ears of your listeners. As much as we love admiring them, guitars are at their most enjoyable when they completely disappear in our hands during play. If you get one that does that, the last thing you'll be thinking about is the logo.

HELL FOR LEATHER

I noticed in issue 386 that you guys recommended leather and suede products to Rob Francis, who emailed in search of the perfect guitar strap. It's worth mentioning that if, for whatever reason, you are looking for a good guitar strap that isn't manufactured from animal products then there are plenty of cruelty-free options. For example, couchguitarstraps.com over in the US make some very cool straps – plus belts, wallets and other accessories – from recycled military-issue seatbelt material, vintage car vinyl and more, and the company counts members of Wilco and Mastodon among its fans. Don't get me started on leather amp handles and horse-hide glue...

David Strachan, via email



Guitarist
EXCLUSIVE
OFFER

VINTAGE VOYAGE!

IN CASE you missed it in last month's issue, here's a reminder about an exclusive offer for *Guitarist* readers to experience one of the world's finest vintage guitar collections at first hand, on an all-inclusive weekend trip to Sweden. Go on, spoil yourself – or get some pals together and make it a 'tour' to tone heaven...

To celebrate last issue's Gear Of The Year edition, we got together with the good people at Guitars: The Museum in Sweden, whose incredible collection of vintage guitars featured in issue 387. From '58 Flying Vs to '54 Strats and more, the museum is the perfect place to lose yourself in the magic of vintage tone. The collection's owners, Mikael and Samuel Åhdén, have generously offered *Guitarist* readers the chance to go on a 'guitar safari' visit to the museum for just £500! For that price, you'll get return flights from London to the beautiful

city of Umeå on the edge of the Arctic Circle, then take a guided tour of Guitars: The Museum with the Åhdén Brothers, attend a B-Bender guitar clinic and also attend a talk by the brothers, examining the collection's finest instruments in full detail. Guests will stay at Clarion Collection Hotel Uman in Umeå (a four-minute walk from the museum) and meals will be provided both at the hotel and at the museum restaurant where you can sample a bespoke 'Guitars' ale. This stunning offer is for the weekend of 13 to 15 March 2015 only. As a bonus, anyone taking up the offer will be entered into a draw to win a custom printed, signed and numbered, limited-to-20 edition GTM Fender Cabronita Series guitar valued at over £500. To book a place, visit: guitar.axaco.se. Be aware this offer is strictly limited to 20 places, on a first-come-first-served basis. So don't delay!

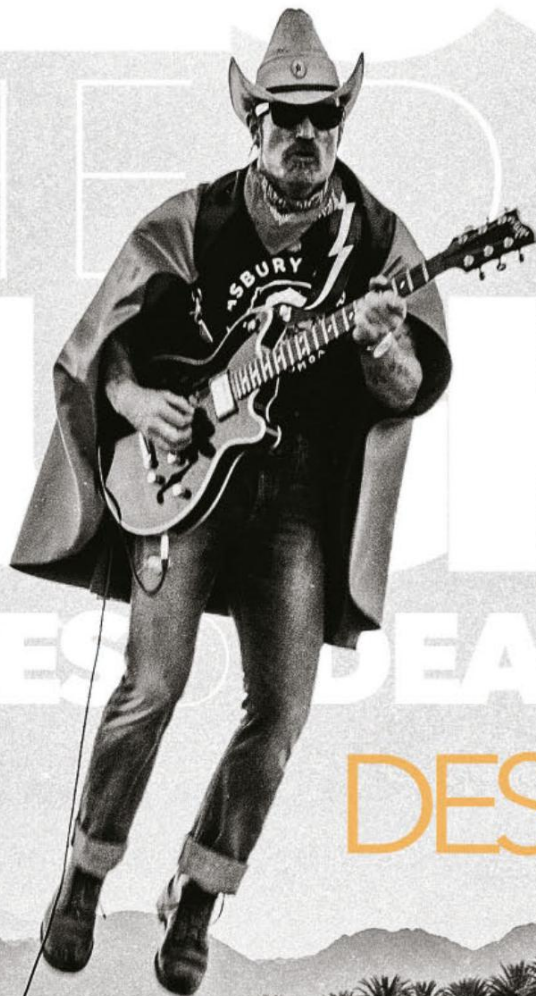
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WISH LIST

Photography by **Neil Godwin**

VIDEO DEMO



<http://bit.ly/guitarist389>

Avalon Guitars Ard Rí A3-335FC **£4,110**

Avalon has been making guitars since 1989 and shares some history with Northern Ireland's famous maker George Lowden. But that's another story! Based in Newtownards, five main builders craft the current Avalon range that has, in the past two years, been restructured, as main man Steve McIlwrath explains. "Since the recovery of the business in 2012, we've grouped the model range into six distinct collections," he tells us. "Pioneer is the entry-level Avalon (known formerly as the Legacy series); Fusion, the nylon-string models (previously the Jazz series); Americana, the retro-styled, Sunburst-finished trio of models; Anthem, the artist signature/tribute models; Arc, the bevel guitars; and Ard Rí is formerly the Premier series, which has the widest choice and highest grade of tonewoods and is the most flexible range in terms of custom-build options."

And it's from that top range that our featured beauty originates – an auditorium-sized acoustic completed on

24 September 2014. *Ard rí* means 'high king' in Irish, and it's an apt title for one of the most beautiful instruments – in looks and sound – we've encountered for a while. The understated aesthetic lets the beauty of the woods, especially the imbuia on the back and sides, shine through. The design uses Avalon's AXE bracing pattern and here, along with the Alaskan yellow cedar top, with rosewood binding and sycamore purfling, we have a matching ebony fingerboard and bridge.

The standard price of this Ard Rí is £3,440, and there are upgrades here for the body woods, which takes the price up to £4,110. But the beauty of this Ard Rí collection is that you can create your own instrument from four different body sizes, with or without rounded or pointed cutaway, and with plenty more options to choose from. If you're on a tighter budget but like the style, the Pioneer auditorium starts at £2,870. 

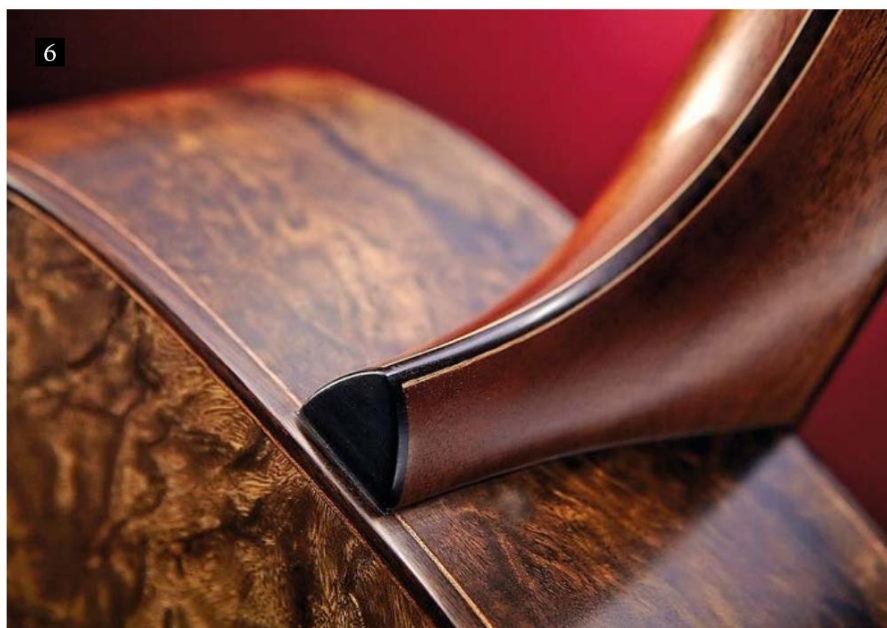
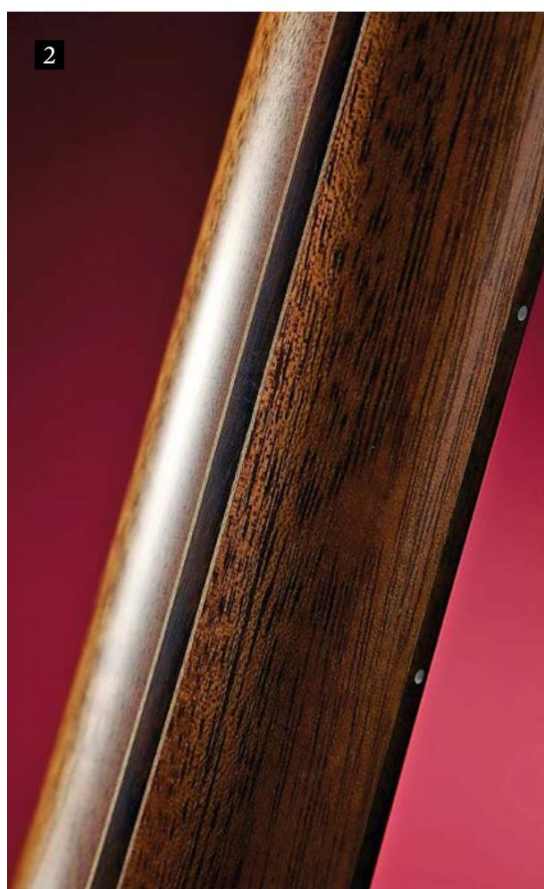
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- 1** The back and sides are made from some extraordinarily figured imbuia, also known as Brazilian walnut
- 2** The five-piece mahogany with sycamore and rosewood centre laminated neck
- 3** The top is also an unusual choice: Alaskan yellow cedar. The decoration here is beautifully understated, such as the abalone with rosewood and sycamore purfling
- 4** Another understated decoration is the inlaid abalone Avalon logo on the rosewood-faced headstock
- 5** The back of the headstock, with its nut area strengthening volute and Gotoh SG381 gold-plated tuners, is almost as beautiful as the front
- 6** A beautifully carved heel with ebony cap sits at the body end of the neck



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Music



Foo Fighters

Sonic Highways

★★★

Roswell Records

Grohl and company return with a country-spanning eighth album

After spending much of the mid-2000s simultaneously becoming one of the biggest rock bands on the planet while ploughing an increasingly unadventurous musical furrow, Foo Fighters returned to form with 2011's *Wasting Light*. It was comfortably their finest album in more than a decade, and sparked hope that maybe the Foo's best days weren't behind them after all.

Sonic Highways is a follow-up with a curious hook. Each of the album's eight tracks was recorded in a different US city, with a musical luminary from each of those locales – including Joe Walsh, Rick Nielsen and Gary Clark Jr – providing their input to the process. The album is accompanied by an HBO documentary, screened on the BBC in the UK, charting both the musical history of each city visited and the studio process behind the track recorded there.

Interesting? Definitely... but is it any good? Perhaps due to the collaborative, disjointed nature of the recording process, it's not



always the most coherent collection. Stylistic shifts between the tracks are understandable given the different locations and personnel in each case, but it's occasionally jarring. The dominant 7th riffing of *The Feast And The Famine* is infectious and classic Foo's, but the segue into the Southern-fried rock of Zac Brown collaboration *Congregation*, with its twin-guitar harmony lines, is a little peculiar, to say the least.

With such an illustrious guest list, it's perhaps no surprise that some of the album's standout guitar moments belong to them. From Gary Clark Jr's classy,

bluesy soloing on *What Did I Do?/ God As My Witness*, to Joe Walsh liberally sprinkling Eagles-isms all over *Outside*, there's plenty to enjoy here. Having said that, it's also nice to hear Chris Shiflett finally cutting loose on a Foo's album, breaking out a mean solo and some tasty slide riffing on *Something From Nothing*.

When does an interesting idea become a gimmick? While there's plenty for hardcore Foo's fans to enjoy here, it's hard to shake the feeling that this album was more of an excuse to make some cool documentaries than a purely musical endeavour. **[JG]**

Standout track: *Outside*

For fans of: Soundgarden, Kings Of Leon, QOTSA



On the Record



ALBUM: *Heigh Ho*

STUDIO: Ocean Way Recording,
Hollywood, California

PRODUCER: Greg Koller

"I have no commercial aspirations for it. I just wanted to make a record that sounds like a record I wanted to hear"



Blake Mills

The Californian session god who shared a stage with Clapton turns solo star with a genre-splicing new album

The Sessions

"It's an interesting story: we recorded *Heigh Ho* in the 'B' room at Ocean Way, but most of the vocals were done in my car. I would drive out somewhere, really late at night, usually after two in the morning, when I'd been using my voice all day and it was finally warmed up. I'd drive to the beach, or to a park, and I had a microphone that I plugged into this simple little interface called an Apogee Duet. I'd record vocal takes into a laptop, then listen back to see if they were usable, sonically. The sound was actually quite good, because the car is like an

isolation chamber. All the cloth seats soaked up any reflections, and the windshield was angled at such a drastic slope that there wasn't slapback. And, y'know, everyone sings in the car!"

The Guitars

"My friend lent me this 1800s gut-string parlour that I used to write and record a few things. It's got these wooden banjo tuners, so it's a bitch to keep in tune. Then there was the '52 Tele that Jackson Browne pulled out to show me one night. I couldn't put it down, so he said, Just hang onto it for a while! There's a lot of pedigree

in that Telecaster. It's been played by a bunch of people, and it's covered in gunk, but I can't bring myself to wipe it off, because there's no telling who put it there. Almost all the slide stuff was played on my Coodercasters. I have two, and they've both got a neck pickup from a hollowbody Guyatone and a Valco in the bridge. But they're very different: one sounds like a human voice and the other has a really wide range."

The Tones

"The amplifier was a film projector that my friend Austen

Hooks built. He takes film projectors from the 40s and modifies them so the audio section can be used as a guitar amp. I have a couple, and that's kinda the centrepiece of my rig, running through cabinets that he also built. We mic'd the back of the cabs, too, and that helped retain some of the body. The projectors just sound different. It doesn't colour the sound, like so many guitar amps do. I'd also put drums through the preamp section of a guitar amp, then take a line out straight to the board. So there was all this equipment being used in a context that's a little more



Blake also uses a Goya Rangemaster's quirky switching to achieve interesting overtones

"Most of the vocals were done in my car. The sound was actually quite good. Everyone sings in the car!"

unusual than just plugging a guitar into an amp. Most of the effects were outboard – some tape delay and compression – I can't recall any stompboxes."

The Mix

"We spent a year mixing this record. I'd sit with Greg Koller and meddle with it until it felt like my memory of being there performing in the room. There's such a beautiful sound in that 'B' room, that if you can capture it, you can transport the listener to that space. But it's a difficult thing to capture. It's sort of like realism in painting: there's a lot of mystery in getting a record to sound real. In the studio, there was a main live room, and then a side room, where we put another cabinet – so we could turn it up and really get a wide stereo image of the guitar without turning up the drums and bass, too. To have an isolation room during live tracking that's entirely dedicated to one guitar amplifier... that's quite unusual."

The Lessons

"*Curable Disease* was tough. I was trying to record that song just with guitar, and then sing it afterwards. Y'know, to just get the guitar performance, and then go and sing the vocal in my car. But I just couldn't really

play it with any kind of a pocket, and I really didn't like the way I sounded singing it without playing guitar. It wasn't a real dialogue. Finally, after trying to record that song for several days, I realised it was one where I really needed to be playing guitar and singing at the same time, just to get the pocket and the rhythm going. When it isn't happening like that, it's a very isolating feeling..."

The Verdict

"I wanted this record to sound... very much like it does! Yeah, I'm pleased with it. It's something that I got to see all the way through, in the way I wanted to. My reputation as a guitar player is something I'm certainly proud of, but I think sometimes people expect something wild, fast, loud or aggressive. It's not really the kind of musician I am. But I think once that wears off, and people are able to listen with open ears, there's something else to take from it. I have no commercial aspirations. All the aspirations for it have been met. I just wanted to make a record that sounds like a record I want to hear." [HY]



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Albums Of The Year

Our writers pick the finest fretwork committed to wax in 2014

The War On Drugs *Lost In The Dream*



Sometimes the drugs do work

Written by lynchpin Adam Granduciel while wracked with the emotional fallout that followed a year of heavy touring, *Lost In The Dream* channels the restless wanderlust of a great American road movie. Cruising under big skies awash with woozy ambience, sonic motifs rush past the listener like sun-bleached motel signs and abandoned cars, while Granduciel's yearning vocals and snaking guitar melody lines provide the glue. Introspection has rarely sounded so euphoric. **[CV]**

Standout track: *Red Eyes*

For fans of: Bruce Springsteen, Tom Petty, My Bloody Valentine

Jim Campilongo *Dream Dictionary*



Hall-of-mirrors Tele tones with haunting beauty

Jim Campilongo is that rare thing – a guitarist who wears his influences on his sleeve, but somehow sounds like no-one else out there. Deeply quirky but richly musical, Campilongo and his band cut this album of delirious Telecaster workouts as live takes, meaning each song is an absorbing, on-the-edge dialogue between fine musicians. From the darkly jagged tone poem *Heaven Is Creepy* to the Chet-on-Tramadol jauntiness of *Pie Party*, it's a mesmerising listen from a fine player. **[JD]**

Standout track: *Pie Party*

For fans of: Roy Buchanan, Merle Travis, Marc Ribot

The Black Keys *Turn Blue*



Less fuzz, more atmospherics as 'Keys go nocturnal

Album number eight saw Dan Auerbach and Patrick Carney take the Black Keys' sound on a journey through the tail end of the 1970s. While a band 'going prog' is often a hint to make for the exits, in Auerbach's hands, *Turn Blue* manages to wrap up blues, stoner-rock and soul into an accessible, laid-back package. The guitar work is more subtle and less instantly hooky than previous albums, but for this moody late-night slow-burner, less is most definitely more. **[JG]**

Standout track: *Year In Review*

For fans of: Tame Impala, Jonathan Wilson, Arcade Fire

Ben Howard *I Forget Where We Were*

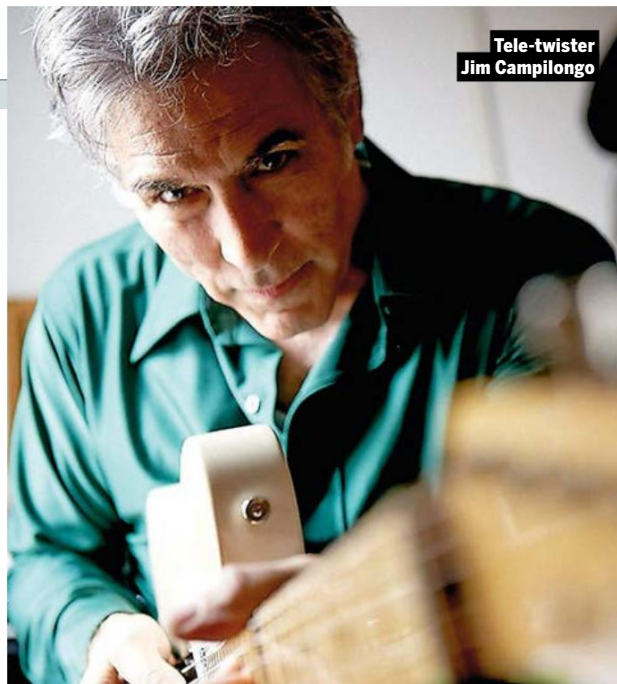


Brit singer-songwriter's impressive second

From the opening track, *Small Things*, onwards, Howard takes you on a personal journey via thick delay swells, warm guitar tones and chilling lyrics. Powerfully emotive and evocative in his vocal delivery amid dense ambience, it makes for a deep, multi-layered experience that marks Howard out as a musician with writing maturity far beyond his 27 years. One of the most honest, humble and talented singer-songwriters of his generation. **[RA]**

Standout track: *She Treats Me Well*

For fans of: John Martyn, Jeff Buckley, Nick Drake



Tele-twister
Jim Campilongo

The Dionne Farris & Charlie Hunter Duo *DionneDionne*



Stripped-down, seven-string soul

Released in the last quarter of 2014, this nine-song collection of songs made famous by Dionne Warwick seems an unlikely choice, but in the school of restraint, this record features highly. The 'band' is Charlie Hunter – as featured in *Guitarist* 388 – on his custom-tuned seven-string; the voice belongs to Dionne Farris, known best for her work with Arrested Development. A masterclass in the understated, *DionneDionne* tackles big songs with immense groove, space and intimacy and serves to reclaim the extended-range guitar from the detuning metal players. **[DB]**

Standout track: *Walk On By*

For fans of: John Pizzarelli, Ella Fitzgerald, Joe Pass

Sharon Van Etten *Are We There*



Singer-songwriter shines on self-produced gem

Are We There is an unswervingly personal album, a letter to lost loves, imbued both with wounded reflections and defiant retorts. The Brooklyn singer-songwriter's voice glides from a fragile lament to a towering vibrato. In the absence of The National guitarist Aaron Dessner, who played on and produced previous album *Tramp*, clean Jazzmaster tones, tasteful acoustic playing and EBow textures continue to abound. A sparkling, melancholy record to immerse yourself in. **[GW]**

Standout track: *Every Time The Sun Comes Up*

For fans of: The National, Joni Mitchell, Lana Del Rey

...And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead IX

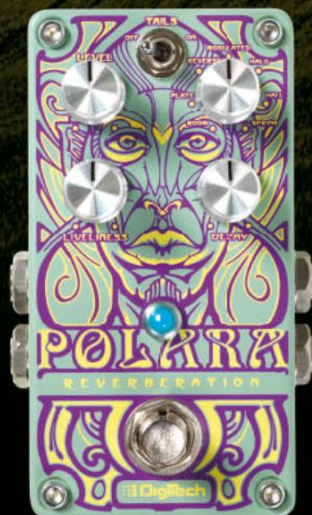


Post-hardcore titans re-engage prog sensibilities

The Texan alt-rockers always tread the line of post-hardcore and prog carefully, but their latest full-length leans a little more to the latter – and for guitarists, that's no bad thing. Huge overdriven textures and chiming arpeggios dominate the sonic field, yielding some of the band's most affecting tracks yet, such as *The Ghost Within*, while the likes of *Lie Without A Liar* keep their thunderous indie roots in check. **[MB]**

Standout track: *Bus Lines*

For fans of: At The Drive-In, Death From Above 1979, Sonic Youth



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These Days

With 18 million albums sold and over four decades in the business, it's a given that Jackson Browne knows a thing or two about songcraft. What's less well documented is his relentless enthusiasm for guitars, from vintage acoustics to pawn shop treasures. Following the release of his 14th studio album, the quintessential Californian singer-songwriter sat down with *Guitarist* to talk about his love for wood and strings... **Words Jeff Slate**

Jackson Browne is wrapping up some summer dates, and although his voice shows signs of road wear and he has a gig in just a few hours, he's more than willing to talk. And not just about his fantastic new album, *Standing In The Breach*, and the gear he plans to take with him on his upcoming tour to support it, but about the lessons he learned early in his career about record production, how his approach to songwriting has developed over the years and, of course, his large collection of guitars.

"I have two 00-17s, both from the 50s," he tells us as we pass the 90-minute mark in our promised 40-minute interview. "One of them is tuned to a modal G tuning. It was the answer to my quest to have a guitar in a tuning that allowed me to play a song that was normally played with a band. In order to play it on acoustic, I had to devise a new tuning. It's a tiny guitar, but it's got a great, deep, big sound. I can tell you what the tuning is if you want..."

"I keep the Martin in a G tuning," he elaborates, "but then you take the sixth string down to C, and you take the B string

up to D. That way, it doesn't have any thirds in it. In order to play the G chord, you play it open, but with a finger on the 7th fret, on the sixth string. It's an amazing tuning because you can play these very big, open chords. The top strings ring like a dulcimer, and you can play these chords that sound big, deep and dark."

But why the Martin 00-17? "The guitar has such a bright top-end, but that tuning gave it a really distinctive sound," he reflects. "The low chords sound amazing, because they have this brightness on top, but they're also very deep. I found another 00-17 – I keep that in standard tuning – and that guitar became the go-to guitar for *Standing In The Breach*. I played it, Greg Leisz [Browne's longtime guitarist] played it on probably four songs on the record, and Carlos Varela, a friend of mine who's a Cuban songwriter, also played it on one song. They aren't identical, of course. And I keep them in those tunings. I don't go back and forth between these odd tunings on the same guitar, because it takes a while to get a guitar comfortable with a tuning like that. So they live in that tuning."





Browne is happy to talk acoustics for some time, particularly about his collection of vintage Gibsons, but he's especially engaging discussing modifying his guitars to his needs. He clearly loves tinkering with these models at home, and often one of his luthier friends will take a neck here and a body there, creating what could only be described as Frankenstein guitars.

"I've got two Roger Benedict Groove Masters," Browne explains. "One I keep in standard [tuning], and one I keep in D. What's unique about them is that they're thinlines. They're like a Strat, but they're thin, and the body's made out of spruce. They have a very sort of acoustic sound to them. They also have a tone chamber with an f-hole. They've both got Seymour Duncan Strat pickups – some sort of vintage set. I also had a Buzz Feiten tuning job done for D tuning, which is really perfect because it sounds wonderful and in tune.

"And then there's my Teisco Del Rey, one of the best guitars I have. I was playing this standing next to Billy Gibbons at the [Rock And Roll] Hall Of Fame, and he said, 'There's probably four million dollars' worth of guitars on this stage, and you're standing there with a \$100 Japanese guitar.' Later, I got him one, which he loves. It's amazing. It's got one pickup. The aluminium pickguard looks like it has a speaker in it, but I took it out. Any extra weight, I like to get rid of. It doesn't sound very good – that speaker in the pickguard – but because of the aluminium pickguard, the pickup sounds incredible. It's very microphonic. It's a really microphonic Gold Foil pickup. One of the secrets of the guitar is that if you suspend that over a hole and attach it to a piece of metal, then the whole face of the guitar is microphonic. It's incredible, let me tell you."

Own The Song

Of course, Browne's growing enthusiasm with his gear collection is centred around his career-long obsession with sound. "I was very lucky, right from the beginning," he reflects on his self-titled debut and its follow-up, *For Everyman*. "I knew I wanted to produce right away. I didn't want somebody else to make those choices for me. And I knew that the key to getting to do that was a manager and record company



Jackson's Gibson Montana acoustic signature guitar

that would let me take my time. I remember hearing an early mix of my second record, and it didn't sound quite right, so I had to go back. 'If you don't know, nobody knows', that was the basic axiom. And David Geffen was great [Geffen was Browne's manager early in his career and signed him to his own Asylum label]. He let me turn down some of the most famous producers, that he wanted me to work with and go after it myself. It took me a long time to learn certain things, but at least I learned it in my time."

And what were the lessons, especially on those first, remarkable records? "I have definite preferences, but I also like stuff to just happen," Browne reveals. "I'll rule out certain things, too. If I have a keyboardist who's a really great pianist, I still might not want whatever he comes up with on the recording. I sometimes prefer the simplicity of the way I play something, even though the guy is the most soaring and beautiful player. And sometimes I don't know what I want – or don't want – until I hear it. I may sound like a control freak, but I just want a certain emotional truth to be brought to bear. I'm not so much of a control freak that



One of a pair of vintage Gibson LG models, this has a spruce top

I need to dictate what other people do, but I need something from them that is a genuine performance.

"The songwriter was sort of ascendant in those days," he says almost wistfully. "Maybe it's been that way for a long time now, but at the time it was a new deal. It was a new way of going about things. A lot of people were singing, but if they'd written the song then they had the mandate to sing the song. That carried over to how you wanted to treat it, how you wanted it done."

The Right Voice

"Almost everything that I play, I take with me," Browne confesses when we ask if there are instruments in his collection that are too fragile to take on the road. "I've got a great crew and they understand. But we take good care of stuff. It's not like they're going to get beat up. I did have somebody drop a monitor cabinet on one of my guitars once. It made this incredible gash, and we looked at each other and we couldn't believe that the thing hadn't been crushed into a thousand pieces. If it had been me, I would have been really pissed off. But stuff happens. I don't believe in leaving the great guitars at home, though. I couldn't go out on the road and play a guitar I didn't love."

Browne has a long association with Gibson acoustics, and it's a love affair that crosses over into his collection of Martin guitars, too. "I kind of fell into using Gibsons

"David Geffen was great. He let me turn down some of the most famous producers, that he wanted me to work with, and go after it myself"



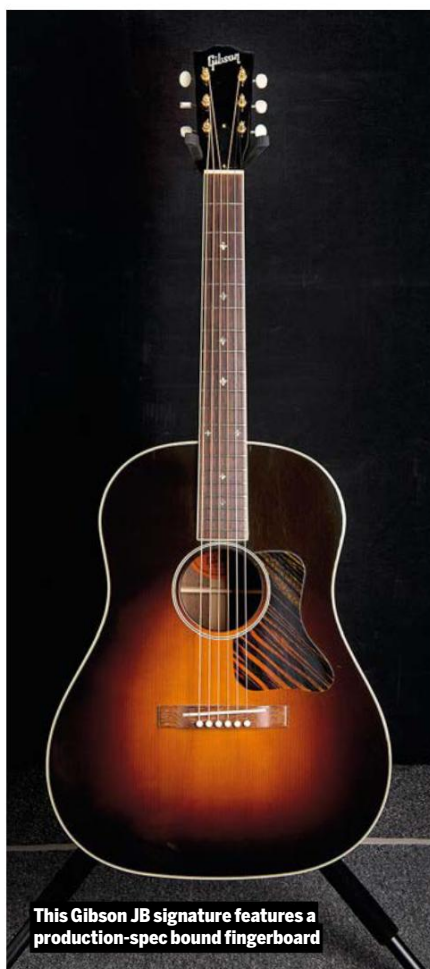
Another half of a pair, this time an all-mahogany 50s Martin 00-17



The 1930s Gibson Roy Smeck-influenced Browne's signature guitar



Jackson's "really great" D-28 that he keeps in Open D tuning



This Gibson JB signature features a production-spec bound fingerboard



This Banner headstock LG-2 from the mid-1940s features a mahogany top



Another Martin, this time a sunburst D-41 dreadnought



Jackson keeps one of his pair of 50s 00-17s in a modal G tuning



This highly microphonic Teisco Del Ray features an aluminium pickguard



Back in 1934, the Gibson Roy Smeck Radio Grande had a list price of \$100



Benedict Groove Master S-types feature spruce thinline bodies



Jackson's Gibson CF-100E is tuned to C, with the sixth string down to C



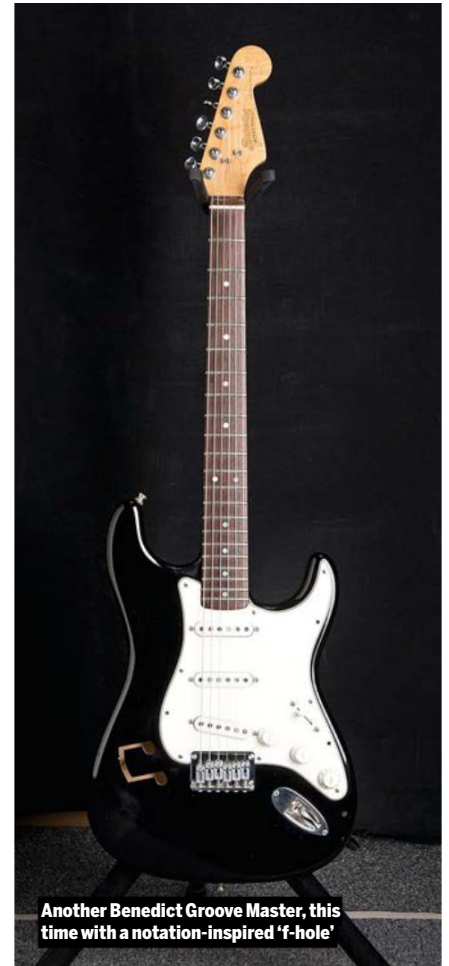
Another quirky electric: Browne's Supro-Logo'd Coodercaster



A rare 1961 Martin F-55 electric with DeArmond pickups



Jackson's rosewood T-style hails from Japan and has been weight-relieved



Another Benedict Groove Master, this time with a notation-inspired 'f-hole'

for a while," he tells us of some of the guitars featured here. "I kept buying and buying them. For a while, I was into the big-bodied ones from the 30s. I got Gibson to make some of them, and they made a new model for me that had some of those qualities. I have a couple of those. But I also play the Martins.

"I have a really great D-28, which I keep in a D tuning, as well as a D-41 that I use. These guitars all do a particular thing really well. One thing I like a lot is regular [open] D tuning, like a D chord. I like having guitars that are tuned lower than they would usually be. It gets things sounding deeper, which I like. I've also got guitars that sound really great because they're so jangly. It took me a long time to figure out that I wanted different things from different guitars. I'd realise that a guitar could be great, even though it couldn't do certain things. Maybe it was great because it only does a high, thin thing. But it took me a long time to stop looking for the same thing in each guitar. So I've got guitars that make me want to play a certain way and, once that turns into a song, very often I'll just leave the guitar in that tuning and say, 'Okay, that's all set up to do that one thing now.' And when I go to play that song, it's that thing with that guitar. It's like having a certain band play a song. My Martin F-55 electric, circa 1961, is my new favourite guitar," he tells us of his latest acquisition. "It has these DeArmond

pickups. A lot of Gretsch guitars have these pickups. They sound really great. It's a hollowbody guitar, and very much like the 00-17 in the neck. It's got the same headstock as my other Martins. It's just beautiful: beautiful, in-tune, ringing. It's great for fingerpicking, or anything really.

"I've also got a Tele-type; kind of a rosewood Telecaster," he says, surveying his guitars. "It's got an f-hole. It was just a body that we found. It's a Japanese knock-off, like a copy, and not a very exact copy, of a Telecaster. But the bridge pickup sounded incredible. Once again, it's super microphonic. You tap on the pickguard and get great sounds. It was really heavy, so we routed out the back. I just did that because it was too heavy to stand around with because it's rosewood. On my third attempt at getting a neck I like on it, it finally paid off. Now it's my go-to electric. Once again, it's that front pickup. It's not really the Tele-ness of it, but the uniqueness of that Japanese copy of an American-made guitar, with the totally microphonic pickup.

"I have a couple of Gibson LGs, too," Browne tells us, relishing letting us in on his passion for guitars. "One of them is a Banner headstock, an LG-2 from about 1946, when they started using mahogany for the tops because they ran out of spruce. I have another one that has a spruce top."

Like most of us, Browne loves scouring auction sites for hidden gems. "I've got a

really cool piece that I just found on eBay," he says. "I've got a guitar-maker friend named Billy Asher, who's a luthier and makes great guitars. I've got a bunch of his guitars. But he's also worked on every single one of my guitars. Every single one of my guitars has been tweaked, adjusted, maintained, fixed when they break or made to work when they weren't quite what the guitar makers had in mind. A lot of them needed to be finessed. He's a genius at that. For instance, I play my [Gibson] CF-100E in G tuning, with the sixth string down to C. It has a pickup at the end of the neck, and knobs on the face. I play it in a tuning that gives it a great, deep voice. I play songs like *Running On Empty* on it. I had to replace the B string, because I use it with bronze strings – I think that if you used regular electric guitar strings, you wouldn't have to compensate for the fact that the B string is too loud. I just took the steel screw out of the pickup and put in a dummy screw, like a stainless steel one that's non-magnetic."

Finally, Browne shows us his latest eBay purchase. "This neck wasn't made for this body," he says. "This is a Teisco body that I found on eBay in Australia. We went looking for a neck that might work, and this is actually a 12-string body. I just liked it because of how badly it was painted. I'm dying to plug it in, but it hasn't had the strings on it yet. I've also never seen this particular pickup. Even though it's a Teisco



pickup with square pole magnets, I've never quite seen it. It'll be interesting. It had a neck pocket that was for a bigger neck, so he filled the neck pocket and then made a new pocket for it. That's a luthier's job. I couldn't possibly make that come out right."

Sing The Truth

Jackson's latest project is *Standing In The Breach*, his first studio album since 2008's *Time The Conqueror*. Packed with his trademark gift for melody, it's chock-full of deep rumination on love and loss and simply trying to get by in the world, juxtaposed with songs of a more political nature. But why so long between albums?

"I've been busy, I just haven't been making [studio] records," Browne confesses. "I've been more or less productive at different times in my life. But I had to become more industrious to get this album made. In terms of writing, for instance, I put as much into the writing of the songs as I ever have with anything else, but not in the context of record making. It was more in the context of living and trying to find out an approach to certain topics that I figured were important to me and, I think, important to life."

"Finding a way into difficult subjects, for me, was really worthwhile but involved kind of a task, if you know what I mean. There are some things I don't want to do. I don't want to preach to or harangue people. I want to catch their interest. I'm not really trying to write a rock essay with these things. I want to write a song."

"I want to write songs that are thoughtful and consider the problems we face. The music that's always meant the most to me has said something, and that's what I aspire to"

There are a number of inspirations behind Browne's continually timeless nature of songwriting. "I grew up listening to old people singing," he tells us, letting us into his process in a way he rarely does.

"I grew up listening to John Kurt. If you grow up listening to Louis Armstrong and Mose Allison, and even Bob Dylan when he was really young, it has an effect. Dylan sounds like an old man, even in his early days. He was channeling a lot of these older players and cultivating. These days people kind of think it's an old person's perspective, a sort of weary perspective, but I think it's just him emulating the people he grew up listening to. So if you grow up listening to those old people, like I did, well, then it has an effect, and that's the great thing about folk music. So maybe most of the great artists are old men. But hopefully you're gravitating toward what you know, too."

"I want to write songs that are thoughtful and consider the problems that we face," he goes on. "I'm not trying to have a song offer the solutions. The solutions lie in our individual choices, the way we live our lives, and what we decide to do in the world. I've

never really felt like I was a musician that didn't ever have a stake in the world. Sometimes, I try to talk myself into that, like nobody's going to fault you if you just write your songs and play your shows, and treat this like it's a job. But I guess the music that's always meant the most to me has said something, and that's what I aspire to. Paul McCartney was incredibly insightful as a young man to write *Eleanor Rigby*. It was incredible to suddenly thrust that view of life and of death, as brief and pop as it was, into a pop environment that had never had that stuff talked about. No music had stuff like that. So I grew up with The Beatles, Bob Dylan, The Stones, and all the folk music and Appalachia music, as my heroes and teachers."

"I started taking a longer and longer time to finish writing songs. I like simple songs, too, so there is something of a paradox in trying to write a simple song about something that requires a lot of engagement with a subject. But there's so much more humanity in music that comes from people who are singing about the truth of their situation." ■

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EST. 1953

IN MY
LIFE

Joe Perry

Over four decades in the making, Joe Perry's memoir chronicles the life of a man known for his bluesy riffs and hard living as part of one of America's most successful groups of all time. *Rocks: My Life In And Out Of Aerosmith* offers a no-nonsense look at the rollercoaster ride of his band's 45-year history. And after surviving the press blitz for *Rocks*, Perry is more than happy to oblige when we ask to dig into his love of guitars...

Words Jeff Slate Portrait Ross Halfin

Uncle Plucker

"The first time I heard a guitar was when my uncle played. He had a homemade instrument – it was shaped like a ukulele but sounded like a guitar – that I remember he used to pull out around the holidays to play Portuguese folk songs on it.

"That was my first exposure to that type of instrument. He let me play it and put my hands on it, and it just felt good. It felt comfortable. Then, later on, I got a Silvertone. The action on that was unbelievable. It had to be a half an inch across the neck. If there was ever a guitar designed to turn you off from

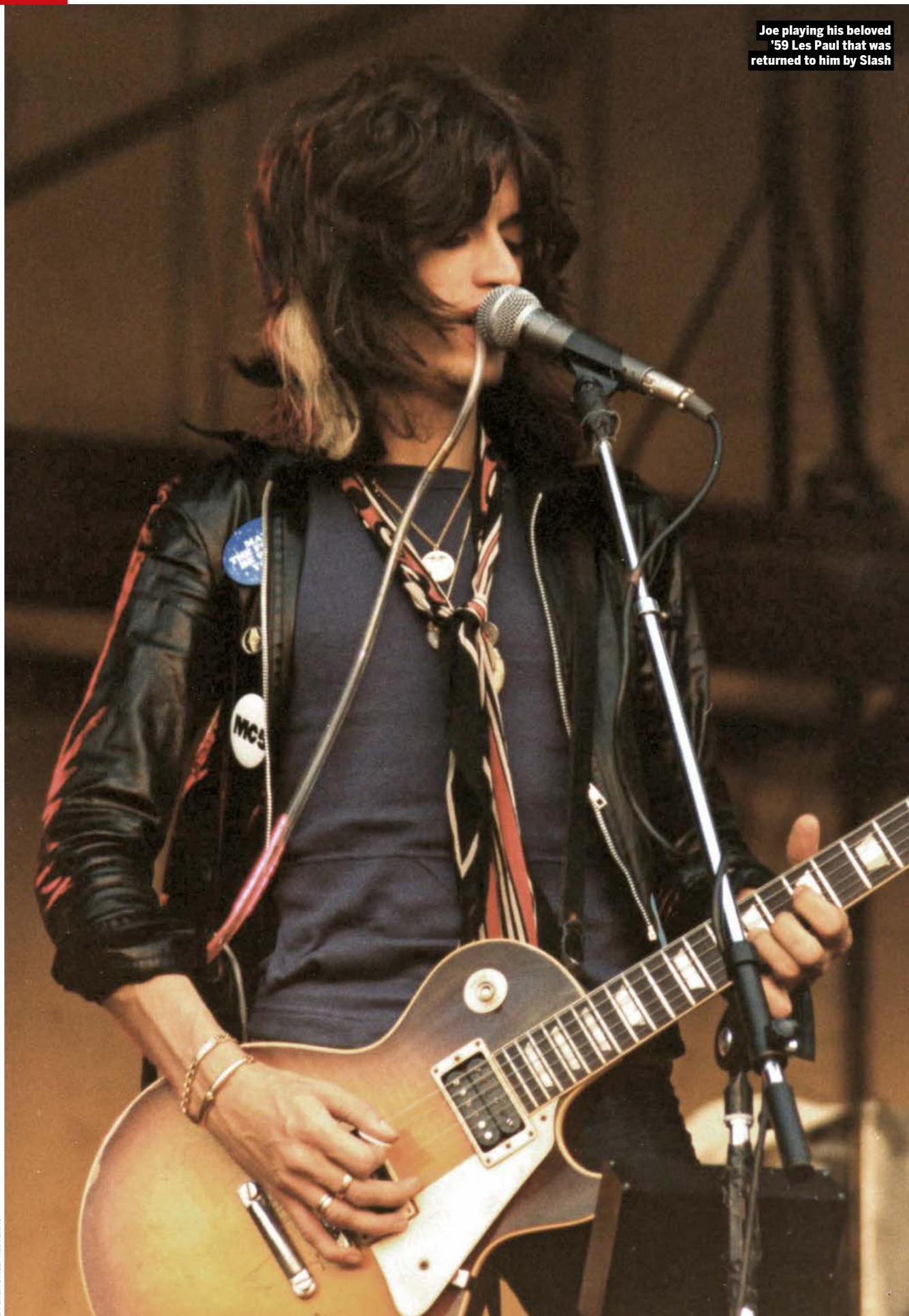
playing guitar, it was that one. It hurt so much to play, to have to press down those heavy strings.

"At that point, when you have that calling, you do the best with what you've got. That was when I first fell in love with it. Then hearing the teenagers play in their band in the kitchen next door, playing rockabilly stuff, that's when I first started hearing rock 'n' roll, hearing it on the radio, and realising that it was pretty much based on one guitar. When I started playing in a band, I was with a lot of guys better than I was, and it was a real learning experience. But those guys were seniors, and





Joe playing his beloved
'59 Les Paul that was
returned to him by Slash



© PETER STILL/REDFERNS



Custom Shopping

Perry's latest Gibson Custom creation looks simple, but has a few tricks under the hood...

WHEN asked about his favourite guitar at the moment, Perry reveals he's been working with Gibson to develop a new signature guitar and has fallen in love with a new prototype that the company has sent him: "I have a Les Paul right now that's a prototype, because we're talking about doing a signature thing, and I've got to say it's the best of both worlds."

"It's the best of the Stratocaster and the best of the Les Paul. Because I love the sound of the Les Paul and, ultimately, I love the way a Les Paul feels, but I love the ergonomics of a Strat. I love the whammy bar. So this new guitar I'm playing is a Les Paul from Gibson's Custom Shop, with one pickup and a vibrato arm on it."

"It's balanced and works great and stays in tune. And it's got a [Chandler] Tone X for tone control – it has what looks like a tone knob, but actually when you pull it out it brings the Tone X into action [a 16dB boost with a midrange sweep – Ed]. So you can either set it to a cool tone or get a wah-wah thing out of it. Right now, that guitar gives me a lot of stuff to play with."

I was an underclassman, so when they graduated I stepped up. I became the leader of the band after starting out as the new guy. I was at Vermont Academy – a boarding school – and it was definitely a place where I could seek some refuge from the tie and sport jacket thing, and the whole regimen of being in a boarding school. Being able to play some rock 'n' roll was a place to kill time. The rest, as they say, is history."

Young Love

"The first guitar I really lusted after was a Gretsch Country

Gentleman, like George Harrison played on The Ed Sullivan Show. I was playing these Japanese-styled guitars but my friend got a Country Gent. It took a while for him to get it, but when he first opened that thing up to show me... the smell, the sight, the touch. It was almost like that scene from *Spinal Tap*. 'Don't even look at it!' I've gotten a couple of other Gretsches, but I never got a Country Gent exactly like that one."

"I eventually got a Duo Jet that I used when I played the solo for *Dude Looks Like A Lady*.

I brought that one on the road and played it for at least 10 years. Then it just started to show too much wear. As hard as it is to play and keep in tune, it still has that sound. I play it a lot in the studio. Anyway, I think the next guitar that I really, really lusted for was the Les Paul, but before that I had a Starfire IV by Guild. A beautiful one. It's a beast! I played that in the early days, and then I traded it in for my first Les Paul..."

Paul Bearer

"My first Gibson was a Les Paul, a '68 reissue. I ended up scraping the finish off it to see if there was some kind of maple underneath, but obviously it wasn't too exceptional. It definitely helped the sound a little bit. I really like the P-90

sound, so I gravitated toward Juniors. But the Black Beauty and a few others were my main guitars for a long time. Somewhere along the line there, somebody probably walked into the dressing room and said 'Hey, listen to this' and it blew me away, and I ended up using it pretty much exclusively through the 70s. I also remember borrowing a three-pickup SG. I really didn't like it that much. I just didn't like the balance of it. Once you get used to it, they sound great. Some people just love them, but for me, I didn't like the way it felt as much as the Les Paul."

Left Hand Man

"I wasn't surrounded by a whole music scene. Learning guitar was really whatever

"The first guitar I really lusted after was a Gretsch Country Gentleman, like George Harrison played"



© ROSS HALLFIN

“There’s definitely a kinship there, especially me and Steven. We stayed friends the whole time when I’d left the band”

I could find out from different people. I was in a very small town, and only a couple of people played guitar.

I had an interesting conversation with Paul McCartney a couple of months ago, actually. I’m left-handed but I play right-handed because, basically, the instruction record that I had at the time said you fret with your left hand and put the pick in your right hand, so there you go. So I asked Paul how it was that he started from the beginning playing left-handed. And he named about three or four artists that were popular when he was starting out – like Slim Whitman – and he said that when he saw that, he felt like it was okay and that was how you did it if you were lefty.

So, maybe if I had started out in a different place and different time, and seen someone play left-handed at that point, I might be playing the guitar left-handed today.”

Long Players

“There’s definitely a kinship there, especially me and Steven [Tyler]. We stayed friends the whole time when I’d left the band. I was friends with everybody in the band. And Steven definitely managed to do the same thing. So there’s definitely something really special there. But mainly I think that [our longevity] has to do with the fact that we have a lot of things in common outside of music. When we have time, we both can talk about that stuff and not have to deal with music,

or the band, or whatever issues might be coming up. I’m sure that’s been essential, and I’m not sure I really realised how important it was until I started thinking back to all we’ve been through in writing my book.”

A Family Affair

“When I met my wife, we were determined not to make the same mistakes we’d both made in the past. We took our time and really became friends first. That was the most important thing, and I think that still remains the most important thing. But I think that the next thing is the importance of keeping your family together. For me, it’s the cost of doing business. When I have to go on the road, the most important question for me is how long am

I going to be away from the kids, or what’s it going to take to bring them along? They have to be in school, of course. But I think the most important thing is physically being together. That’s always been the paradigm, from the beginning. So my wife and I have this foundation, which is the two of us, and then after that raising our kids is key. Really, it’s one of the most important things you can do. For anyone that’s been on the road, you know the cost of bringing extra people with you makes it really tough.

“When we asked the kids if they want to go to school or want to come on the road, they always wanted to go on the road! Our youngest kid wanted to spend the last two years of school near home with his

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Playing his signature Les Paul at Download, with Steven in typically understated form

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friends, though, so we made whatever adjustments we had to make. And he just graduated from Boston University. But being physically close, so that you can see what's going on, is key, I think, especially in the internet age. You've got to give your kids the tools to deal with whatever comes at them."

Parental Advisory

"There's a picture I have, when we were on the road with Mötley Crüe, and they'd bring in a stripper pole. They'd set up tents and all that and have strippers backstage every night,

for an hour or so. So when our son Tony turned 16 we noticed he would disappear for a little while every night. I knew where he was, but we let him go and watch the show. It was a little bit more X-rated than we would have liked, but he was 16 and coming of age. And there's a great picture of him with the strippers, and he's got a cowboy hat with a big 16 on it. We have that on the wall somewhere in the house. Hey, it's rock 'n' roll."

Burst Brothers

"After leaving the band [in 1979], cash was tight. I wasn't using

that Les Paul that much because I was using a Strat that I'd put together a lot. I'd put all my other guitars down and pretty much just played that. So I sold the Les Paul. It was, 'goodbye, see you later.' Then many people had it. And finally Slash had it. I suppose it could have gotten in the way of our friendship, because he used it in a lot of pictures, and I can see why it was hard for him to let go of it.

"Totally by surprise, he gave it back to me. He showed up on my birthday with it. But really, the cool end to the story is that it had actually been stolen from Slash, and he said it showed up in the mail. I asked him about it; whether that really happened or not. Because I wanted to know. It's just a really cool ending to the story. So the

bottom line is that any time he wants to use it, he can use it. As it turns out, Gibson made a run of relics and copied the guitar right down to the tee, so I bring one of those on the road with me because that guitar is just too collectible to take any more damage. So the best thing was to have a duplicate made.

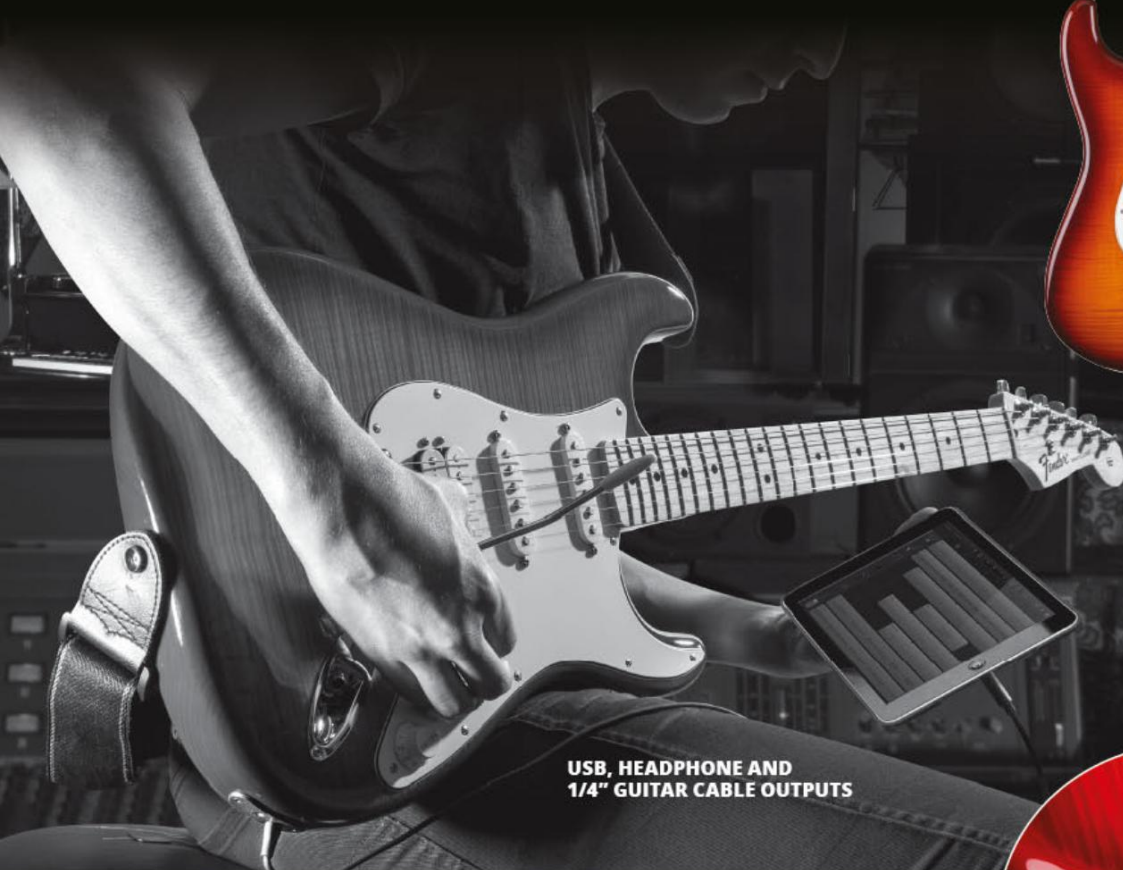
"Gibson is making great stuff out of their Custom Shop, but I was surprised how close they were able to replicate it. They got it right down to the feel and the tone. It's one of those rock 'n' roll legends now. If you read it in a script and go, 'Nah, that could never happen.'" **G**

Rocks: My Life In And Out Of Aerosmith by Joe Perry with David Ritz, is out now via Simon & Schuster

"When we were on the road with Mötley Crüe, they'd bring a stripper pole and have strippers backstage"

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Youth Development

In a rare guitar magazine interview, Sonic Youth frontman Thurston Moore lifts the lid on his killer new solo album, the roots of his thirst for leftfield experimentation and, perhaps unexpectedly, his ongoing fascination with black metal...

Words Matt Frost **Photography** Adam Gasson

Thurston Moore laughs as he sips a pint of Guinness across from us in his local Stoke Newington boozery. “I’ve never really been a guitar geek! I realise that I’ve been sort of a poster boy for guitar geekdom to some degree... but I’ve never been a guitar geek myself,” he claims.

“Guitar geek” or not, Thurston – who has been residing in London for the past year – is arguably one of the most influential guitarists of the last 30 years, along with (naturally) his Sonic Youth six-string cohort, Lee Ranaldo. Their extreme altered tunings, masterful feedback manipulation and unique experimental guitar figures – all matched with teasing melodic noise-pop sensibilities – have proved hugely influential on a thousand and one bands the world over.

Outside Sonic Youth (who have been on “indefinite hiatus” since 2011), Moore has also managed to knock out four stunning solo records since the mid-1990s while also collaborating and improvising with some of

the music world’s most creative and uncompromising personalities.

For his latest album, *The Best Day*, Thurston has a new band in tow, consisting of My Bloody Valentine bassist Debbie Googe, Sonic Youth drummer Steve Shelley and Nought guitarist James Sedwards. Indeed, Sedwards happily joins us in the pub for part of the interview to help chew over the new record.

From a guitar perspective, how did you approach the arrangements on *The Best Day*?

Thurston Moore: “It’s something that came together quickly songwriting-wise. It wasn’t very belaboured at all. By the time I showed James the songs I was working on, they were purposefully simplistic to some degree, and minimal. At that point in time, I was kind of interested in just doing these really linear songs that had a lot of focus on the drone of the guitars. When we were first playing them, they were instrumental and it was all about the idea of repetition with two

Fender guitars playing together. Then they became more song-oriented and truncated to some degree and lyrics came in, and then Steve and Deb came in and they became real songs.”

What tunings did you both utilise?

TM: “Mostly a tuning that I’ve used on some of my solo records. I don’t know how much I’ve used it on Sonic Youth material, but it’s CGDGCD, which I think I used a lot on *Trees Outside The Academy* [2007]. It’s not far removed from a tuning I used in the mid-90s on *Psychic Hearts*, which was CGDGBB, which we revert to live because we play songs from that album at the end of our set. There’s also a tuning, DDAF#AD, that I use for the title song that’s quite different, but James stays in that other tuning.”

James Sedwards: “Yeah, I’m just in CGDGCD throughout. It just worked out really well because I guess the whole purpose of a lot of this was to have the guitars in unison and to get those overtones ➤



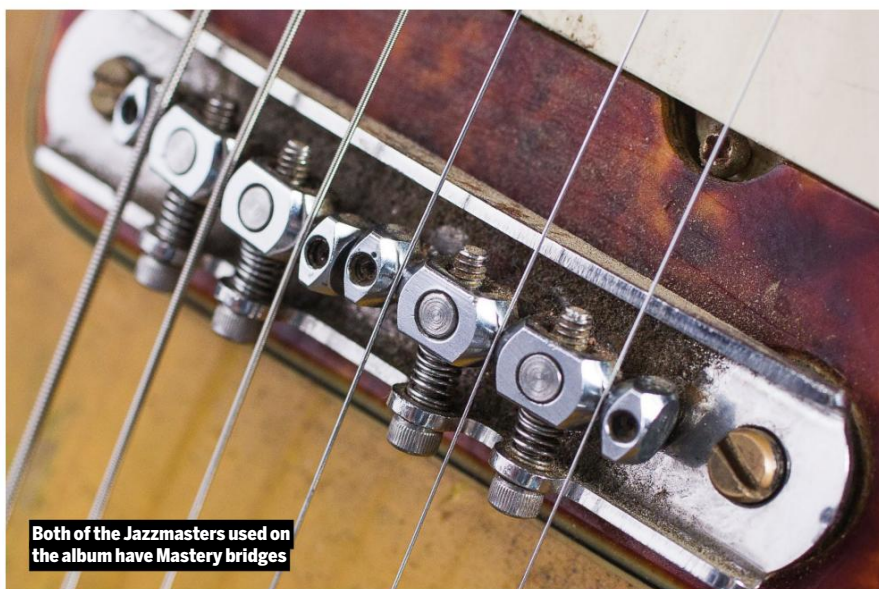
Thurston's Jazzmaster – a natural heavy relic!



Jazzmasters were integral to Sonic Youth's sound, but plenty of mods took place!



Electrics removed to avoid accidental mid-gig switching...



Both of the Jazzmasters used on the album have Mastery bridges

of unison guitar strumming. There was no need to really diversify the guitar parts too much."

What guitars did you play in the studio, and which of those are you taking out on the road?

TM: "Actually, I primarily played the Sunburst Jazzmaster that I'm playing now on this tour across the whole record. Then I also used a 12-string Martin acoustic on a few songs."

JS: "I used a really old Jaguar, which I really like the sound of and I know it really well. It's a 1962 model and there are no modifications, apart from it's got a Mastery bridge on it. It worked really well on the recording, but I'm not using the Jaguar in the live band right now. I'm using a Jazzmaster, which Thurston's kindly leant me."

TM: "That's a first series '58 Jazzmaster. Both Jazzmasters have Mastery bridges and the Mastery vibrato units. It's surprising how much you can use those [units] and not see your tuning go all over the place."

What have you been plugging into amp-wise?

JS: "I've got a very old Marshall JCM800 split-channel combo, which I used in the studio. It's very versatile, records well and you can get a lot of different sounds out of it."

TM: "I have a DeVille that Fender graciously gifted me when I moved here. I was just like 'I need to record', and I got that and used that in the studio. They're kind of a workhorse amp. Maybe they're not the most tonally interesting amp, but I think they're really good for small gigs and they're okay for recording. But what I usually use is a Peavey Road Master tube head powering a 4x12 speaker cabinet. I used that set-up a lot through the last 10-plus years of Sonic Youth."

JS: And that's what we've been using live on the last run of dates. They're very loud and very clean, but it's kind of a powerful clean."

How about effects on the album?

TM: "Well, James has a whole array that he can tell you about!"

JS: "There weren't many on the record, actually. I think I had a Pete Cornish G-2 overdrive pedal, which was useful for lead work, and there was probably an analogue delay there somewhere. I used a Lovetone Flanger at one point. That doesn't give you a classic flanging sound, but more strange or unusual modulations. Mainly, the sound was just guitar into amp. There were probably one or two drive pedals in there somewhere, but we both use Pro Co Turbo RATs live and in the studio. They seem to come in very handy."

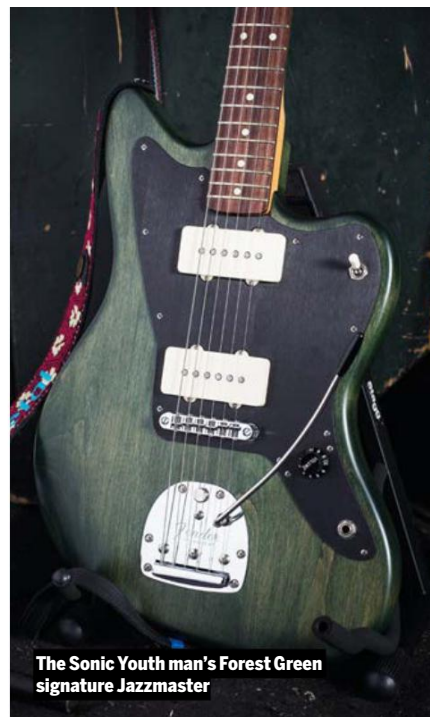
TM: "I've been using Turbo RATs for quite a number of years. I don't know if it's my favourite distortion sound, but I know it well enough and they're really tough on the road..."

JS: "Yeah. Really, really tough on the road. They're also very versatile. Some of my pedals prefer one amp to another, whereas those just seem to work well with whatever the backline is on the day."

Thurston, who or what first inspired you to pick up a guitar?



The Peavey Road Master has long been Thurston's main amp



The Sonic Youth man's Forest Green signature Jazzmaster



Dirtboxes are the primary theme on Moore's pedalboard

"I didn't really take it seriously until I heard the Ramones. The first thing I wrote was this song called *I Don't Wanna Mow The Lawn No More!*"

TM: "I had an older brother who brought one into our household so, all of a sudden, there it was. I didn't really have any aspiration to become a guitar player but I thought that it was maybe the coolest instrument to play. I would invariably break it out of its case when he was away, wire it up to the stereo system and play it, but there weren't any role models for me that I thought I'd be able to play like. I didn't really take it so seriously until '76, when I heard the Ramones and the Sex Pistols, and then I was like, 'Oh, yeah, I can do that... and I like doing that'. I started actually coming up with songs on guitar, and I remember thinking, 'Oh, I can give this to the Ramones!' The first thing I wrote was a song called, *I Don't Wanna Mow The Lawn No More!*"

Glenn Branca was an important influence, wasn't he?

TM: "Well, I had these ideas of what a guitar maybe could do, but I never really thought about altered tunings or anything like that. Then I saw Glenn Branca play at some loft gig in New York around '77 and he was actually accomplishing what I was hearing a little bit in my head. He had six guitars, a drummer and a bass player and it was just really ferocious, and they were going through these long movements. I was like 'How's he f**king getting that sound?' Then I realised that he was tuning guitars to single notes. One guitar was all high Es, another guitar was low Es, another guitar was in Ds, and so on. I was like, 'Oh, that's interesting!' and I tried doing it, tuning just to one note. I think from there I just started

Jazz Man

THURSTON Moore explains how he fell in love with the humble Fender Jazzmaster... "The Jazzmaster came into our world at some point in the mid-to-late 80s. I think we got one and we realised that it was a really good guitar, and they were somewhat affordable at that time. We found they were the most functional guitars for what we were doing and the behind the bridge action and the length were just kind of right... and for my height and build, I felt the body was just right, too. A lot of the guitars I used before were kind of small on my body. I'd see pictures of me playing and it just looked like this weird giant playing these little guitars! Modifications were necessary, though. At some point, we found that tune-o-matic bridges were better to use. Then we got rid of the electrics on the top because you kept hitting it while you were playing and it would turn into some other unwanted tone."



James Sedwards plays guitar in Thurston's band, and shares his love of the Jazzmaster



Essential tuning notes on the back of the Jazzmaster headstock



James borrowed this 1962 Jazzmaster from Thurston for live and studio work

fooling around with tuning the pegs and just coming up with different ideas of tunings. It was fairly naïve, but seeing him was certainly a catalyst.”

Which other guitarists were important to you back in the late 70s?

TM: “I loved bands like Teenage Jesus [And The Jerks] and The Contortions, where the guitar players were women who were just playing slide and they weren’t exactly playing traditional guitar. Those were my inspirations because I was like, ‘Well, I don’t have to play traditional guitar!’ I just wanted to write songs and I wanted to be in a band and I wanted to have a guitar make noise and I wanted to be subservient to the song... so I just kind of taught myself my own way, but I wasn’t snobbish. I wasn’t like ‘Oh, Eric Clapton and Jimmy Page are worthless’, or anything, like the way punk was. I always really appreciated high-technique guitar playing, but I realised that that wasn’t what I was going to do. I just wanted to be radical and experimental with it, and I never really thought of myself as being a guitar player,

“When Sonic Youth first started, I didn’t feel like I needed to be at any level of playing to do what we had to do. In fact, none of us really were”

per se. I was just using the guitar as a means to an end, and so I was very attracted to other guitar players who were like that.”

How were you experimenting at the very start of Sonic Youth?

TM: “When Sonic Youth first started, I didn’t feel like I needed to be at any level of playing to do what we had to do. In fact, none of us really were, although Lee [Ranaldo] was the most accomplished. He had actually been playing guitar in a way where he could work his way around a fretboard fairly well, but I was just instantly like ‘F**k it, I’m just going to put a drumstick under the 12th fret! This guitar sounds really great... let’s just write a song that way!’ And then on the first song on the first record [*The Burning Spear*, *Sonic*

Youth], instead of a lead guitar solo, there’s an electric drill solo. Lee came up with that by putting a contact mic on an electric drill and sending it through the guitar amp. For whatever audiences we were playing to back then – and it was probably nobody – they’d be watching us do our first song and Lee would start playing the electric drill really loudly in the middle of it! I knew right away that we had something and that we were going places with those kind of moves, you know?”

What were the band’s early guitars like?

TM: “Just cheap Harmony guitars and Framuses and things that we’d find for, like, no money at a pawn shop. I had a Fender Stratocaster that my brother gave me when I was 19, but that got stolen fairly quickly as ➤

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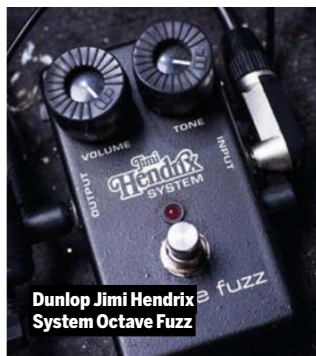
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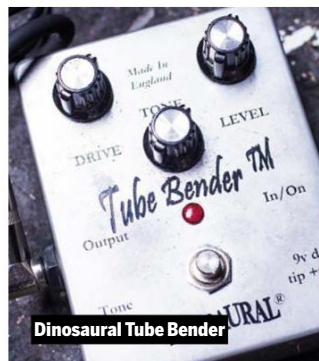
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James's live rig is also dirtbox-heavy, including this Cornish G-2



Dunlop Jimi Hendrix System Octave Fuzz



Dinosaur Tube Bender



The road-proof Pro Co Turbo RAT



Thurston runs the Road Master through a Marshall 4x12 cabinet



Debbie Googe's bass rig for the shows with Thurston

"Branca ended up coming over with six guitars. They were crappy guitars... and he'd modified them. He was devaluing the no-value they had!"

soon as I moved to New York. It was a nice guitar, but I think he actually bought it stolen to begin with, so that was its trajectory, I guess. Then, when we first started getting more active writing more songs after our first record, we needed other guitars to do things on. I remember expressing this to [Glenn] Branca, and he ended up coming over to our flat with about three guitars in each hand. They weren't even in cases – 'Here's some guitars for you guys to play!' They were crappy guitars... and he'd modified them not so much electronically but cosmetically, like he'd shaved some of the headstocks so they were like spears!

"He was, like, completely devaluing the no-value that those guitars had! I think we

ended up trading them in to get some better guitars."

When did you start to really play around with altered tunings?

TM: "The first Sonic Youth album was all standard tuning, but we kind of started f**king around a little bit with stuff on *Confusion Is Sex* [1983]. And a lot of that was just based on the guitars we were using, like one just had four tuning pegs on it and four low strings. *She's In A Bad Mood* was written with that and with me just sliding up on it and creating atmospheres with my playing. It wasn't until after that that this tuning of F#F#F#F#EB happened, and that was the first real tuning that was sort of notated. When I came up with that,

I immediately started writing songs in it, like *Brave Men Run [In My Family]* and *Death Valley '69*. Then we refined how things worked and worked with other tunings. Lee would either do something that was in unison or he would do something of his own invention that was complementary. It wasn't discussed. It was just the way we were doing it."

What are your favourite tunings?

TM: "The record we did right after *Confusion Is Sex* was a mini-LP called *Kill Yr Idols* [1983]. There's a tuning on there that is GGD#D#DD. I always liked that tuning. It's just three notes, but that's what *Kill Yr Idols* and *Brother James*, and a few other things were in. It created this more heavy rock kind of sound that I really liked. The other tunings tended to be a little more squirl-y, some more than others, but this one was really open to the point where I could create songs with that kind of chug-a-lug to them but they still had that real minimal electric mantra sound. I'd like to go back to that tuning, actually, and do some more with it." ➤

serious guitar

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290



James and Thurston with two of Moore's modded Jazzmasters

How many effects did you tend to use while you were in Sonic Youth?

TM: "Lee started using pedals first, but I don't know how early on. We didn't use them for a while because pedals were another expenditure which we didn't have any money for. I think maybe the first pedal that was used was probably a compressor pedal, just so we could get a punchier sound out of the amp or something. I held out for quite a while on using pedals, while Lee started getting more expansive with it, which I thought was fine.

"I would just use the amp for overdrive. It was like, 'Well, okay – you can do all the pedal work and I'll just be playing the way I play!' Even to this day I don't really use pedals, except for certain sections of songs that get into long improvisations, but I don't really utilise them too much. The pedals I have are just variants of distortion. I used to use a phase-shifter, but I don't use that anymore."

How did Sonic Youth start using feedback as a compositional tool?

TM: "In terms of using feedback compositionally, I think that just sort of happened. There wasn't many people that I know of playing feedback guitar in our scene. I think Black Flag was really influential in that respect. I have a tape of Black Flag, where Lee and I are at the gig,

"Even to this day I don't really use pedals, except for certain sections of songs that get into long improvisations, but I don't utilise them too much"

and it must've been like '83 and they had just stopped playing a song; it was almost two minutes before the next song came on because something was happening onstage. The amps were just rolling with feedback. It was kind of low but it filled up the room in such a way and you can hear Lee as I'm recording it, saying, 'This sounds amazing! We have to do a whole record of this'. In '82 or something, we were asked to play at this performance art space in New York and we decided to do a guitar feedback performance. We stood there, turned the amps up and fed back for 10 minutes. It really polarised people... but I think the first time we used feedback as a compositional element, where we had control over it, was on *Bad Moon Rising*. I love it. It's just the relationship between you, the guitar and the amplifier. James and I still do it when we play. That's something I enjoy doing more than anything – improvising with feedback as a primary sound!" 

Thurston Moore's album *The Best Day* is out now on Matador Records

Black Riffing

IN 2014, Thurston Moore – perhaps surprisingly to some – guested on black metal supergroup Twilight's latest release, *III: Beneath Trident's Tomb*. But black metal guitar-playing is something he's got more than just a passing interest in...

"Certainly a lot of guitar action that happens on black metal recordings was really curious to me – let's put it that way – like a lot of the minor-key riffing that goes on with a black metal group like Hate Forest or something, where it's like this real wash of guitar and an industrial buzzsaw-type sound or something. It didn't seem to be referencing anything that was traditional in guitar playing at all. It was just coming out of some weird void, trying to accomplish some really sort of demented state through a guitar. I thought, 'Well that's as experimental a guitar sound as anything out there,' even if it's not its intention to be experimental."

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ALL CHANGE

For some players' tastes, Gibson USA's 2015 electric line-up might feature a few too many departures from classic spec for comfort. But change, often driven by market forces, is exactly what forged the instruments that helped define the sonic vocabulary of popular music, creating classic tones we still revere today. Join us as we investigate what went wrong and right with innovation during Gibson's golden era...

WORDS

DAVE BURRLUCK

PHOTOGRAPH

JOSEPH BRANSTON



When exactly did we become innovation-phobic? That's an apt description of what many of us guitar players are. Gibson's new 2015 line-up is purposefully innovative and there's a whiff of distaste in the air: we want them to make them how they used to, don't we? If we jump back in time 65 years, we're beginning to sound like the smug jazzers who were the kings of the guitar – the archtop – and who were about to be totally usurped in the space of just a few years by rock 'n' roll and the solidbody electric instrument. But using Gibson's 'golden era' period of the 50s through to the mid-60s as an example, well, was there any more innovative guitar company plying its trade?

Gibson was, of course, a mature company by then – unlike the new noise, Fender. If that meant a certain conservatism held the firm back, and meant it was often reactive to other trends, it worked in favour of many of the instruments it created. Yes, the Les Paul came after the Telecaster, but what a graceful thoroughbred it was compared to the Fender's plank body with its screw-on neck.

Yes, the three-pickup Stratocaster is, for many, the ultimate solidbody, but don't forget Gibson was the first production maker to feature a three-pickup electric, the ES-5 in 1949. Again, you needed more than a screwdriver to build that sumptuous archtop electric. And 1949 was the year Gibson created the ES-175 as a more affordable laminate version of the L-4; it remains an unquestionable jazz standard.

NO OPTION

We have questioned the sense in Gibson including its G Force tuning system on the majority of this year's models, but back in the day that's exactly what it did with its new designs. Options? Pah! The single-coil P-90 was superseded by the improved dual-coil humbucker, so that's what went on the top-line Les Paul from 1957 – it would be some years before you could buy a new Les Paul with P-90 pickups. The P-90 was a more basic design, retained on the cheaper start-up guitars such as the Les Paul Junior. The Tune-O-Matic bridge, now such a generic item because of its design and function, was a vastly improved part over previous archtop bridges, or the wrapover-style bridge; by 1958 you couldn't buy a Les Paul Standard 'Burst without a Tune-O-Matic or PAF humbuckers.

If some of the designs surrounding Gibson's early solidbodies were a definite reaction to the rise of Fender, the development of the thinline not only seemed more in keeping with Gibson's archtop heritage but was a suggestion of two successful guitar players, Billy Byrd and Hank Garland. The resulting 1955 Byrdland might not be viewed as a classic in retrospect, but it was the first step in the development of the unquestionably classic ES-335. It's interesting, too, that Byrd and Garland requested a shorter scale length and narrower neck, believed to be for ease of complex chord fingering and fast runs. That's a direct contrast to Gibson 2015 necks, isn't it? But isn't this a major part of guitar innovation: experimentation?

The Les Paul went through four specifications before the final '58 to '60 'Standard' was arrived at. Then, of course, while the name was retained, the recipe was changed to what we now refer to as the SG in less than three years. There was no option. This constant change was simply to stimulate sales. It's no different today, is it?

WHO'S LEADING WHO?

The 50s was such a dramatic period for Gibson in terms of new designs, that by 1957 there was a period of reflection and evaluation. The sales and sound of the electric solidbody had proved it was here to stay, yet Gibson president Ted McCarty never believed it was particularly comfortable, being too small and too heavy. The introduction of the Byrdland and other thinline guitars had, up to a point, been successful. However, what was to come – combining the solidbody with the thinline hollowbody and creating the centre-blocked ES-335 design in one of those eureka moments – was informed by Gibson's prior art, but also a responsibility to its heritage and the players who'd bought its instruments. Gibson made proper guitars for proper guitar players. Well, mostly...

The year of the ES-335's appearance, 1958, also saw the arrival of the Flying V and then the Explorer – a short-lived modernistic statement, and complete sales failure, that the market certainly wasn't gagging for. Not for a few decades anyway.

We'd perhaps like to think that design is somehow different today from how it was back in the 1950s.

Gibson Tune-O-Matic bridge makes it possible to tune your guitar to perfect accuracy on each individual string, at the bridge. It permits precise adjustment for intonation and each saddle can be reversed individually, for full range tuning. Easily adjusted for fast, low action.

Gibson humbucking pickup is a new approach to tone generation from string vibration. This high impedance pickup is sensitive to the smallest string vibration but rejects interference in the form of hum, static, or related noise. Two methods are provided to set the pickup: 1.) adjusting screws set pickup; 2.) adjusting individual polepieces set each string.

Gibson wonder-thin silhouette... only 1 1/4" to 2 1/4" thick.

Gibson wonder-thin straight neck—with adjustable truss rod... first developed by Gibson. Positively keeps the neck from twisting or warping because of climatic change or string tension... keeps tuning exact in the upper register. Neck can be adjusted perfectly in minutes. This is the famous slim, fast, low-action neck.

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Electric Spanish Guitars

An all-star guitar series for the most discriminating players... providing brilliant sustaining tone, fast action, and easy handling. Wonder-thin and light, these Gibson electric guitars fit close and comfortably against the body, giving easy access to the entire fret range. The slender neck with low-action frets is extremely fast and easy to finger... strings seem feather light. The feel is just right! Famous Gibson firsts—the electric guitar and the wonder-thin silhouette—are combined in these fine instruments.



1. On its introduction in 1949, Gibson's three-pickup ES-5 featured a trio of individual pickup volume controls and a master tone. It was a forward-thinking combination that offered a huge array of sounds

2. What a difference a year makes – 1960 saw the Les Paul Custom, Standard, Special and Junior given a drastic makeover in an attempt to rejuvenate sales that had been in decline since 1953

We have sophisticated market reports and feedback; we have the internet to access all sorts of opinion, but even for the most informed there's still a massive amount of trial and error. If the ES-335 arrived fully formed, a classic, the ES-345 with its Vari-Tone and stereo output was a classic example of designers offering something because they could rather than because of a market desire. So, innovation: should it be designer-led or market-led? The reality can be both.

CHANGE IS ESSENTIAL

What is a given is that if your instruments aren't selling as well as you'd like them to, you need to change, and although back in the 50s Gibson didn't reinvent its entire product line every year, which is what it seems to have done for the past few years, change it most certainly did. That pressure to come up with new designs has created some of the most iconic guitars of all time.

The regular Les Paul's biggest-selling year was 1953, hence the changes in its design until the final switch from Goldtop to the classic Sunburst in 1958, and its corresponding name change to 'Standard'. The Les Paul Junior, TV and Special had been successful from 1954 onwards, but by 1957 a dip in sales meant they received a facelift, from single- to double-cutaway to allow easier high-fret access – another perceived plus and part of the ES-335's design. By 1960, again due to slower-than-desired sales, it was decided the entire electric line needed a substantial revamp to the newer, sleeker SG styling, also with its improved high-fret access, 'extra slim, fast, low-action neck' and lighter weight. Of course, in retrospect, we've all exclaimed 'what were they thinking?' Back then, it was a business decision. Any business, old or new, would recognise Ted McCarty's statement... "the only reason you discontinue something is because it doesn't sell."

Continued on p80



Although back in the 50s Gibson didn't reinvent its entire product line every year, which it seems to have done for the past few years, change it most certainly did

2



FROM FIRST TO 'BURST

While the Stratocaster arrived almost perfectly formed in 1954, the Les Paul took six years and a series of significant design revisions before Gibson hit on what many regard as the high-water mark of the electric solidbody guitar.

Let's wind the clock back to 1952 and take a look...



LES PAUL MODEL
1952-1953

Gibson got some things right at the first attempt: the shape, scale length and control lay-out were bang-on. P-90 pickups and the Goldtop finish came as standard, with some examples featuring gold backs and sides, too. More problematic was the bridge/tailpiece, which the patent document shows was intended to be strung over the top. However, this was impossible due to the shallow neck pitch. Palm muting was out of the question, and Les wasn't happy...



LES PAUL MODEL
1953-1955

Late 1953 saw the Ted McCarty-designed 'wrapover' stud bridge/tailpiece correct most of the ills of the previous trapeze arrangement, and when neck pitch problems were addressed in early '54 the result was one of the coolest Les Pauls of all. Intonation is, of course, something of a compromise with a wraparound bridge, but devotees will swear that there's a certain something in the tone and sustain offered by this arrangement that makes the struggle worthwhile.



LES PAUL MODEL
1955-1957

If intonation had previously been an issue, Mr McCarty once again had the answer in the form of the Tune-O-Matic bridge, a design that made its debut on the Les Paul Custom in 1954. The previously used stud wrapover became the string anchor – it had originally been intended for the strings to pass over the top, and some players, such as Joe Bonamassa, 'top-wrap' their guitars as such for a slinkier feel – and the new bridge offered precise intonation adjustment.



LES PAUL MODEL
1957-1958

Although, 60 years later, a soapbar-loaded Les Paul still delivers many players' idea of tonal heaven, when engineer Seth Lover found a way to buck single-coil hum in 1955, it wasn't long before Gibson replaced the P-90 pickups on its Les Pauls with new PAF humbuckers. Although this enforced 'upgrade' wasn't unanimously popular with players at the time, it's hard to argue with the place that PAF-loaded Les Pauls have carved in rock history.



OFF-PISTE LES PAULS

In over 60 years, the Les Paul has certainly been mucked about with. The Deluxe, from '69, got the pickups wrong and changed the body and neck construction, but still looked the part at least. Less so the '69 Les Paul Professional and Personal with low-impedance pickups and electronic jiggery-pokery. The Recording following in '72, a little more conventional but still festooned with knobs and switches. The

Signature appeared in '74 – half Les Paul, half ES-335... with low-impedance pickups.

The 80s saw some messing with the classic mahogany/maple body. The '83 Spotlight Special had a central walnut block and ultra-figured maple flanks. Why? The late 80s Studio Lite started with a Fender-like back contour then added balsa wood body inserts – not as daft as it seems – to reduce weight, but it never caught on. MIII

versions of the Studio Lite and Classic appeared in the early 90s with HSH pickup combinations that added versatility but ruined *that* look.

For many, the first Robot Les Paul, and from 2007 with first generation auto-tuning set-up, was too hard to stomach, not to mention tune. And the Dusk Tiger? Oh...

It makes the 2015 LPs seem quite conservative and *on piste*, by comparison.



LES PAUL STANDARD
1958-1960

In mid-'58 the Goldtop finish and lightly-toned back, sides and neck made way for Cherry Sunburst tops and red stain elsewhere. Previously, tops were made from three pieces of unmatched maple, hidden by gold paint, but the visible grain of the 'burst finish saw Gibson switch to book-matched, two-piece tops. Until early 1960, the highly UV-sensitive red dye used was prone to fading. Jumbo fretwire arrived midway through '59 and the neck shape slimmed down by mid-1960.



LES PAUL STANDARD
1960-1963

Despite its Holy Grail status amongst collectors, the '58 to '60 'Burst wasn't a roaring commercial success for Gibson, and late in 1960 there followed a radical switch to a design that would later come to be known as the SG, with its thinner, all-mahogany body, pointed horns and easy upper-fret access. The model was renamed the SG Standard in late '63, and though it seems unthinkable in hindsight, for a period of time the Gibson Les Paul went out of production entirely...



LES PAUL STANDARD
1968-1969

Somewhat bafflingly, Gibson responded to the demand for Les Pauls triggered by the likes of Clapton and Bloomfield with a new Standard that resembled a '56 Goldtop rather than a 'Burst. Despite wider cutaway binding and other departures from 50s spec, these guitars still became desirable in later years, though the arrival of 'pancake' body construction in early '69 removed them even further from the source. The model would soon be re-christened the Les Paul Deluxe...



LES PAUL STANDARD 2015
2014-

The Les Paul Standard has remained in production since the mid 1970s and undergone numerous reinventions over the years, some in the name of authenticity, others innovation. In late 2014, Gibson announced that the 2015 Standard would feature G Force automatic tuning, a zero fret adjustable nut and wider fingerboard dimensions, to name but a few of the sweeping changes that have set internet forums alight. How does the class of 2015 stack up? Turn to p86 to find out...

3



Gibson
Flying V

Gibson leads the way with this "design of the future" ... the Flying V model guitar. The twist-back, modernistic lines of this really "forward-looking" instrument will be a real asset to the combo musician with a flair for downmanship. The tapered lines provide complete accessibility to all six strings throughout the entire twenty-two fret range. The new humbucking pickup generates more power and creates greater clarity and sustaining tone while reducing hum from outside interference.

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SPECIFICATIONS
4 1/2" wide at top, tapering to 1 5/8" wide at tail, 19 1/2" long, 1 1/2" thick, 24 3/4" scale, 22 frets

Flying V—Natural lined Korina finish.....\$247.50
Case—Faulless, oblong, hard shell, plush lined..... 75.00



Gibson
ES-335T

The newest star in a long list of Gibson favorites, this revolutionary new double cutaway, thin electric Spanish guitar meets today's needs for individual performance, large or small ensembles, recording, television and radio. Engineered after consultation with leading players, the ES-335T presents a striking appearance and sensational response. New body construction, with solid fitting neck, pickups and adjustable bridge, provides the stability essential for clear, sparkling, sustaining tone—while retaining a body size and shape that is easy and comfortable to hold. Provides easy access throughout the entire twenty-two fret range on all six strings.

The double cutaway, thin body, with arched top and back of curly maple has matching maple rim and pearloid binding • extra narrow, slim Honduras mahogany neck with Gibson Adjustable Truss Rod • attractive peghead with large pearl inlays • Rosewood fingerboard with pearl dot inlays • twin humbucking pickups located for contrasting treble and bass response • individually adjustable polepieces • separate tone and volume controls which can be preset • toggle switch to activate either or both pickups • Tune O Matic bridge permits adjustment of string action and individual string length for perfect intonation • nickel plated metal parts • enclosed individual machine heads with deluxe buttons.

SPECIFICATIONS
1 3/8" wide, 19" long, 1 3/4" thick, 24 3/4" scale, 22 frets

ES-335T—Natural Finish.....\$282.50
ES-335T—Sunburst Finish..... 267.50
No. 319 Case—Faulless, plush lined..... 46.50



4

ADDED VALUE

It seems wrong for us to look at these instruments that we lust after, or use to pay the bills, as simple 'products' to be sold, so that the manufacturer, plus the whole distribution and retail chain are able to make money from them. But that's the reality. It was no different back in the day, either.

That was the reason for the SG, and let's face it, back in 1960 the new-style Les Paul Custom, for example, was quite a looker. It still is today, with its three humbuckers, futuristic shape, unimpeded access to the uppermost frets, and let's not forget the vibrato or the famous "fretless wonder" neck. So, are Gibson's 2015 guitars, with their raft of 'improvements', any different? Aren't they simply lists of features, improvements and innovations, certainly in terms of its G Force tuning system, that provide added value and will hopefully sell. No doubt 2016 will bring more changes... and so it goes. This year's G Force might be next year's vintage grommet tuner. Maybe Gibson will revert to the thinner nut widths of guitars such as the Byrdland...

And speaking of birds, Gibson still had a statement or two to make to conclude its golden era. It was called the Firebird. It's still in the line today: an uncompromising instrument that appeared in 1963, deemed a 'flashier' model to combat the guitars of Fender. Funnily enough, 51 years on, it's still doing the same thing. So, all the shapes used in Gibson's current line-up were designed by 1963, a stark reminder of the conservatism of this guitar-selling lark. Is it any surprise that some might feel that all these changes to

Isn't the point of innovation to provide us with something potentially useful, we didn't think we needed? Can you say that these G Force tuners, wider necks and adjustable zero frets of Gibson's new guitars are bonkers unless you try them?

Gibson's 2015 guitars are ill-advised – a change too far? All around us, technology is changing the way we live and work. Just remind yourself how recording technology has changed. Many of us were perfectly happy with analogue tape, but modern digital multi-tracks allow us to record and create to a high standard on our laptops, tablets or smartphones. It might be a smaller field, but maybe the robotic 'smart' tuners of Gibson's new guitars could revolutionise the way we use our instruments: the access to a host of tunings, all at the punch of a few buttons. You don't really need those reversing beeps to park your car, do you? But if you have them, you use them. Then, when you drive a car without them it seems as though something is missing.

Isn't part of the duty of innovation to provide us with something potentially useful, something we didn't necessarily think we needed until we tried it and got used to it? Can you really say that these G Force tuners, wider necks and adjustable zero frets of Gibson's new guitars are bonkers unless you try them? Food for thought. **G**

3. The Flying V and ES-335 were launched during the same year, but guitar buyers of 1958 weren't quite ready for the V's angular futurism

4. An original, natural finish '58 ES-335 without fingerboard binding. Rocking horse manure seems positively abundant by comparison

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INNOVATION & ARTISTRY

Over seven decades, the Gibson Les Paul has been pivotal to many legendary players and era-defining recordings. The new 2015 Les Pauls are some of the most versatile ever, but if you want a crash course in classic, genre-defining LP tone, go to these albums pronto. Tone, shred, duelling guitars and more abound...

WORDS

MICHAEL LEONARD

JOHN MAYALL WITH ERIC CLAPTON *BLUES BREAKERS* (1966)



A pivotal Brit blues album with stinging tone, this kick-started the now-fabled combo of Gibson Les Paul and Marshall. Clapton, then 21, bought his 'Burst, inspired by *Let's Hide Away And Dance Away With Freddy King*, but we'll never know if EC's 1960 LP was unique or not: it was stolen from an early Cream rehearsal.

GARY MOORE *STILL GOT THE BLUES* (1990)



Moore bought the 'Greeny' Les Paul from Peter Green in the 70s, yet he made it sound very different from its original owner. The late Irishman's more overdriven sustain launched his solo career with *Parisiennne Walkways*, but he here honed his sound into a thick syrup of sonics that remains a benchmark to many blues-rockin' Les Paul acolytes.

THIN LIZZY *LIVE AND DANGEROUS* (1978)



Although released after studio overdubs had been added, nothing can deny this live twin-Les Paul feast. Brian Robertson's sharp wah excursions were on a '60 LP Custom: Scott Gorham's more silky soloing was on a 70s LP Deluxe with mini-humbuckers. A lesson of how two Gibson Les Pauls and two players in the same band can sound totally different.

LED ZEPPELIN *II* (1969)



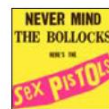
Jimmy Page recorded much of *Led Zeppelin I* on a Fender Telecaster. For *II*, he brought overloaded heaviness and righteous riffage via his '59 Sunburst. Page's fabled production techniques – small amps, ambient mic'ing – make the whole sound huge. From *Whole Lotta Love* to *Heartbreaker*, this signals the birth of Gibson Les Pauls as weapons of riff destruction.

GUNS N' ROSES *APPETITE FOR DESTRUCTION* (1987)



The 80s weren't kind to Les Pauls, with few authentic reissues. EVH-inspired hot-rodded S-types abounded – until this. Yet Slash's main AFD axe was a '59 LP replica built by LA luthier Kris Derrig. Gibson and Slash have collaborated on many signature models since. Gibson copying a copy of what they first did best? That's leather-trouser post-modernism.

SEX PISTOLS *NEVER MIND THE BOLLOCKS...* (1977)



Steve Jones recorded ...*Bollocks* using a pair of Les Pauls: a black "1954" (Jones says) Custom and a white 1974 Custom, through a Fender Twin Deluxe. The result? Chuck Berry-esque redux-riffing and the most almighty gobbing roar. Manic Street Preachers' James Dean Bradfield tells *Guitarist*: "I have the same gear, basically. Can I sound like this? No."

FLEETWOOD MAC *LIVE AT THE BBC* (1995)



Rather than any single FM studio album, this live compilation best captures Peter Green's sweetest Les Paul tone. The '59 guitar's 'out-of-phase' pickups (mis-installed after a repair, goes the myth) is the stuff of Les Paul hoodoo, but London expert/collector Phil Harris believes it's more to do with unusually large pickup routing. Face it: it could be just PG's magical touch.

ZZ TOP *TRES HOMBRES* (1973)

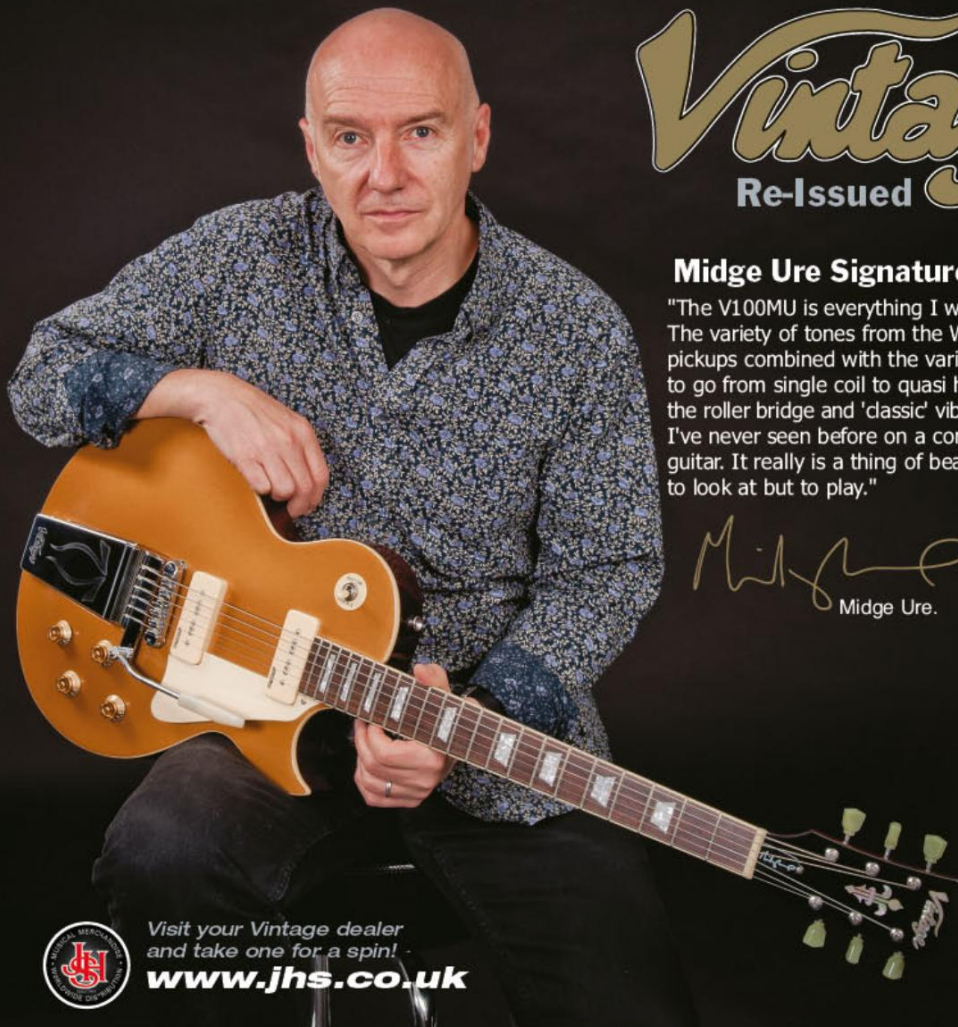


Billy F Gibbons' '59 'Pearly Gates' is a fabled vintage LP, fuelled by BFG's own penchant for telling a good yarn or 50. Whatever the real origins of Gibbons' acquisition – he says he bought it from a farmer for just \$250 – it shines here on the first truly great ZZ Top album. A Peso for a pick, and with just 0.007-gauge strings, *Tres Hombres* is trippin' with top Texan tone.

OZZY OSBOURNE *BLIZZARD OF OZZ* (1980)



Randy Rhoads was a rare talent. He took EVH-style shredding stratospheric, while bafflingly claiming Vivaldi, Pachelbel and Bach as his main influences. RR's LP was a '74 Custom, and his thick tone and harmonics influenced many. Ozzy sidekick Zakk Wylde, another Les Paul lover, says simply: "What Randy achieved in just a couple of years is right up there with the best of the best."



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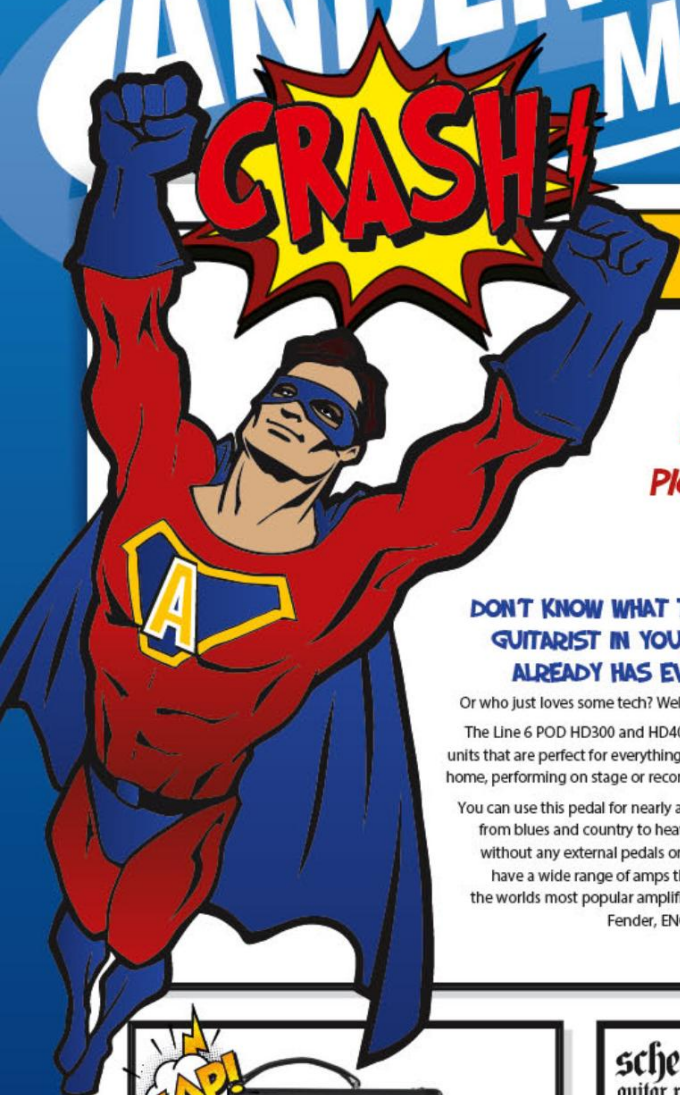
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PAUL SHOOK UP

For 2015, Gibson's annual makeover is more radical than ever. We take a close look at a trio of classics

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Gibson 2015 Les Paul Studio, Deluxe & Standard £899, £1,699 & £2,499

What we want to know

1 Another year, another Les Paul?

Yes, 2015's line-up from Gibson USA is the most radical we can remember. The forums are alight with comment: it's fair to say Gibson has 'done a U2'.

2 What's the problem?

The 'problem' is that Gibson's meat and potato production division has piled innovation into most of the new guitars, whether we want it or not. You can't buy a 2015 Les Paul, for example, without the rebranded Min-ETune self-tuning system, which is now called G Force.

3 What, no options?

No. The options are all in-built to the specific model: neck profile, weight relief, top carves, pickups, controls. On top of that, virtually all the models have wider necks than ever before. Like we say, radical.

The new line-up of Gibson's USA production guitars is full of change. Are you ready?

First off, the Tronical-designed Min-ETune 'robot' tuning system has been rebranded as the G Force Tuning System and is standard – not optional – on all the guitars, with the exception of the Derek Trucks SG and Firebird. In fact, while the Trucks model sticks to its 2014 specs the rest get a raft of changes. There's the Zero Fret Adjustable Nut – a first for Gibson – wider necks and thicker rosewood fingerboards, pearl inlays, lower frets and improved Plek set-up and intonation. All the models have proper gloss nitro finishes and come in a new-design TKL moulded case; each has a Les Paul 100th birthday signature on the headstock; there's a new 'improved contact' output jack and "more robust cables" for a "stronger signal strength", and each guitar also has a small Les Paul hologram sticker.

Our three review samples give us a taste of the three levels of Les Paul in this year's line-up. Aside from all the above changes, each model has a quite specific specification in terms of weight relief, neck profile and other instrument-specific features. The Deluxe and

Standard, for example, have upgraded Tune-O-Matic bridges with titanium saddles; the Deluxe features new mini humbuckers for "improved tonal balance and coil-splitting versatility", while the Standard offers a slot-in/pull-out removable pickguard.

Studio

Gibson is hugely detailed in the specifications of these new guitars. The Studio features a 'multi-piece' mahogany back that's classed as 'medium' density (the lower the density the lighter the weight). The back has an opaque colour, so you can't see any joins or the 'modern' weight relief that is one of a number of ways Gibson attacks the problem of weighty mahogany. The modern relief

The Rivals

There's no shortage of guitars based on the LP blueprint. **Fret King's Eclat Standard** (£575) is a great-value single-cut. **PRS's SE Bernie Marsden** (£750) is a crackin' vintage vibe alternative, while the **S2 Singlecut** is USA-made with a bevelled-edge top at £1,300. A more rock choice is **ESP's LTD EC-1000**, in various formats and pickup options from £800. **Schecter's Solo 6** has several versions at around £700. If your budget stretches to the Standard bracket, **Vigier's GV Wood** is worth a look (approx £2,900); it's more mainstream and around the same price as **PRS's SC 245**



The larger strap buttons present on 2014 Les Pauls have been retained



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Gibson has treated the 2015 Les Paul Studio to a pair of tasty 57 humbuckers



The G Force automated tuning system is now standard across the Les Paul range

was introduced last year and is described by Gibson as being “elliptical sound-chambers inside the mahogany body. Fully ‘chambered’ Les Pauls can, some argue, feedback like a semi. Modern weight relief solves all that.”

The Studio’s maple top is B grade, which sounds a little lowly, and there’s only one grade (C) below it, with eight grades, up to AAAA, above it. Save for a little flame in the centre of the two-piece top, it’s plain, but it works really well with the stripped-down, classic vibe created by the unbound Desert Burst gloss finish, dark cream pickup surrounds and switch collar and the almost aged-looking satin nickel-plated hardware. There’s another quality grade in terms of the top, and that affects the carve, or ‘body contour’ as Gibson calls it, especially around the edge of the top. We have four grades: flat, slight (as here), classic and enhanced – the latter, presumably, making the most of the violin-like dishing as the top flows into the outer edge. There’s not much of

that here, but time is money – more contouring means more time sanding, and compared to either of the other LPs on review, the Studio is really very attractively priced.

The neck has similar options. There are colour classifications for the rosewood ‘board: light, medium and dark; ours is medium and does look a little ‘dry’. Then, of course, there are the neck profiles. The Studio has the slim taper (measured at 21mm at the 1st fret, 22.4mm at the 12th) – one of five profiles offered across the range. If you’re thinking, “I know that profile” prepare to be wrong. Gibson has retained its standard string spacing at the nut and bridge (36.5mm and 50mm respectively) but increased the actual width of the neck, so the nut width, depending on profile, is approximately 45mm wide and the width at the 16th fret neck join is a little over 57mm.

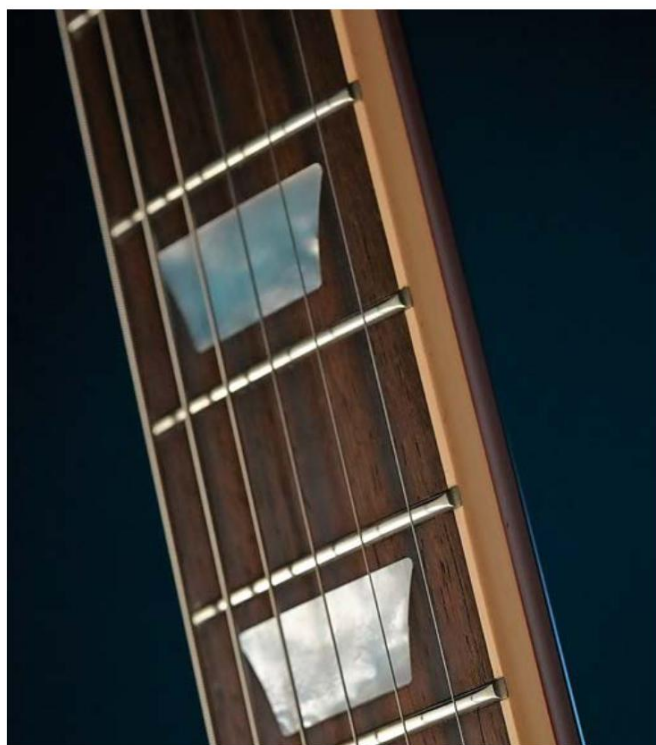
As the price reflects, this is a more deluxe upgrade but it drops to the lowest C grade maple top

As a result, the outer strings sit some way from the edge of the fingerboard; there’s a standard 12-inch radius to the fingerboard itself and the fret wire is on the small side of medium: approximately 2.24mm wide and 1.1mm high. A radical change is the height-adjustable zero fret. Made from cryogenically treated brass (an ultra-low temperature process used to harden certain metals), a central section – that sits within a fixed outer nut-like housing – is held in place by string tension and two locating posts. The front edge, like a fret, is domed; the back edge is a series of grooves which act as string guides. Between the outer pairs of strings are two small Allen key bolts, which can raise or lower the height of the nut – not itself a new idea: Gordon-Smith has a height-adjustable brass nut, so does Warwick, but we’ve not seen

a height-adjustable zero fret like this before.

Face-on, nut aside, the headstock looks pretty standard, except for 2015 we get a thick gold signature ‘Les Paul 100’ script logo – referring, of course, to Les Paul himself, who was born in 1915. Flip the guitar over and we have the new G Force tuning system, which looks identical to the previous Min-ETune. Aside from the red, green and blue banks of the previous system we have two additional banks (white and yellow) of six presets, all aimed at those players who want to access low tunings such as C to C, for example. There’s also another six-slot user bank (magenta). Including standard tuning, that’s 24 different tuning presets with space for 12 of your own. There seem to be a lot more in-depth editable parameters for the more serious musician, not least the ability to ‘sweeten’ the tuning via +/- 12 cent ‘offsets’ on each string.

There’s a wide choice of pickups across the range. The Studio offers the 57 Plus and 57 Classic humbuckers, both with



The neck is virtually the same width as the Studio's but more rounded in feel



New mini 'buckers feature steel-blade pole pieces under nickel-plated covers

Alnico II magnets. We get the higher-speed knobs with multi notches, for grip, around the top edge, too. Wiring is all to a PCB with push-in contacts – the coil splits, via pull/push switches on the volume controls, are what Gibson calls 'tuned coil taps'; the single-coil sound is created via a capacitor acting as a filter rather than knocking one coil out. You still get a little hum in individual pickup selections, but full hum-cancelling in the mixed pickup mode; there's also less volume drop in the 'single-coil' mode. The larger strap buttons are retained, too.

Deluxe

As the price reflects, this is a more deluxe upgrade but it

drops to the lowest C grade maple top, as it's offered either under a very cool-looking Wine Red translucent finish, as reviewed, or completely opaque Gold Top or Pelham Metallic Blue. That said, there is a 'burst option that will be very plain-looking, like those Deluxes of the 70s: not everyone wants figure and flame.

Weight relief is the earlier nine-hole variety, and designated as being 'low' density mahogany for the back, although it's the heaviest of our

Under the hood is the modern weight relief and centre-joined 'ultra low' density mahogany back

review trio. The top's contour is 'classic', noticeably more dished than the Studio, plus we have cream binding around the top edge and the fingerboard. The neck's width is pretty much identical to the Studio, but the profile is 'rounded asymmetrical', putting more meat on the bass side (21mm at the 1st fret, 24.6mm at the 12th) and more overall girth further up the neck. The new-design mini humbuckers – that use Alnico V magnets with steel-blade pole pieces, hidden under

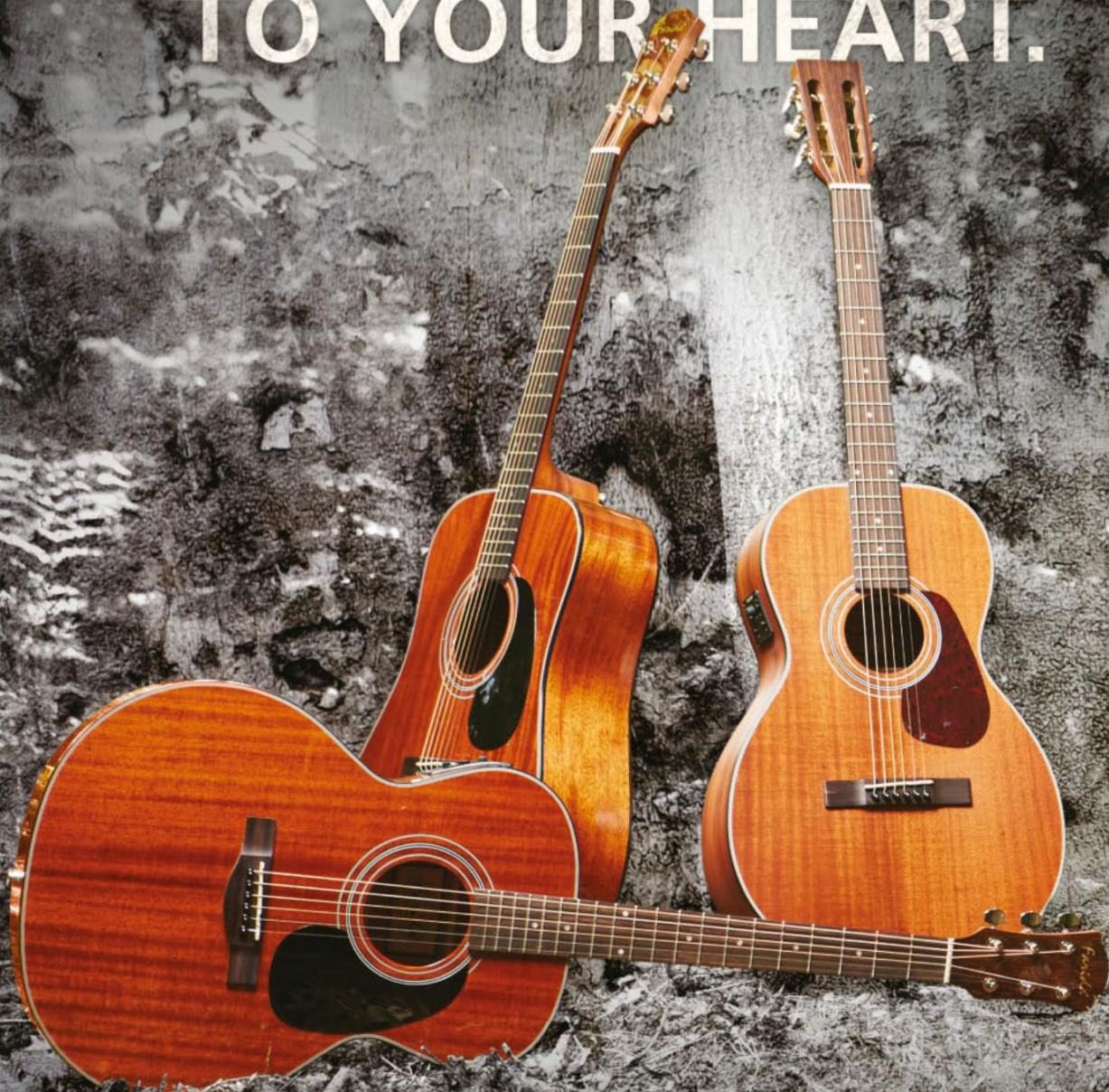
nickel-plated covers – have a hefty DC resistance, quoted as 26k ohms for the bridge and 17k for the neck; they have standard coil-splits, too, voicing the inside single coil of each pickup – once again, they are fully hum-cancelling in the mixed position. Finally, we have the active level boost (with adjustable gain on the circuit board to set and forget), meaning we drop down to a master tone control plus two volumes, both with pull/push switches to engage those coil-splits. The hardware is nickel-plated.

Standard

As the definitive Les Paul, the Standard has gone through



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The Standard packs a pair of Gibson Burstbucker Pro covered humbuckers



We get an active level boost with a single master tone control and two volumes

some changes over the years, not least recently! This year's model builds on the Deluxe with a very classic-looking AA-grade figured maple top that certainly isn't over-dramatic, and with the 'enhanced' body contour is subtly more dished than the Deluxe. Under the hood is the modern weight relief and centre-joined 'ultra low' density mahogany back – it's still no lightweight, though. The neck profile is the 'slim' profile but asymmetric, again putting more beef on the bass side (20.8mm at the 1st fret, 22.5mm at the 12th). The fingerboard is classed as 'dark' – a very close call between that and the Deluxe's in colour, there's slightly more 'interest'

here with purple streaks to the grain.

A neat addition is the easily removable no-screw pickguard, which via three small prongs slots into the cream pickup rings, leaving no open screw holes as the standard fixings do when you remove it.

It returns to the four-control layout with dual Burstbucker Pro humbuckers, with their slightly unmatched coils – a difference of about 200 turns – and Alnico V magnets. Again, we have the tuned coil-taps via

the volume controls' pull/push switches, but we also have pull/push switches on the two tone controls – pulling up the bridge pickup's tone sends that pickup straight to the output jack, bypassing the tone and any interaction of the other controls; the neck pickup's tone, with the switch pulled up and both pickups selected, puts them out of phase.

Overall, the gloss finishing on all three guitars is really good: typically Gibson in that it's not mirror-perfect, but it's clearly

thin, crisply coloured and also pleasantly non-sticking on the neck backs. The Standard's Candy finish refers to a subtle metallic gold fleck that's barely visible under normal light, more noticeable – still very subtle – under a brighter illumination.

Sounds

For all the forum inches devoted to pricing, the rebranded Min-E-Tune and *that* script logo on the headstock, the most striking aspect of each of these instruments is the way their respective neck shapes feel in your left hand. The three profiles here are all comfy enough, but there's no doubt that the wider nut width of all three is initially something of

The most striking aspect of each of these instruments is the way their neck shapes feel in your left hand

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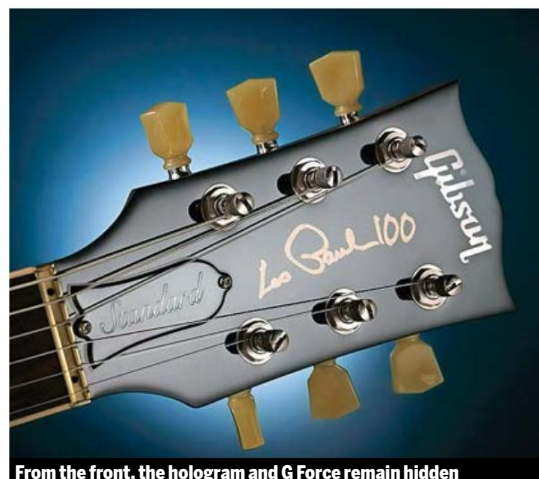
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The Standard delivers classy refined tones with a clean sound that may surprise you



From the front, the hologram and G Force remain hidden



The AA-grade maple top typifies the Standard's high-quality feel

a curveball for those who find grasping the company's classic neck shapes akin to sliding your feet into a comfy old pair of slippers. As string spacing is the same as ever, the additional real estate on the treble and bass sides of the fingerboard might prove a challenge for thumb-over-the-top players – less so for guitarists used to a traditionally dimensioned classical guitar – but it provides a safety net for those with a more exaggerated left-hand vibrato technique, and for inexperienced players there's much less chance of slipping off the edge of the 'board when playing either E string. In practice, though, it's initially a little disconcerting for a dyed-in-the-wool Gibson addict; it takes only about half an hour of playing time before the fingerboard dimensions become a non-issue and you get on with the matter in hand: making music.

It wasn't that long ago that Gibson reserved 57 Classics for

its USA vintage reissue models, and here they help the Studio deliver authoritative humbucker tones that are every bit a grown-up Les Paul. There's plenty of treble, too; it's a far cry from the woolly high end and heavy mids of the ceramic pickup-loaded LP Studios of the 1990s. Pulling either volume pot to put the corresponding pickup into single-coil mode yields an alternative set of hollower, spankier sounds that are eminently usable onstage – there's none of the gut-wrenching drop in volume that made many of the coil-split options of yesteryear so unappealing in a live context. For the price, the 2015 LP Studio is a serious guitar.

Although, with its pleasingly chunky neck profile, the Deluxe

is the most comfortable to play, the mini-humbuckers are initially a little underwhelming compared to the authoritative punch and bite of the Studio's 57s – especially as it's almost double the price – but, hold your horses, there's the small matter of that gain boost mini-toggle to consider. Flip that switch and you'll be sorely tempted to snap it off, leaving it permanently engaged; suddenly, there's a red hot firecracker of a guitar in your hands with a satisfyingly crisp high-end and huge output (though you can tame this internally should you need to) that's great for anything from Mick Ronson tones to hot-rodded 80s hard rock.

Compared to the Deluxe's active boost, the Standard is, of

course, somewhat tamer. That said, it's a seriously classy performer that feels richer and more sophisticated than its siblings in every position. Played clean, even the full humbucking tones have a three-dimensional, bell-like complexity that may redefine your expectations of how much clean mileage you can get from a Les Paul Standard. The single-coil voicings are, likewise, a more expressive step up from those of the Studio and Deluxe.

Additional sauce here comes courtesy of the 'straight out' setting, providing a little more raunch, and you get a honky, out-of-phase tone that's useful should you need a T-Bone Walker or pseudo-Varitone-type lead voice to slice through a mix in the studio.

Back in full humbucking mode, crank up your amp or add a nice overdrive pedal and the Burstbucker Pro pickups excel for the kind of classic lead tones that the likes of Clapton, Page, ➤

Flip the gain boost switch and there's a red hot firecracker of a guitar with a crisp high-end and huge output

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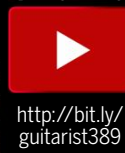
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Kossoff and many more used to define the vocabulary of rock. The Les Paul Standard may be priced dangerously close to a used R8 or R9, but in the heat of battle with a hot, loud amp you'd struggle to get a cigarette paper between the tones on offer here and their Gibson Custom equivalents. Not for the first time, we encounter a crop of new Gibsons, in which the Les Paul Standard sets the standard when it comes to sonic quality.

Verdict

As usual, new Gibsons arrive with no shortage of talking points, and there are plenty here to alarm the purists – not least that if you want to buy a new Les Paul Standard that doesn't have a brass zero fret, board-mounted components, G Force tuners and non-traditional fingerboard dimensions then you'll have to shell out at least £3,199 for the 'entry-level' Gibson Custom Plaintop R8.

However, our recent conversations with Gibson indicate that the company's 2015 USA models simply aren't aimed at the same players who lust after vintage accuracy – onboard self tuning, more beginner-friendly fretboard dimensions and the like are symptomatic of a conscious decision to appeal to a new generation of guitarists.

Less controversial are improvements in the fit and finish, but it remains to be seen whether the people Gibson is targeting have the funds to splash out on the Deluxe or Standard; both are fine instruments, and the Standard is the real 'heart purchase' here, but we'd suggest that it's priced in a ballpark that's accessible only to older, well-heeled beginners, rather than the next generation of guitar heroes.

The Studio might not be the best looker here, but it's the star performer overall, as £899 buys you a great-sounding, versatile, USA-made Les Paul with a 'proper' nitro finish and a serious hard case. We expect them to fly. **G**



Gibson 2015 Les Paul Studio

PRICE: £899 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Medium density mahogany (w/modern weight relief), B grade figured maple top
NECK: 1-piece, slim taper profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 624mm (24.6")
NUT/WIDTH: Brass zero fret/45.6mm
FINGERBOARD: Medium rosewood, m-o-p trapezoid inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Satin nickel-plated Tune-O-Matic bridge and stud tailpiece, G Force 'robot' tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 50mm
ELECTRICS: Gibson 57 Plus (bridge) & 57 Classic (neck) covered humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual volume (w/ coil-split) and tone controls
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 3.85/8.48
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: See LP Deluxe
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Desert Burst (as reviewed), Manhattan Midnight, Wine Red
Gibson
GuitarGuitar
0800 456 1959
www2.gibson.com

GUITARIST RATING	★★★★★
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: Excellent value, high-quality sounds – including those single-coil voices – these will sell by the truckload

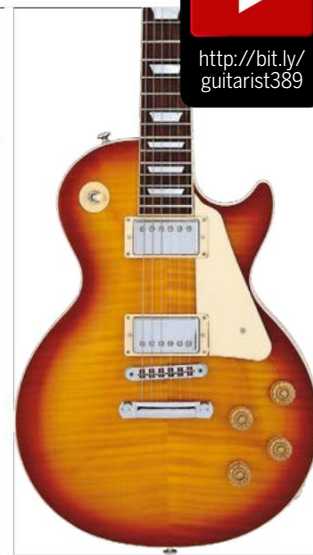


Gibson 2015 Les Paul Deluxe

PRICE: £1,699 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Low density mahogany (w/ 9-hole weight relief), C grade maple top
NECK: 1-piece, rounded asymmetrical profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 624mm (24.6")
NUT/WIDTH: Brass zero fret/45.5mm
FINGERBOARD: Cream bound medium rosewood, m-o-p trapezoid inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Nickel-plated Tune-O-Matic bridge and stud tailpiece, G Force 'robot' tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 50mm
ELECTRICS: Gibson new LP covered mini-humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual volume (w/ coil-split pull/push switch) controls, master tone, 2-way level boost toggle switch
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 4.8/10.5
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: LP Junior Single Cut (£699), Special DC (£799), LPM (£799), Classic (£1,599), Traditional (£1,999), Standard Premium Quilt (£3,199) & Supreme Heritage (£4,299)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Heritage Cherry Sunburst, Pelham Blue Metallic Top, Wine Red (as reviewed), Gold Top

GUITARIST RATING	★★★★★
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: A little more niche tonally, but a great option for hot 70s sounds and 80s rock, thanks to the onboard boost



Gibson 2015 Les Paul Standard

PRICE: £2,499 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Ultra density mahogany (w/ modern weight relief), AA grade maple top
NECK: 1-piece, slim taper asymmetrical profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 624mm (24.6")
NUT/WIDTH: Brass zero fret/45.4mm
FINGERBOARD: Cream bound dark rosewood, m-o-p trapezoid inlays, 254-406mm (10-16") compound radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Chrome-plated Tune-O-Matic bridge and stud tailpiece, G Force 'robot' tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 50mm
ELECTRICS: Gibson Burst Buckner Pro covered humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual volume (w/ coil-split pull/push switch) and tone controls w/ straight out and out-of-phase pull/push switches
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 4.1/9
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: See LP Deluxe
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Heritage Cherry Sunburst Candy, Tobacco Sunburst Candy, Trans Amber Cherry Back Candy, Honey Burst Perimeter Candy

GUITARIST RATING	★★★★★
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: It's expensive, but if you can get on with the 2015 spec there's a depth of tone that's a cut above its siblings

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To Be A Pilgrim

Bringing bowlback back? The UK company that took on Ovation in the 80s says it's time to try...

WORDS **Dave Burluck** PHOTOGRAPHY **Joe Branston**





Pilgrim by Vintage Mayflower Deluxe £409

What we Want To Know

- 1 Pilgrim? Who?**
Ladies and gentlemen of a certain age might remember this, ahem, 'cult' UK brand, which had a little flourish in the spotlight in the mid-to-late 80s.
- 2 Ovation copies?**
Yes, in that they used the synthetic 'bowlback' design, but designer Paul Tebbutt never liked the feel of the originals, so his take is, frankly, a bit more comfortable.
- 3 But a bowlback in 2014? Are Ovation even still in business?**
Now Fender-owned, Ovation closed its USA factory earlier this year, just after introducing numerous off-shore, lower-end models. It seems that in the lower-priced markets, the bowlback is still valid.

The JHS-owned Vintage brand has built quite a reputation for affordable quality, both in the acoustic and electric worlds. Both ranges include numerous clones of the classics, but it's in its acoustic range that we've seen really interesting instruments. Guitars designed in conjunction with Gordon Giltrap and Paul Brett, for example, have brought something a little different to the low-to-mid-priced acoustic market. Pilgrim is another: a blast from the past that's been transported through time into today's very different market.

As Pilgrim's Paul Tebbutt explains over on p102, his design might have been heavily influenced by Ovation's bowlback concept, but from the outset it was quite a different beast. This new Mayflower Deluxe, like the standard Pilgrim model that reappeared back in 2010, might use the standard Ovation 641mm (25.25-inch) scale, with a flatter fingerboard radius, and a fibreglass bowlback, but its outline is vastly different, and key to the design. It's much more waisted, with a more pronounced horn. It's approximately 393mm across the body – around 6mm smaller than Ovations – likewise in

length and indeed the depth, which if you're familiar with your Ovations equates to a lightly shallower 'mid-depth' bowl. These changes are important, as an Ovation, even with a still bulbous mid-depth bowl, certainly played seated, takes some adjustment. The subtle changes to the bowl's contours here, not least a flatter side in the treble-side waist, mean that the Mayflower simply feels more manageable, both seated – especially if you cross your right leg, flamenco-style – and strapped on.

The top is a nice-looking piece of solid cedar with some clean inlays around the

The Rivals

There's little place for the bowlback, like other forward-looking designs, in the ultra-conservative higher-end acoustic world. The lower-end, gigging market, however, still has plenty of cutaway electro **Ovation** instruments. The Chinese-made **Celebrity** range retails just below the Pilgrim, and the mid-depth bowl **CS24P Celebrity Standard** (£334) features a coloured solid spruce top; the **Standard Plus** (£394) has various exotic-wood veneer tops. A key feature of Ovation's later Adamas was its multi-soundhole top; the current **Celebrity CE-44** (£394) captures that in a variety of coloured solid spruce and exotic wood laminate tops from £394-£442. All prices exclude a gigbag



The solid cedar top is complemented by some tidy inlays around the soundhole



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A three-piece maple and mahogany neck recalls the original guitar



The Deluxe has a larger horn than the 2010 guitar



The Fishman preamp does an respectable job

soundhole and inside the lightly figured maple binding. Internally, there's a fairly standard X-brace, and like many of the newer-generation Vintage instruments we've seen, overall it's pretty clean. The three-piece neck, with thin black ebony stringers between the central maple section and outer mahogany pieces, is satin finished. With the maple binding wrapping the rosewood fingerboard, it captures the quite folksy British vibe of the original, although the headstock, while perfectly functional, is a little 'vanilla' compared to the more distinctive Ovation design. The medium frets are very nicely fitted and polished; the bone nut and saddle are well done, too, although there's no compensation on the latter.

As you'd expect, powering is more mainstream than the original Pilgrim or Ovation; we have Fishman's SoniCore undersaddle mated to the well-spec'd Presys+ preamp, although it sits

on the lower bass side, below the waist like an Ovation, and means all the legends are upside-down viewed in playing position.

Sounds

Once you've adjusted to the feel of the bowlback, it's a fine guitar with a solid-feeling D-shaped neck profile. Unplugged, the sound is a bass light, there's a little honk and it's not the woodiest tone we've heard. But there's something about these guitars that makes them seriously good rhythm instruments, especially for rockier styles where you don't want scooped mids and high-end sparkle. Frankly, you want some dirt. But it has a softer side, too: fingerpicked, dropped tunings worked better than we imagined, both unplugged and plugged in, where the Fishman system does a decent job of losing some of those honkier mids and extending the lows. As we've said before, this is a neat

preamp... if only there were some contrasting control markers: small black knobs on a black fascia, onstage, just don't work. That gripe aside, the Mayflower has quite a projecting voice that really works in an ensemble setting, as well as with modulation, delay and reverb, blurring the lines a little between traditional 'acoustic' and 'electric'.

Verdict

There's something classy about this package – not least the leather-detailed gigbag. Aside from its almost David and Goliath-like heritage, it's tidily made with a very solid, highly playable neck. It's slightly more manageable than a traditional Ovation bowlback, thanks to its altered geometry, and has a strong projection both acoustically and amplified; it's not the sort of sound that would inspire an album of solo guitar instrumentals, but it sits nicely with a fuller band mix or, conversely, the solo strummer who wants to rock out a bit. It's also the sort of solidly built guitar that will probably still be here after the apocalypse... along with the cockroaches and Keith Richards. **G**



Pilgrim by Vintage VPG900N Mayflower Deluxe

PRICE: £409 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Cutaway bowlback electro-acoustic

TOP: Solid cedar

BACK/SIDES: Fibreglass

MAX DEPTH: 140mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 393mm

NECK: Mahogany/maple/mahogany laminate

SCALE LENGTH: 642mm (25.25")

TUNERS: Enclosed, gold-plated

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42.5mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound rosewood with micro abalone dot inlays, approx 356mm (14") radius

FRETS: 22, small

BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony/56mm

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 2.63/5.79

ELECTRICS: Fishman SoniCore undersaddle transducer with Fishman Presys+ preamp w/volume, 3-band EQ, notch, brilliance, phase switch and tuner.

OPTIONS: The original VPG001 (£369) has a Sunburst finish, chrome hardware and unbound fingerboard

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: Natural (as reviewed)

JHS

0113 5865381

www.jhs.co.uk

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: Well-priced, quality package that packs a punch and doesn't slip off your leg as easily as certain guitars

"Once you've adjusted to the feel of the bowlback, it's a fine guitar with a solid-feeling D-shaped neck profile"

The Long Walk Back

Pilgrim's father figure, Paul Tebbutt, refreshes our memory of his original guitars and explains how, more than two decades after he closed his factory, they've reappeared

"You reviewed one in 1985," exclaims Pilgrim's driving force, Paul Tebbutt, when we say we can't actually remember his original guitars. He's right, of course, although, well, we've seen a lot of guitars since then. So, how did Pilgrim exist in the first place?

"The name goes back to 1975, when I opened my first music shop in Leicester. Prior to that, I'd been repairing banjos, fiddles and other stringed instruments," he tells us. "When I got the shop, I met so many really good makers that were a lot better than me, so I designed instruments for them to make under the Pilgrim name – we did some mandolins, banjos and some standard wooden guitars. That's how I started, just dabbling..."

It seems quite a leap to a synthetic bowlback acoustic...

"When, as we call it, the 'O-word' guitars appeared on the scene, I thought they were a brilliant idea: the rounded back going back to the basis of a lot of stringed instruments. I thought if we could make a guitar that actually sounded like a proper quality guitar, but produced without having to make standard back and sides, with the associated cost, then we could potentially make something very good but more affordable. We then spent three to five years making various things – the first ones we had for sale had more of a Maccaferri-style shape, which I didn't think was modern enough. I wanted something up-to-date, even before its time, as most guitars were dreadnoughts – not too many people wanted smaller-body instruments. It took us till 1979, and that was with a cutaway, which was pretty unusual for an acoustic: that's the shape, it hasn't changed."

Didn't Ovation have a thing or two to say about your design?

"No, the construction was totally different. We were more traditional in the way we put the guitars together – there was no conflict at all. There was one distributor who thought that because we had what I call a 'contoured back' we might be infringing something, but I'd registered the design



myself, in 1979 or '80, plus the fact that we had a cutaway before they [Ovation] did."

So what happened?

"We produced them from 1979; then we started our factory in '85. FCN distributed the guitars, and I still had my shop, Fiddler's Green. We were making 30 to 50 a month. I knew from the start we wouldn't get into mass production. I just wanted to produce a really top-quality instrument with the tone and playability of something with another nought on the price. We stopped in 1990; the recession put a lot of shops out of business and we weren't getting paid."

How about your return?

"Numerous people had asked if I wanted to get started again, but I knew it wouldn't work making them in the UK. I was still in retail; I knew what was going on and being made. We had some guitars come into the shop and I thought, 'wow, if that is what the Chinese can do now, I'd be happy to put my name to that.' That coincided with JHS handing over the distribution of Ovation to Fender in 2008; I knew them and we began to talk about the feasibility of making Pilgrim again, in China. We relaunched the guitars in 2010, but it's taken nearly five years to get right. I'm very happy."

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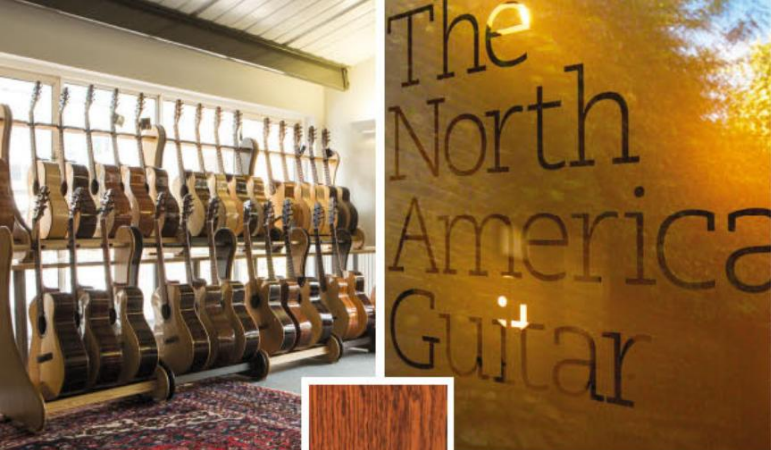
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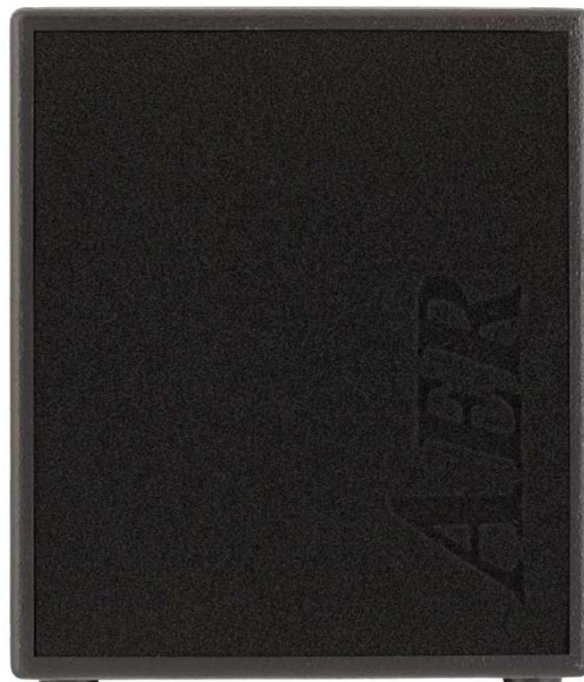
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LANEY A1+ & AER MM200 £279 & £1,199
AMPS





What You Need To Know

1 Who is Monte Montgomery?

He's a Texan guitarist/singer/songwriter who has a unique approach to electro-acoustic guitars. Bluesy, rocky, grooving stuff is his bag, and the boy plays loud!

2 Doesn't he use lots of overdrive?

At times, but the AER is designed to be super clean all the way and offer tons of headroom. The overdrive is often coming off an additional electric guitar amp.

3 What if I don't need all that power?

Good news for you, then. Laney's just released one of the no-brainer bargains of the electro-acoustic decade...

Laney A1+ & AER MM200 £279 & £1,199



Two very different price points meet two very different acoustic amp needs. Which is yours?

WORDS **Mick Taylor** PHOTOGRAPHY **Joe Branston**

We've said it before and we'll say it again: for many acoustic guitar players, a dedicated acoustic amp is nestling down there near the bottom of the essentials list: after all, why wouldn't you just plug into the PA? Well, Germany's AER, and Laney from good ol' Blighty have some fairly compelling answers, as it turns out, the former wrapped up in the formidable new MM200 Monte Montgomery signature amp, the latter in the Far East-built, far more affordable A1+.

Laney's smart black design is certainly contemporary, and its front-mounted control panel and handy upright or tilted back cabinet design sets it out as unique. The proprietary TuffStuff coating really does take the knocks, while the eight-inch bass driver and one-inch

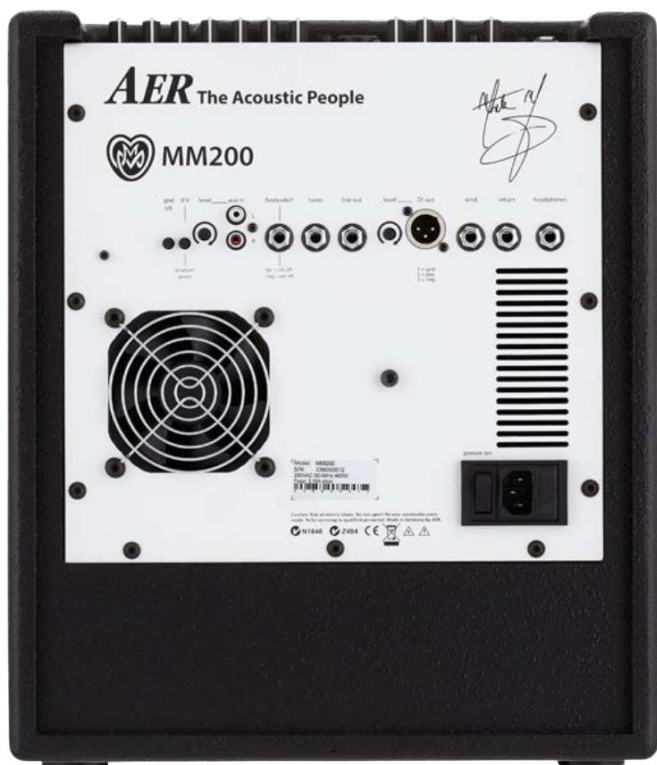
dome tweeter are protected by a metal grille behind the foam front. That's good news, as there's no carry bag included. Practicalities are completed with an integral pole mount, so it can sit comfortably on a

standard speaker stand, and while 12.5kg is reassuringly weighty for such a small box, it's more than manageable as a one-handed carry.

The AER MM200 is physically bigger, but only 2.5kg



The Laney's controls are housed on the front, while the AER's are back-mounted



more weighty, a surprise when you find out it has two eight-inch speakers powered by two 100-watt transistor power amplifiers. It has neither a pole mount nor tilting option, but we know from years of experience with AER that it is built like the proverbial tank: totally roadworthy, yet still extremely classy in the looks department. It also has an included padded slip cover.

Both amps offer two independent channels; in the Laney's case they're identical, with a whole heap of tone-shaping ability on board. Combi jack/XLR inputs mean you can use a microphone in either channel, while channel two has switchable phantom power for use with mics that need it.

The MM200's channels each have slightly different features – anyone familiar with the popular Compact 60 3 will recognise it immediately – and only channel two has an XLR option. In fact, checking the detailed spec of the MM200

against its little brother reveals that the only obvious circuit differences are at the input stage; minor differences in sensitivity and impedance, but it's otherwise the same as the Compact 60 3, including all the controls, EQ values and so on. One important thing to note is that channel one on the MM200 has optional 9V phantom power that can power certain guitar electronics, those able to accept power on the sleeve of a stereo or TRS jack cable. Channel two, meanwhile, has 48V phantom power for mics or other sources that require it.

Both amps feature a global tone switch – called 'colour' on the AER and 'shape' on the Laney (Foo Fighters, anyone?) – both of which offer a relatively more mid-scooped/more hi-fi-like sounding option. One or the other position will more readily suit your particular guitar and pickup choice: there's no 'right' setting. The EQ sections are very different. AER goes for



Laney's anti-feedback section will be a welcome addition for gigging guitarists

a super-simplistic approach: no parametric mid option (no middle control at all on channel two, in fact), and as regular users of the Compact 60 3, we'll say that it's testament to AER's design that we rarely find a need for it.

However, the Laney's more powerful and tweakable EQ – including a 200Hz to 9kHz parametric mid – does enable some extra control over the main 'speaking' voice of your guitar. Equally useful is the Laney's anti-feedback section, that's aimed directly at body

resonance-type feedback.

If you've ever played loud with an electro-acoustic guitar, you will have suffered this, so Laney has tuned the feedback killer over a wide range from 30 to 3kHz to give you the best chance of getting it under control: it works, too. Before engaging it, we'd recommend trying the phase switch, which can be an instant solution for certain feedback types.

Now, if you've heard Monte Montgomery play, you might be surprised that he finds no need for a feedback-busting section,

The AER is built like the proverbial tank: roadworthy, yet still extremely classy in the looks department





Both amps have XLR DI outputs, headphone sockets, effects loops and line outs

phase switches or any other extra features on his AER. The man plays loud – one of the reasons the MM200 is so heffing powerful – often with extra effects and overdrive in his sound (albeit through an additional electric guitar amp). In that respect, you might say that the Laney is aiming to be the jack of all trades, while the AER is focused on only the features that Master Montgomery needs and uses.

Both amps also have effects sections, headphone sockets, auxiliary inputs, tuner outs, line

outs and effects loops, and of course the all-important XLR DI outputs. The Laney has a mute switch on the front panel, while Montgomery requested that his mute be footswitchable, to wit you get a top-panel mounted jack where a switch can be connected. There is not one included.

Sounds

We tried systems including the Taylor ES, Fishman F1 Aura+, K&K Pure Mini and Fishman Rare Earth Blend with both amps, and it's immediately

obvious that the Laney A1+'s ambitions and performance are a long way north of its price point. The parametric mid proves its worth with the K&K Pure Mini (in its host Collings CJ35), for example; a dominant colour around 800Hz to 1KHz is easily tamed, while the Taylor has a bit of a nasal envelope just above that. The Laney tunes it all well.

Dealing with the same issues on the AER is harder. The controls do offer more flexibility than they might suggest; but the Taylor,

especially, is left wanting through the AER. The majority of guitars just sound good plugged straight in with minimum fuss, however.

Switching to the far more ubiquitous Fishman under-saddle and blend systems is less of a challenge for either amp. The dual channels enable you to deal with a split signal from a dual-source system, but again the Laney's more involved EQ enables you to tweak things more exactly.

The big departure between the amps comes with volume.



Channel two on the MM200 offers 48V phantom power for microphones...



...while channel one has a 9V phantom power input



The tidy appearance of the MM200's rear panel is matched by its sonic class

The AER's sonic integrity shines even at near-deafening volumes, if your guitar isn't howling at that point

While the Laney sounds pretty good up to the edge of its abilities – enough for small bar sound reinforcement and backline in small-ish bands – the AER's colossal lungs just keep on shouting way past acceptable levels, and they do so with the kind of musically dynamic interaction with your guitar that the Laney cannot match. The AER's sonic integrity shines even at near-deafening volumes, if indeed your guitar isn't howling at that point. Montgomery's often does, and it's something he uses to brilliant effect.

The onboard digital effects are a point of significant difference, too. The Laney's are useful for a bit of ambience, but don't have the depth and sonic sophistication of those in the AER, reverbs especially: played side by side, the AER's effects are noticeably more refined.

Verdict

Acoustic amps are hardly very sexy, tending to be more often a slightly reluctant, needs-based purchase rather than something

driven by want or desire. However, that's a crazy situation if you're a performing musician who uses an electro-acoustic guitar, because a good acoustic amp can transform your tonal world, and can increase your enjoyment of performing exponentially as a result.

Laney's A1+ is an absolute value-for-money no-brainer: good sounds, versatile controls and a feature set that makes it a superb companion as electro-acoustic backline, or indeed guitar and vocals sound reinforcement for small bars and cafés.

The far more pricey AER MM200 is a professional-grade powerhouse, better suited to concert stages, and of course the specific needs of Monte Montgomery. To us, it feels like a Compact 60 3 on steroids, and what it might lack in EQ tweakability it more than makes up for in immense sonic integrity, dynamics and delivery at pretty much any volume level you can stand. Professional? Yup. **G**



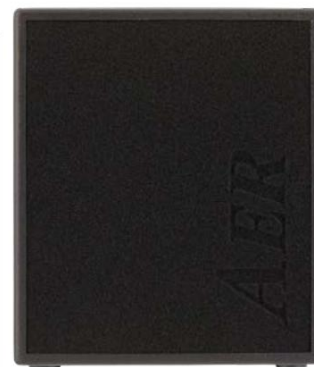
Laney A1+

PRICE: £279
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Acoustic guitar combo amplifier
OUTPUT: 80 watts RMS
CHANNELS: 2
LOUDSPEAKERS: 1x 8" bass driver, 1x 1" tweeter
CONTROLS: Shape switch, gain, bass, sweep, mid, treble (x2 for two channels), anti-feedback level, aux in level, effect select, effect level, effect send, master volume
CONNECTIONS: 2x XLR/mono jack input, headphone out mini jack, aux in mini jack, DI out XLR, effects send and return (both 6.3mm jack), line out (6.3mm jack)
FOOTSWITCH: Laney FS2 for effects mute and master volume mute (optional, not included)
DIMENSIONS: 348 (h) x 387 (w) x 312mm (d)
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 12.5/27.5
Laney
0121 508 6666
www.laney.co.uk



GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★	
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: Compelling performance and a competitive price make this a no-brainer acoustic amp choice



AER MM200

PRICE: £1,199
ORIGIN: Germany
TYPE: Acoustic guitar combo amplifier
OUTPUT: 200 watts RMS
CHANNELS: 2
LOUDSPEAKERS: 2x 8" full range
CONTROLS: Channel 1: high/low gain switch, gain, colour switch, bass, middle, treble. Channel 2: line/mic input switch, gain, bass, middle, treble. Master: effects pan, effects select, effects level, master volume, level control for DI, level control for aux in, ground lift, 9V phantom on/off
CONNECTIONS: Inputs: channel 1, 6.3mm jack. Channel 2: Combi TRS/XLR. Mute footswitch jack and switch. Rear panel: Footswitch, tuner out, line out, effects send and return, headphones out (all 6.3mm jack), DI out (XLR)
FOOTSWITCH: Optional for internal and/or external effects mute and master volume mute (not included)
DIMENSIONS: 420 (h) x 360 (w) x 300mm (d)
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 15/33
Westside Distribution
0141 248 4812
www.aer-amps.com

GUITARIST RATING 4 ★★★★★	
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: Pro-level build, sound and performance with colossal volume. Probably overkill for 'normal' electro-acoustists! ➔

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Six Acoustic Amps

Our pick of the best of the rest

1 Fender Acoustasonic 150 £442

A 150-watt (2x75W) monster with two channels that can handle instruments and/or mics, with pre-selected voicing options and string dynamics controls. It also has in-built digital effects and Fender's handy tilt-back legs. It has sound settings for electric guitar, too: very versatile.

Fender GBI, 01342 331700,
www.fender.com

2 Yamaha THR5A £199

This lunchbox-sized amp offers four kinds of digitally modelled microphone simulations for your amplified sound. Five watts is great for home practice and recording; just about enough for light sound reinforcement for tiny gigs. There's no XLR out, but it has a USB out. **Yamaha, 0844 811 1116, uk.yamaha.com**

3 Marshall AS50D £279

An absolute stalwart of the acoustic amp world, what the AS50D lacks in sophistication, it makes up for in functionality, reliability and sheer value for money. Often used as a PA-in-a-box, you can sing through it, play through it and use it for backing tracks/mp3s, too.

Marshall, 01908 375411,
www.marshallamps.com

4 Fishman Loudbox Artist £659

The world leader in acoustic guitar pickups also makes acoustic amps. This no-nonsense 120-watter offers two versatile channels, in-built effects, anti-feedback and all the output options you'll need. It represents excellent value for money as a workhorse acoustic amp.

JHS, 01132 865381, www.fishman.com

5 Trace Acoustic TA200 £1,225

This 200-watt stereo powerhouse is laden with tone-shaping features, alongside some clever footswitching functions. Made popular during the 80s and 90s, the brand came to symbolise the modern acoustic guitar sound, and has now been upgraded and re-engineered for today's pro players.

Peavey, 01536 461234,
www.traceelliot.com

6 Roland AC-33 £415

This stereo amp has guitar and mic/line channels, putting out 15 watts a side (30 in total). There are in-built digital effects and a 40-second sound-on-sound phrase looper, while the optional battery power makes it appealing for musicians on the move.

Roland UK, 01792 702701,
www.roland.co.uk



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Rainger FX pedals £99-£199

Quirky homegrown stompboxes with a distinctive visual style

WORDS **Trevor Curwen**

PHOTOGRAPHY **Joby Sessions**

Rainger FX, based in north west London, was set up in 2009 by David Rainger, whose background as a guitarist and studio engineer led him to design and build pedals for his own personal use, before moving into commercial production after realising that other guitarists would be interested in using them. With the aim of providing new sounds inspired by music that's around right now, the ethos of Rainger effects pedals is that they should sound great, be totally reliable and fun to use...



Dr Freakenstein Fuzz DrFF-3

PRICE: £199

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Fuzz pedal with modulation

FEATURES: Hard-wired true-bypass, Igor expression pad

CONTROLS: Knife switch (power), volume, oscillator, modulation switch, modulation rate, hi/lo switch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, Igor osc input, Igor mod, range input

POWER: 9V battery, 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)

MAX DIMENSIONS: 130 (w) x 140 (d) x 75mm (h)

Rainger FX

www.raingerfx.com



This pedal won't even power up unless you engage the laboratory-style knife switch, bringing life to the monster. And a monster it is: this pedal delivers glorious, harmonically-rich fuzz, albeit via a noise gate, so you get silence between notes; but you need to have the guitar volume max'd and play carefully to avoid unwanted sonic artefacts. An OSC knob, which controls the harmonic overtones, is effectively a tone control for the fuzz and for dialling in a low octave via a hi/lo switch that offers two different fuzz voices. There's also adjustable modulation for the OSC for sweep or tremolo effects. The doctor has an assistant named Igor, too: a foot-controlled pressure pad that you step on to tweak the OSC or the modulation range, so filter sweeps, wah-like effects, bringing the low octave in and increasing modulation, are all possible.

Verdict

Powerful gated fuzz with a range of features to animate it either statically or in performance.

GUITARIST RATING

★★★★★

Guitarist says: A freak-out box for tone-mangling knob manipulators

El Distorto

PRICE: £129

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Fuzz/distortion pedal

FEATURES: Hard-wired true-bypass, comes with rockpick double-pointed spectrum

CONTROLS: Drive, volume, offset switch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery, 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)

MAX DIMENSIONS: 60 (W) x 106 (D) x 50mm (H) (not including antennae)



Stand it on end and it looks like a cute cartoon alien, but the El Distorto's 'ears/antennae' are locking Neutrik sockets for your jackplugs, as the design of the asymmetrical pedal leaves no place for conventional sockets. What we get is a silicon diode-based distortion pedal with drive and volume knobs, plus an extra switch on the base that destabilises an offset in the circuit. Without the offset, you are in fuzz/distortion borderland with solid overdrive at lower drive levels, gaining more of the fuzz character as you advance the knob.

There's no tone control, but the pedal is very nicely voiced with an upper-mid presence that cuts through. With the offset switch engaged, the sound gets fuzzier around the edges, with a phasey swimminess and an increase in harmonic content that makes you want to dig in for squealing high single notes.

Verdict

The most conventional-sounding of the range, the El Distorto is a great dirtbox.

GUITARIST RATING

★★★★★

Guitarist says: Two distinct distortion voices in one pedal



<http://bit.ly/guitarist389>



Dr. Freakenstein's Dwarf

PRICE: £99

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Fuzz pedal

FEATURES: Hard-wired true-bypass, Igor expression pad

CONTROLS: Tone, volume, hi/lo switch, Igor mode switch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, Igor input

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)

MAX DIMENSIONS: 41.5 (w) x 104 (d) x 60mm (h)

Dr. Freakenstein's Dwarf takes the circuit from the Dr. Freakenstein Fuzz and puts it into a dinky micro pedal with a sloping top. The prominent feature is a large tone knob controlling the harmonic overtone pitch, but you also get a thumbwheel for volume control with plenty of extra wallop for your amp. A hi/lo button, changing the intensity of the overtone, gives you two flavours of the full-on fuzz: one with a prominent lower octave at higher settings of the tone knob. The fuzz is gated, so there's no rolling back your guitar to tone it down, and it's easy to trigger the odd spluttery glitch; but it offers a huge sound, tailor-made for big riffs and powerchords. Igor's two switchable modes offer cool performance possibilities, too, such as controlling the pitch of the overtone in real time while playing lead.

Verdict

A big fuzz for small pedalboards, but with an extra layer of expression from Igor that'll put a grin on your face.

GUITARIST RATING



Guitarist says: Stompbox of small stature with a massive sound



Air Traffic Controller

PRICE: £189

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Synth expansion box pedal

FEATURES: Hard-wired true-bypass, 'runway landing lights' LED display

CONTROLS: Level, resonance, air-signal, distort, peak/pitch/random switch, hi/lo switch (for active or passive guitars)

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery, 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)

MAX DIMENSIONS: 131 (w) x 110 (d) x 70mm (h)

The Air Traffic Controller gets its name from the idea that it can produce "airy whips of sound", and while that's pretty descriptive of some of its sounds it's probably best to get technical to explain what it does. Basically, you get a distortion circuit whose sound can be blended with a white noise generator (for hiss), with the whole lot then going through a low pass filter with a cut-off frequency that can be controlled by dynamics, note pitch or, if you want to confound your audience, just randomly. With the resonance turned down, you get almost conventional fuzz/distortion with a noise-gate, but turning up the resonance brings in varying degrees of filter to add a synth blend to your notes. While the white noise (brought in with the air knob) isn't pitched, it will follow guitar dynamics, adding a layer to the sound.

Verdict

An intriguing pedal. It won't be for everybody, but its bold sounds might tempt noise merchants.

GUITARIST RATING



Guitarist says: An engaging new take on the 'synth' pedal



Yerasov pedals

£54-87

From Russia with love, a range of affordable stompboxes

WORDS **Trevor Curwen**

PHOTOGRAPHY **Gavin Roberts**

Yerasov is a Russian company that produces amps, cabinets and effects pedals. We recently featured its GTA15 15-watt combo and now it's the turn of some of its stompboxes. Yerasov makes other effects pedals, but its UK distributor currently has just six of them (plus a loop selector) on the books – all reviewed here. Construction standards are high with good-quality components, and all of the pedals can run from an adaptor or a battery, accessed via removing the baseplate.



Yerasov S-Compressor SC-3

PRICE: £54

ORIGIN: Russia

TYPE: Compressor pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Level, tone, attack, sustain

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 126 (w) x 94 (d) x 54mm (h)

Yerasov UK

07534 429269

www.yerasov.co.uk

The S-Compressor is similar to another pedal we're looking at here, the Black Formica (p118), but for less money. While it ostensibly offers the same four-knob functionality, a peek inside reveals differences in the circuitry that results in a very mild compression experience. You can't really clamp down heavily on your signal here (if that's your bag, try the Black Formica instead), but it has a pleasant enough sound, and can offer a good amount of compression to even things out. Unfortunately, the S-Compressor's tone control is disappointing – we'd have preferred something that can add a bit more bite – but the pedal has one very good thing in its favour, in that there is extra gain available that can drive an amp very nicely. Turn the level up full, step on the footswitch and you'll get a lovely boost, combined with compression that should make your notes sing for solos.

Verdict

Compression with a boost, if you need it, that doesn't cost a fortune.

GUITARIST RATING



Guitarist says: Cost-effective compression with extra gain on tap



Yerasov Beige Bug BB-1

PRICE: £79

ORIGIN: Russia

TYPE: Booster pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Boost, high cut, low cut

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 126 (w) x 94 (d) x 54mm (h)

The Beige Bug can provide a massive 30dB of boost, plus tonal shift, if you want it, delivered in a way we haven't seen on other boost pedals. We get high cut and low cut knobs that, turned fully clockwise, offer a flat response. Rolling the knobs back starts to bring in the cut, so you can reduce either the top end, the bottom or a combination of both. With the boost on offer you can push a valve amp to various degrees with a fairly neutral sound that's like adding a more overdriven second channel. The cut knobs come in useful if you want to tame the top end of your boosted sound, (something we found ourselves reaching for on louder boosts), or lose a little body for more of a treble boost vibe. Various combinations are available until, with both knobs at full cut, you get a frequency-restricted tone that gives prominence to the upper mids.

Verdict

A decent utilitarian booster with practical tonal options.

GUITARIST RATING



Guitarist says: The Bug is Beige but certainly not boring





<http://bit.ly/guitarist389>



Yerasov Delay DM-6

PRICE: £75

ORIGIN: Russia

TYPE: Delay pedal

FEATURES: Buffered bypass, 40-640ms delay time, can be used in an effects loop

CONTROLS: Delay time, repeat, effect level

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, 2x standard output (out, delay out)

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 100 (w) x 120 (d) x 60mm (h)

The DM-6, unlike the other Yerasov pedals here, features buffered bypass, which makes sense as a delay is often the last pedal before an amp – and that facility should allow the use of a long cable without signal loss. Although it is a digital unit, Yerasov says that it has designed the DM-6 to sound like an old-school analogue delay and, while there's no obvious degradation from repeat to repeat, they are voiced with a warm tone that blends nicely with guitar. With delay times covering the most practical of guitar applications, repeats that run from zero up to the same level as the dry sound, and a repeat knob that's nicely graduated to get the number just right, there's a wealth of sounds.

Verdict

Some users might want more from their delay pedals, but if you just want a good, honest, solidly-built, low-noise delay with well-voiced repeats and plenty of variety through knob adjustment, the DM-6 doesn't disappoint.

GUITARIST RATING



Guitarist says: No-frills delay that will do the job with no fuss



Yerasov Brown Creature BC-1

PRICE: £87

ORIGIN: Russia

TYPE: Distortion pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Volume, treble, middle, bass, gain

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 126 (w) x 94 (d) x 54mm (h)



Part of the 'Insect' series, said to be of boutique quality, and each named after a particular bug, the pedal features an embossed graphic of said creature, which looks a bit vicious. That's appropriate, really, as the sound is more than capable of having some bite to it. What you are buying into is a distortion pedal with the usual volume and gain knobs, but also three-band EQ with separate treble, middle and bass controls. The range on tap runs from a practical gritty boost that can take your amp up that extra notch, through to the balls-out distortion of a cranked stack. If you want to retain your tone or give it a subtle tweak, the EQ ranges have been chosen sensibly to complement each other, like on an amp, while still being capable of more radical stuff such as scooping out some midrange and combining treble and mid boosts to project solos through a full-band mix.

Verdict

A hard-rocking distortion unit that will let you set the tone.

GUITARIST RATING



Guitarist says: Solid rock distortion with creative EQ options





Yerasov Black Formica BF-1

PRICE: £78

ORIGIN: Russia

TYPE: Compressor pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Level, tone, attack, sustain

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 126 (w) x 94 (d) x 54mm (h)

Something may have been lost in translation when naming this pedal, as it's actually blue, and we wonder if the designers are aware that Formica is more commonly known here as a decorative laminate rather than a species of ant. We digress. The Black Formica is a four-knob compressor based around a high-quality VCA made by *that* corporation, and it is capable of some pretty strong compression. Juxtaposition of the attack and sustain knobs is the key: between the two, it's possible to vary the amount of squash, from getting the dynamics a little tighter and evening out chords to a squishy effect, and settings that will eke out sustain. The tone knob is effective for replacing top end lost through compression, or just offering a brighter sound when the pedal is engaged.

Verdict

Its name might suggest something you'd find in a goth's kitchen, but this is a useful compressor for keeping your signal consistent and adding sustain.



GUITARIST RATING

★★★★★

Guitarist says: Workmanlike compression for a variety of tasks

Yerasov Green Tick GT-1

PRICE: £83

ORIGIN: Russia

TYPE: Drive pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Volume, tone, drive, fat switch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 126 (w) x 94 (d) x 54mm (h)

The Green Tick is green for a reason. Yep, it's based on another famously green pedal and its full name, Green Tick Screamer, sort of gives that one away before you even plug it in. In terms of control, though, this goes beyond the basic Tube Screamer design to include a Fat switch alongside the volume, tone and drive knobs. In use, it does pretty much what a TS does, sounding fairly similar to our TS-808 in the sense that it's a pedal that can deliver a natural overdriven sound as an add-on to a clean amp, or offer an increased upper-mid presence and extra drive to an already distorting amp; and if you think your sound may have lost some of its weight, flick in that fat switch for an immediate lift down at the lower end of the range to put it back.

Verdict

Okay, it's another Tube Screamer-style pedal, but it's one that adds a bit of extra spice with that Fat switch, so it's definitely worth a look if you want to go green.



GUITARIST RATING

★★★★★

Guitarist says: Familiar sound and functionality with extra fat



THIS IS **THE SOUND**

Photo: Pat Graham

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fender.com

JONNY GREENWOOD
WITH THE LONDON CONTEMPORARY ORCHESTRA — JULY 28, 2014
ROUNDHOUSE, LONDON, ENGLAND

Fender



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Music is Our Passion

th•mann

www.thomann.de

What you need to know about...

Guitar Wireless Systems

Although freeing you up to throw some onstage shapes, it was often possible that your hot solo could have a bit of local taxi chatter as a random intrusion, but these days wireless systems have moved on. Here's what you need to know

HOW IS IT ALL DONE?

Instead of having a cable from guitar to amp, you have a short cable from the guitar to a battery-powered wireless body pack, which can attach to your belt or guitar strap. That body pack then takes the electrical signal from your pickups and transmits it as radio waves to a receiver that converts it back to an electrical signal and in turn sends it to your amp via another cable. In times past, VHF systems were the norm, and they are still available, but improved performance is offered by the current options of either a UHF analogue system or a digital system that works in the 2.4 GHz ISM band.

DOES GOING WIRELESS ALTER YOUR TONE OR DYNAMICS?

Well, any component between your guitar and amp will have some influence on your sound, cable included – so you may hear a difference replacing a cable with wireless, but not necessarily one that's detrimental to your sound. The general thinking is that UHF analogue systems are more likely to compromise dynamic range and tone than digital systems, which offer full bandwidth. A digital system may in fact give you an extended top end, which is why Line 6 has incorporated a feature that emulates the more subdued top that you'd get with a long cable. Our advice is to play through a system before you buy...



HOW DO MY PEDALS FIT IN?

You can connect your pedals between the receiver and the amp, although that may entail using a couple of long cables if you have the sort of receiver that's designed to sit on top of an amp. However, some manufacturers have designed receivers in the shape of a stompbox that can sit on the floor next to your pedals.

WHY NOT JUST USE A CABLE?

Good question – the majority of us use a cable, but it can add to stage clutter and there's the possibility of stepping on it, getting tangled up and pulling it out. It also ties you down to one location on stage – perhaps not a problem on smaller stages, but if you want to run around or just walk across the stage to talk to the keyboard player, a wireless will give you that freedom. It can also let you leave the stage during a soundcheck to see how things will sound for the audience, or go to the bar...

Guitar Wireless Systems

Audio-Technica System 10

Stompbox-style switching

The System 10's stompbox-style receiver has two outputs linked to a footswitch that can either mute the signal from output A or switch between output A and output B so you can use one output to connect a tuner pedal or switch between two amps. With all of the digital systems here, two things are constant: setting up the transmitter and receiver is an instant doddle, and the sound is strong and clear with plenty of top end in it.

Verdict

This is not only robust and compact enough to sit neatly on any pedalboard, but gives you neat switching options, too.

Audio-Technica System 10

PRICE: £319

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Digital wireless system (2.4GHz ISM band)

RANGE: 60 feet

FEATURES: Stompbox-style receiver

CONNECTIONS: Standard jack output x2 (A and B)

TRANSMITTER POWER SUPPLY: 2x AA battery (7 hours' battery life)

RECEIVER POWER SUPPLY: 9V-12V DC (170mA). Power adaptor supplied.

RECEIVER DIMENSIONS: 101 (w) x 130 (d) x 44mm (h)

Audio-Technica

0113 277 1441

www.audio-technica.co.uk



GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Solid stompbox with practical switching options

Line 6 Relay G50

Cable sound without a cable

Line 6's Relay G50 has become a popular choice among guitarists. The receiver is stompbox-sized to sit on your pedalboard, but does have a pair of antennae sticking out. There's no footswitching available, but there are two simultaneous outputs (maybe one for signal and one to connect a tuner) and a unique feature in Cable Tone: a knob that lets you set a simulated cable length (up to 100 feet) to reduce top-end stridency and sound more like a cable – it works a treat, too...

Verdict

At its current price, the G50 offers great value for a digital system, and that shaping of the top end is a practical and welcome feature.

Line 6 Relay G50

PRICE: £279 (£249 until 31 December)

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Digital wireless system (2.4GHz ISM band)

RANGE: 200'

FEATURES: Stompbox-style receiver, cable simulation, mute switch on transmitter

CONNECTIONS: 2x Standard jack output (tuner/aux, main)

TRANSMITTER POWER SUPPLY: 2x AA battery (8 hours' battery life)

RECEIVER POWER SUPPLY: 9V DC (300mA). Power adaptor supplied

RECEIVER DIMENSIONS: 125 (w) x 134 (d) x 40mm (h) (height with fully vertical antenna: 120mm)

Line 6

01788 566566

www.line6.com



GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: An affordable digital stompbox with practical tonal options

Fender FWG 1010

Branded wireless to match your guitar

Fender's FWG 1010 is 'powered by AKG' and looks almost identical to that company's Perception system (SRP £199) with a receiver that's around half-rack size to sit on top of your amp. The transmitter has a screwdriver-operated control inside the battery compartment that will best match its input sensitivity to your guitar, and the receiver's output knob has plenty in reserve to drive your amp a little harder. The signal is decent, albeit more compressed than the digital systems.

Verdict

At £299, the FWG 1010 is outclassed by the digital systems, but at its street price (below £200), it could do the job.

Fender FWG 1010

PRICE: £299

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: UHF wireless system

RANGE: 150 feet

FEATURES: Tabletop receiver, mute switch on transmitter

CONNECTIONS: Balanced XLR and standard jack outputs

TRANSMITTER POWER SUPPLY: 1x AA battery (8 hours' battery life)

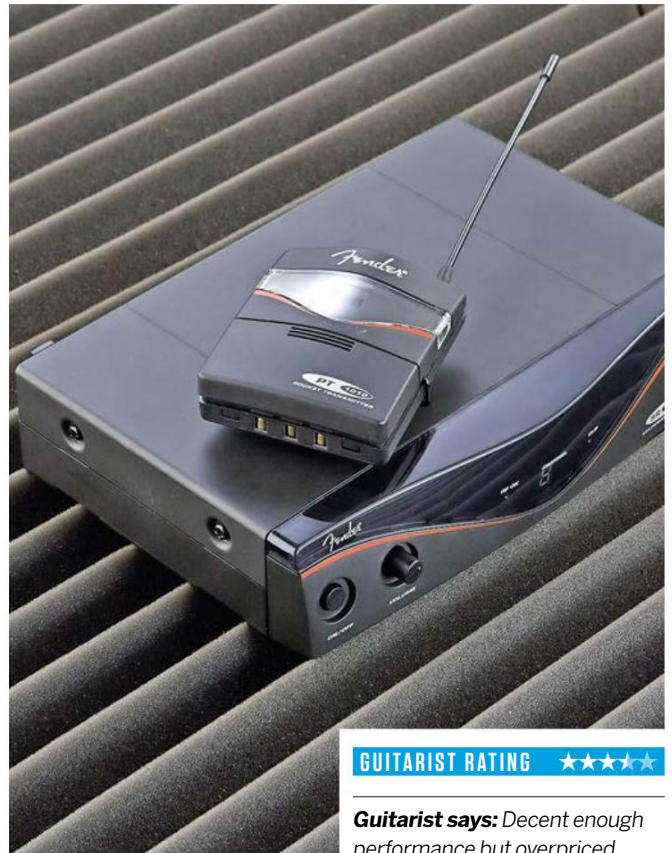
RECEIVER POWER SUPPLY: 12V DC (500mA). Power adaptor supplied

RECEIVER DIMENSIONS: 200 (w) x 165 (d) x 44mm (h)

Fender GBI

01342 331700

www.fender.com



GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Decent enough performance but overpriced

Shure GLXD-16 Beta

Buy wireless, get a tuner too...

The latest from the long-term mic and wireless systems manufacturer, this extremely robust receiver is in stompbox form and features a built-in tuner – press the foot-switch to bring it in (with or without muting the guitar signal). It also has no antennae, and can run from the same power supply as your pedals, so is very pedalboard-friendly. The transmitter uses a rechargeable (mains or USB) battery, but a display on the receiver lets you know you have plenty of power left: an hour's charge will give you three hours of usage.

Verdict

With solid metal construction and an onboard tuner that saves pedalboard space, this classy system is a very practical choice.

Shure GLXD-16 Beta

PRICE: £389

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Digital wireless system (2.4GHz ISM band)

RANGE: 200 feet

FEATURES: Stompbox-style receiver, tuner

CONNECTIONS: Standard output

TRANSMITTER POWER SUPPLY: Rechargeable Li-on battery (16 hours' battery life from a full charge)

RECEIVER POWER SUPPLY: 9-15V DC (250mA to 400mA). Power adaptor supplied

RECEIVER DIMENSIONS: 95 (W) x 133 (D) x 46mm (H)

Shure Distribution UK

01992 703058

www.shure.co.uk



GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Solid build, classy operation and a tuner. What's not to like?

Guitar Wireless Systems

Samson Concert 88 Guitar

Go wireless and pay less

With a receiver that can sit on your amp or fit into a rack, the

Concert 88 offers UHF analogue operation at a price that won't break the bank. A volume knob on the front of the receiver sets the output to your amp and, halfway up, is about as loud as a cable, so has plenty left to boost your amp if you wish to take advantage of that. There's a little less dynamic range than the digital systems, but set your amp to match it and this will translate your tone well.

Verdict

If you want a wireless system but don't want to pay the extra money for a digital option, the Concert 88 performs well.

Samson Concert 88 Guitar

PRICE: £161

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: UHF wireless system

RANGE: 300 feet

FEATURES: Tabletop receiver, rackmount kit included, mute switch on transmitter

CONNECTIONS: Balanced XLR, standard jack outputs

TRANSMITTER POWER SUPPLY: 2x AA battery (8 hours' battery life)

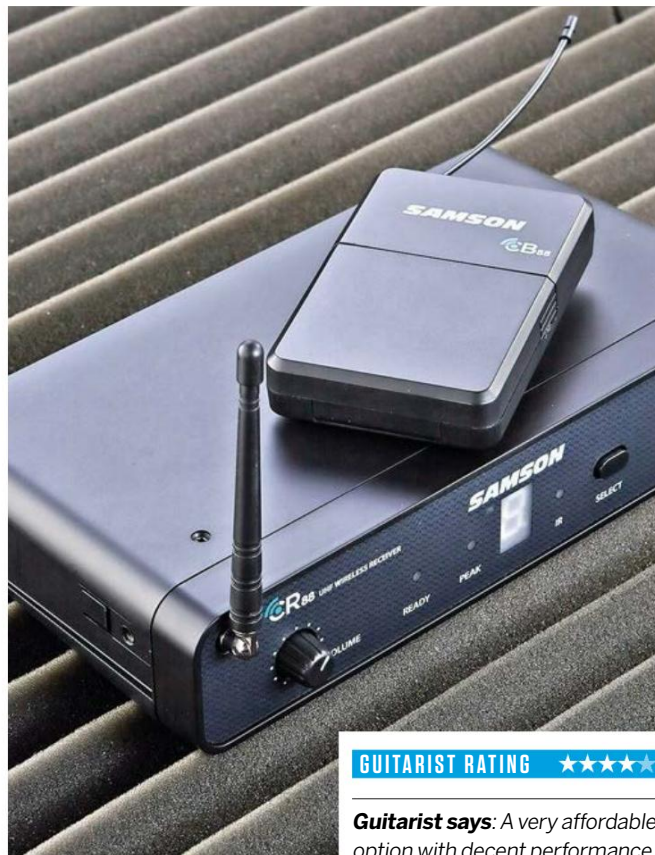
RECEIVER POWER SUPPLY: 15V DC (200mA). Power adaptor supplied

RECEIVER DIMENSIONS: 210 (w) x 125 (d) x 44mm (h)

Korg UK

01908 304600

www.samsontech.com



GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: A very affordable option with decent performance

AKG DMS Tetrad Performance set

One receiver to unite them all

The Tetrad is not cheap and is not a specialised guitar tool, but it offers a feature set that could work for a whole band. The Tetrad receiver sports four separate channels, each with its own physical output, plus the ability to mix the sounds of the separate channels to a single mix output. Of course, you'd need separate transmitters for each guitar or mic (the Performer set comes with one DPT transmitter), but each could be routed to separate amps or PA channels.

Verdict

For a single guitar, there are cheaper and more practical options, but it could suit a band.

AKG DMS Tetrad Performer set

PRICE: £579 (extra transmitters: P5 £179, D5 £219, DPT inc C111, £219)

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Digital wireless system (2.4GHz ISM band)

RANGE: 150 feet

FEATURES: Tabletop receiver, rackmount kit included

CONNECTIONS: 5x Balanced XLR output (mix, channel 1, 2, 3, 4)

TRANSMITTER POWER SUPPLY: 2x AA battery (7 hours' battery life)

RECEIVER POWER SUPPLY: 12V DC (500mA). Power adaptor supplied

RECEIVER DIMENSIONS: 298 (w) x 135 (d) x 44mm (h)

Sound Technology

01462 480000

www.akg.com



GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: The Tetrad could be the heart of a system for a whole band

Smart Recording.

Top audio quality and comfortable control by an iOS or Android app.



DR-22WL



DR-44WL



- ▶ Direct, encrypted wi-fi connection between the recorder and your smartphone or tablet computer
- ▶ The free DR CONTROL app allows you to remote control the recorder and check the recorded material
- ▶ Send your recordings wirelessly from your smartphone
- ▶ Numerous automatic functions can make recording easier
- ▶ Record simultaneously in WAV and MP3 format or with different level settings
- ▶ High resolution (WAV/BWF up to 96 kHz and 24 bit or MP3 up to 320 Kbit/s)
- ▶ Use practice functions, overdubs and a reverb effect
- ▶ Simple scene dial for instant setup on the DR-22WL
- ▶ 4 tracks with mixer and bounce feature on the DR-44WL

DR-22WL



DR-44WL

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£134 & £118

More new twists on the TonePrint formula

CONTACT: TC Electronic **PHONE:** 0800 917 8926 **WEB:** www.tcelectronic.com



**Guitarist
CHOICE**

TC Electronic is rapidly becoming one of the premier names in delay and reverb, and the company's onslaught of ambience shows no sign of letting up. Hot on the heels of the X4 incarnation, the compact Alter Ego V2 Vintage Echo packs 11 delay types, including Pro Guitar Shop-tuned models based on classic tape and analogue echoes, such as the Binson Echorec 2, Boss DM-2 and Maestro Copykat. The T2, meanwhile, is the sequel to TC's Trinity Reverb, and offers 10 delay sounds focused on atmospheric 'verbs.

The Alter Ego offers the standard array of delay controls – decay, tone, mix, delay type – plus a subdivision switch, which selects between quarter notes, dotted eighths and a dual-delay combination. It also boasts audio tapping, initiated by holding the footswitch down and strumming short 1/4 notes, while switching to the delay type control's LP setting activates the pedal's 40-second looper. The T2, on the other hand, is a simpler affair, with controls for decay, tone, mix, reverb type and a two-position pre-delay switch.

Both pedals include a single TonePrint slot for firing up

sounds from TC's ever-growing library of presets via the TonePrint app or a computer, or making your own using the comprehensive TonePrint Editor. In addition, you get stereo inputs and outputs, plus nine-volt battery and power supply operation, analogue dry-through and a choice of true or buffered bypass.

Sounds

Each twist of the T2's reverb type knob is like entering a new dimension; there's a stunning range of modulated 'verbs, from flanging to chorus-y wobble and painfully slow seasick pitch bends, while huge hall textures instantly conjure Jeff Buckley-esque arpeggios from your guitar. Even at 12 o'clock on the decay dial, each type yields colossal trails, so don't look here for your spring kicks. These hi-fi sounds put the T2 squarely in the ballpark of ambient pedals such as the HardWire Supernatural, albeit minus the pitch-shifted shimmer modes. Yet while the sounds are sensational, the pedal's usability is somewhat hampered by the reverb types being marked by roman numerals, which hardly makes for straightforward preset finding.

If you've played the Alter Ego X4, which we reviewed a few issues back, you'll know exactly what to expect from the V2: you'll find warm, tape-like repeats from the Echoplex and Deluxe Memory Man models, crunchy decays courtesy of the Copykat and swirling detuned ambience from the Echorec and Echoflanger simulations, while new settings such as 2290 Mod and Reverse Mod add a touch of psychedelia to proceedings. Add in the easy-to-use 40-second looper, and it's hard to complain about the feature set on offer here.

Verdict

Although these pedals are more niche than TC's flagship Flashback Delay and Hall of

Fame Reverb, they do what they do extremely well, and with the addition of a TonePrint slot, you can always have a tamer reverb or more modern delay in your back pocket. While it sounds fantastic, the T2's modulated 'verbs could be a little over the top even for ambient fans, but the Alter Ego V2 is equipped to appeal to just about any player, whether you're well versed in vintage delays or not. **[MB]**

GUITARIST RATING

Alter Ego V2 ★★★★★
T2 Reverb ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Two purpose-specific ambience generators, which each offer a broad and arresting range of sounds within their spheres



Peavey ReValver 4 £Free



Peavey's ultra-tweakable amp sim gets a major update

CONTACT: Peavey PHONE: 01536 461234 WEB: www.peavey.com

Peavey's ReValver 4 is a major update to its standalone and plug-in amp modelling software, that allows you to tweak the amps at component level. The company says that it is a complete redesign from the ground up, so that all aspects of the program are new, from the engine of the program to its graphical user interface.

Also new is the pricing structure, which sees a basic version of the program downloadable for free, with additional modules (amps, stompboxes, etc) available for purchase online from \$1.99 to \$7.99. If you don't fancy doing it that way, there's a ReValver 4 Producer Pack (\$99.99) that comes loaded with all the equivalent amp/stomp/effects/RIR cab modules from version III.V, plus some new stuff. Owners of III.V can upgrade to the Producer Pack for half that amount.

In Use

ReValver 4's GUI is more user-friendly than the previous version. Now, rather than one single scrolling rack view, you can call up separate views for the input and output sections, the amps and cabs and the post-effects rack, plus you get a nice virtual pedalboard to drag stompboxes onto. ReValver 4 offers a dual signal chain, so you can run two rigs together with various output options and, with plenty of Peavey amps, plus the popular choices from other manufacturers, there are a lot of great-sounding tonal options available even before you start tweaking. ReValver's unique feature right from the start has been the fact that you can look at schematics and mess around with any amp's components – change valves, swap transformers, et cetera – and now Peavey has refined that with new technology, opening

the route to custom designing your own amps. The speaker side of things has also improved with the RIR 2 Speaker Simulation module, which offers convolution-based cabinet modelling with adjustable mic placement and attention to details such as adjustment of the interaction between guitar and cab.

Two entirely new features are worthy additions to the program. The first is yet another sound-tweaking option in the form of ACT (Audio Cloning Technology). This module offers shaping of the guitar sound at the input to make your guitar sound like a different guitar/pickup combination chosen from a set of profiles – Les Paul, Strat, for example. You can also use ACT after modelling for some final tone shaping. The second new feature is a GIG mode, whereby you can load eight presets into

the memory for instant access. You can switch between these using your mouse, but they can also respond to MIDI control, so you could use a MIDI switcher, making live use a more practical proposition.

Verdict

ReValver's sounds are very responsive to picking dynamics and guitar volume control, making for a satisfying playing experience. With a pair of amps, some cabinets, overdrive, tremolo and reverb, the free version has plenty to get you started and let you know whether ReValver is for you. If it is, we reckon that the Producer Pack is a real bargain. **[TC]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: This massive reworking of the software offers improved usability, adjustability and sonic authenticity



EBS Valve Drive DI

£269

Drive and tonal enhancement for your bass, plus a DI in the same box

CONTACT: Sound Technology **PHONE:** 01462 480000 **WEB:** www.soundtech.co.uk

In this clean and precise digital world, bass players are reminded constantly of just how clinical the sound of their instrument has become, particularly when being forced into using a DI into a PA or studios desks. But, as its name suggests, this EBS unit offers a valve-driven preamp along with an XLR balanced output, plus padding and ground lift switches as required by any good DI box. With input volume, master gain and a three-band EQ with a choice of vintage or normal bias, this is ideal for adding some tonal boost, colour and drive to your sound at the kick of a switch.

Sounds

It's all about a single preamp valve (ECC83/12AX7) adding fully controllable tonal colour and distortion to your bass sound, whether you use it as a DI box or as an effects pedal. Ultra-smooth in operation, it

fattens your bass tone from cool and sophisticated, or if pushed harder it's Cream-era Jack Bruce. The user manual's classic rock, vintage overdrive and crunch setting examples neatly describe what sounds can be achieved. Background noise-free and with true bypass, this is quite simply a great performance-enhancing tool that all bass players will surely appreciate.

Verdict

While there's nothing wrong with a good clean bass tone, there are times when it can lack body, and that's when a little dirt can add some excitement. With the usual robust EBS build quality, this is a great pedal to own. **[RN]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Far more useful than you can imagine – well worth the cost

Mono Guitar Sleeve £99



Superior case company offers superior gigbag

CONTACT: Westside Dist. **PHONE:** 0141 248 4812 **WEB:** monocreators.com

Not all gigbags are created equal. At a basic level they can be little more than a soft cover, offering no protection for your instrument. At Mono level, however, you have arguably the best money can buy. That doesn't mean cheap, though; Mono's standard range – including the Vertigo gigbags at £149 – can seem costly, which is where the Sleeve comes in, around 40 per cent cheaper.

Designed for solidbodies only, the black or grey (ash) outer material is both rugged and water-resistant with dual padded shoulder straps, steel riveted side carry handle and that all-important rear carry handle placed midway up the case, as well as an airline suspension hook. The main zip feels really tough and the case is designed to open from the top. Both front and back are padded and the Headlock feature, moulded from shock-absorbing EVA rubber, supports the neck, offering excellent protection.

Where the Stealth really scores is with its messenger-style storage pouch, designed for laptops or tablets, and also the likes of pedals, leads and mains adaptors. Its fold-over cover is secured by seatbelt webbing and a steel buckle. Yup, it looks cool too.

In Use

Packed with a Stratocaster, laptop, a couple of pedals and leads for a good stroll, a couple of crowded buses then London's Underground at rush hour we can't fault the comfort. In fact, our Strat had a much better journey than we did.

Verdict

If you're a travelling musician, just buy one. **[DB]**



GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: A superbly designed gigbag – we can't fault it: your guitar will love you

Finhol Auto Stomp Player & KickBox Mark III **£267 & £123**

More kit for the one-man band

CONTACT: Thomann PHONE: N/A WEB: www.thomann.de



With a decidedly lo-fi heritage, the humble foot stomp is a great way of giving the solo player a bit of bass-drum like kick. German brand Finhol has applied some serious ingenuity to the Mark III KickBox, with its low-profile walnut box, superb anti-slip matt base and choice of two digital samples – kick drum or cajon.

The small stomp box Auto Stomp Player is classed as a “human controlled drum computer”, and takes an input from the KickBox, or other foot stomps. We have a choice of 12

drum ‘patterns’, from lone bass drum or cajon to bass drum, snare or rim, plus hi-hats; we have similar combinations from the cajon, including a shaker, and both straight beats and a couple of shuffles. In manual mode, as you kick in your quarter beats the snare and hi-hat follow in tempo. In auto mode you set the tempo with four kicks and the pattern plays until you kick once to stop it.

Sounds

Both units sound clean and contemporary. The level

between the different drums on the Auto Stomp is preset, and in drum computer territory it’s basic stuff – there’s no dynamic range, so the beats can sound a little relentless, but it’ll certainly fill out a solo/duo performance.

Verdict

The KickBox III is very neat if you want a hi-fi kick. The Auto Stomp Player is ingenious, if a little relentless in use. But both will appeal to the increasing number of us who need to fill out our performances, but retain a human element. [DB]

GUITARIST RATING

KickBox III ★★★★★
Auto Stomp Player ★★★★★

Guitarist says: The KickBox is a modern take on the foot stomp, while the Auto Stomp provides a fuller backing. Here’s to the one-man (or woman) band!



Cordoba Guilele **£239**

A uke for guitarists? Yes, as long as you have small hands...

CONTACT: Selectron UK PHONE: N/A WEB: www.cordobaguitars.com

Cordoba makes primarily nylon-strings at a variety of levels, as well as ukes and a smattering of steel strings. With its recent acquisition of Guild and new UK distribution, it’s a

name you’ll be seeing more of. This diminutive Guilele is hardly a new concept – Yamaha’s Guitalele has been around for ages – but Cordoba’s take is different, not least in this

solid spruce-topped cutaway electro format, although both acoustic and lower-spec pack versions are available at £199 and £115 respectively.

Essentially a six-string tenor uke, it’s tidily made with a 50mm string spacing at the bridge – the same as your Les Paul – with a 46mm nut width, slightly wider than your 2015 Les Paul (though narrower than Yamaha’s Guitalele nut width of 49mm). But these are nylon strings, so it feels pretty cramped. Tuned as if you’re capo’d at the fifth fret, it’s easy enough to get used to and once, like any uke or nylon-string, those strings have settled in, it’s

a lot of fun, adding some well needed bass to the uke’s high-pitch plink. The onboard pickup with two-band EQ and volume preamp means it’s perfectly giggable and recordable.

Verdict

If you can’t get on with a standard four-string uke, or if you want a very compact six-string electro-classical, this isn’t such a daft option, Essential? No way. Fun? Definitely. [DB]

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Ideal starter for micro-sized beginners or a neat electro uke with bass strings

Mansons

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Fuzzy Rhodes FR75 £119

A supplier of transistors to boutique pedal builders makes its own fuzz

CONTACT: Langrex PHONE: 01403 785600 WEB: www.langrex.co.uk

Langrex may be a new name in effects pedals but the well-established West Sussex company is the largest supplier of valves in the UK and also lays claim to having the largest stock of Germanium transistors in the world! Supplying these transistors to pedal builders gave the company the idea to produce its own fuzzbox, the Fuzzy Rhodes FR75, based on a Sola Sound Mk1.5 Tone Bender from the 60s, the transitional model between the first Tone Bender and the Tone Bender Professional MkII.

The Mk1.5 featured just two transistors in a circuit which was borrowed by Arbiter for the Fuzz Face and also used in Vox

Tone Benders, produced in Italy. The FR75 uses a Mullard OC75 Germanium transistor, like the original, but pairs it with a Silicon transistor to combat volume loss.

In addition to standard fuzz and volume controls, the FR75 adds a pre-gain knob that works well in matching the pedal to your pickups' lower settings, yielding a leaner sound. The knob adds impedance, so you can use a wah in front of the fuzz without the usual feedback/oscillation problems. Soundwise, it's authentic 1960s fuzz all the way, and you get an internal transistor bias trim pot to dial in your preferred sweet spot, too.



Verdict

If you saw our recent boutique fuzz pedal round-up, you'll know fuzz comes in many flavours and can be expensive, but less than £120 for a hand-built fuzz isn't bad if the FR75's flavour is to your taste... [TC]

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: One for the fuzz-tweakers out there, but it's still good value for a boutique vibe and sound

PedalDeck Artist Series Board £99

New Brit 'board firm takes on stiff Stateside competition

CONTACT: PedalDeck PHONE: 0161 282 8000 WEB: www.pedaldeck.com

While their proportions have shrunk, stompboxes have never been bigger, and the humble pedalboard now comes in a wide variety of forms. New on the scene is UK company PedalDeck, debuting with the Artist Series Board following 18 months of R&D in the quest to create the perfect off-the-shelf stomping ground.

The product is made from a single piece of high-grade aircraft-quality aluminium, with no welds – and with all design and manufacture taking place in the UK, the company is able to ensure consistency of production. The Artist Series Board measures 610 (w) by 320



(d) by 60mm (h), with more sizes, and soft cases, on the way next year. It costs £99, while the Board plus flight case is £165. If you decide to buy the flight case later, there's a discount voucher with the standalone Board.

In Use

The Artist Series Board comes with two metres of self-

adhesive Velcro for attaching your pedals, plus a full set of brackets and bolts for securing a Voodoo Lab power supply beneath the frame – there's no need for the time-consuming pre-drilling of holes here. The underside of the unit also features cutaways to allow access to the VL Pedal Power 2's sag switches, as well as three

inputs for AC power cables. It's a sharply designed system, with well-cut holes and an unyielding, sturdy frame.

Verdict

We commend any new contender in the pedalboard arena, and while PedalDeck doesn't have the most original design, it brings a number of well thought-out tweaks to the formula, which make it a smart buy. [MB]

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: A UK-made 'board that has well-considered features, with plenty of room for pedals and power supplies alike



Gibson

The all new innovative 2015 Gibson guitars have started to arrive. See them on our website or visit either store to give them a go!



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Koll

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Koll Troubadour ST Mamm 2014 Show Guitar Surf Green £2099.



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California, USA

Xotic Effects Pedals from California are quickly becoming a staple for pro pedal boards all over the world! It really isn't hard to see why people are choosing these gorgeous sounding pedals...we think they are amazing! Hear them and you WILL buy one!!



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Two-Rock are incredible sounding, hand built boutique guitar amps, made in Rohnert Park, California. Two Rock Bi Onyx Head, Two Rock Studio Pro Plus Heads & Combos, Two Rock Sensor Heads & Combos. **Huge selection in stock, from £999. New Two Rock Crystal models just released. Prices start at £2299. New Two Rock Bi-Onyx 40 just released. Prices start at £2559**



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GUITARS

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RedPlate

RedPlate Amps, established in 2006 is a sole proprietorship located in Phoenix Arizona. The Owner, Henry Heistand has been involved with playing and servicing tube amplifiers for over 41 years. Redplate are true boutique amps, hand built with an uncompromising attention to detail combined with a final tweaking process that gives the player that last extra amount of tonal excellence.
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Musical Products Inc.

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Lowden

GUITARS

Lowden guitars are made under direct supervision by George Lowden in his hometown in Downpatrick, N Ireland.

The integrity and passion - recently described as "Olympic guitar making" - which goes into each and every Lowden guitar, has never been stronger. Coda Music in Stevenage has a great selection of Lowden guitars always in stock. Come into the shop or see them on our website. New Wee Lowden and Pierre Bensusan Old Lady on order. New 40th Anniversary models on order including: Wee Lowden 38 Brazilian Rosewood, Wee lowden 35 Indian Rosewood & F38C Brazilian Rosewood.





Strymon Deco £279

Tape saturation and double-tracking effects housed in a convenient stompbox format? Yes please!

CONTACT: MusicPsych PHONE: 0207 607 6005 WEB: www.strymon.net

It's no secret that Strymon pedals have become a fixture of pro and well-heeled amateur pedalboards the world over, with units such as the BigSky, Mobius, TimeLine and Flint delivering the kind of functionality and sonic performance required by demanding effects nuts. Housed in a smart, brushed metal enclosure manufactured from nickel-plated aluminium, the Deco harks back to the age when the physical effects achievable through clever manipulation of reel-to-reel tape machines were king.

Best situated at the end of your effects chain when used within a traditional electric setup, the Deco offers a range of digital approximations of the kind of effects achieved in the recording studios of the 50s and 60s by manipulating vintage tape recorders. Your key control on the left-hand side of the pedal is Saturation, which when engaged, apes the warm overdrive and dynamic compression that occurs when

tape machine inputs are run hot and overloading; crank it up and think Keef's raunchy 'acoustic' guitar on *Jumpin' Jack Flash* and *Street Fighting Man*.

Over on the right, we're into the world of simulated ADT – automatic double tracking – the precursor to all of the time-based effects we take for granted. The rotation of the lag time control encompasses flange – so named because the engineer had to physically slow down one of a pair of tape recorders playing back identical signals by lightly pressing on the flange (rim) of the playout reel to achieve the swooshing filter effect – chorus, slapback echo and tape-style echo with a short maximum delay time of 500ms.

Volume and blend offer control over output volume and dry/wet blend respectively, while wobble dials in random modulations akin to manually varying tape speed. The three-way type toggle switches the virtual tape decks from in-phase (sum) to phase-inverted (invert), to stereo ping-

pong or mono double repeats (bounce), depending on how the unit is hooked up. There's plenty of stealth functionality; holding down the doubletracker bypass footswitch introduces through-zero flange on the fly, while high trim, low trim, auto-flange time, wide stereo mode and +/- 3dB boost/cut are all accessible in 'hidden' mode. You can also plug in an expression pedal, add an external tap switch or plug in a 'favorite' switch to save and recall a favoured preset.

Sounds

Whether as part of an everyday mono guitar rig or hooked up in stereo (there's an internal jumper that facilitates the use of a TRS stereo input cable) as an outboard studio effect, using the Deco is almost like stepping back in time – witness the pretty damn authentic Sun Studio-style slapback echo – yet many of the sounds are also curiously contemporary. In a climate where mainstream guitar playing has become less strident

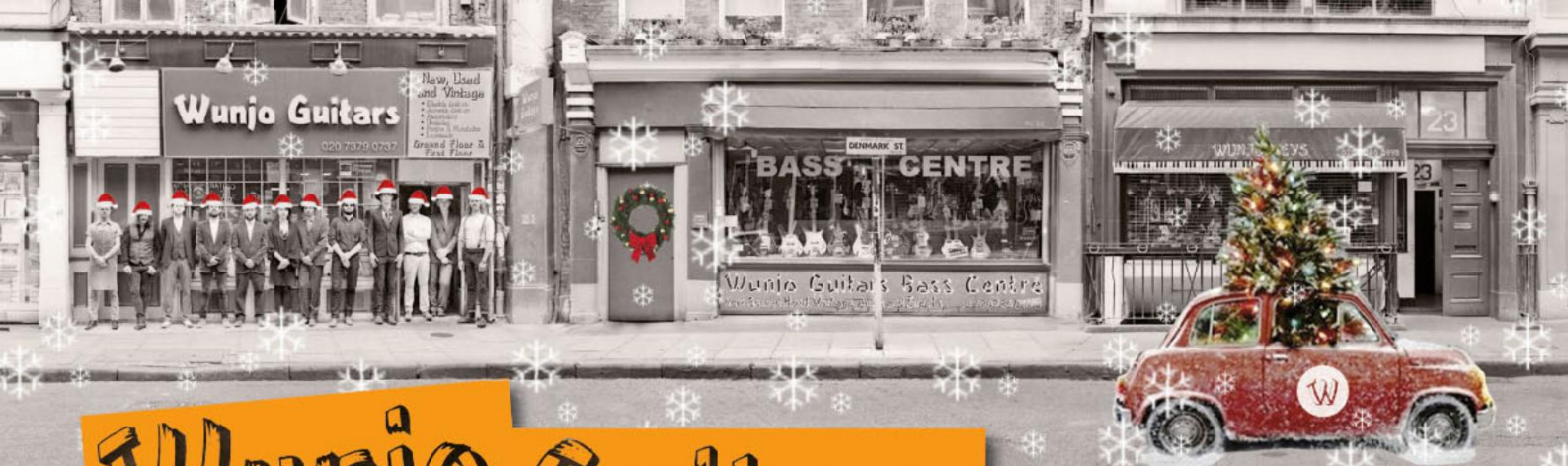
and more textural, and bands such as Tame Impala have popularised guitar tones that sound like an overdriven mixing desk rather than a wall of Marshalls, the colouration and tone-shaping options here make the mundane a whole lot more interesting and the already interesting take flight. Of course, the Deco's scope isn't limited to guitar; watch our video demo to hear the mind-bending results when you apply it to every instrument in a mix.

Verdict

Whether you want to add a retro flavour to your live sound or channel the spirit of Abbey Road in 1967 in the studio, paradoxically, the Deco's emulations of vintage effects sound fresh and inspiring. [CV]

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: The sounds that were previously limited to high-maintenance machines and DAW plug-ins are now available on your pedalboard



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Longtermers

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

Godin Montreal Premiere with P90s & Bigsby

Dave Burluck

FINAL REPORT It's a race against time to get the Godin sounding how our reviews editor wants it to. There will be swearing...



I was really liking most of this Godin, but I just couldn't get the bridge pickup to sound right. I shared my frustrations with Jaime Campbell at The Creamery (www.creamery-pickups.co.uk), who'd sent down a set of pickups he'd designed with New Order's Bernard Sumner. We'll get to those shortly, but I really needed to sort these P-90s.

"There are a number of subtle differences between the old vintage P-90s and pretty much all modern versions, with the exception of a few makers, including myself," said Jamie. "One of the reasons for the brighter/tighter sound is that the internal bobbin many makers use is an imported off-the-shelf version, a couple of millimetres taller with a thinner internal core, which means the coil is a little taller and thinner, which affects the magnetic field. All other things being equal, it gives a slightly brighter sound." This was making sense with my dilemma...

Jamie went on: "Also, the strength of the two bar magnets underneath the coil has a real impact on the sound. While magnets don't have 'tone', they do have strength, which can 'hold' the strings a little more or less depending on that strength.

"A weaker set of magnets 'hold' the strings a little less, allowing them to vibrate more freely, giving a slightly warmer, rounder sound, whereas stronger magnets 'hold' the strings a little more, helping to increase the attack, focus, brightness and 'loudness'. For my vintage-voiced P-90s I use custom, shorter, slightly weaker magnets, plus internal bobbins I've had made, which are shorter than the off-the-shelf parts, with a slightly wider internal core, which means I can make a shorter, wider coil to add more warmth and 'fatness'.

"Also, with the Godin and the bridge pickup being closer to the

bridge, you're naturally going to get a little more brightness, a little more of that clipped sound, as the strings are vibrating a little less close to the saddles. Anyway, I'll send you down a pair of my vintage-voiced P-90s..."

It never ceases to amaze me just how difficult it is to swap pickups on a semi. The Godin is no different, but I've put that pain and swearing in the past...

Jamie's new neck pickup sounded beautiful. The guitar didn't sound bad before, but The Creamery P-90 has a far higher sound quality: soft and musical but with percussion and clarity. But despite adjusting the bridge

unit, it was still too thin and bright. "Okay, I'll make a slightly hotter version," said Jamie, and it duly arrived a few days later.

Whatever voodoo Jamie had applied, finally we got there. No, we didn't end up matching the nearly £3k tone of that Gibson Memphis Luther Dickinson, but to compensate for the too-close-to-the-bridge bridge pickup placement, the second new bridge pickup's slightly overwound nature gave it a little more poke and fatness, taming some of the highs – it's a little more '60s' compared to the '70s' sound of the neck – a really great match. From being a 3.5 in our ratings, this Creamery'd up Godin has leapt up to a 4.5, no question. It's the end of this test, but I feel as if it's only the beginning...



Godin Montreal Premiere P90 w/ Bigsby



First reviewed: 366

(with humbuckers)

Price: £1,399 (inc gigbag)

Type: Single-cutaway, thinline centre-blocked electric

Body: Laminated Canadian wild cherry top, back and sides with a 'Breathe-Through' carved spruce centre-block

Neck: Mahogany, glued-in, 628mm (24.75") scale

Pickups: 2x Godin Kingpin single-coils

440 Distribution

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www.godinguitars.com

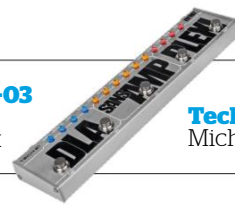
Guitarist's test products



TC Electronic Alter Ego X4
Chris Vinnicombe



Larri ve OM-03 Silver Oak
Dave Burrluck



Tech 21 Fly Rig 5
Michael Brown

Fender '68 Custom Deluxe Reverb

Joseph Branston

INTERMEDIATE It's more 'Fortunate Son' than 'Bad Moon Rising' as our snapper hones his John Fogerty act...



So after a few months, am I still in love with this bold 'silverface' combo?

Certainly. Since last time, I've been working with a Creedence Clearwater Revival tribute band in which this beauty has really come into its own. I'm very lucky to have a musician girlfriend, who understands the need to practise for hours at a time when learning a new set of material... which is something I'd scarcely taken advantage of for a while!

I'm well aware that my Loar archtop and the '68 Custom Deluxe Reverb are a long way from the setup that John Fogerty used (although he did play a certain amount on a Gibson ES-175 before it was stolen!), but sitting down and figuring out licks for hours on end has once again become a regular thing. So I'm still very fond of the Fender's inspirational clean tones, even if my partner might be less so...

Does it have drawbacks? Of course. If you want a "do everything" amp, then you're either going to have to look

elsewhere or use pedals to get crazier overdrive tones. If you want this thing to overdrive, you have to turn it up pretty loud, it's really as simple as that. Luckily, I'm a bit of a purist so the straightforward nature of the Deluxe is right up my street. I'm heading into the studio soon and am looking forward to seeing how the Deluxe deals with that.

Fender '68 Custom Deluxe Reverb



First reviewed: 382

Price: £1,198

Type: Valve combo with onboard reverb and tremolo circuits

Output: 22 watts @ 8 ohms

Valves: 4x 12AX7, 2x 12AT7 (preamp), 1x 5AR4 (rectifier), 2x 6V6 (power amp)

Fender GBI

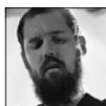
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Gibson 2014 SG Standard

James L'Esteve

FINAL REPORT The Emp!re guitarist's walk on the wild side reaches its conclusion



I have had this beast in my possession for four months. During that time, we have

been the best of friends and enemies, but as you'll see from my final words on the matter, it has been a successful mission. Where I did have to make some further alterations, however, was with regard to the Min-E-Tune system. It's highly accurate and it worked well when I was sitting, jamming in my house. However, as soon as I took this guitar to the stage, the Min-E-Tune just wasn't for me. I like to tune my guitar manually. If it's handled automatically, I feel a piece of my process has been taken away.

It brings to mind the way many of us guitarists feel about valve and modelling amps: you know the modelling amp works, you know it sounds good, but bringing yourself to use it in public takes a significant mindset shift. In the end, I removed the Min-E-Tune – at least you have the option of removing it without damaging anything. As it is, I'm left with a

guitar that has become my number one instrument. The sound and playability surpassed all of my expectations, and what's more, I haven't enjoyed the challenge of taming an instrument like that in a long time. It didn't feel safe and obvious, it felt more adventurous and interesting. And the bottom line is it sounds amazing.

Gibson 2014 SG Standard



First reviewed: N/A

Price: £1,199

Type: Double-cutaway solidbody electric

Body: Mahogany

Neck: Mahogany, set

Pickups: 2x '57 Classics

Hardware: Tune-O-Matic bridge, stopbar tailpiece, Min-E-Tune self-tuning machineheads

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"The Cobra is your answer to high gain, single coil tone without compromising dynamics or frequency response."

Tim Mills, founder and managing director,
Bare Knuckle Pickups

With the Cobra you get the radical look and construction of the Black Hawk humbucker but the Cobra coils are very much true single coil pickups. Each pair of uniquely annealed nickel plated steel blades are powered by a pair of custom size ceramic magnets ensuring an even string-to-string balance of magnetism for optimum driving of the coil windings. These pickups may be single coil by design but they play with all the output of a humbucker. Despite having massive amounts of power on tap, the emphasis is firmly on dynamic response for a precise and expressive tone.

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The tastiest of chestnuts a-roasting on the Q&A fire this issue: truss rods, buzzing, relics and whether DIY is ever the right option...

Q&A

Guitarist's expert panel



Dave Burrluck

is *Guitarist's* assiduous reviews editor and is also the author of numerous guitar books. Very handy with a fret file and indeed any aspect of a finely fettle six-string.



Mick Taylor

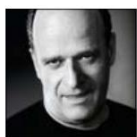
ex-editor of *Guitarist*, has wielded Allen keys, screwdrivers and sandpaper and from an early age; he also has a worrying obsession with pedalboards.



Neville Marten

edited *Guitarist* for 13 years, after working for both

Fender and Gibson as a repairer. From desirable Les Pauls to dream Strats, he's owned and worked on the lot.



Nick Guppy

is *Guitarist's* amp specialist with a wealth of experience gained from

collecting, repairing and restoring all kinds of guitar-related audio.

Email us your questions: guitarist@futurenet.com or write in to *Guitarist* magazine, Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. If you can include photographs of the problem area, so much the better!

Trussed issue

I have an old, thinline semi-acoustic guitar made by Antoria (like a Gibson ES-335, it has a glued-in neck). It has developed a noticeable fret buzz at the higher part of the fingerboard. I've tried raising the bridge, which helps a lot but then leaves me with an uncomfortable playing action as a result. I've read about truss rods and how to adjust them, but I'm nervous to do this; do you have any advice please?

Steve Rampling, via email

It may well need a truss rod adjustment, Steve, but there's no need to be worried about doing this if you follow the advice below. However, as you say the guitar has a few years on it, it may not be only the truss rod that needs attention. One possibility is that the neck has pulled forwards as a result of string tension, creating a turn-up at the body end.

In this case, the truss rod will rectify the relief in the middle part of the fingerboard, but it won't have any effect at the top few frets. It's a possibility that it may need a specialist repair; there's a process where (on set-neck guitars) heat can be applied to the neck, enabling it to be moved to the required position. However, before we go stampeding for the worst possible scenario, you should try the truss rod.

Start off by sighting the neck. Look down the edges of the fingerboard – one side at a time from the nut to the last fret – and see how much curve there is in terms of relief. You should be seeing a 'dip' along the length of the neck: remember that the string is your straight line, and the neck's deviance away from it is the relief. So, if there is



noticeable relief, remove the cover over the truss rod nut and tighten it by half a turn or thereabouts (clockwise) to take out some of the relief in the neck: the neck should be more straight relative to the string when you sight it again.

You'll get an idea instantly if the truss rod is doing what it should. If the adjuster is stiff and won't move with reasonable pressure, go to a nice man who has done it a thousand times before: a guitar repairer.

Acoustickup?

I have recently acquired an old acoustic guitar that looks good and sounds nice played acoustically, but I would really like to be able to plug it in to a PA system or amplifier. How hard is it to fit an under-saddle pickup and

side-mounted preamp? I'm quite good with woodworking and general DIY-type technical tasks, so I'm confident I could do it, but are there any pearls of wisdom you might be able to give me please?

Jim Goulding, via email

This job is always best done by someone who's done it many times before, Jim, but you do sound pretty confident, so here's some food for thought.

Find somewhere appropriate to work: well lit, with adequate protection for the guitar and so on, and if at all possible, somewhere that can be left set up if you don't get finished for whatever reason.

If you really want to mount a preamp in the side of the guitar, you'll need appropriate

Email us your questions: guitarist@futurenet.com or write in to *Guitarist* magazine, Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. If you can include photographs of the problem area, so much the better!

What Should I Buy?

Best value quality acoustic

Q The time has come for me to buy a 'real' serious acoustic guitar. First and foremost, I want something of high build quality, with a classic sound. My dreams of playing Wembley Stadium aren't completely dead, but I don't think I'll be ready to plug in, so a pickup isn't a necessity and I don't play up the neck, so I'm happy for it to be a non-cutaway guitar; I prefer the more traditional look, as well. Like everyone else, I'm looking for the maximum guitar for the optimum (notice I didn't say 'minimum') price: my budget is around £1,000.

Alan Brooks, via email

A You certainly have a lot of choice, Alan: there are a lot of excellent modern acoustic guitars, so getting something that sounds great for your budget is not difficult. Our preference has always been for leading brand names, and it's not just snobbery; they tend to hold their value much better should you ever come to sell and, if you pick a brand that connects with you emotionally, they can inspire you to want to play to boot. Some people really couldn't care less about all of that, of course! Here are three to get you thinking... **[MT]**



2. Essential ingredients

The **Larrivé OM-02** (£899) is a brilliantly simple, high-quality folk-sized guitar using a solid spruce top over solid sapele back and sides with proper ebony fingerboard and bridge. There are absolutely no frills whatsoever and the satin finish is the only polarising feature: some people like it, some people will only have gloss.



3. Ultimate bang for buck

Yamaha's redesigned-for-2014 **LL16D ARE** (£804) is an 'original jumbo' (Yam's take on the dread') available in the pictured Black or more conventional Natural. Featuring a pre-aged solid Engelmann spruce top over solid rosewood back and sides, it's a superb all-rounder, with a passive, non-intrusive pickup. It's 'tighter'-sounding than the Martin: play them both and see what you prefer.



1. Pure acoustic for life

The **Martin D-15M** (£1,216) has won *Guitarist's* coveted Gold Award twice; once for the original model, and again in the 'Burst' (£1,371) variant that had some subtle tweaks to its construction and finish. Solid mahogany throughout means a forthright tone that makes it a great all-rounder. If you prefer a smaller body, go for the 000-15M.





Do Relics age differently from 'new' new guitars?

specialist tools – a keyhole saw, for example. Then you need to mark out and cut a hole to the exact right size for whatever preamp you choose. Aside from the obvious danger – getting the hole wrong – the biggest threat is to the edges of the lacquer, that will have a tendency to split and crack. We'd strongly suggest forgetting about a side-mounted preamp and going with something that sits inside the soundhole; either a simple volume control or something more involved, such as one of Fishman's Ellipse systems. Less hassle still would be to fit an under-saddle pickup that has a preamp in the endpin jack – such as the LR Baggs Element – and do your sound shaping with an outboard preamp, amp or mixing desk.

Speaking of the endpin, it will probably need reaming out to the correct size for the new jack socket. This requires a specialist tool, and we always recommend using a hand drill when doing it, as it's easy for the guitar's endblock to split. Using an electric drill gives you very little feedback, while a hand drill is more controllable. You'll also need to make sure the guitar is clamped/held safely while drilling, too.

For the under-saddle pickup itself, first make sure that you buy one that's the right size for your saddle slot: measure the slot before buying the pickup! The slot needs to be clean and flat on the bottom, with a hole drilled at one end to feed the pickup lead through. All good-quality under-saddle pickups

come with comprehensive instructions. Finally, the saddle will need to be sanded down to your required action height. The important thing here is that the bottom of the saddle is as flat as you can make it. It's not rocket science, but experience is everything with this stuff!

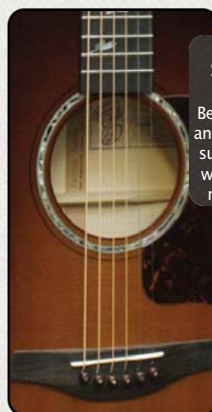
Old Relic

You blokes at *Guitarist* seem pretty obsessed with Fender Relics, and while I just can't understand the appeal myself, I do have some practical questions at this point. What happens when these artificially aged guitars get old? Do they continue to 'age'? Will they wear out more quickly as a result? I'd be fascinated to hear your opinions on the matter.

Adam Williams, via email

Hmmm... It's been almost 20 years since we saw our first relics, and some of our friends still have examples of those early guitars. They're not much different from genuine oldies in our opinion, Adam, and haven't seemed to suffer any problems as a result of their 'less than perfect' starts.

Not all new guitars are kept pristine, of course, and regardless of how it begins, the more finish you wear off, the more moisture, corrosion and physical wear will ensue. While that's not to everyone's tastes aesthetically, functionally speaking it takes a lifetime to 'wear a guitar out'. We suspect that will happen to precious few guitars, ever, ➤



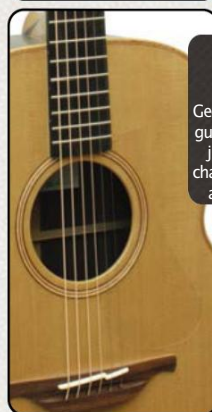
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"A favourite line of ours is: one player's tiny buzz is another player's deafening roar. There are no rules"

regardless of how they started out.

More truss trouble

I have an older custom-made guitar with a chunky neck that is very straight, even when the truss rod is loose. I wanted to get the guitar set up to how I like it, but the tech said the neck wouldn't adjust to give much relief, suggesting there wasn't much he could do without more serious work to the neck: a problem. That all sounds expensive and extreme – what do you think, oh plank-spanners of *Guitarist*?

David Reece, via e-mail

A neck doesn't have to have a lot of relief in it, David. We were talking with Tommy Emmanuel for *Guitarist Presents Acoustic* recently, who told us that he likes his necks pretty much dead straight, and he's certainly not alone. With too much relief, you have to lower the action to make the guitar playable, which can then cause buzzes at the high end of the neck. Straighten the neck, however, and the strings will come down and you can raise the bridge so they don't buzz.

That said, your tech is right. The truss rod isn't doing what it should, which is making the guitar unappealing for you. Even worse, if the neck decides to move further back and it overbows, you will be in real trouble and it may need to be heat treated to create the relief you desire. How about suggesting that to your tech as a course of action now, and see what happens?

Buzz too much?

I have a simple question that I suspect has a complicated answer: how much buzz is too much buzz? Specifically, I'm referring to fret buzz and the relative action height of my guitar. It seems that no matter where

I set the action, there's still some buzz acoustically, even though I can't hear it through my amplifier. So how much buzz is too much buzz for you lot?

Mike Dawson, via email

This is one we've answered many times before, Matt, and it's always controversial.

A favourite line of ours is: one player's tiny buzz is another player's deafening roar. There are no rules, except that the notes need to be able to sound, of course!

So, yes, it's absolutely normal for there to be some audible fret buzz; it's a fundamental part of the guitar's sound. If the buzz is audible through the amp, it's probably too much, likewise if it leads to choking when bending strings, or prevents you from playing what you want to play. Ex-editor, guitar repairer and all-round font of guitar knowledge Neville Marten, for example, tends to have his guitars pretty 'buzzy' by some standards, but they always sound ace when he plays them! So our advice is to not get hung up on it, unless it hangs you up while playing.

Right saddle? Or left?

I've noticed that the intonation adjustment screws on Gibson-style bridges can face either way: on some guitars, the screws face towards the nut, but on others they face towards the tailpiece. Is there a correct way for them to be facing?

Richard Manning, via email

There is a correct way, Richard, and it depends on the type of bridge, as they're not all the same. The individual saddles on all tune-o-matic bridges 'should' have their flat side facing forward and the sloping edge looking back, but of course you do see them swapped around to allow for more



Van Dilemma: mod the Squier, or buy one these?

adjustment length on certain strings. That wasn't your question, however. On the old-style ABR-1 bridge, the intonation screws should face forwards – towards the nut. If the stud tailpiece is screwed right down, the bridge screws can foul the strings if they face towards the tailpiece, leading to potential string breakages. On the newer, 'Nashville' Tune-O-Matic (with legs that screw into studs rather than directly into the body), the screws face backwards, making them easier to adjust. So yes, there is a correct way, depending on the type of bridge.

Van Strat

Like all men of a certain age, I'm having a bit of a Van Halen moment. I've got a Squier Strat gathering dust, so I was wondering what it would take to VH-ify it? You know – a humbucker, Floyd Rose, custom tape/paint job? I vaguely

remember *Guitarist* modifying a few Yamaha Pacificas years ago – any major pointers you could offer?

Declan King, via email

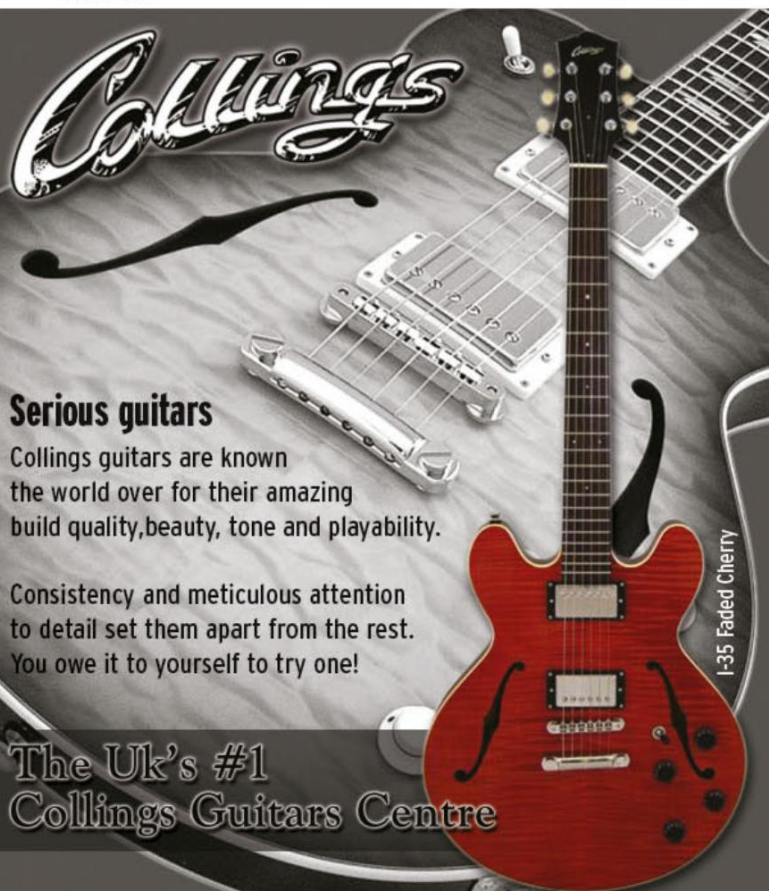
The main pointer would be to your local guitar shop and the very competitively priced EVH Striped guitars, Declan. All the essential Vangredients are there, from the paint job and Floyd, to the humbucker and D-Tuna (that drops the low E string to D).

As for the Squier, the bits alone will cost you a couple of hundred quid at least, not to mention the butchery/woodworking (delete as applicable to your skill level) required to fit the pickup, rout the body for the Floyd and so on. It can be done, of course, and it'd be a fun project. If you do it, please send us pics and an account of your experience that we can share with the people of *Guitarist* readership. **G**



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OLD GOLD

PHOTOGRAPHY NEIL GODWIN

'62 Fender Stratocaster

The dawn of the 60s ushered in a decade of change for Fender: while the Stratocaster's popularity was soaring thanks to the likes of The Beach Boys, Dick Dale and Hank Marvin, it wouldn't be long before the company was bought out by CBS in 1965. Even before the takeover, the Strat underwent a number of significant changes, perhaps most notably in the fretboard department. From 1959, a 'slab' rosewood 'board with the underside milled flat was standard. During 1962, Fender switched to pre-radiused maple necks fitted with a uniform width, 'round laminate' rosewood cap that followed the curve. This gorgeous example features the earlier slab arrangement; the shape of the rosewood section behind the nut is a dead giveaway.

The other key indicator as to this Strat's age is the green-hued scratchplate, a result of the three-ply white/black/white celluloid nitrate pickguard's centre section bleeding into the other layers. Shrinkage over time often leads to cracking around the neck pickup's bass-side screw, too, also seen here. These 'guards were replaced in 1965, but there's something magical about the way they discoloured. Combine that with the guitar's effortless playability, and this example certainly has us green with envy...



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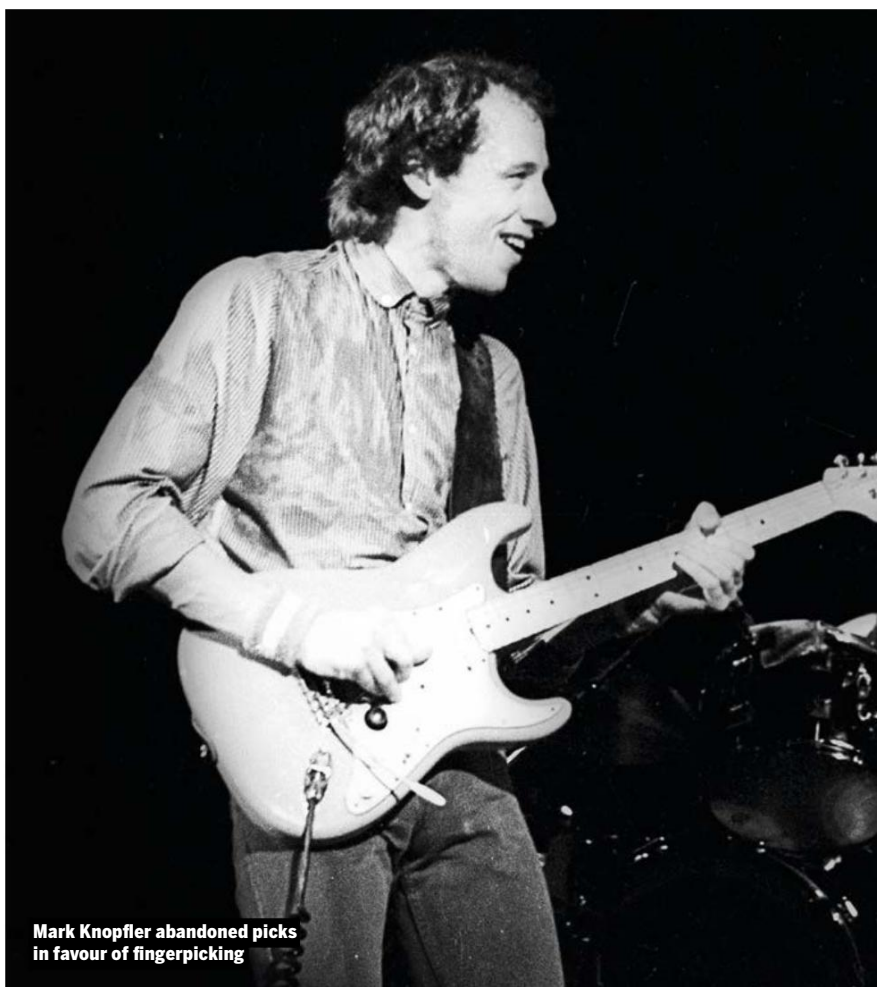
Tutor: Neville Marten | **Gear used:** Fender '56 Relic Stratocaster, Vox AC15C1

IN OUR last Blues Headlines we looked at the playing of the much missed JJ Cale. This month, we take a peek at a guitarist who demonstrates clear similarities in style. While Mark Knopfler's slightly bluesy, slightly country playing, laid-back delivery and use of fingers to pluck the strings might not be a direct result of listening to Cale, he has acknowledged his admiration for the man, and there are obvious parallels in their approaches to music.

Knopfler has stated that he discarded picks after playing an acoustic at a party; due to a bowed neck and 'egg slicer' action it was strung with extra-light strings, and the only way he could make it sing was by plucking the strings with three fingers. Knopfler says he found his 'voice' on the guitar that day, and has continued as a fingerpicker ever since.

Knopfler cleverly mixes arpeggio-style playing – both along the neck and across it – with a classic lick-style blues-rock approach. But what made his playing instantly recognisable on Dire Straits' debut album – and different to almost every other major guitarist at the time – was a country flavour brought to bear by the use of less obvious string bends, a variety of doublestops and a cleaner than usual Strat tone. Bear in mind that the late-70s was the era of powerful Les Paul Customs through Marshall amps; be it Brian Robertson of Thin Lizzy, Steve Jones of the Sex Pistols or Mick Ronson, legendary guitarist with David Bowie.

Many players – myself included – ditch the pick from time to time, either to gain that particular tone you get from using flesh on steel; or because it makes them play differently. Certain techniques, such as arpeggio playing, string skipping and speedy string-to-string play, are so much easier to do when several fingers are employed together.



Mark Knopfler abandoned picks in favour of fingerpicking

© ANDRECSILLAG/REX

If you haven't tried it, perhaps now is your chance – a great tip is that, should you find yourself lacking inspiration, either in the studio or in a gig, give your pick the elbow and try an approach that's favoured by more than a few top players. Jeff Beck, Richie Kotzen and

our friend Mr K can't all be wrong! I've employed the same chord sequence as last month, and the backing track's the same, bar the addition of some extra rhythm guitar to add a bit more punch. Have fun, and I'll see you next month.



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Example 1

I'D RECOMMEND that you check out the video content that accompanies this lesson, where you'll get visual information that's impossible to detail here.

I begin at the bottom of the neck with a lick built around the D minor CAGED shape. Other notes are used, including the open third, first and second strings (4th, 9th and 6th respectively). Sticking rigidly to any scale or shape seldom yields the most natural results, so it's worth seeing what notes lurk around the area you are playing in.

Next comes a semitone bend incorporating the 9th (E) and 3rd (F), with a fretted 4th (G) in a repetitive lick that leaves the E and F clashing in a 'country meets BB King' manner. After a few licks using the D minor pentatonic and D natural minor scale, we find ourselves

in a CAGED A minor shape at the 5th fret for a Knopfler-esque arpeggio, with a final bend up to the tonic (D). Lift your fretting fingers off as each arpeggio note is played, as we want them to sound individually and not as a chord.

There are more 'joining up' licks, until we arrive at a doublestop bending idea at the 12th, 14th and 15th frets (second and third strings). This is a great way to increase power and is a real 'moment'.

We couldn't do a Knopfler-style solo without a culminating repetitive lick across the strings in minor pentatonic shape 1. Playing with fingers is perfect for this – watch mine to see how I do it. I use two fingers, but Mark would employ all three – so do whatever feels natural!

Example 1 Musical notation for guitar, showing three systems of notation (treble and bass staves) with fret numbers and chord symbols (Dm, F, C, G).

System 1: Treble staff shows a lick starting with a semitone bend (BU) on the 9th fret (E) and 3rd fret (F), followed by a fretted 4th (G). The bass staff shows the corresponding fret numbers: 0, 2, 1, 1, 3, 1, 3, 3 (5), (3), 1, 3, 1, 0, 1, 0, 3, 0, 3, 1, 2, 3.

System 2: Treble staff shows a lick starting with a semitone bend (BU) on the 9th fret (E) and 3rd fret (F), followed by a fretted 4th (G). The bass staff shows the corresponding fret numbers: 5, (6), 3, 3, (6), (5), (6), 3, 3, 6, (5), (6), 3, 6, (5), 3, 5, 6, 3, 7, 6, 8, (10), 8, 6, 8, 6, 5, 7.

System 3: Treble staff shows a lick starting with a semitone bend (BU) on the 9th fret (E) and 3rd fret (F), followed by a fretted 4th (G). The bass staff shows the corresponding fret numbers: 7, 6, 5, 8, (10), (8), 5, 8, 5, 8/10, 8, 10, 8, 6, 8, 5, 8/10, 8, 10, 13, 10, 13, 10, (13), (12), 10.

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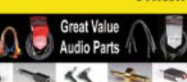
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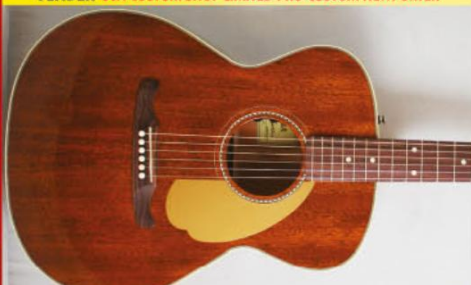
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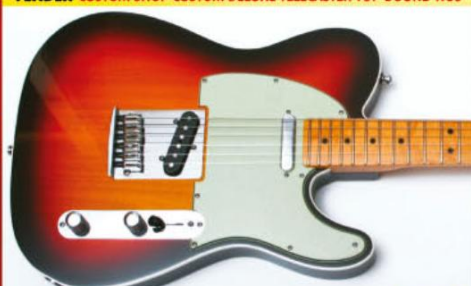
Fiesta Red **£1449**

FENDER CUSTOM SHOP LTD EDITION RELIC CABRONITA 'BORACHA' JAZZMASTER



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FENDER CUSTOM SHOP CUSTOM DELUXE TELECASTER TOP-BOUND NOS



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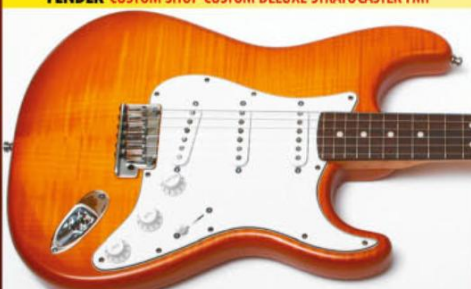
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Fiesta Red

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