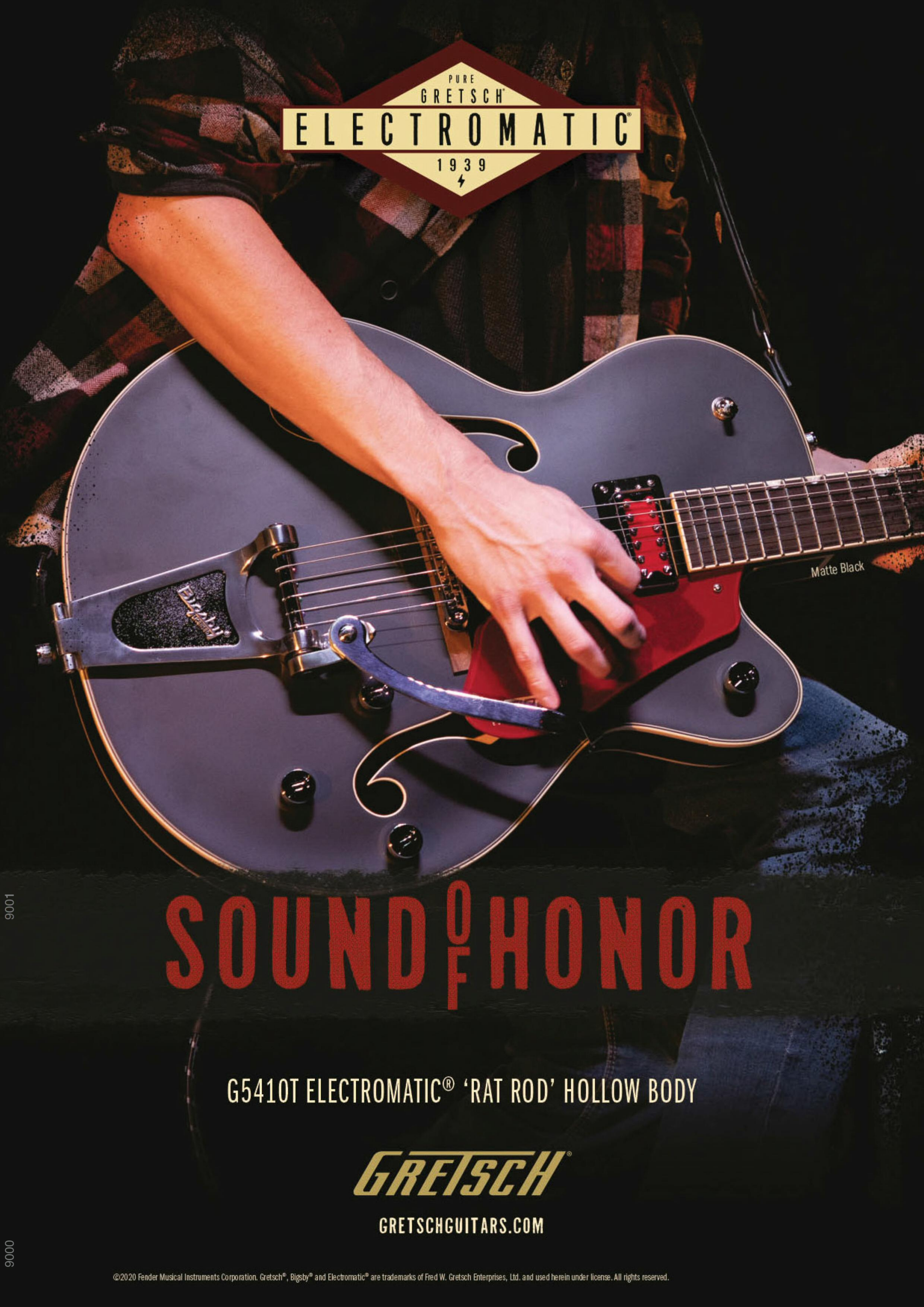




Matte Black

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BEYOND SHRED

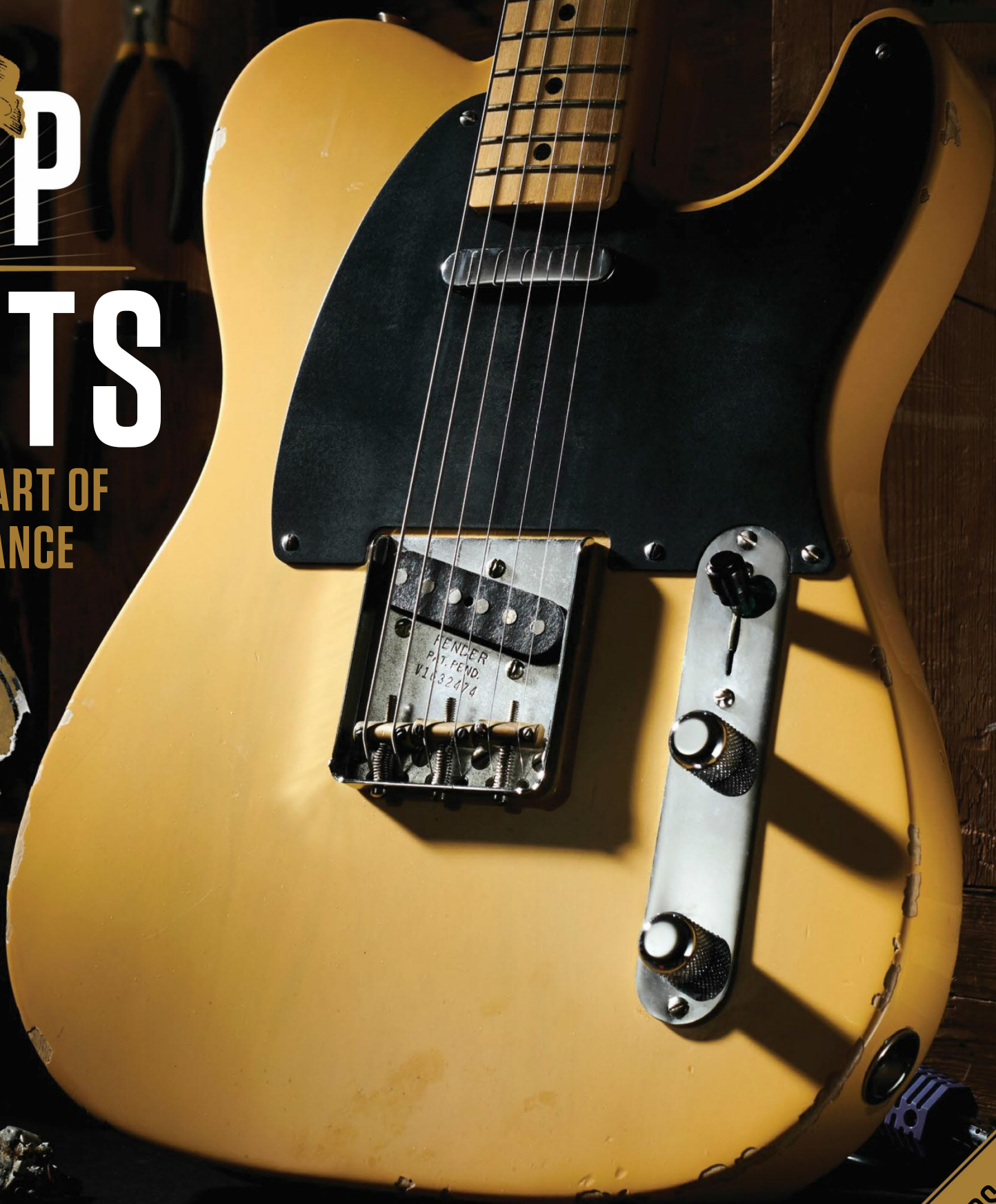
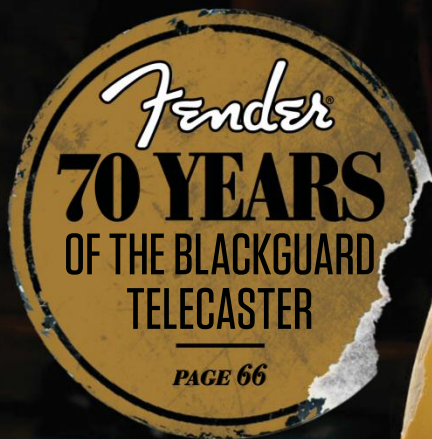
The Charvel DK22 is a rock all-rounder for our times

Issue 461

Guitarist

40 PROFESSIONAL SETUP SECRETS

TOP TECHS ON THE ART OF
GUITAR MAINTENANCE



REVIEWED FENDER AMERICAN ORIGINAL '70s TELE CUSTOM VICTORY V4 DUCHESS
TAYLOR BUILDER'S EDITION 324CE STRYMON COMPADRE VAHLBRUCH PEDALS

PLUS
STEVE HOWE ON YES & GUITARS
TAYLOR'S ANDY POWERS
GIBSON FIREBIRDS

BORN PLAY^{TO}

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BY Lowden



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Rules Are Made To Be... Repaired



I recently broke one of my own rules and bought a guitar sight unseen from a private seller over the internet, which always carries the risk of disappointment when the guitar arrives (if it arrives...). Happily, the guitar, an American Vintage '52 Telecaster, proved to be a nice instrument. There were a few niggles, though, which explained its very tempting price.

The guitar's original case was AWOL, the switch tip fell off, and the nut around the shaft of the jack socket had worked loose, meaning the whole assembly was loose and crackly. The guitar also came strung with nines, which I felt didn't really deliver the full twangy majesty of that Tele tone. A sliver of gaffer tape wrapped round the end of the pickup selector solved the loose switch tip and the loose jack socket was fixed in the ordinary way, holding the socket from the inside to stop it rotating while I tightened the nut. The nines were replaced with a set of Curt Mangan That Pedal Show 'Mick Here' 0.010.5 to 0.050-gauge strings – the signature set of the illustrious former editor of this tome, Mick Taylor.

With these quick fixes and a good clean, the Tele felt much better and sounded great. True, there are one or two trickier things I'd like to tweak, too – more of which in future instalments of Mod Squad – but those small changes alone were enough to put a proper 'New Guitar Day' grin on my face. The moral, if there is one, is that a little goes a long way when it comes to maintenance and setup, so don't be afraid to get stuck in. We hope this month's hands-on guide (see p50) helps you on the way to getting satisfaction from your Tele, Les Paul, Strat or whatever your main squeeze may be. Enjoy the issue and see you next month.



Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights



Locksmith

Stellar acoustic guitarist John Smith shares his tips on surviving lockdown on **p44**



Streets Ahead

Taylor is known for sustainable tonewoods, but the company's latest find comes from an unexpected place: cities **p110**



Huber & Above

Nik Huber's celebrating 25 years of superb luthiery with an all-new model on test inside: the Piet **p88**



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Neil Godwin

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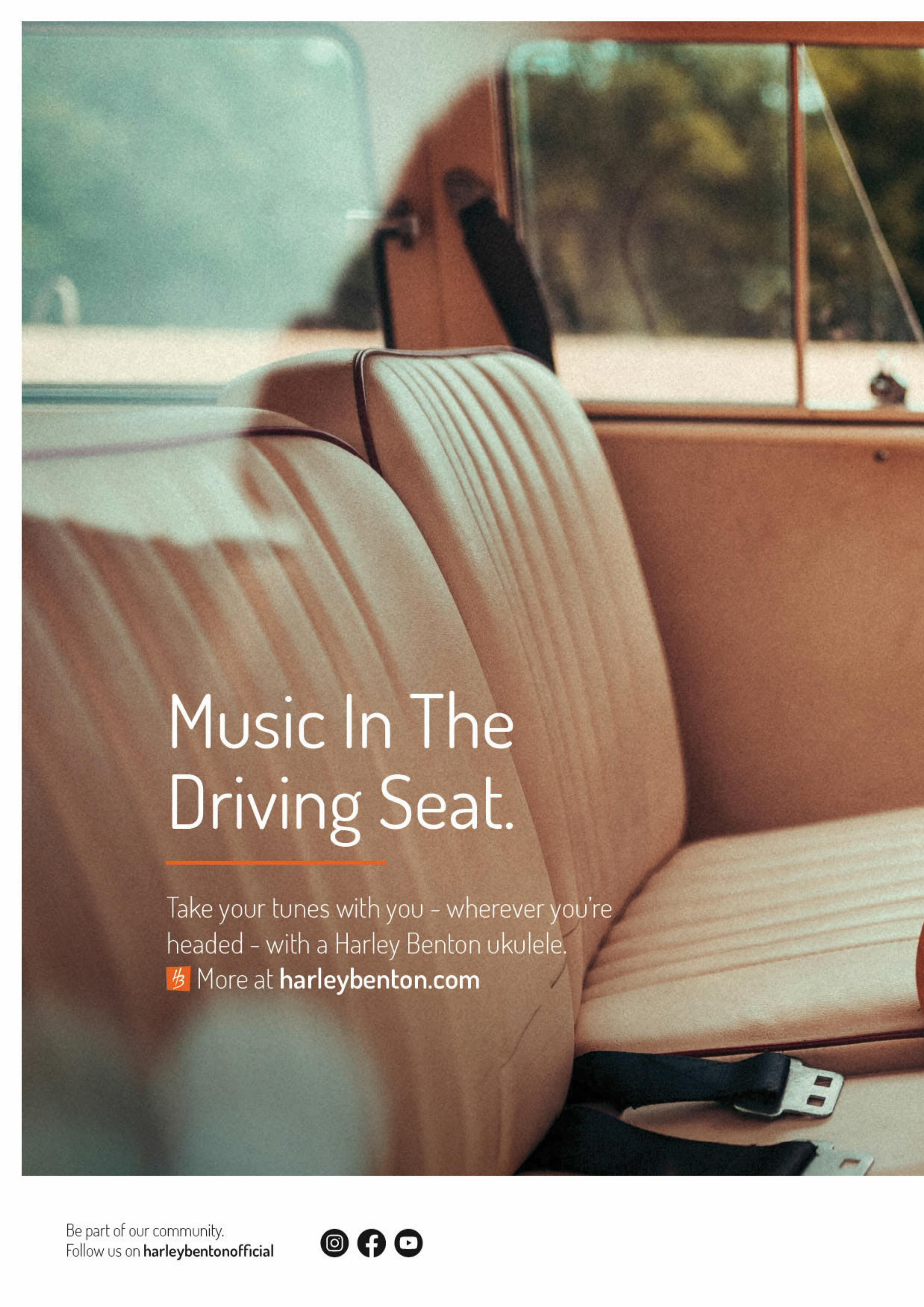
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FIRST PLAY



**CHARVEL PRO-MOD DK22
SSS 2PT CM**
£949

.....
WHAT IS IT? An affordable
mash-up of modern feel and
classic tones in Charvel style

Skin Deep

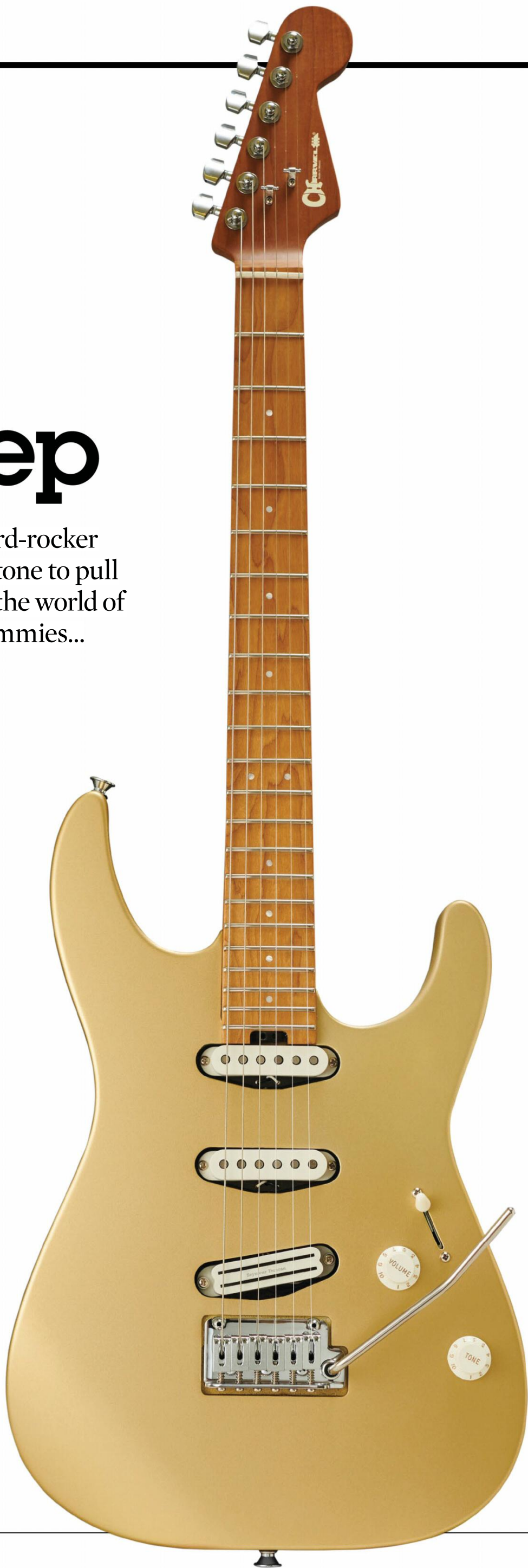
Nevermind the shredders, this hard-rocker from Mexico has enough vintage tone to pull bluesers and country pickers into the world of compound radii and floating whammies...

Words Ed Mitchell **Photography** Neil Godwin

Some electric guitars come with baggage. There's a 'reputation'. Unfair as it may seem, guitars can be judged on the company they keep. We look them up and down and instantly decide whether or not we want anything to do with these characters. Gretsch? Easy. Rockabilly throwbacks. Next. Rickenbacker? Lovable mop tops. Jingle jangle. End of. And what of the Charvel Pro-Mod DK22 minding its own business on this page? C'mon, you'd have to be some bearded slab of tattooed meat to bother shredding on one of those things. Right?

Imagine for a second you got this six-string Goldilocks all wrong. Maybe it isn't just for those who only got a clean sound that one time the battery in their metal pedal fizzled out. With some gentle persuasion on our part you might even begin to regard this guitar as a perfect contemporary interpretation of the Fender Stratocaster. Yeah, we went there. We just need to back it up.

Let's begin by breaking down that model designation. 'Pro-Mod' signifies this guitar is a member of Charvel's affordable Mexican-built range. 'DK' refers to the Dinky body shape, basically a slightly scaled-down Strat-style design, while '22' equals the number of jumbo frets. 'SSS' means you get three single-coil-sized pickups and '2PT' points to the two







1. Charvel's die-cast locking tuners provide faultless tuning stability

2. Our DK22 maple neck is caramelised, a process that involves baking the maple to help it resist changes in temperature and humidity

Rolled fingerboard edges and the compound radius mean you almost feel like the guitar is playing itself



pivot point recessed Gotoh Custom 510 vibrato unit. Finally, 'CM' is shorthand for the 648mm (25.5-inch) scale caramelised maple neck. You've no doubt heard of torried or roasted maple; caramelised means the same thing. The wood is heated in a kiln to remove moisture, which leaves it more stable, not to mention looking beautifully tanned. Here the neck is further reinforced by a pair of graphite rods.

The better-dead-than-shred brigade might assume this guitar has a basswood body like so many modern metal machines. In fact, it's classic Strat-style alder that resides under that satin urethane Pharaoh's Gold finish. The sculpted rear of the Dinky body offers maximum player comfort, while the Strat-style jack plate is cleverly angled upwards to direct your cable over your strap or into a radio pack.

Upper-fret access is excellent thanks to a scoop cut into the rear of the treble

side cutaway, and a rounded body heel that does its best to keep out of your way. As mentioned, you get 22 frets here and they come mounted on a 305 to 406mm (12- to 16-inch) compound radius fingerboard. Yes, that's a particularly 'shred' appointment, but lest we forget Fender's new American Ultra Stratocaster also features a compound radius 'board, albeit one that's 10 to 14 inches. That guitar is also heavily contoured to promote easy upper-fret access. Makes you think.

We love the restraint shown in the hardware choices. Charvel could have chiselled in a double-locking Floyd Rose and still tickled its target markets' fancy. Instead, you get that lower-profile Gotoh Custom 510 vibrato. It's a nice bit of kit. The aforementioned double pivot points make for super-smooth operation, the centre-threaded screw-in arm stays put wherever you leave it, and a set of locking



'heads provides faultless tuning stability. The slippery Graph Tech Tusq XL top nut helps out, too.

Before we plug in, there's the electrical stuff to contend with. The DK22 is a SSS format guitar. In actual fact, it has two regular single coils and a single-coil-sized humbucker. The bridge pickup is a Seymour Duncan SHR-1B Custom Hot Rails humbucker. The middle unit is a Seymour Duncan SSL-6 Flat Strat single coil. The neck position is occupied by another SSL-6, this time 'Reverse Wind, Reverse Polarity' (aka RWRP) to cut hum when used in conjunction with one of the other pickups. Controls include the fast and loose 500k EVH Bourns Low-Friction master volume, a No-Load master tone, and a five-way pickup selector blade switch.

Feel & Sounds

The DK22's neck is slim. We measured it at 19.7mm at the 1st fret and 21.1mm at the octave. Despite that snake-hipped demeanour this Charvel has just about the most stable neck we've ever come across. That's obviously a consequence of the caramelisation process and the graphite reinforcement, but we're still impressed. This thing is built for comfort *and* speed. The rolled fingerboard edges and the compound radius mean you almost feel like the guitar is playing itself.

You can dive-bomb on the DK22 if that's what you're into. The vibrato recess also allows for a decent amount of pull-back. That said, we enjoyed the shimmer and sustain that comes with gently manipulating the vibrato arm back and forth. Using more of a Jeff Beck approach than, say, Steve Vai makes the most of the Gotoh Custom 510's travel. Again, tuning stability never disappoints.

Let's get our heads around the pickup switching options. Position one is the bridge

3. Upper-fret access is fantastic thanks to a scoop on the rear of the treble side cutaway and the rounded neck heel. There's also some contouring on the back of the body to accommodate your ribcage or belly... whichever comes first

4. The Dinky comes spec'd with a sculpted area on the rear bottom body that accommodates a Strat-style recessed jack plate. What makes this so cool is the fact it's angled upwards to direct your guitar cable over your strap button or into a wireless transmitter





There's no shred-friendly double-locking Floyd Rose vibrato here. Instead, you get a recessed Gotoh Custom 510 unit. This vibrato comes paired with a set of locking machineheads and a slippery Graph Tech top nut. The result is faultless tuning stability

It can't be pigeon-holed as just another shredding machine, even if that's Charvel's target market

SHR-1B Custom Hot Rails humbucker, both coils engaged. The second click on the switch coil splits the bridge pup to offer the inner coil in partnership with the middle SSL-6 Flat Strat. Number three is the outer coil of the bridge pickup in cahoots with the neck position SSL-6. Four finds the middle and neck single coils also working together. The last position is the neck SSL-6 Flat Strat doing its own thing.

Plugging in, you quickly realise that the DK22 is not some bovver-booted yob with too much to say for itself and absolutely no table manners. Yes, we'd wager direct mounting the bridge pickup has given it a touch more tonal girth than a traditional Strat single coil usually possesses, even in the split modes. Reverse angling it Jimi-style also helps to emphasise the low-end and soften the top E treble, and yet you'll find classic 'glassy' Fender tones here, too. Positions two and four on the switch dial in the much-loved Hendrix 'in-between' tones. Position three comes over like the middle setting on a Telecaster, with a wash of additional warmth.

Adding overdrive naturally ups the aggression of the bridge pickup, but it's definitely more focused sounding than a full size 'bucker. Clarity and note separation are exceptional. Of course, in all positions dialling the No-Load tone control to its highest notched setting reveals some additional presence.

Verdict

You typecast electric guitars at your peril. We all know that Gretsch guitars cut plenty of mustard outside of their supposed comfort zones. That goes for Rickenbacker, too. Similarly, the Pro-Mod DK22 SSS 2PT CM can't be pigeonholed as just another shredding machine, even if that's Charvel's target market.

Yes, we reckon the customer base for this guitar is potentially wider than that. Blues, country, classic rock – whatever turns you a coin, the DK22 has got your back. If this were a Fender American Ultra or a Suhr Classic we wouldn't have to persuade you to relax your prejudices and preconceived notions. Yet this guitar has that same combination of vintage and contemporary appeal – and for much less money.

Bottom line time. The Charvel Pro-Mod DK22 SSS 2PT CM is an exceptionally well-built guitar with fantastic playability and a tonal range that runs from vintage to modern. If ever there was an example of a guitar that should be judged on its tone and feel first, with its looks a distant third, this is definitely it. **G**



CHARVEL PRO-MOD DK22 SSS 2PT CM

PRICE: £949

ORIGIN: Mexico

TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric guitar

BODY: Alder

NECK: 2-piece caramelised maple with hand-rubbed urethane finish, graphite reinforcement and Luminlay side dots, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq XL/42.86mm

FINGERBOARD: Caramelised maple with rolled edges and small dot inlays, 305-406mm (12-16") radius

FRETS: 22, jumbo

HARDWARE: Chrome recessed Gotoh Custom 510 six-saddle floating bridge with screw-in arm, Charvel die-cast locking tuners

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53mm

ELECTRICS: Seymour Duncan SHR-1B Custom Hot Rails humbucker (bridge), SSL-6 Flat Strat single coil (middle), SSL-6 RWRP Flat Strap single coil (neck), master volume, No-Load master tone, five-way pickup selector lever switch

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.4/7.5

OPTIONS: Hard case (£108); padded gigbag (£43)

RANGE OPTIONS: The Floyd Rose-equipped Pro Mod DK24 HH FR twin humbucker with Floyd Rose vibrato and alder or okoume body starts at £899; a hardtail version is available at the same price

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Pharaoh's Gold (as reviewed), Gloss Black, Electric Blue

Fender Musical Instruments EMEA

01342 331700

www.charvel.com



9/10

PROS Combining bang-up-to-date performance with classic tones in a beautifully simple package – well played, Charvel

CONS A gigbag would be nice; no lefties

PRO-MOD DK24

**ELEVATE YOUR
PERFORMANCE**

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FIRST PLAY



**VICTORY V4
'THE DUCHESS' HEAD**
£699

WHAT IS IT? Compact pedalboard-sized head with a unique four-valve preamp, onboard digital reverb and a Class D power amp

Pint-Size Powerhouse

Victory's low-gain, high-powered compact head takes some beating. Time to downsize?

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Neil Godwin

Victory Amplification's onward march toward domination of the world boutique amp market had another boost at this year's NAMM Show, with the arrival of a rather tasty valve-driven head that's small enough to live on most pedalboards. Launched from the same design springboard as Victory's V4 pedal preamps, 'The Duchess' amp is just a little larger but contains a Class D power stage that can deliver a whopping 180 watts into a four-ohm load. As if that wasn't enough, there's also a smooth digital reverb and a tremolo effect.

Another reason for the V4 Duchess's slightly increased dimensions is that the mains power supply is built in, so there are no wall warts to pack in your gigbag, just a regular kettle lead. As you'd expect from Victory, the build quality is first class, with a tough powder-coated steel chassis and mini chickenhead knobs protected by a raised steel kick bar. Cooling is assisted by a 60mm fan on the left-hand side of the





The Duchess
V4 Guitar Amp

The Duchess
V4 Guitar Amp



1

1. The V4 Duchess features distinctive 'pen and ink' style graphics on a tough powder-coated steel chassis. As well as looking very classy, it's as hard as nails

2. The single speaker outlet can deliver up to 180 watts into a four-ohm load. That's serious power that can easily dominate a stage, with practically infinite headroom. Full-output protection means if you just want to use the balanced line out for recording, you don't need to have a speaker plugged in

chassis that is permanently on and lots of perforations on the right-hand side. The fan is there mainly to reduce the chassis surface temperature rather than protect the electronics, and Victory has tweaked voltages and speeds to arrive at a workable compromise between cooling and noise; however, there's no 'off' switch.

Inside the chassis, the layout is similar to the V4 pedal preamps but busier, with no less than nine circuit boards of varying

sizes and a fair amount of carefully routed wiring. The valves sit horizontally on their own board in ceramic sockets. The Duchess uses the same valve complement as the other V4 models, with an EC900 triode in the V1 position followed by three CV4014s. These look a little like regular 12AX7s at first glance but aren't. The CV4014 is a military version of the EF91 pentode. These valves were made by Mullard in the early 1980s to NATO specifications and represent the last and best of the British valve manufacturing industry. They were liberated from storage in a former cold war nuclear bunker and boast a minimum lifespan of 6,000 hours, which makes it possible for Victory to offer an impressively unique two-year warranty on them.

The Duchess's single-channel preamp is easy to navigate, with controls for Volume, Master Volume, Bass, Mid and Treble. There's a level control for the built-in digital reverb, and Speed and Depth controls for the Duchess's tremolo effect, which

Its big temptation is the unique preamp design, powered by four of the best valves ever made in the UK



2



is activated by an onboard switch or a remote single-button latching footswitch. A smart violet LED positioned above the footswitch informs you the tremolo is on. On the rear panel, there's a single input jack, a remote footswitch jack, a pair of send/return sockets for The Duchess's series effects loop, a balanced line out, and a single loudspeaker outlet. Another useful extra is a standard nine-volt 500mA outlet, which can power other effects.

Overall, the V4 Duchess is typical Victory – built for the rough and tumble of professional touring, either in pedalboards or on top of speaker cabinets. While tipping a pint of beer over it would not be recommended, it should stand up to any amount of rough treatment.

Sounds

It might look pint-sized, but this is really all about massive valve-sweetened clean sounds. There's some natural overdrive from the all-valve preamp, which sounds fabulous for contemporary Robben Ford-inspired clean soloing tones, but things really start to happen when paired with your favourite overdrive pedal. We tried combining The Duchess with a couple of Tube Screamer and Centaur replicas, as well as a Zoom MultiStomp, which packs a selection of digital overdrive and distortion pedal models. All of these can be run off



The Duchess's built-in DC outlet with current to spare, though some multi-effects can be hungrier and may still need their own power source.

We teamed the Victory with a 2x12 open-backed cabinet fitted with Celestion Vintage 30 speakers, making a total eight-ohm load into which the V4 Duchess delivers a solid 90 watts. Even at roughly half of its 180 watts maximum output, The Duchess offers exceptional clarity and headroom and is almost brutally loud, easily capable of overpowering most drummers in an unmic'd gig environment. The all-valve preamp works to sweeten the tone and enhance any drive pedal's best features, while acting as a truly stupendous clean channel.

3. The V4 Duchess has a straightforward layout that's easy to drive, with Speed and Depth controls for its foot-switchable built-in tremolo effect, and a Reverb level control

4. The series effects loop is the perfect place to connect delays and modulation effects



Inside the V4 Duchess is an always-on fan to stop the chassis surface going above comfortably warm. The speed has been tweaked to reduce noise to sensibly low levels without compromising performance

The Duchess's onboard effects are superb, too. The digital reverb sits on the border between warm and bright, while the tremolo adds plenty of vintage atmosphere, giving The Duchess a seductive contemporary Twin Reverb-inspired vibe. There's more than enough range on the Speed and Depth controls to cover any need, from punky staccato warbling to deep pulses that conjure up evocative 50s vibes. The balanced line out is clean and powerful, too, although there's no speaker emulation. Victory argues, quite logically, that there are now so many standalone emulators, it makes sense to leave users to find their own ideal solution if they need one.

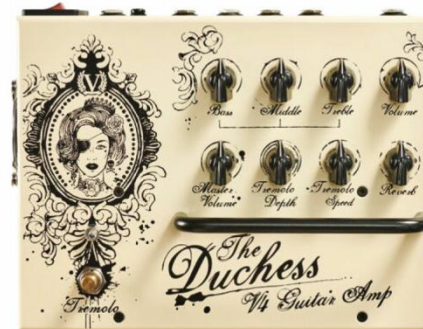
Verdict

Compact is as cool as ever, and Victory does compact better than most other manufacturers. There may be some solid-state heads that offer more functionality perhaps, but the V4 Duchess's big temptation is its unique preamp design, powered by four of the best valves ever made in the UK. If you team The Duchess with Victory's V112-Neo cabinet, which houses a single four-ohm Celestion

The Duchess offers exceptional clarity and is almost brutally loud, easily capable of overpowering most drummers

Copperback capable of handling 250 watts, you've got a supremely portable rig capable of producing earth-shattering volume, while the head on its own will fit into any overhead luggage carry bag.

Aimed at professional players and serious amateurs looking for a lightweight solution that doesn't compromise on tone or quality, it's hard to believe that The Duchess packs as much power as two Twin Reverbs into a box the size and weight of a large paperback. Quality at this level doesn't come cheap and we think that, overall, the V4 Duchess is excellent value for money. It's an inspired design combined with artistic flair and a deep appreciation of what makes for great guitar tone, or as Victory's founder and designer Martin Kidd says, "it's quite the little box". **G**



VICTORY V4 'THE DUCHESS' HEAD

PRICE: £699

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Valve preamp, Class D power amp

OUTPUT: 180W RMS into 4 ohms, 90W into 8 ohms, 45W into 16 ohms

VALVES: 1x EC900, 3x CV4014 (EF91)

DIMENSIONS: 105 (h) x 224 (w) x 170mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.6/3.5

CABINET: Pressed steel

CHANNELS: 1

CONTROLS: Volume, Bass, Mid, Treble, Master Volume, Reverb, Tremolo Speed/Depth

FOOTSWITCH: Single-button footswitch (not supplied) toggles tremolo

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Foot-switchable tremolo effect, series effects loop, digital reverb, balanced line out, DC power outlet

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: The matching speaker cab is the V112 Neo Cabinet, with a single 4-ohm Celestion Neo 250 Copperback speaker (£499)

info@victoryamps.co.uk

www.victoryamps.com



10/10

PROS Huge power and clarity with real valve warmth in a pedal-sized package; brilliant for pedalboards or lightweight rig-building; versatile

CONS It would be nice to have an 'off' switch for the fan for home recording with real microphones; a carry bag would be a useful extra



ERNE
BALL

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REGULAR
SLINKY
CUSTOM GAUGE
MADE IN USA

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BURBANK
SLINKY
CUSTOM GAUGE
MADE IN USA

ERNE
BALL
ULTRA
SLINKY
CUSTOM GAUGE
MADE IN USA

FIRST PLAY



**FENDER AMERICAN
ORIGINAL '70S
TELECASTER CUSTOM**
£1,789

WHAT IS IT? The first Telecaster to feature the proper-recipe Wide Range humbucker for nearly 40 years

The Lone Ranger

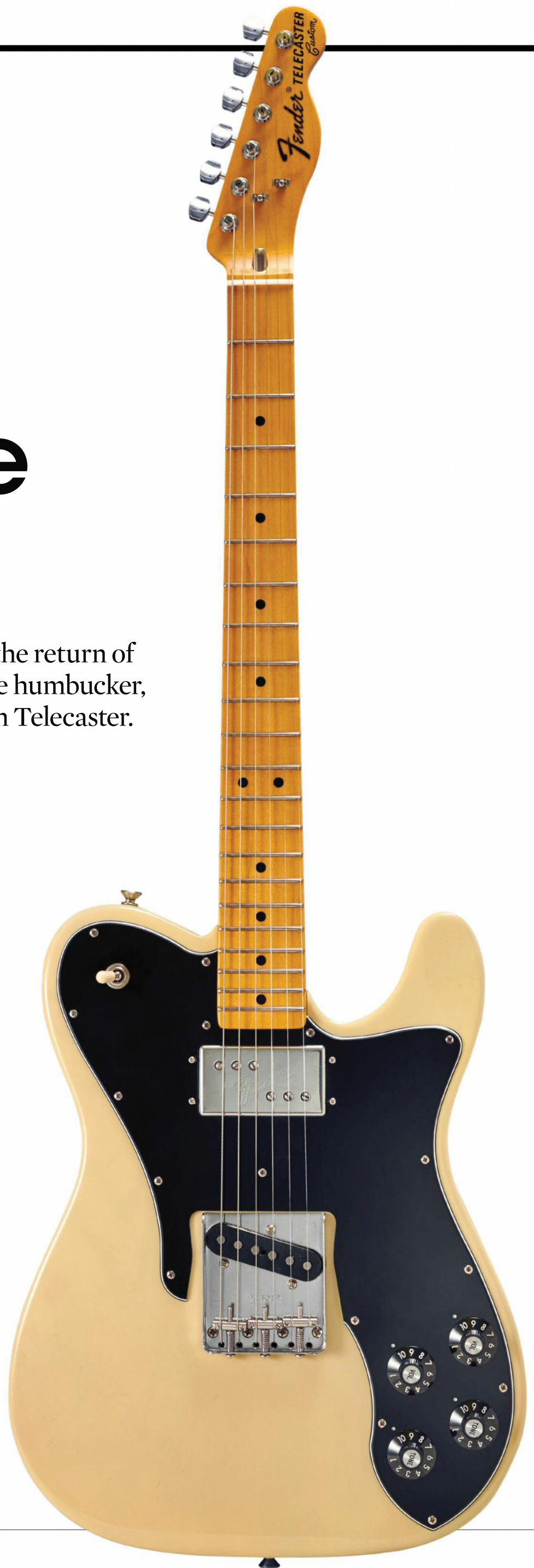
Earlier this year Fender announced the return of the original-style Cunife Wide Range humbucker, which now graces a single production Telecaster. We travel back to the 70s...

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Neil Godwin

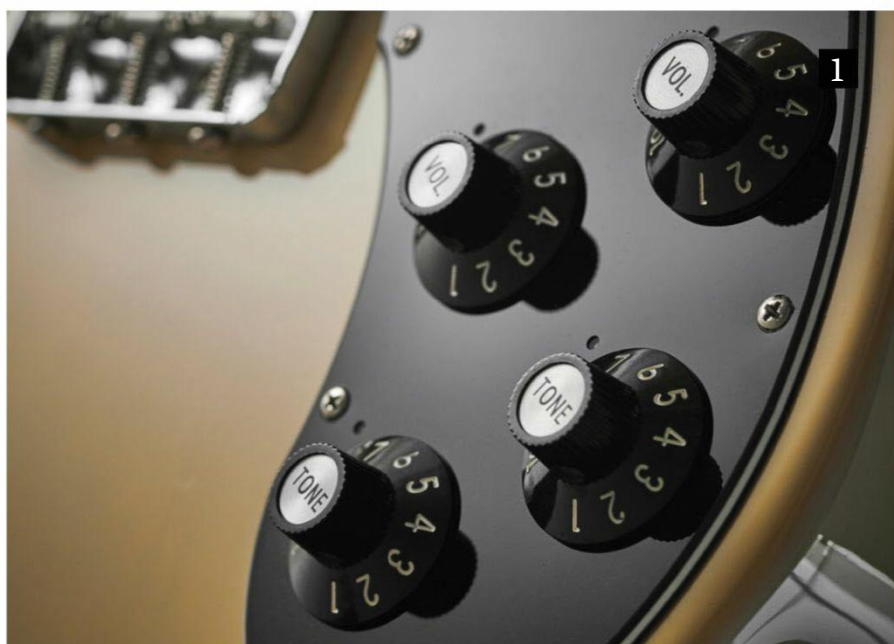
While it was an astonishing decade for music, the 1970s was a bit of a low point for the electric guitar, certainly from the cornerstones of the industry, Fender and Gibson. Fender's CBS era is especially reviled, with accountant-led manufacturing leading to poor quality. But 50 years on, many of the designs from that period are viewed in a different light and numerous (once derided) models have long since found their way back into both fashion and Fender's catalogue.

A great example from that era is the humbucking-loaded Telecaster trio of the early 70s: the Thinline, Custom and Deluxe, a clear and obvious attempt to gain some market from Gibson. Various versions of these models have regularly been – and still are – available, constantly fuelled by new generations of players.

But a big problem has been that original Seth Lover-designed Wide Range Fender humbucker. It used threaded Cunife magnets, a material that became impossible to source by the end of the 70s. And while many pickup makers, Fender included,







1. This new version retains the original 70s-era circuit with 1meg-ohm pots and, of course, its more Gibson-style control layout with individual volume and tone controls for each pickup and a shoulder-placed three-way toggle pickup selector

2. Combining the Wide Range with the classic Tele bridge single coil was an inspired move. Here, the bridge features a slightly hotter 60s wind with a DCR of 7.41k measured at output

have made repros, they've had to use a different recipe. For 2020, however, after considerable research and investment, Fender has brought the material back and this new '70s Telecaster Custom (along with a smattering of Custom Shop models) is the first Fender USA production guitar for nearly 40 years to use a Wide Range humbucker to original specification.

You'll know the most vintage-aimed American Original guitars are the closest you're going to get before you move up to the Custom Shop, but this Tele is not a slavish reissue. Guitars like this were known for their overweight ash bodies with a thick plastic poly coating that was also used on the necks and maple fingerboards. The list of 'horrors' from this period also includes three-bolt neck joints, a Tilt neck, that bullet truss rod adjustor... even the shape was wrong. In fact, there were plenty of good ideas let down by bad practice.

"Cunife definitely has its own set of rules and it's a really stern taskmaster... The fidelity is lovely, but there's no low-end" **Tim Shaw**

"That's precisely the point," Fender's Tim Shaw tells us. "It wasn't that the ideas were bad, it was that the execution was sloppy because of everything else that was going on at the time. That's why the new Acoustasonic models have that Micro-Tilt – because I never wanted anyone to touch the saddle."

This new version of the now much-loved Telecaster Custom, then, aims to correct those issues. That thick, gloopy poly finish is replaced with a clean, crisp nitro – and it's far from overweight. We were surprised, however, to see an alder body on the spec sheet instead of the expected ash, but this is something we might have to get used to.

"Our issue with ash right now is twofold," Tim explains. "One is that the emerald ash borer [beetle] has been working its way south in America and as it does it's pretty much killing all the usable ash. Most of the ash is harvested in Mississippi, and in the Deep South we had huge flooding the year before last down there that kept a lot of this stuff underwater and they couldn't get it. So our ash stock went from, 'Oh, we've got plenty,' to 'Oh, we don't have much at the correct weight specification,' and a lot of the stuff we can get is *really* heavy."

3. Don't let features such as the bullet truss rod adjustor put you off – this is a very easy-to-adjust Telecaster. Those two string trees ensure a good back angle behind the nut for the top four strings

4. After considerable research and investment, the proper Wide Range with its Cunife magnets is finally back. Its high 9.97k DCR reflects the extra coil winding necessary to add bass to the sound, hence the enlarged size of the design. Look out for a twin-humbucking Tele Deluxe later this year



In its American Original guise, the new Custom appears far from a long-lost relic. In fact, this piece feels more like it's come from the modern-day Custom Shop than the 70s. But it wears its 70s chic rather well, particularly in this muted cream Vintage Blonde finish, which is just marginally translucent over the alder body. Hardware details remain pretty much period accurate with those (again, once derided) 'F' logo tuners and their slot head posts, which are perfectly functional; the easy-to-adjust bullet truss rod adjuster is likewise fit for purpose.

Always less popular is the three-bolt neck join that, incidentally, actually uses a bolt in the central lower position below the usual machine screw. But with a correctly cut and level neck pocket as here, it's rock-solid. Plus, thanks to the Micro-Tilt, you can adjust the pitch without needing a shim – a feature we see on the current American Professional range, for example, albeit with four screws, and on the far-from-vintage Acoustasonic Tele and Strat, as Tim mentioned earlier.

Of course, while many humbucking Teles use the more standard Tele volume, tone and three-way lever setup, even

though we have a single coil at the bridge, here we have dual volume and tones all mounted on the large scratchplate with its 15 screws. And then there's the new Wide Range humbucker at the neck, very firmly mounted with four screws but with a much larger footprint and wider aperture than a standard Gibson-style humbucker. For example, the Wide Range measures approximately 79 by 45mm compared with the 70 by 38mm of a regular covered Gibson-style 'bucker.

Under The Hood

As we've reported before, it's far from easy to access the electronics on guitars such as the Tele Deluxe and this Custom. To remove the scratchplate there are 15 screws, and to service, replace or even take a look at the bridge pickup you need to remove the entire bridge assembly. As Tim Shaw discusses later on in this feature, things are pretty much vintage accurate with unusual 1meg-ohm volume pots and 250k tone pots – all are CTS. Tone caps are .022 microfarads, wired modern-style. There's no ID on the Wide Range pickup at all, although you can clearly see those threaded Cunife magnetic polepieces.

Feel & Sounds

If Fenders from the 70s felt like this, their reputation might not be so sullied. It's a touch over average in weight but certainly doesn't approach the boat-anchor bulk of many from that decade. Importantly, the neck isn't covered in an over-thick poly finish. Yes, the finish sits over the frets before they're levelled and dressed, so they feel marginally wider than the same wire on a rosewood 'board, but there's enough height for smooth bends, and this is a neck that does feel very smooth overall. It has a slightly 'sticky' feel after some hours of playing, though not in a soft fashion. Despite the spec sheet telling us the guitar ships with 0.010-gauge strings, these are nines and while it gives the guitar a slightly lighter feel than any of our references, it does add to the slinky playability. Setup and intonation are really good – well, as good as the three-steel-saddle bridge allows.

The medium C neck profile is exactly that: fairly modern standard in lower positions, 21.5mm deep at the 1st fret, but not filling out quite as much as the American Pro's neck at 22.6mm by the 12th fret. Controversially for some, we have a 241mm (9.5-inch) radius to the 'board, not

High Life

Fender's Tim Shaw discusses the Wide Range pickup and its unique Cunife magnets in detail

The Wide Range has a reputation as being a 'hot' humbucker because of its DC resistance, not its sound. Why?

"Basically, an Alnico magnet – irrespective of the grade – is about half iron. Cunife is 60 per cent copper, 20 per nickel and 20 per cent iron. There's not enough inductance, so unless you have a lot of wire, or a lot of *something*, there's no low-end to them. I mean, the fidelity is lovely and there's really quite an interesting tone to them, but I have since tried to make a variety of pickups with these magnets, some that Seth – probably – never tried, and I felt it exactly. Cunife definitely has its own set of rules and it's a really stern taskmaster in that sense. Left to its own devices, the magnet has a lot of fidelity but no low-end at all."

When we spoke earlier this year at the NAMM Show, you said that the Wide Range is "internally the most manufacturable pickup pre the modern age". Can you expand on that?

"So, with this pickup you've got these two nylon bobbins with solder terminals on them, so it's even faster to make than eyelets. It's got a steel underplate, it's got a cover and a backplate with four screws holding it in place and 12 magnets. It's a lot simpler and more manufacturable than Seth Lover's Gibson humbucking design. You can't put solder terminals into butyrate – like Gibson used [for the bobbins] – because it melts too fast. It's not a potted pickup, although we wax the coils but not the cover. I'm not sure if I said earlier, but we found the original tool, so we're actually running the bobbins from that."

So, this new pickup is exactly the same as those from the 70s?

"As close as could be rationally made, yes. Which is to say those original pickups were probably not made at the factory in Fullerton, more likely a side company that they used. George Blanda, before he retired, and myself had long talks about these pickups, but unlike almost every other metal working tool we have, we never had the tools for these pickups, so we had to reverse-engineer the tooling from the original parts of the pickups. The only difference – and only guys who assemble pickups would know this – is the original height screws were #4-40 and the new ones are #3-48, because that's what everyone now uses. But apart from that it's pretty much as close as we could get. We did have a lot of the original drawings and a tremendous amount – although not all – of the data. And whatever you think of CBS they did document, so we have a lot, but not all, of the documentation."

You had to come up with a bridge single coil that matched up with the Wide Range, didn't you?

"Again, this is probably another cost-saving thing at CBS, but a lot of these pickups from this time are relatively under-wound. They're flat polepieces, too, which means you don't have to keep up as big an inventory if all the polepieces are the same length. If you play a 'Micawber'-style Tele, the humbucker just crushes the bridge pickup. So I had the new Wide Range and put it with a stock pickup and thought, 'Let's talk about this a bit!' The bridge pickup ended up being more of a 60s



Tim Shaw and his team used original CBS data and drawings to make the first authentic Cunife-powered Wide Range neck pickup in 40 years

wind [with staggered magnets] and is slightly to the hotter end of the 60s variance. But it plays nicer with that neck pickup."

You've retained the original circuit here with 1meg pots. Why?

"Well, I'm copying the original sonic signature as much as anything. You see, at that time Fender had 250k and 1meg-ohm pots: the Jazzmaster and Jaguars used 1meg, then everything else, the P-Bass, Teles, Strats, Jazz basses, used 250k. Seth came from Gibson where everything was 500k. If you look at the inductance of the pickup – which, of course, Seth would have done, as he was an engineer – it's nominally five henrys. This is a little higher than an original Gibson PAF, which would be about four henrys. But, like I said, that comes from the extra wire not the magnet. Seth's instincts would have been 500k, but they didn't have them. 250k would have sounded like hell and backed the high-end way off, so he had no choice but to go 1meg.

"I believe the Custom Shop are using 500k with these pickups because Mike [Lewis] doesn't have to be a slave to anything. I prefer the taper of 500k pots to 1megs because taper change is always a percentage of resistance, so there's a lot more variation in a 1meg. Late-60s Teles, of course, were 1meg as well, and that's like the classic fingernails-on-a-chalkboard high-end. So, again, at the time, using 1megs would have been perfectly normal."

While Keith Richards helped raise the profile of the original model, the 70s humbucker-loaded Tele Customs never found great success and were discontinued in 1981



PHOTO BY RICK DIAMOND/GETTY IMAGES



the original 184mm (7.25 inches), but in combination with the neck shape and the smooth, slinky feel of the fingerboard face and frets, it works extremely well.

For many, a Telecaster is simply about its bridge pickup, and this supplies the cut with a little extra heat. It's got that steely bite in spades and with a little added compression it has you practising your country licks for days – a different sound from the rawer and beefier clout of a typical early 50s ride. Switching to the neck humbucker, surprisingly perhaps, it doesn't overpower the bridge as its 'hot' DCR might suggest, yet it fills in the lows especially and smoothens the midrange while retaining the snap of the guitar itself. Compared to our '69's single coil, it's a sort of halfway house between that and a PAF-style Les Paul, for example.

But it's the pickup mix where the money lies. The typical single-coil mix's funky sparkle sounds enhanced. There's more depth but still plenty of cut and, of course, you can tame the bridge's high-end simply by rolling off its own tone. The volumes provide less subtlety than you might think. A slight roll-off of either in the mix position quickly reverts to the solo pickup sound – but sit the Custom in a band mix, not least one with a little Stones-y swagger, and the classic bite of a Tele is simply

If Fenders from the 70s felt like this, their reputation might not be so sullied... This piece feels more like it's come from the Custom Shop

supported with a little more meat and depth, while never losing that snap and bite. It's a different experience from the current American Professional Tele Deluxe, which moves closer to a thicker Les Paul voice. This Wide Range, as we said, sounds a little lower powered but with that additional clarity. It's far from a one-trick pony, though: from beautifully clear cleans to notable definition with some overdrive and dense effects, it has huge potential on this platform.

Verdict

While 2020 is all about the 70th anniversary of the original Fender Broadcaster, the return of this humbucker is certainly worth getting the bunting out for. At this American Original level, it's also celebration of classic 70s style and an excellent chance to reevaluate some Fender design details that were buried in the mire of the CBS era. A faultless guitar with a wide-ranging voice that feels far from a reissue and very much now. **G**



FENDER AMERICAN ORIGINAL '70S TELECASTER CUSTOM

PRICE: £1,789 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: Ash

NECK: Maple, 'Medium C' profile, bolt-on w/ Micro-Tilt

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT: Bone

FINGERBOARD: Maple, black dot markers, 241mm (9.5") radius

FRETS: 21, vintage tall

HARDWARE: Vintage-style strings-through-body Tele bridge with plain steel rod saddles, Vintage 'F'-stamped tuners – nickel/chrome plated

ELECTRICS: Fender Vintage-Style '70s single coil Tele (bridge), Tim Shaw Authentic Cunife Wide Range humbucker (neck), 3-position toggle pickup selector switch, individual pickup volume and tone controls

OPTIONS: Rosewood fingerboard (3-Color Sunburst only)

RANGE OPTIONS: Other Teles in the American Original range: '50s Tele (£1,699); '60s bound Tele with rosewood 'board (£1,749); '60s Telecaster Thinline (£1,879)

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, '50s Tele Butterscotch Blonde only (£1,699)

FINISHES: Vintage Blonde (as reviewed), Mocha, 3-Color Sunburst – gloss nitrocellulose

Fender Musical Instruments EMEA
01342 331700
www.fender.com



PROS Excellent American Original build; proper Wide Range humbucker with balanced bridge single coil; a proper version of a badly executed original design

CONS While it's great to hear how it would have sounded back in the day, we'd probably opt for 500k pots

The Lineup

Gas Supply

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

PRS SE P20 & SE P20E £399 & £499

CONTACT **PRS Guitars Europe** PHONE **01223 874 301** WEB **www.prsguitarseurope.com**



FINGERBOARD

There are a few luxury appointments on these guitars, not least the ebony fingerboard and iconic PRS 'bird' inlays

ELECTRICS

It's not just a clever name. The SE P20E comes loaded with a Fishman pickup and matching active GT1 preamp

BODY

The spec is high with a solid mahogany top and ebony bridge. The back and sides are formed from sheets of laminate mahogany



Q&A

What am I looking at here?

So, PRS stands for 'Paul Reed Smith' – we're sure everyone gets that bit – and SE is the affordable Asian-sourced line of Paul Reed Smith Guitars. You'll catch that imprint on a slew of well-made yet affordable editions of the brand's iconic Custom 22 and 24 guitars, numerous artist signature models, not to mention a bunch of acoustics. The P in P20 and P20E designates that these are parlour guitars.

What's the difference between the two models?

The extra E stands for Electric or maybe Electro... Whatever, you get the idea. The P20E is loaded with a Fishman pickup and an active GT1 preamp. The volume and tone controls are hidden just inside the soundhole for a cleaner look. That said, aside from that electrical upgrade on the P20E, these two models are reading from the same spec sheet.

Enlighten me...

The big story here is the solid mahogany top, stabilised by PRS' Hybrid 'X'/Classical bracing. This smart format gives the top enough flexibility to get the maximum tone and volume from that little body without compromising the top's strength. We enjoyed this fine balance in other PRS SE acoustics we've tried, in particular the fuller-figured PRS SE TE50EVS and SE AE60ENA. The remainder of the body is made from laminated mahogany. A retro aesthetic is established by the herringbone/crème body binding and soundhole rosette, and an ebony bridge and bone saddle promise good tone and sustain.

What's the feel like?

The mahogany neck joins the body at the 14th fret and features PRS's much-loved Wide Fat profile. If that suggests a baseball fat vibe, you're way off. Most players will find this shape easy to get along with. The

bonus for existing Wide Fat PRS electric owners is that the transition to the P20 and P20E should be stress-free. Other neck-centric treats include the ebony fingerboard and its bird inlays and a complement of 20 medium frets. You should also know that these guitars come with a 628mm (24.72-inch) scale length. This statistic ensures a comfortable string tension that allows you to go a touch heavier on the string gauge than you perhaps otherwise would. In fact, PRS ships the P20 and P20E with 0.012 to 0.053 gauge strings.

Is that it?

There are a few other things to mention. The classic PRS shape headstock with Mr Reed Smith's signature is framed by a set of vintage-style tuners with pretty crème butterbean buttons. You also get a top nut made from the same bone as the bridge saddle. There's a padded gigbag included in the price and your finish options

NECK

PRS has shipped its new SE Parlor models with the popular Wide Fat neck profile found on its electric guitars



are Black Top with crème pickguard, and Charcoal and Vintage Mahogany with a black plate. As the name suggests, the Black Top model features regular mahogany coloured back and sides. Charcoal is an all-over satin black finish.

Why would I want a parlour guitar over other shapes?

There are a bunch of possibilities and portability is one; these guitars are simply easy to lug around. Say you want a travel guitar but also need an instrument with good tone, you should consider a parlour model. The low string tension makes these things a joy to play, so there's another reason to get more acquainted. While their volume isn't a match for beefier brethren like the Dreadnought or Super Jumbo, a parlour's focused voice and lively tonal response make them perfect recording instruments. Small wonder fingerpickers love these little guys so much.

JARGON CRUNCHING

Parlour guitars: Back in the day (we're talking late 19th century here), parlour guitars were almost exclusively owned and played by women. That partly explains the smaller body and lighter string tension. The other reason these guitars were so diminutive was volume. This wasn't live at Budokan. When one was entertaining convivial company in one's own parlour, shredding one's way through *Greensleeves* or some such, volume was of little concern. Therefore there was no need for a larger model.

ALSO OUT NOW...

THE WOLFMEISTER GIG-SHELLS £410 TO £575

WWW.THEWOLFMEISTER.COM



"To carry a vintage/high-end guitar around in a black plastic bag (ie, pretty much any gigbag) doesn't feel right," says Wolfgang Ritter of his high-end brand of guitar protection. "We were

looking to create something as cool as an old tweed case that was easier to handle and offered excellent protection."

The result is Gig-Shells. Designed in Australia, Gig-Shells are not your typical hard case or soft gigbag. According to Ritter, The Wolfmeister's designs "provide better protection than most other products due to the patent pending protection system. As the name suggests, the system encloses the instrument between its layers. These layers create a resiliently flexible shell, offering sufficient protection against top impact forces and create a spring-like effect to protect against side impact."

Gig-Shell models include the Leo for Fender-style guitars, the Lester for Les Pauls and the like, and the Carol for electric basses.

www.thewolfmeister.com

VINTAGE V6H ICON ULTRA GLOSS DISTRESSED £399

WWW.JHS.CO.UK



As mentioned a few issues ago, Vintage has taken delivery of its latest range of visibly distressed guitars. Included in the new line-up is the Les Paul Junior-style Icon V120 with distressed Black-Over-Cherry and Gun Hill Blue-Over-Sunburst

finishes (£329) and V62 Tele 'tribute' with a Black gig-beaten look (£389). Interestingly, the new V6H HSS format model (pictured here) features a distressed finish that has been sprayed over to give it a smooth glossy appearance. Laguna Blue and Sunburst are your colour options.

www.jhs.co.uk

The Lineup

What's Goin' On

All the best guitar events happening online, in one place

12 Bars In A Video

What started as a moment of lockdown boredom on 5 May has since become a fascinating insight into improvisational approaches. "I want to hear how differently my friends take one chorus in A," Josh Smith posted on Instagram alongside a video performance, which tagged a number of friends in a list that looks like a who's who of contemporary guitarists. "Give me 12 bars in A, guitar straight into amp," were his conditions. And the community delivered.

Highlights include Jason Isbell, Mark Lettieri (using Smith's Vemuram Myriad signature fuzz), Greg Koch, Matt Schofield with his '61 Strat into a Two-Rock, Andy Wood (who even made a lesson teaching his on YouTube), Seth Rosenbloom, Joey Landreth (who did two), and, of course, Smith himself. Add your own to the Instagram collection by using #12bars as your hashtag.

www.instagram.com/joshsmithguitarzan



Josh Smith is bringing players together with 12 bars, one hashtag and plenty of community spirit

Ben Gibbard Live From Home Video

The Death Cab For Cutie frontman was one of the first to embrace live streamed acoustic performances from his home during lockdown to raise money for charity – and the 'one man and guitar' format suits him. He plays a weekly show every Friday featuring songs from his band and other act The Postal Service, with some great covers, too.

www.youtube.com/deathcabforcutie

Guns N' Roses Not In This Lifetime Tour 'Selects' Video

If you missed Guns N' Roses' reunion tour with Slash and Duff or had tickets for their cancelled UK dates, fear not as the band are streaming pro-shot 'Selects'. These highlights might not be the full set, but you still get to see Slash in the form of his life.

www.gunsnroses.com

Eric Johnson Mini Lessons Video

Every Wednesday Eric Johnson has been posting mini guitar lessons to his Instagram page, and all he asks in return is that players donate whatever they can to their local food bank. A great idea and a win-win situation. As any fan would expect, Johnson's insights are truly worth your time and money.

www.instagram.com/officialericjohnson

Pink Floyd Evolving Playlist Video & audio

Following the band's YouTube gig film festival, *Syd, Roger, Richard, Nick and David – An Evolving Pink Floyd Playlist* (found on both Spotify and YouTube) features "rare versions of classic tracks". These include an alternative version of *Have A Cigar*, a demo of *Run Like Hell* and an '72 mix of *Money*.

www.youtube.com/officialpinkfloyd

Radiohead At Home With Radiohead Video

The Oxford band are posting classic gigs weekly on YouTube every Thursday at 10pm until lockdown ends or they run out of footage. "Which will be first? No-one knows," they posted on Instagram. Either way we're hoping their landmark *OK Computer*-era Glastonbury 1997 performance will feature.

www.youtube.com/radiohead

Joe Satriani Club Joe Streaming Sessions Video

Joe's lockdown shows are proving unmissable for fans, with themed episodes so far seeing his G3 buddies Steve Vai and John Petrucci reunite as guests, and a Chickenfoot special. Keep an eye out for more surprises from Joe in the coming weeks.

www.youtube.com/joesatriani

Sturgill Simpson Live At The Ryman Auditorium Video

Simpson played a surprise charity livestream at the venue formerly home to the Grand Ole Opry on 5 June, and he brought along some of Nashville's finest bluegrass musicians to rework his back catalogue for this hour-long set. It showcases a musician digging into his roots.

www.youtube.com/sturgillsimpson

The Blues Kitchen Gaz & Liam Podcast

This weekly show covers a wide range of artists and blues history, with hosts Liam and Gaz. Alongside support of up-and-coming talent, expect a playlist of classics and discussion of the biggest events in the blues world. Musician Ciara Haidar has also been covering song requests from listeners while in lockdown.

www.theblueskitchen.podbean.com

The Players

News and happenings from the world of your favourite guitarists



Gabriel Cyr finally strikes out on his own with a mesmerising solo EP

New Explorations

Our 2018 Guitarist Of The Year winner releases debut solo EP

Gabriel Cyr has certainly been busy since he won our Guitarist Of The Year accolade in 2018. “Not long after the competition, I released an album called *Desolation* with my band Universe Effects,” says Gabriel from his home in Montreal. “I also worked hard on my YouTube channel, which has grown a lot in the past few years. In 2019 I played guitar on the first album of my friend, the incredible bass player, Carl Mayotte. The record is called *Fantosme* and it is groovy fusion-jazz.”

That same year, Gabriel was readying solo material when crisis struck. “I have had to deal with a physical problem that gave me chronic pain in both arms,” he reveals. “It is something I’ve had for a few years, but it reached a very bad state in June 2019. I wasn’t able to play for more than 15 minutes without having pain. Happily, I’ve seen a few specialists and I’ve been able to treat my condition with a strict stretching and exercise program. I’m much better now and I finally released my first EP in May 2020.”

And it’s definitely been worth the wait. *Spectrum Exploration I* offers a sublime and versatile mix of Gabriel’s melodic influences with his jazz-fusion schooling that we saw in his GOTY entry in full abundance. “My goal was to make an instrumental-rock record and use simple forms inspired by popular songs – intro/verse/chorus, and so on,” Gabriel explains.

While Gabriel stays busy during lockdown with his YouTube channel, remote session work and teaching via Skype lessons, he’s also got his eye on the next release. “I am currently composing my second EP, *Spectrum Exploration II*, and I would like to release it by the end of 2020. It will incorporate a heavier sound and metal influences, but I want to keep the same melodic songwriting approach.” We can’t wait to hear the results.

Spectrum Exploration I is out now, available to buy via Bandcamp and streaming on major platforms. To find out more visit

www.gabrielcyr guitarist.com

Guitarist was saddened to hear of the passing of American bluesman **Lucky Peterson**, who died on 17 May, aged 55. He had been celebrating his 50th year in music, having begun his career at the age of five when he tracked his first album, *Our Future*, with some of the tracks produced by the legendary Willie Dixon. Over the years he backed Etta James, Little Milton and Otis Rush, in addition to having a prolific solo career touring the US and Europe. His most recent album, *50: Just Warming Up!* was released last year.

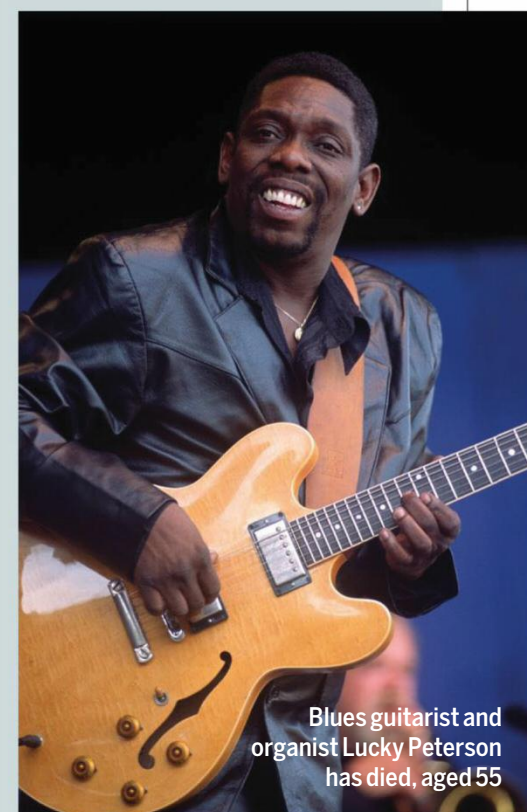
Mark Tremonti has revealed he’s writing a song with the player he once suggested “could be the best guitar player on Earth”. In a recent interview with *Metal Wani*, the Alter Bridge man was asked about upcoming projects and responded: “Right at the moment, I’m looking into writing a song with Eric Gales,” Tremonti said. “He’s one of my favorite guitar players in the world and he’s doing a record that, I believe, Joe Bonamassa is producing. He had asked me, we had talked about doing a song together, so I’m trying to tackle that at the moment.”

Two notable **Prince** and **Kurt Cobain** guitars are up for auction in June. The 1959 Martin D-18E that Cobain used for Nirvana’s 1993 *MTV Unplugged* set in New York is a rare bird in itself (only 302 were made). The Prince guitar is one of his four original Cloud custom designs, credited to O’Hagan Guitar Company. The 1984 ‘Blue Angel’ was used by the musician on the *Purple Rain* tour in 1984 to ‘85. Both go under the hammer as part of Julien’s Auctions’ Music Icons sale, taking place in Beverly Hills on 19 and 20 June.

Live Nation CEO **Michael Rapino** has cast doubts on

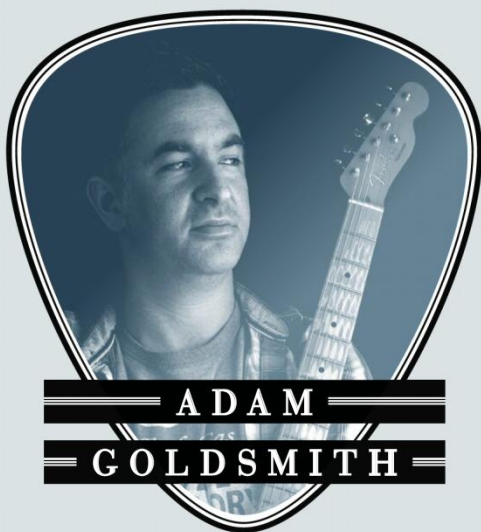
traditional live music concerts returning before 2021. In a quarterly earnings report, he said that Live Nation would look at the potential for drive-in concerts and fan-less gigs in the short-term. He added: “Looking a bit further out, given that 80 per cent of shows are rescheduled rather than cancelled, and as noted, almost all fans are holding onto their tickets, we believe 2021 can return to show volume and fan attendance at levels consistent with what we’ve seen in recent years.”

Brian May has confirmed he had a “small heart attack” recently. The 72-year-old Queen legend needed surgery after a heart scare in May. “I thought I was a very healthy guy,” he said in a video posted to his Instagram page. “But I turned out to have three arteries that were congested and in danger of blocking the supply of blood to my heart.” He was fitted with three stents to open the arteries during his hospital stay. “I walked out with a heart that’s very strong now,” added May, “so I think I’m in good shape for some time to come.”



Blues guitarist and organist Lucky Peterson has died, aged 55

Photo by Education Images/Universal Images Group via Getty Images



SESSION DIARY

Strat's Love

While a Strat is often labelled the archetypal guitar model, it took **Adam Goldsmith** a while to find his perfect match

One thing I've never owned – that many guitarists consider their most essential possession – is a Strat that I've really bonded with. I've always found it easy to bond with Telecasters, and Gibsons, especially 335s, but for some reason the ideal Strat, the archetypal electric guitar, has eluded me so far. I've had several Custom Shop models, all of which have been nice guitars, but none of which I stuck with – despite always having to take one on sessions, because they are *the* sound of electric guitar that people expect to hear and (sometimes more importantly) see when they hire a guitar player.

This week I've been sent some tracks to record for production music company Audio Network, and the charts have been marked up with suggested sounds and guitars. This is not an unusual thing for composers to do, and nine times out of 10 the references, in terms of electric guitar, are either 'Strat' or 'Les Paul'. This gives me a base to work from in terms of the general type of sound the composer has in mind. I won't always exactly follow the suggested instrumentation, but I will follow the general spirit of the instruction. For example, I'll often use one of my PRS guitars, either a DGT or a Custom 24 I've had retrofitted with OX4 pickups (which I love) instead of a real Les Paul, largely because the tuning (especially on the G string) and reliability of PRS is better than that of most Les Pauls, and this is more important for most projects I work on.

Most of the charts for this project I'm working on are marked 'Strat', so I'm using an interesting guitar that I bought about two years ago on a trip to London's Denmark Street, home of many legendary guitar shops. I'd decided to take the plunge and buy a vintage Strat as I wanted to finally find one I really loved. I'd arranged appointments to try a couple of different guitars. First up was a refinished Fiesta Red 1962 model, which, from memory, was around £10,000. I was a little nervous as I've never spent this amount of money

on a guitar, but I figured: it is my job, it's a tax write-off, etc, etc, and I'll only ever buy one of these guitars. I experienced a mixture of relief and disappointment after playing it for half an hour or so in the shop, however, when, despite the magic – real or imagined – of playing an original '62 Strat, I concluded it didn't sound or feel better than a nice Custom Shop model. I then experienced the same feeling with a couple of later 60s examples a bit further down the street.

The Search Is Over

I was just about to make my way home when I spotted a beaten-up white Strat in the window of Regent Sounds, which had an interesting story behind it on closer inspection. It had been owned by a working musician from north London for most of its life and was a composite of a couple of different guitars. The neck was from a 1964 Strat, with a Brazilian rosewood fretboard, and it looked like the neck and mid pickups were from the same guitar, while the bridge was a 1972

example. As for the body, no-one has been able to agree on its origin for obscure technical reasons I don't fully remember. Best guess seems to be late 60s or early 70s, or possibly not even Fender at all. However, I loved this guitar straight away.

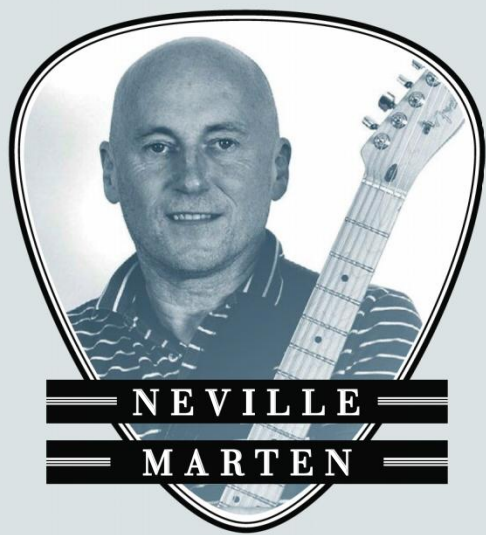
The neck was the real selling point. It feels absolutely amazing and fits my hand perfectly. At around £4,000 this guitar was the same price as a Custom Shop model but had bags of vibe from years of use, which you just can't fake, so I bought it immediately. The only thing I've been not quite so happy with is the weight of the body (it's too heavy for me), so in the absence of an available original 60s body, I commissioned Scott Cameron of SC Relics to provide me with a nice lightweight Fiesta Red body (pictured below), similar in appearance to Michael Landau's guitar, which I love the look of.

It should be arriving this week, so I'll be very interested to see how the addition of this body impacts the tone and general feel of the guitar once it's been fitted, and will report back next month. **G**



Adam and the original guitar, with Nile Rodgers, at Wembley Arena two years ago, and (right) the new body by Scott Cameron of SC Relics





NEVILLE'S ADVOCATE

Listening Posts

This issue **Nev** talks about the '10 most influential albums' social media posts and what he learned...

If, like many of us lately, you've been living your life through the various digital channels available, you'll have noticed the plethora of 'post a pic of this or that, one a day for 10 days, no explanations or descriptions' on Facebook and other social media platforms. Most of us on the magazine have done our 10 albums, and some are currently on their 10 black-and-white photo posts.

When I listed my most musically influential listening, many of my friends were perplexed that my first three choices were by Elvis Presley, Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra. They'd expected guitar stuff. But my first musical influence was my mother, who played classical music and jazz albums on the 'radiogram' when we were kids. Of course it seeped into my subconscious, as it did with my siblings. We all then went off and got into different things – one brother adored Motown and the other prog, while my sister was into blues and soul. Seeing Jamie Dickson and Dave Mead run through their albums was

a total revelation, too – they came out with things I'd never imagined, and some stuff I'd not even heard of.

But this whole exercise got me to thinking. I'd posted about four days' worth of choices before I realised I'd not listened to some of these records in years. And here I was touting them as my favourites. The first thing was to redress that situation. It was strange, though, because when I re-auditioned them I realised I'd completely forgotten some of the Ella and Frank tracks, and was shocked at how corny some of the Elvis ones were. But then I suppose usually it's a few particular songs that stick out in any collection, and it's these that give you the impression that the entire album was amazing. But Elvis totally nails the slow blues, *Reconsider Baby!*

Even with Beatles releases, which generally contained a very high percentage of quality songs (and which I use as my example because their repertoire is ubiquitous), there were always those that I didn't much like. The silly ones such

as *Maxwell's Silver Hammer*, *Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da*, *Yellow Submarine* and *When I'm Sixty-Four* often hit you first because of their sheer catchiness. But they soon palled and the 'weird' offerings like *Tomorrow Never Knows*, *Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds* and *I Want You (She's So Heavy)* wind up being the ones that stand the test of time.

New Favourites

Having reconnected with my own favourites, I figured my next task would be to delve into some of the favourites of my friends. These ranged, as I'm sure you'll know from seeing what your own pals have selected, from the sublime to the ridiculous. Being something of a reticent listener to new music, I decided to go for the albums I'd at least heard of, or that were by artists I may have avoided but people I respect can't get enough of.

I find it hard to believe there are some really famous albums – by really famous bands and singers – I've never listened to from start to finish. For instance, I loved early Led Zeppelin and devoured each release up to a certain point, but then what they were doing began to diverge somewhat from my tastes, which were changing to more melodic music. Naturally I've heard every song now, but I never chose to buy certain albums. Same with David Bowie. I'd say in my list of 100 favourite singles a lot of his music would be in there, but some of the albums after *Hunky Dory* didn't initially float my boat.

That has to be corrected. So I will start with those two legendary names, and then perhaps King Crimson, Yes and Genesis (I've always loved certain tracks by prog bands, but it was never my 'thing'). And if any of this has struck a chord with you, do write and share which artists or albums may have passed you by, or which you have recently 'discovered'.

So, what's up first – is it *Station To Station*, *In Through The Out Door*, or *Going For The One*? See you next month. **G**

NEV'S GAS OF THE MONTH

Is it an amp? Is it an app?



What? Positive Grid Spark amp
Where seen? positivegrid.com
Price? \$299 (including soft bag)
Description? Positive Grid's range of software, hardware and mobile apps will be known to those who regularly record, whether at home or in the studio. This new dedicated desktop guitar amp offers to revolutionise how we practise, learn songs,

compose and record. It's a proper amp (with knobs) but uses a phone app that lets you connect to Spotify and the like, plus download a plethora of songs to which it can teach you the chords. It even includes a loop and slow-down facility. It will also let you play a guitar part and intelligently learn your harmony and rhythm, then create a bass and drum groove to play along with you. Using Positive Grid's BIAS modelling software, the Spark brims with authentic-sounding valve tones and effects. You can even use it as a computer interface, to connect to DAWs such as GarageBand, and so on. We couldn't have imagined this 10 years ago, but it could well be the shape of things to come.



CONFESSIONS OF A LUTHIER

What's In A Wood?

This issue we welcome a new columnist, British luthier **Alex Bishop**, for his monthly musings on guitar building

When it comes to handmade guitars, I love a bit of aesthetic flair, but beyond the fancy details, for me it's all about the wood. And I'm not sure there are many guitarists or luthiers out there who would disagree. It might be the exotic allure of cocobolo, the Englishness of a piece of indigenous walnut, or a slab of reclaimed timber with a story, but what's certain is for today's discriminating guitarist there is certainly plenty of choice.

Fortunately for a one-man-band luthier like me, life in lockdown has been a relatively unchanged affair with the exception of some socially distanced repair drop-offs, alongside the disappearance of teaching and gigging. And so it was a pleasant surprise to pick up a couple of commissions soon after the shutters dropped, triggering a couple of lengthy Zoom chats and telephone conversations on timber selection. So, where does one start?

The two main considerations when choosing wood for your guitar are fairly obvious: aesthetics and tone. With regard to looks, it's really a matter of opinion.

For some people the showy figuring of AAA quilted maple is divine; for others it's garish. The word 'figuring' is generally used to describe this almost three-dimensional effect caused by unique growth patterns in the tree. Sapele, walnut, spruce and many others exhibit their own variations. Just look up guitars made from 'The Tree' (a mahogany with deep tortoiseshell quilting) to see how the world's best luthiers deal with such eye-catching timber.

How do such growth patterns affect the tone? The quick answer is you're unlikely to hear a major difference, rather it's the species of wood used for the back and sides that provide most of the 'flavour'. Maples tend to deliver a bright tone, whereas rosewoods offer the familiar warmth loved by fingerstyle players and folk guitarists.

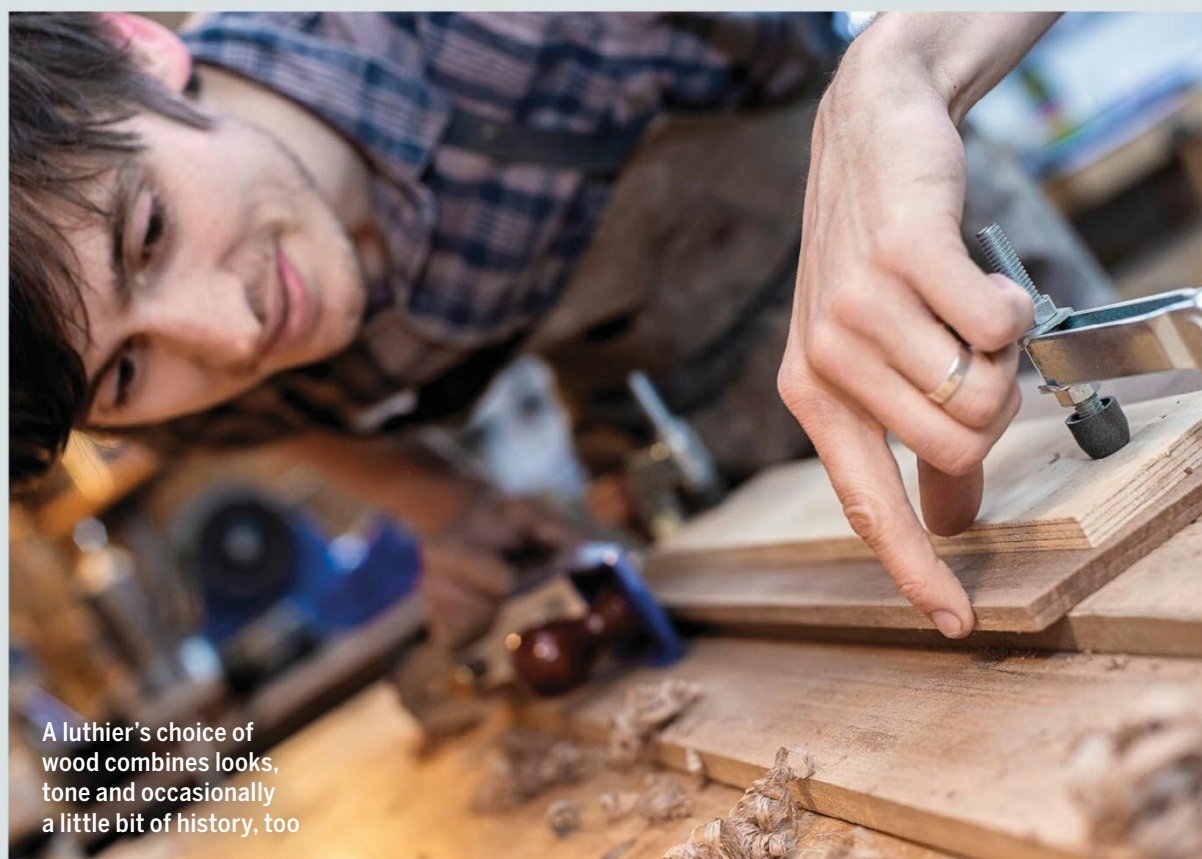
I've found other woods, such as walnut and mahogany sit somewhere between the two. But these words simplify what we actually hear, so in order to make sure I'm speaking the same language as the client, it helps to have a reference guitar to use as a starting point when discussing

tone. Where this is not possible we can use a little history to direct things. One of my recent commissions was for a Gypsy-jazz-style tenor guitar. The customer was looking for something with a traditional sound, permitting a couple of modern appointments including an arm bevel. A European spruce top matched with walnut seemed the obvious choice, as this was the standard for the Selmer factory in the 1930s. I happened to have one last beautiful straight-grained set of English walnut in my wood store, with heart wood running down the middle. A couple of photos on my cameraphone later and the decision was made.

Limits Matter

There are other considerations, too. Certain woods are covered by CITES restrictions, so don't expect to take your brand-new Brazilian rosewood parlour guitar on holiday without the relevant paperwork. The type of timber you choose can also limit the creativity of the design. Inlay work can get lost in the visual noise of highly figured woods, so it doesn't pay to throw in the proverbial 'kitchen sink', even if your budget is a big one.

Instead, it's working within limits that makes for the most enjoyable challenge and a meaningful end result. In May, I was supposed to be exhibiting at the Holy Grail Guitar Show, and although the event was cancelled I still rose to their challenge to build an instrument from reclaimed wood. This all-mahogany Gypsy-jazz guitar is built from an old table, with oak bindings and a fingerboard from an old house beam, avoiding softwood for the soundboard altogether. As a result it's seen me experiment with cedar lattice bracing to strengthen the extra-thin mahogany top. Add to this the fact the instrument has been built under lockdown during a worldwide pandemic and the end result is going to be a guitar with a fascinating story behind it before it has even sung its first note...



A luthier's choice of wood combines looks, tone and occasionally a little bit of history, too

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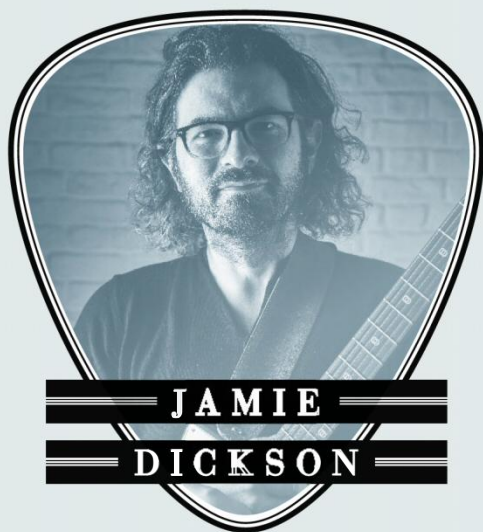


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RAISING THE TONE

Going Nuts

This month, **Jamie** asks high-end Brit luthier Seth Baccus how much a guitar's nut contributes to its tone

This month's column was prompted by a debate I saw unfolding on a Facebook thread this month. Someone had posted about upgrading the nut on their guitar, but, as people will, someone else soon commented that it was nonsense that nut material was a big influence on tone because most notes played on the guitar are fretted – in which case, the nut plays no role in forming the sound of the note.

Now, obviously, not all notes played on the guitar are fretted. I, for one, love to include as many shimmering open strings in my chord voicings as I can – and who could deny the power of Hendrix slamming the open low E string at the end of a huge lick? On the other hand, when soloing or playing barre chords, the nut is mostly left out of the tone equation.

•

“Bone nuts aren’t all created equal. There’s going to be so much variation in terms of the quality of the material”

•

It seems there's justice to both sides of the argument. To get to the kernel of the matter (sorry), I contacted Seth Baccus, a Cornwall-based luthier whose elegant electrics are among the finest being made in this country. Like most luthiers who are serious about their craft, Seth has experimented widely with tone-forming components. I asked him how much he felt the nut really contributes to guitar tone? And what nut materials work best?

“If you're playing a barre chord and you're fretting every string, the nut is redundant. I don't see how you could argue otherwise, really,” Seth says. “But in terms of the sound of chords with open strings, or open strings played during solos, it's very important what the nut is made out of.”

After years of experimenting with a range of nut materials, Cornwall-based guitar maker Seth Baccus favours bone





Seth's Nautilus Classic features a hand-cut bone nut



Seth continues: "Over the years, I've tried various things. I've tried Graph Tech's Tusq; I've tried Earvana compensated nuts; I've tried man-made synthetic materials like Corian and various different kinds of bone. At the end of all that, I've settled on bone as standard, nowadays, because the bone that I buy is really, really high quality. So that's an important thing to take into consideration: bone nuts aren't all created equal. There's going to be so much variation in terms of the quality of the material."

"When I was actively investigating various nut materials for suitability, I used to take a small piece and just drop it onto the workbench from a height of six inches or something. You could hear the resonance of the material when it hit the bench. That'll give you an inkling. You're always looking for a 'ping' rather than a 'thud'."

Seth explains that after testing all the alternatives and choosing bone as his preferred nut material, he further discovered that there are two specific qualities he looks for in bone nuts.

"If I was selecting a bone nut and I had several to choose from, what I'd be looking for is high-density bone with a [tight-grained] porousness, so that you've got a very even and consistent density throughout the material. By comparison, cheaper guitars will often feature a nut made of the kind of Chinese bone that you can bulk-buy and which is very porous and soft and doesn't really sound that good."

But what about the synthetic option?

"Synthetic materials do offer a viable alternative," Seth says, "But some do lack a bit, tone-wise, compared with a really high-

quality piece of bone. I think the Corian is probably the closest synthetic material to bone. It's a really nice material and, again, I think that's because it's so consistent and it's very hard. It's very high-density and in comparison to a piece of bone it's almost indistinguishable. Whereas I think some of the other stuff can be a bit soft."

So is the bone that luthiers use just any old animal bone? And how is it produced?

"Yeah, it's interesting," Seth says. "I was having a conversation with a friend and customer the other day who is in the process of turning vegan. He was asking me if I could veganise his Nautilus and obviously I said, Yes, absolutely, no problem at all! Then we started talking a little bit about it and he was asking the same sort of question, really. My understanding is that it is mostly a by-product from the leather industry and it is just regular bone. So at the most basic level it is that simple. Juha Ruokangas of Ruokangas Guitars uses Finnish moose shin-bone for his guitars, for example. Again, that's because he thinks it is particularly dense."

"The bone that I buy is also treated with some kind of lubricating solution that permeates through the bone entirely. So it kind of yellows up and gives it a nice vintage colour for one, but it also makes it incredibly slippery. And obviously, one of the things that we really want from a nut is [low friction] through the slots there."

Next month, Seth promises to explain how the process of crafting nuts influences playability of an instrument to an even greater degree than the material itself – but for now it's back to the workshop, with a bone to pick for a new guitar... **G**

THREE TOGETHER READY

A trio of hand-built, Brit-built electrics by independent luthiers



Seth Baccus Nautilus Classic £4,299

Hand-crafted electrics don't get much better than Seth's flagship electric, the Nautilus Classic, which is partly inspired by the designs of mentor Andy Manson. With a one-piece Spanish cedar back and beautifully figured maple top, we called it "a true professional's guitar" that combines Gibson-inspired tones with a Fender scale-length in a detail-obsessed build that exudes tone and tactility.



PJD Guitars Carey Elite £2,200

We couldn't get enough of the lightweight, tone-rich performance of the Carey Elite by Brit luthier Leigh Dovey. The thinline design features a two-piece swamp ash body with a maple cap, while the neck is roasted maple capped with chocolate-dark rosewood, and a Fender-like 25.5-inch scale. Bare Knuckle Old Guard pups sounded great, too.



Gray Guitars Skipper from £3,100

Offsets have never been more popular and in the Skipper Gray Guitars has created a Jazzmaster-style electric with a beautiful korina body (in the example we saw) that irons out some of the kinks of the original Fender design through use of components such as a Mastery bridge and Radioshop ID '62 pickups.

Substitute

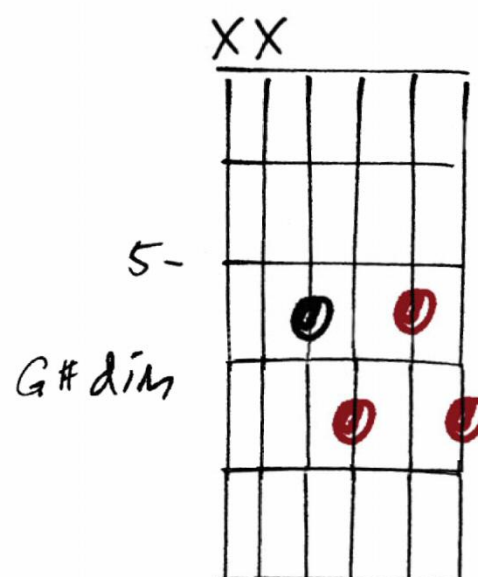
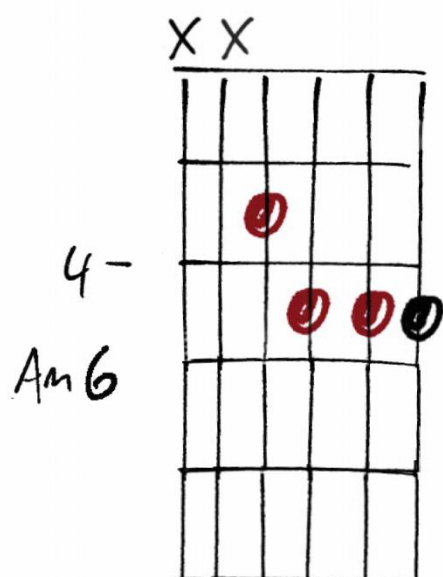
This Issue: Summer Is Coming

There's a definite jazzy, summery feel to the chords this issue – you'll get the hint when you play through these shapes and hear that they are part of a harmonised chord scale, from which you can make a fragment of the classic *Summertime*. The melody would appear on the first string. However, this isn't a lesson on how to play

Summertime. Instead, it's a demonstration of how small or fragmented chords can be moved around in order to create both harmony and melody.

Players such as Joe Pass, Barney Kessel and Martin Taylor manage to add bass lines in, too, but there isn't space to get into that here. In any case, we only need

the open fifth string to give a root for the A-based chords and the open sixth for the rest. Though these are not included in the chord boxes, you can still hear how it would all fit together. Leave the bass notes to the bass player (or indeed your imagination) and you can play these suggestions in any key.

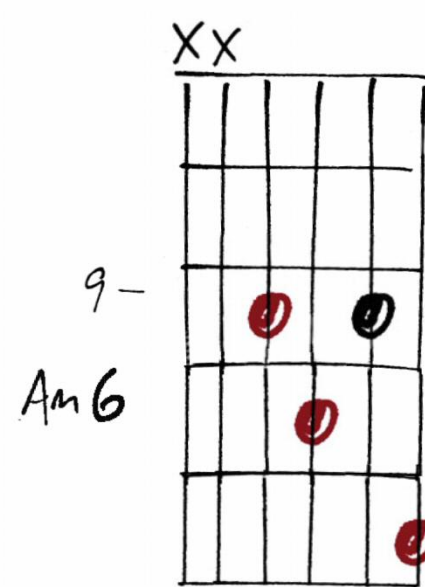
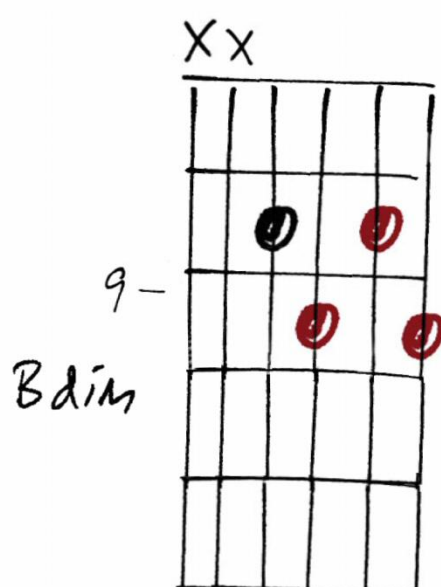
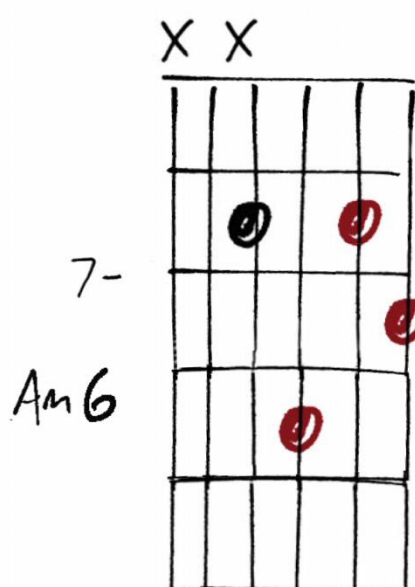


Example 1

This Am6 omits the root (as do all these chords) and has the F# (the 6th) at the bottom. Jazz guitarists often produce harmonically dense chords with surprisingly minimal-looking chord shapes – here is one of them! Don't forget that this chord can be moved up or down to any key.

Example 2

You can look at this chord as a G# diminished if you like, because the G# is at the bottom. Still, it works very nicely over an E bass note, in which case it would be more appropriate to call it E7b9... What matters, though, is that it works nicely with the other chords!



Example 3

A second version of Am6 but with a different 'stacking' of notes: here, the root is on the bottom, followed by the 5th, 6th and minor 3rd as we rake across the strings. This is all about being aware of the top note to find or create melodies.

Example 4

We've seen this shape before, but in this position it becomes B diminished. Adding an E bass note shows it in a different light as an E7b9 – similar to the version featured earlier, but now in a different inversion with D as its top/melody note.

Example 5

Shuffling the notes in Am6 around again, we arrive at this third version with the E (the 5th) on top at the 12th fret. Try playing the three Am6 chords in sequence and you'll hear the possibilities available by changing things up and featuring a different note on top – or at the bottom!

Feedback

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

Star Letter



TALKIN' BOUT HIS GENERATION

I was 16 when I got my first guitar. My brother was 14 and got a drum kit. Every time we watched *Nirvana: Live! Tonight! Sold Out!!* on VHS we'd be inspired to go make a noise. Actually seeing it being done was rare, as there was no MTV yet, in our house at least. We used to record stuff to a mono cassette deck. To 'overdub' we'd play that recording in

the room and play something else over it and record that onto a second tape deck! No such recording has survived, nor has the tape deck, but you can imagine how good it sounded... Over the years I have had a few recording devices, but never managed to record music without going to a studio with whatever band I was in at the time.

Fast-forward nearly 30 years and my 14-year-old son has YouTube for infinite inspiration, is at Grade 6 on guitar, owns a bass guitar, plus a really nice Roland electronic drum kit. For his 14th birthday he got a Focusrite interface and with a little help from me managed to suss out how to record it all into GarageBand on his iPad. Less than 24 hours after the final piece fell into place he had recorded his first track.

I am soooo proud, not least because it's really good, with elements of Mogwai and Metallica, but because he has made the best use of the technology at his disposal and combined it with the considerable talent he has at his disposal. I guess that is exactly what me and my brother were trying to do with the tape decks. Now all I need to do is persuade him to play drums while I record all my hitherto undocumented songs...

David Dallas, via email

Many thanks for sharing, David. We've often said that if our 15-year-old selves could see the kit that's cheaply and easily available these days we'd be flabbergasted. Similar to your experience, we spent hours fiddling with four-track PortaStudios and dreaming about being able to go 'into a studio' to make a professional recording. Egg boxes on the walls of the garage were standard issue and if you wanted to learn how a solo of a famous song went you'd have to get down the local music shop and buy the TAB – or use your ears and try to figure it out.

By comparison, players starting out today have some fantastic aids to learning. However, there are good and bad points to everything. We remember interviewing Alex Lifeson once as he explained how listening again and again to Cream records – trying to nail Clapton's solo – really trained his ears. Likewise, many of the greatest recordings of all time were made on just two or four tracks. As we are given ever more power to realise our creative dreams, it's important remember that sometimes restrictions force us to be more ingenious and, yes, creative in getting the results we want.



KORG

Each issue's Star Letter wins a Korg Pitchblack Custom – a smart pedal tuner with ultra-high +/-0.1 precision for sharp visibility and pinpoint accuracy right at your feet.
www.korg.co.uk

KIT'S A HIT

Hi guys, don't know if you are interested, but after your kit-build T-style in issue 460, I fancied doing one for myself. With the lockdown in place and it not being safe to work, I thought it might keep me busy. I'm a builder by trade so have the necessary tools and thought it would keep me out of the good lady's hair as well!

I duly bought a Rocktile Tele-style electric kit for just over £100. Having played but not having owned a Tele before I thought, "If I'm gonna build a guitar, that's the one to do." It came with a basswood body, bolt-on maple neck and a rosewood fingerboard, which I coated with a nitrocellulose 'Vintage Amber' stain, topped of with a nitro clear-gloss lacquer.

The only thing I changed out was the bridge, replacing the one supplied with a Wilkinson, primarily because I wanted to



John Mayer's PRS
Silver Sky: dividing
opinion since 2018

put an 'ashtray' cover on and the bridge supplied had no sides for the cover to grip onto. I also ordered a tortoiseshell pickguard online. The 'Coronacaster' logo was done with Letraset, while cheekily changing the Fender logo into my name, Hinder, was accomplished with a printer, a very sharp Stanley blade and some spray mount, before lacquering.

Not a bad guitar to play for the money and a great experience building it. I'll certainly be building again, but next time more of an original, not a kit.

Ritchie Hinder, via email

The guitar looks stunning, Ritchie. You've clearly put your lockdown time to good use – and we're delighted Dave Burrluck's piece has inspired you to such heights. While we doubt 'Coronacaster' is worth trademarking from a commercial perspective (makes you wonder how the beer brand is getting by at the moment), there's no denying the guitar is a beauty.

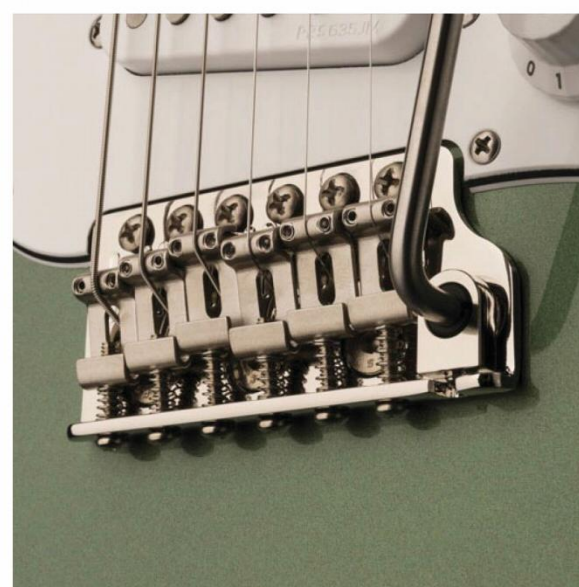
Would readers like to have a proper competition for your home builds? We've floated the idea before but now seems the perfect time, so write and let us know if you'd like to see us host a grand prize for Britain's best home-built guitars – we could do a category for adaption of kits and another for totally original pieces. Suggestions on a (virtual) postcard, please...

SILVER TONGUE?

I feel the need to make a point or two after reading John Mayer's comments in the mag about the Silver Sky. Bet you haven't heard that before!

Mayer says: "I want all Silver Sky guitars to be great" and adds that all Silver Skys will be as good as each other. Come off it, John. How long have you been around guitars? They're made of wood. Never, ever will guitars be identical; there will always be a best one, one that resonates better than the rest. It's a known fact of the universe.

Mayer also says: "I'm responsible for a lot of people using that fourth position [on a Strat]." Come off it, John. We were using that fourth position before you were born, and to take any credit for it is daftly arrogant. What is interesting is that Mayer could have



got all he needed from the Fender Custom Shop. Fine that he chose to work with Paul, but clearly he still wants a Strat!

And by the way, the mag remains interesting, relevant and beautifully produced. Keep on keeping on, chaps.

Rich Sharp, via email (a Strat owner for more than 50 years)

Thanks Rich, it's often hard to tell if John Mayer believes his own hyperbole or is just trolling us all – but there's no doubting he's a fine player and songwriter. I think it might be news to Hendrix and others that it was John Mayer, in fact, who popularised the hollow-sounding position 4 on the pickup selector of a Strat that Fender defines as "middle pickup and neck pickup together". To be fair to John, maybe's he's disallowing all 'unofficial' use of that sound before 1977 when the five-position selector was adopted! And yes, even Paul Reed Smith's exacting production standards can't render all pieces of wood completely equal – and, more to the point, why would you want them to be? Might as well build

guitars out of plastic if you want that. Wait, Dan Armstrong already did that... See, John? There's really nothing new under the sun.

LOCKDOWN 'LUTHIERY'

I've been playing guitar for over 40 years and, like many of your readers, have succumbed with increasing frequency to GAS (insert cheap gag...) as I've navigated middle age, to the point where I now possess a 'nice' collection of guitars. Not so many that I never get to play them all, and just enough to leave me feeling there's always room for one more. However, I've never even contemplated building my own guitar – until now...

For about 20 years I've had a fully loaded scratchplate, complete with Kent Armstrong 'hot rail' pickups, push-pull pots and all manner of coil-tappery, gathering dust in the loft, a hangover from a previous customisation of my Tobacco Sunburst JV Strat (played, by the way, by your very own Neville Marten at the end of a memorable gig in Sible Hedingham in the mid-90s!) that I later decided to undo once I'd been



Cameron Murray's 'Stellacaster':
named after his daughter and
an inadvertent mash-up of
Stratocaster and Telecaster

told that said guitar was “probably worth a bit”. I figured this really was a waste of good hardware and the idea started to take hold of buying an old banger of a Strat on eBay and inserting the idle scratchplate, thereby creating some kind of hot-rod guitar and adding to my collection to the tune of one, and at relatively little cost.

It was only when I started my search that I discovered there are establishments out there that sell brand-new bodies, necks and a vast selection of hardware. Provided you're willing and able – and can hold your nerve enough – to drill some holes, apply some decals and wield a screwdriver, you can put together a half decent guitar in a matter of days, if not hours.

Mind you, I haven't been bold – or perhaps stupid – enough to try and wire the thing up. I'm not good with electrics at the best of times and with all the wizardry in the pickup arrangement I'd be sure to blow the guitar up and myself, too, in the process. So I've decided to leave that to a professional...

I realise it's a bit of a stretch to describe all this as 'building a guitar', but it's given me huge satisfaction and is an example of what can happen when you use a bit of unexpected spare time to step out of your comfort zone. The only thing is, now I've done it once...

Cameron Murray, via email

The guitar looks mighty fine! And you raise an important point: guitar making isn't some lofty ivory tower only master luthiers can access. Sure, at the highest level, it's a complex craft. But what you did is also valid and rewarding, as Dave Burrluck also shows this month with his T-style build in Mod Squad. One great way to ease yourself in is to begin with maintenance on a cheap guitar, as showcased in this issue's cover feature, so you understand the working principles thoroughly and feel confident undertaking basic work. But, as you've proven, getting stuck in can lead to handsome results. Nice one! Regards from Nev, too.

GOING VIRAL...

Last issue we asked you to send us your lockdown recording projects and you didn't disappoint.

Here are three that caught our ear. Big thanks to everyone who sent something in – we'll share more next month, so fear not if you missed the cut this time.

TRACK 1 **theDirt3** *Winning*

George Blacklock sent us this moody, evocative track by his outfit theDirt3 that channels TheThe and The Afghan Whigs to brooding effect. We loved the swirling flange/phase tones on the edgy, effective guitar parts, too.

<https://bit.ly/461feedbacklick1>

TRACK 2 **Maarten Jansen** *Always With Me, Always With You*

Subscriber Maarten Jansen bravely tackled the North Face of Satriani's back catalogue with this self-assured cover of Joe's yearning ballad *Always With Me, Always With You*. Jan's girthy tones and confident phrasing rise to meet the occasion, so nailing this track is definitely something he can tick off his bucket list.

<https://bit.ly/461feedbacklick2>

TRACK 3 **The Pieces Of Mind** *Car Ride*

Reader John Reardon impressed with this swirling 60s road trip track that recalls The Yardbirds' dalliance with psychedelia and The Doors. It's one of 12 tracks John finished during lockdown, showing that the creative mind can wander far, even when it's hard to physically hit the road.

<https://bit.ly/461feedbacklick3>

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

Music

The month's best guitar music, plus top players in the studio



PHOTO BY CARY FAGAN

Khruangbin *Mordechai*

Dead Oceans

9/10



Ethereal, nomadic grooves from Texan trio

We live in an amazingly rich time for absorbing all kinds of music from around the world. Yet few bands bring so many disparate elements together in such a beguiling and coherent form as Texas trio Khruangbin. For newcomers to their sound, there are glittering fragments of so many good things in their work, from The Shadows to Roy Ayers to Ali Farka Touré (told you it was a heady cocktail). And yet despite the disparate nature of their influences, they are one of the tightest yet grooviest outfits working today, their sound totally coherent and effortless to listen to.

Their latest, *Mordechai*, is their most ambitious record to date, adding more of superb bassist Laura Lee's vocals to the mix on the one hand, while guitarist Mark Speer's flowing, eclectic playing roams further across continents of musical

influences than ever. The record was inspired, we're told, by a spiritual epiphany Laura Lee had while on a hike with a family she had never met before. Certainly there's an ethereal soulfulness to even the most direct, danceable numbers such as *Time (You And I)*, while *So We Won't Forget* sees Speer channel Malian guitar styles to shimmering, flowing effect. His breadth of vocabulary is tremendous, but he always wears his musical erudition lightly – while drummer DJ Johnson pins everything down with irresistible grooves that are economical yet so compulsive. *Dearest Alfred* sees the band wander through dreamlike, sunlit soul-terrain, washed by gentle waves of phaser tone. Like a gemstone, turn this album in the light and there are so many facets to it, you'll want to listen and relisten to enjoy them all. **[JD]**

Standout track: *Dearest Alfred*

For fans of: Roy Ayers, Curtis Mayfield, Shuggie Otis

Eric Clapton & BB King *Riding With The King: 20th Anniversary Edition* Reprise Records

8/10



Blues legend supernova on anniversary reissue

It certainly doesn't feel like it was 20 years ago that Eric Clapton and BB King teamed up to make this album. In celebration, Reprise has remastered the original and even thrown in a couple of previously unreleased tracks for good measure. In keeping with the traditional blues leanings of the June 2000 release, Muddy Waters' *Rollin' And Tumblin'* and Willie Dixon's *Let Me Love You Baby*, which were both recorded at the time, now join the ranks. The former finds EC working out on acoustic slide with BB punctuating every phrase as only he could, whereas the Dixon classic is medium paced with both guitar men taking passionate solos and, despite BB claiming post-take that he "screwed up in a couple of places", it sounds great to us! **[DM]**

Standout track: *Three O' Clock Blues*

For fans of: Eric Clapton, BB King, Muddy Waters

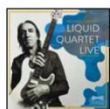


PHOTO BY KIM ZUP/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

This 20th anniversary celebration includes two previously unreleased tracks from EC and BB

Michael Landau
Liquid Quartet Live
The Players Club

8/10



Live outing for renowned superstar sideman

When James Taylor refers to someone as “the complete virtuoso” and this feeling is further backed up by Steve Lukather saying, “He is one of the finest players in the world,” you know they must be talking about someone pretty special. The guitarist in question is Michael Landau, who has enjoyed a stellar career playing with a who’s who of music’s elite, including Joni Mitchell, Ray Charles, Miles Davis and Pink Floyd, among others. In November of last year Michael took his band (drummer Abe Laboriel Jr, bassist Jimmy Johnson and guitarist/vocalist David Frazee) to LA’s famous Baked Potato Jazz Club and delivered a blues-driven set featuring some of his back catalogue, peppered with a few new tunes. Needless to say the guitar work throughout is immaculate – check out the frenzied soloing on *Greedy Life*, for instance. A six-string tour de force. **[DM]**
Standout track: *Killing Time*
For fans of: Robben Ford, Scott Henderson

Liquid Quartet Live sees Michael Landau hit the stage with a setlist of new tracks and favourites from his back catalogue



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HARGRAVE

EOB
Earth
Capitol/Polydor

9/10



Radiohead's Ed O'Brien branches out with eclectic solo debut

In the same vein as his signature Stratocaster, Ed O'Brien's new solo album, *Earth*, has been released under the EOB moniker. Penned by Ed over the course of several years, the Radiohead guitarist's debut was predominantly produced by

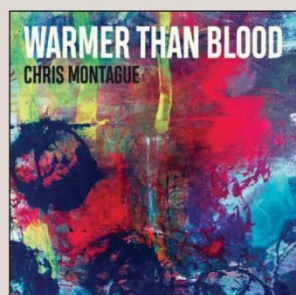
Flood (U2, Depeche Mode, New Order). Stylistically diverse throughout, *Earth* is an eclectic collection of tracks encompassing a broad range of sounds from folk guitar to EDM. Guest highlights include Portishead's Adrian Utley featuring on guitar in the hooky up-tempo opener *Shangri-La* and *Sail On*, and appearances by Laura Marling with whom Ed sings a duet on the album's perfect closer, *Cloak Of The Night*. **[RB]**
Standout track: *Brasil*
For fans of: Radiohead, U2

Start me up

On-the-rise guitar acts to look out for

Chris Montague
Warmer Than Blood
Whirlwind

8/10



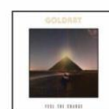
An abstract, exploratory, jazz-influenced musical odyssey

If you enjoyed some of the artists who recorded for the classic ECM jazz record label in the 70s and 80s – which included guitarists Pat Metheny, Ralph Towner, John Abercrombie and Bill Frisell – you will feel immediately at home here. Chris Montague was the founder member of the band Troyka and is accompanied on *Warmer Than Blood* by his bandmate Kit Downes on piano and Acoustic Ladyland's Ruth Goller on bass, of whom he says, “I love how Ruth and Kit both interpret music, they were always going to be my first choice – and writing for a band without drums made us work much harder to create dynamics and shape within each piece. This brought out a whole new dimension in the compositions.” In keeping with European jazz tradition, improvisation is rife and attentive listening offers its own rewards. But the album is mesmerising, full of surprises and musical U-turns throughout, equally interesting and thought-provoking at the same time. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Not My Usual Type*
For fans of: Ralph Towner, Bill Frisell

Goldray
Feel The Change
Akashic Records

9/10



Riffs, riffs and more riffs from psych-rock stalwarts

Following up on 2017's *Rising*, Goldray have taken their soaring psychedelia to new highs with the release of their second album, *Feel The Change*. Comprising the jaw-droppingly talented guitarist Kenwyn House (of Reef fame) and 'high priestess of hard rock' vocalist Leah Rasmussen, the band decamped for the album's recording from London to the Gothenburg-based SpinRoad Recording Studios of multi-platinum award-winning co-producer Pedro Ferreira (The Darkness, Therapy?, Meatloaf). Fittingly, their late 60s/early 70s psych-rock roots have spread to encompass a more riff-centric and heavy (but not quite metal) sound. The result is eight solid tracks of soulful, hard-hitting psychedelic prog-rock that are sure to prise anyone's third eye wide open. **[RB]**
Standout track: *Oz*
For fans of: Hawkwind, Jimi Hendrix

JOHN SMITH

John Smith is one of the UK's brightest rising stars on the singer-songwriter stage, but the onset of lockdown meant cancelling his first American headline tour. You can't tie a good man down, though, and his response was to release a new live album and take to the internet in order to promote it...

Words David Mead Photography Jesse Wild

Back in March, John Smith was in the middle of an Australian tour when the country announced restrictions on mass gatherings due to the Coronavirus. Shortly after, he found himself on the first flight home to the soon-to-be-locked-down UK. A little over a month later, however, and John had released his latest album, *Live In Chester*, and was set to embark upon a 'virtual world tour', a new landmark in his career so far...

Music has been part of John's life from an early age. When he was only five or six he began playing the piano, then the drums. The guitar came a little later, entering his consciousness when he saw the movie *Bill & Ted's Bogus Journey* around the age of 11. "That big guitar duel at the end blew my mind," he laughs. "I thought, 'Oh right, I'm going to have to start playing guitar!'"

John's father worked in the record industry and played guitar himself so, noticing his son's enthusiasm, bought him a red Squier Strat so he could have some most excellent musical adventures of his own. Since then John has gone on to tour the world armed with an enviable selection of Fylde acoustics, making albums along the way. We were curious to join the dots between those early Squier Strat days, a love for traditional English songs and the effect that 'working from home' has had on an otherwise itinerant musician.

"I started listening to Hendrix, Clapton and, later on, Led Zeppelin," John says. "My dad sat me down and played me *Kashmir* and that blew everything open. Suddenly I was obsessed with guitar and from about the age of 11 or 12 I was playing every day. Got home from school, played until I fell asleep. Then later in my teens I discovered Nick Drake, John Renbourn and Bert Jansch. That changed everything again. I became interested in alternative tunings and realised the possibilities of the guitar in a completely different way. As soon as you take your bottom E string down to a D, you've got a different instrument. Then you change them all, put them in one of Nick Drake's strange tunings, and you've got a completely different experience. So I had this evolution as I was

growing with the instrument and being steered by what I was listening to.

"By the time I was about 20, I was writing my own songs, trying to gig them and seeing what would happen if I played out in front of people. With mixed results..."

Did you go through the open mic experience, festivals and so on?

"I'd been playing open mics in Liverpool where I was living. Doing that every night for a couple of years, playing as much as I could, working four part-time jobs to pay the rent while I was just trying to make a go of music. I got a gig up at the Ullapool Guitar Festival. I'd sent them a demo and they offered me a fee. I did the gig, I looked at the cheque and then I looked at what I'd earned from my four part-time jobs in a week and I decided to go self-employed. Then I was skint for five years, but I was gigging and I've been touring ever since. In 2006 I was offered a spot opening for John Martyn to which I said, 'Yes, please'. Then John took me on tour for the best part of two years. Right through his last UK tours I was opening for him. That gave me an opportunity to present myself on the touring circuit and say, 'I'm opening for John Martyn, can I have a gig?' and people would say, 'Yes,' and then I'd get festival slots. Then I got a proper manager and everything, sort of, rolled from there."

"I'd been pulled out of my Australian tour – 12 days into a 24-day tour. I was suddenly broke, thinking, 'How do I fix this?'"



A Fylde Oberon on Denmark Street first introduced John to Roger Bucknall's guitars



After several successful albums, including 2017's *Headlong* and the more recent *Hummingbird*, you were finding worldwide success and had a headline tour of the US in the diary, but then came lockdown. How have you fought back?

"I was just so lucky to have this live album ready to go. I basically mixed it and had it mastered thinking what I'd do is just press a few copies, maybe sell them at gigs, and it would just be a nice bit of merch. Not really realising that it would become this sort of security that it's turned out to be. What I did in the end was print up a thousand and thought, 'People want to go to gigs, they still want to have the communion of a live show, and this is an opportunity to give it to them.'

"I'd just been pulled out of my Australian tour – 12 days into a 24-day tour – I had get home as quickly as possible. And then my first headline US tour was gone, all my dates gone. I thought, you know, 'I'm suddenly broke. How do I fix this?'"

You've been doing gigs online. How was that experience?

"After the first one, it felt like this is basically a virtual folk club. Everyone's

talking to each other. People are talking about gigs they've been to and reminiscing together and getting to know each other. That was the thing that blew me away the most – it was like a real community of music lovers. So suddenly it felt like, 'Actually, you know, this is doable. People want this.'"

How did you get on with the technological aspects of performing online?

"Man, if it's not made of wood and strings, I'm generally not entirely sure it's gonna

work! I just spent a lot of time in front of the computer researching and watching other people. Made a few mistakes, bought a few pieces of kit it turns out I don't need... I just sat in front of YouTube for a few days and figured it out and it turned out I had everything I needed. I ended up using the camera on my laptop, I put all my instruments straight out of my pedalboard into my mixing desk and a USB out into my laptop. All my LR Baggs pickups go through my touring pedalboard, so it's the same sounds that I put out on stage. So the guitar was DI'd into the pedalboard, through the mixer, into the laptop."

You said on your Facebook page that performing online was different in the way that you interact with your songs...

"Yeah, absolutely. For a start I travel with British Airways so I can only take one guitar, but here I've got all my guitars around and so I can make it up as I go along and that was extremely refreshing. As you can imagine, it just enables you to go to different places with the songs. And just having my familiar totems around me, you know, all that junk that I've got in my

"I had this evolution as I was growing with the instrument and being steered by what I was listening to"

Life On The Low Cs

John reveals his tuning secrets

“The tuning I use most often, if I’m just noodling, like the one that I’m guilty of just leaning on all the time is drop D – DADGBE. Then, after that it’s DADGAD. Those are the two main ones. If I’m playing a full gig, then I have to have a guitar in CGDGAE, because my song *Undone* is in that tuning and I haven’t figured out any other way to play it. It’s a good one, you know. Most of it comes from DADGAD or open G and just trying out shapes and finding that they don’t work, so you have to alter a string here or there. I really like having a low C.

“*Winter* would probably be in there as well: CACGAE, which is like A minor 7 over C, and that’s a brilliant tuning. It’s like it’s instantly folky. It just sounds like sad folk music.”



1. John's Schmidt Array 450 pedalboard: for his online gigs he takes a line out of the 'board into a mixing desk and straight into his laptop via USB – simples!
2. "I use a TC Ditto [X2] for reverse/weird loops on one or two songs. I can't do proper structured looping to save my life..."

office, I just felt so comfortable because I'm playing as freely and as openly as I would at home. I'm just noodling, but suddenly there's all these people there and it just feels like it's a very different way of communicating, compared with being on stage and having that implied fourth wall. You know, the formalities of the gig – none of that is there. And that kind of blew me away and I think people responded to it really well."

You're playing Fylde guitars. How did you first encounter Roger Bucknall's guitars?

"Back when there was still Hank's Guitar Shop on Denmark Street. It was a Fylde Oberon and easily the best guitar I'd ever played, but it was a couple of thousand pounds too expensive for where I was at. As my friend and I were driving up to Glasgow to do one of the John Martyn gigs, I just stopped in at [the Fylde Guitar workshop in] Penrith. I looked up the address and I just stopped in. I introduced myself and Roger, sort of warily, said, 'Right, do you want a guitar?' I said, 'Yes, but I can't help but notice that you endorse a lot of older folk musicians. Why don't you endorse someone younger? I'm out there opening for John Martyn, I think you should make me a guitar.' He regarded me with some suspicion and then he said, 'Yes, all right.' To his eternal credit, he built me an extraordinary guitar. Six months after that I was playing it at shows."

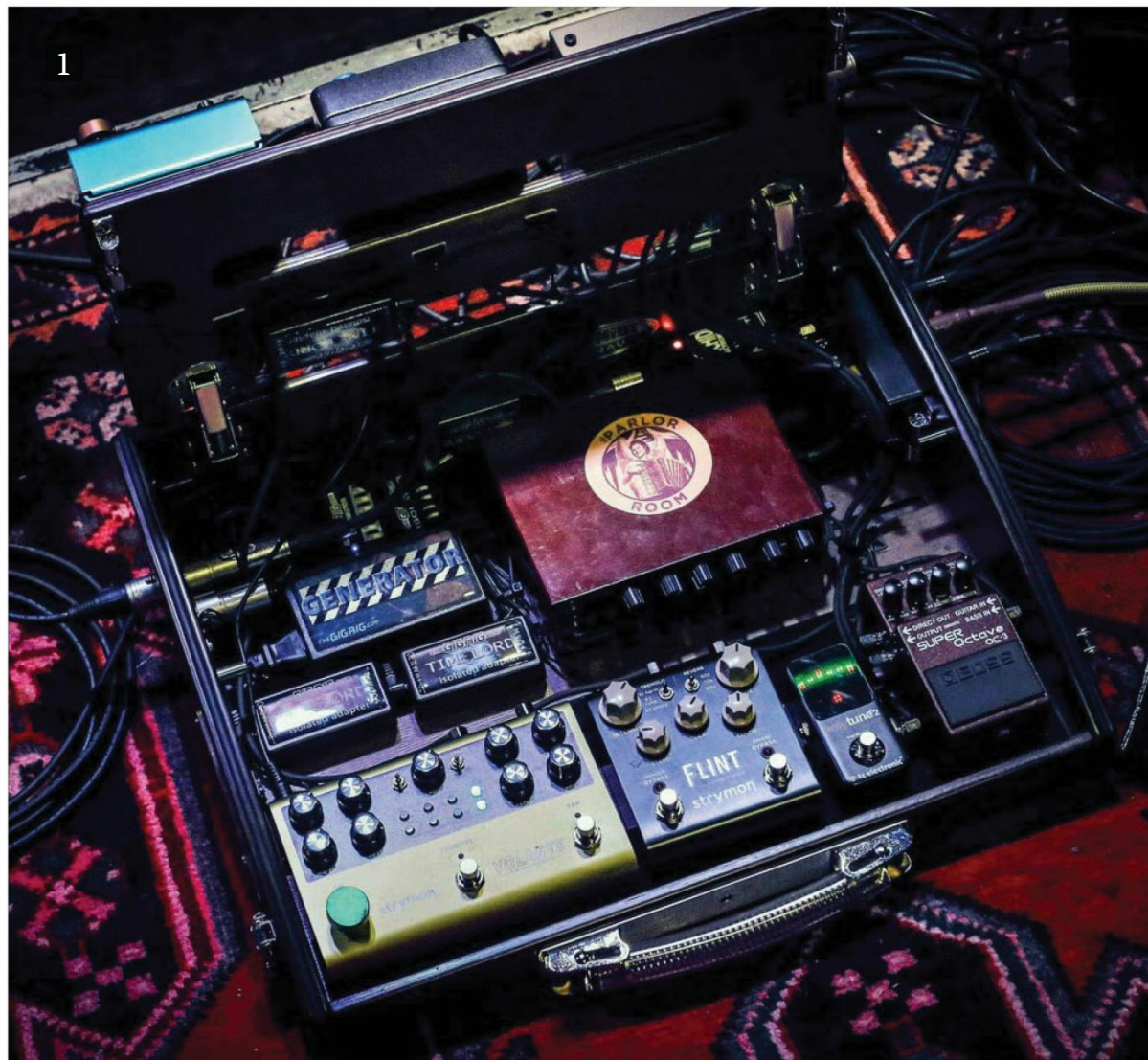
*"I said [to Roger],
'Why don't you endorse
someone younger? I'm
opening for John Martyn,
I think you should make
me a guitar'"*

That would be your Falstaff?

"That was my first Falstaff, with cedar and Madagascan [rosewood]. Four years after that, I was visiting Roger, bringing him a bottle of whisky, chatting. He said, 'Try this,' and he handed me a guitar that was similar to mine but with this really white piece of spruce on the top and Indian rosewood [back and sides]. I played it and then five minutes later I was giving him my credit card. That guitar has now turned completely yellow and it's ageing wonderfully. That's the only time I've ever experienced that – played a guitar and gone, 'I have to have this. There's no other way.'"

What about your pedalboard?

"On the main 'board, a Schmidt Array 450, I've got a Lehle Acouswitch Junior for acoustic and electric signal paths. I use a Boss OC-3 that gives me a bit of reinforcement for when I'm doing solo shows and I want a bit of bass. The real magic pedal is the El Capistan, which is Strymon's tape delay emulator, and that makes everything sound amazing. It's the



Photos by Andy Muscroft

Home Alone

We asked a couple of musicians about their time in lockdown

Jennifer Batten

Solo performer and ex-Michael Jackson and Jeff Beck guitarist



“My brain went back and forth between the perception of being in the apocalypse to having a sabbatical. But then it switched to thinking this was more of a forced sabbatical. I’ve been swimming in tutorials on streaming software and I’ve been making way more content for my YouTube channel. I made a playlist called ‘Jennifer Batten’s Riff Kitchen’ where I upload riffs played fast and slow and broken down, and another playlist of behind-the-scenes storytelling called ‘K So This One Time OK?’, which is released on Mondays. In episode seven, I did a breakdown of playing the Super Bowl.

“I got a green screen and lights and OBS streaming software and signed up for Castr software that allows me to simulcast to multiple platforms. I started doing Facebook Live every Tuesday at noon Pacific time (8pm UK), I then added YouTube simultaneously and also Instagram and Twitch. Like every musician, we’re scrambling to find new income streams.”

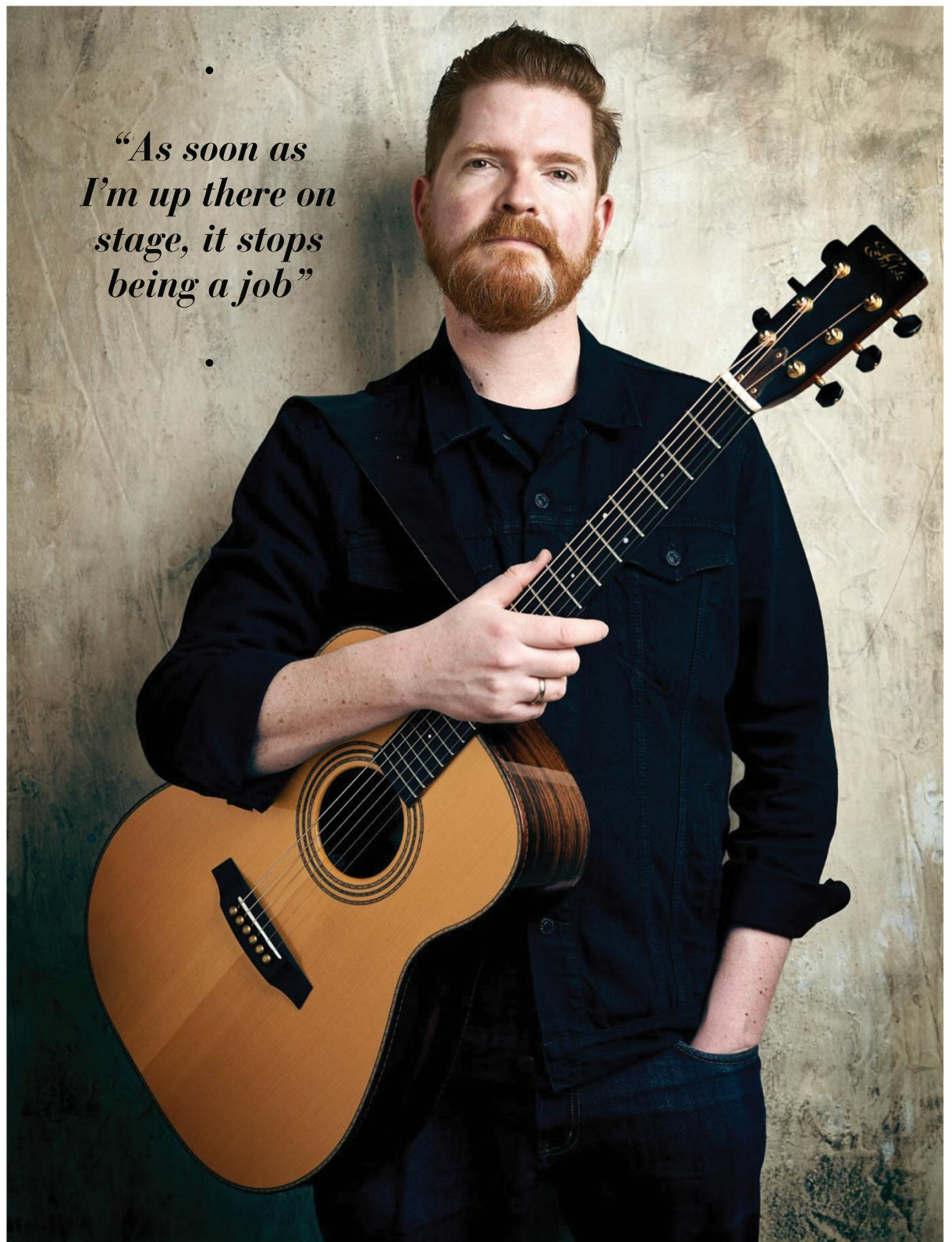
Dudley Ross

Guitarist, teacher and composer



“It’s been a massive, massive change. I’m quite fortunate in that I’ve got my own studio at home and so I’ve been able to continue composing – I’ve been doing lots of library music and online stuff. Zoom lessons are hard because when you’re not sitting in a room with someone there’s definitely something missing. I find it really hard to connect with people.

“So I’ve been locking myself in the studio. I’ve got a short film that I’m writing the score for and so I’m cracking on with that. I also did a collaboration on Soundcloud. I recorded guitar parts for a track, uploaded it and asked everyone to add their bits. People were sending in vocal tracks, drums, bass and so on and we’ve got up to eight tracks now and it’s really interesting. We’ve got everything from smooth 60s stuff to heavy metal, fusion, funk... I’ve had some really interesting people collaborate from all over the world. In fact, Toby Lee Marshall, who plays with Greg Koch, did the keyboards. That was fun.”



‘sound better’ pedal. I’ve got the Strymon BlueSky, a beautiful and convincing plate reverb. I don’t use the hall or the spring, I just use the plate. I’ve also got a [Strymon] Flint on there for a little trem. The Flint is the closest thing I’ve found to a vintage Magnatone. On the electric side I sometimes dial in a Hudson Broadcast. I’ve no call for distortion in my gig, but every now and then a little grit is a good thing.”

What about the future? How are you going about rescheduling your dates?

“Well, I’ve rescheduled my May dates to November and March, but I’m being realistic about November; I’m aware that it could not work out. If it doesn’t, I’ll do it next year. I’m keen not to be tone-deaf to the situation. So I’m not doing anything until at least November, but I may well be off the road for the rest of this year, in which case I’ll just have to go back to Australia in March and finish my tour.

Man, it was going really well. That was the thing – I spent a little bit of time kind of grieving for that, too, because it was the most fun I’ve had on the road in such a long time. And then to be whisked out of it, was... yeah, painful.”

You must be looking forward to getting back out there...

“To quote Danny Thompson, who is one of the wisest men in music, I get paid for the travelling, doing the accounts and booking flights, but I do this bit for free. That’s how I consider it. When I’m in a plane or in a car, I’m thinking, ‘This is what I’m getting my day rate for.’ As soon as I’m up there on stage, it stops being a job.” **G**



John Smith’s latest album, *Live In Chester*, is available now exclusively via his website

www.johnsmithjohnsmith.com



40 PROFESSIONAL SETUP SECRETS

Getting a guitar to play and sound like a dream isn't witchcraft, but experience helps – this is why we asked some of the world's top techs and luthiers how they do it. Read and learn...

Words Dave Burrluck & Jamie Dickson

Photography Neil Godwin, Olly Curtis & Joby Sessions

A while back one of the team was messing about with a Strat they'd had for a while. It sounded great but never quite felt fun to play, being a little too much like hard work to truly relish. Driven by curiosity, they dropped half a gauge in string size and cleaned and set up the guitar while they were at it. The result was transformative. The beautiful tone of the guitar remained, but now the expressiveness that comes with an easy-playing feel was also there – and the fun had returned with it. The point is that while larger repairs and modifications are often best left to qualified repairers or techs, there remains a wealth of reversible tweaks we can all make to our guitars to heighten their performance.

So, why do so many home guitar-maintenance jobs end in a sheepish trip to a tech when we get into difficulties

trying to improve the setup and tone of our guitars? A lot of it has to do with method. If you proceed methodically and logically, many sticky situations can be avoided. The rub is that the aforementioned method (and a fair bit of 'knack', too) tends to come with experience. That's why we got in touch with some of the world's top setup and maintenance experts, from master builders to seen-it-all repair specialists, to glean their hard-won tips on how to tweak, fettle and maintain your pride and joy the professional way, gaining self-confidence in the core essentials of setting up a guitar in the process.

Some of their advice is procedural, some just handy tips. But all of it is, we promise, relevant to every guitarist who wants to get the most from their instrument. So, get the kettle on, head to the shed and prepare to get your hands dirty...

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ASSESSING THE PROBLEM

First things first, whether you're looking to buy used or to fix a niggling problem on your current guitar, some simple, mainly visual checks can tell you a considerable amount about an instrument. After that, it's time to dig a little deeper...

Words Dave Burrluck

INITIAL CHECKS CONDITION

The overall condition of an instrument tells us so much more beyond the obvious scratches, dings and dents. With regular care and maintenance there should be little wrong with your guitar – or indeed one you're thinking of buying. Conversely, you might be looking at a used guitar in a bag, covered in dust with crusty strings and the explanation that “it's been in the loft/garage/shed for years”. Potentially not good at all. So find out as much as you can about the history of a guitar if you're thinking of buying it. Also consider that while “I gigged it for years” might suggest some fretwear and even fingerboard wear, not to mention well-used pots or even a duff pickup, it could likely be a positive – a guitar is well-used for a reason.

WHAT TO DO? *Whether the instrument is brand-new or in a poor state, quickly check it over and dig for a bit of background.*

TUNERS

Check the tuners. Are they stiff or sloppy? If they're stiff, a small drop of oil on the open gears or in the hole on the back can help older tuners. Enclosed tuners really should be fine – just tightening the cross- or flat-head screws at the end of the tuner button will even up the tension. Often the large retaining bolt that holds a modern tuner might have worked loose and is easily tightened by using the correct-size spanner.

WHAT TO DO? *It's pretty rare that you need to change tuners on a new guitar, though many do. One reason might be to go for a set of locking tuners or just something that appears and feels better. If reversible is important to you, you'll need to find a match, particularly in the way the tuners mount to the headstock. Bear in mind, too, that vintage-style tuners have a smaller post hole than most modern styles.*



NUT

Does the nut appear to be cracked? Do the string grooves look like they've been mucked about with? There might even be a piece of tin foil under a string, a quick gig-fix for a low string-groove. If the nut appears okay then a vigorous rub with a stiff toothbrush will clean the slots and adding some light lubricant (Wilkinson's SlipStick is ideal) is dead simple.

WHAT TO DO? *Making a nut (or even fettling one) isn't a basic job. If you encounter any issues then it's definitely worth getting a pro to sort them, from maximising action height by lowering the string grooves to sorting a tuning issue caused by a nut slot that's too tight.*

You wouldn't expect a secondhand guitar to be anywhere near as heavily worn as Rory Gallagher's 1961 Strat, but a careful inspection of subtler indicators of condition can tell you a great deal

**FIND OUT AS MUCH AS
YOU CAN ABOUT THE
HISTORY OF A GUITAR
IF YOU'RE THINKING
OF BUYING IT**

FRETS

Take a glance at the frets. Do they look grooved? If so, are the grooves deep? If that's a yes, you're going to need help. On a less-used guitar, a simple rub with a fine abrasive pad will have them looking mirror-shiny in minutes. Sometimes on cheaper instruments a fret that hasn't been smoothed correctly will feel rough as you bend a string. You can dress the frets yourself but only after you've checked the neck's straightness. Typically using 600-grit (and moving upwards to the finest you have) with a hardwood block, rubbing across the frets from bass to treble side should have those tops gleaming.

WHAT TO DO? *With serious fretwear issues, such as buzz caused by uneven fretting, you'll need professional help. A full or partial refret isn't cheap, especially if you have fingerboard binding or it's a maple fingerboard that may need refinishing.*

FINGERBOARD

Cleaning a dirty, gunky fingerboard is easy, so this isn't really a worry on a used guitar. In most cases, a damp cloth and elbow grease will remove most of the debris, and the edge of a plastic credit or hotel key card can help to get rid of the stubborn dirt. Be careful when using fingerboard oil, though, because it is definitely overused. In normal environments, the occasional light application is all you need.

WHAT TO DO? *Apply the oil to a cloth or piece of kitchen towel – not directly onto the fingerboard – and rub it vigorously into the 'board. Leave to dry and rub again with a clean cloth before you restring.*



Light fret-dressing can be attempted at home and specialist tools are available to make the job easier – but bigger jobs need pro care

NECK SECURITY

If the guitar is a bolt-on, is the neck secure? Gently (and we mean gently!) try to move it from side to side. If there is any slight movement, it could just mean you need to tighten the neck screws. It could also signal that the base of neck pocket is uneven or there's uneven finish build-up.

WHAT TO DO? *Never overtighten anything, let alone neck screws. If they feel tight and the neck still moves side to side, talk to a pro.*

BRIDGE

A quick visual check of your guitar's bridge can tell you a lot. Are the saddles in any way rusted? Never try to adjust rusted-looking saddles on a Strat, for example, without applying and leaving a *little* drop of WD-40 to release the threads. One handy tip is to squirt some WD-40 into a small bowl or saucer and then use an artist's brush to apply it to the saddles. Doing it this way allows you to control the amount you use.

If your instrument has a tune-o-matic bridge, are the saddles sitting right at the front or back edge of the bridge? It might mean the bridge is misplaced so you can't intonate your guitar correctly. Likewise, check that those saddles on a Strat aren't screwed back so far on the bass side that they almost touch the back wall.

WHAT TO DO? *Rust and gunk can be taken off with some WD-40 and a stiff toothbrush, preferably after you have removed the parts from the guitar. Oil and water are no-nos on your guitar. Sometimes rust gets into the small Allen key socket at the top of a Fender height-adjustment screw. If this is the case, soak the saddles in WD-40 overnight and try easing the gunk away with a needle or similar fine point. You might be lucky. Otherwise, you're best off replacing the saddle(s) so you can set the string height correctly.*

BOOGIE JUICE FRETBOARD CONDITIONER

A wipe with a very slightly damp clean cloth will do wonders to remove everyday muck, but cleaning up a used and dirty fingerboard might need a little more than just elbow grease alone. A simple yet quite ingenious product is Boogie Juice. A large felt-tip pen as the dispenser means that you can attack pretty serious grime while releasing a citrus-based natural cleaning preparation that'll not only help remove gunk but will lightly condition your fingerboard, too.

Boogie Juice and its apparently now patented felt-pen dispenser were conceived by Stephen Delft who was a big-wig in the guitar making and repairing world in the 70s. His reviews and columns in *International Musician And Recording World* were essential reading to any budding maker/repairer back then. The product is now made to the original recipe in New Zealand and should be a maintenance kit essential.



Right: Affordable and entry-level electrics make ideal instruments to hone your maintenance skills on, without fear of costly mistakes being made

Below: Basic maintenance of pickups and electronics is, with care, very possible to do at home – but semis such as 335s can be fiddly and complex to work on



IF YOU LOOK INTO THE CONTROL CAVITY AND THE WIRING LOOKS LIKE SPAGHETTI, IT MIGHT MEAN SOMEONE'S HAD A GO AT IT. BE WARNED

ELECTRICS

Plug in and quickly check that the pickups are working. If the guitar is unstrung, just lightly tap the polepieces, check the pickup selector switch then the volume and tone controls. Do they work? Are they scratchy? Are the control knobs loose? Is the output jack loose? If you're able to look into the control cavity, as with a Les Paul, we'd recommend you do. If the wiring looks like a plate of spaghetti, it might mean someone's had a go at it. Be warned.

WHAT TO DO? *Non-functioning pickups, controls and so on might need some professional help to replace, particularly on hollowbody or semi-hollowbody guitars where there's no scratchplate or rear control cavity. However, if your controls or switches work but are a little crackly, for example, using a switch cleaner (such as Servisol Super 10) can easily cure the problem, at least in the short term.*

THE PLAY TEST

Now, if the used guitar you're considering is in a playable state with okay strings, it's time to give it a play test. When you're checking a guitar, a headstock tuner is always handy to have in your pocket. Tune up. Are the open strings speaking cleanly or is one or more of them buzzing? Obviously, you'll want to peel off your tastiest licks to impress the seller... but if you're plugged in, dial in a clean amp tone and start with a low-fret chord and move its inversions up the neck. Does it sound in tune? Compare the open-string root with a high-position chord. Are there any obvious dead or choked notes?

Quickly check the basic intonation with a harmonic then a fretted note across all the strings at the 12th fret. Play those chords slowly and really listen and *feel*. Are the strings getting progressively further away from the frets as you climb up the fingerboard? Play a few simple

OLD GUITARS CAN BE CRANKY BUGGERS; THEY NEED TO BE TREATED WITH IMMENSE CARE AND RESPECT

If you're in possession of a vintage beauty, such as this 1958 Gretsch 6129 Silver Jet, then leave the tinkering to the professionals – any DIY work has the potential depreciate its value



licks, slowly, in all positions and listen out for dead notes or buzzes. Try some slow upper-fret bends: are any strings choking?

Sight down the fingerboard from the nut to the bridge. Do the frets look parallel with each other? They should. Next, using the low E string as a straight edge and looking down as when playing, does the neck have a fairly even, slight concave bow? This is what we're after. Are there any obvious humps? If so, flag it up as a possible reason not to buy that guitar.

With the guitar in playing position hold down the low E with your left hand at the 1st fret and your right hand at the fret where the neck joins the body. There should be a slight gap – around the size of your top E or B string – between the underside of the string and the top on the fret around the 7th or 8th fret. Try the same on the G string and then the top E.

Next, check the nut height by fretting each string at the 4th fret then look at the gap between the underside of the string

and the top of the 1st fret – you should be able to see a very slight gap.

WHAT TO DO? *The neck's truss rod is designed to allow a small amount of adjustment. In basic terms, to correct too much concave bow you need to slightly tighten the truss rod, and vice versa if your neck has too much convex bow. Make the adjustments in quarter turns and then evaluate again as described. See our pro tips here and if you're in any doubt or don't have the correct Allen key or spanner, seek help.*

FINAL THOUGHTS

The basic steps needed to evaluate and fine-tune a guitar in reasonable condition are skills you should learn. Aside from making your new guitar play – and, to a certain extent, sound – how you want it to, evaluation is the key if you want to avoid buying a dog secondhand.

But just because you understand a pentatonic scale doesn't mean you can play like Eric or Jimi. And just because you can put petrol in your car doesn't make you a mechanic. It is always worth getting your guitar (new or otherwise) set up professionally. If things change due to humidity, wear or simply because you want to change string gauge, you'll have less to dial in yourself. But you'll only learn by doing it – and often doing it wrong. Leave your Custom Shop Strat in the hands of a pro while you hone your mechanic chops on a Squier.

A word of warning in regard to 'vintage' guitars. Even if you think you know a bit, please seek professional advice. The slightest change from original specification can, in certain cases, dramatically affect the instrument's value. Old guitars, too, can be cranky buggers; they need to be treated with immense care and respect. Here's to making your guitar play great! **G**

ASK THE EXPERTS

A top panel of professional setup techs share their insider tips for achieving perfect playability and tone

Words Jamie Dickson

MEET THE EXPERTS



RON THORN

With more knowledge than most of us could ever dream of, Fender Custom Shop's principal master builder gives us the lowdown on how to make Fenders perform at their absolute best.



JIM DECOLA

A master builder with Gibson, Jim also hosts the company's hugely popular *Tech Time* videos. If you want to make a Gibson play and sound on point, this is the man to turn to.

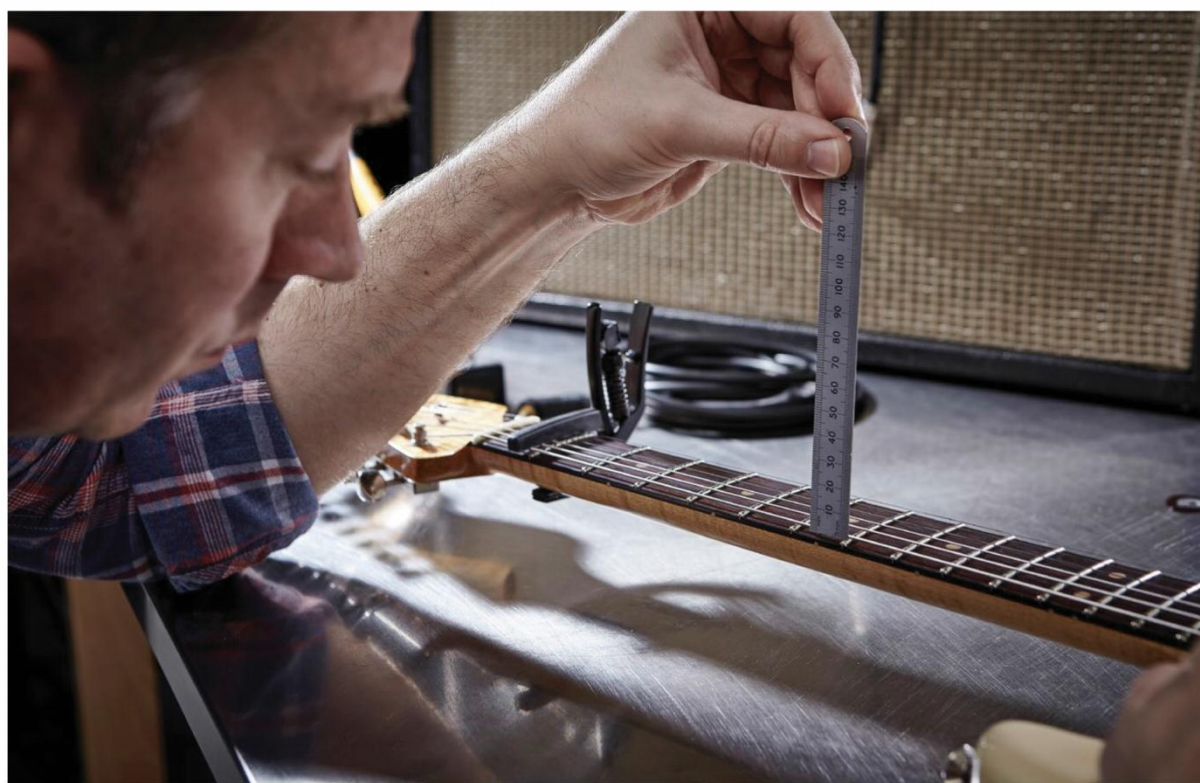


MATT GLEESON

London-based Matt is the founder of Monty's Guitars, a top-flight setup, hardware and repair company that knows how to fettle any guitar to playing perfection.

GET TOOLED UP

"One really important thing is to get yourself a decent metal ruler," Matt Gleeson says, with regards to the surprisingly small number of tools you need for guitar maintenance. "Choose one without a margin at the end of it, so it literally starts from 0 and measures from 1mm onwards. Then get yourself a decent set of imperial and metric Allen keys. Again, you can pick these up for £2 or something from any old place. I would then get a decent screwdriver set with Phillips and flatheads. To be honest, that's pretty much the core essentials. There are a few other things that are quite handy, like three-in-one oil, but those are the basics."



SET UP YOUR WORKSPACE

"Wherever you're working, always keep it nice and clean," Matt advises, whether it's a work bench or the kitchen table. "Get yourself a neck rest, or you can even use a rolled-up towel or something similar so that the neck is supported and is not going to move around. You can also lay a towel down on the work surface, so the body doesn't get scratched – but the downside of that is it will slide around. If you can, get some non-slip matting to place on your work surface instead – or there are things called Rockler Bench Cookies. They're little non-slip discs that you can rest your guitar on so it doesn't move. I've even used buffing wheels on guitars that are immobilised by Bench Cookies and they don't move. In addition to that, you'll

want to have a little pot to contain anything you take off the guitar, such as screws and other small components, so you don't lose any of them."

TRAIN FOR SUCCESS

Ron Thorn uses his own mnemonic to guide the sequence in which he does his setup work. "There's an optimal order for doing setup adjustments on a guitar," he says. "I always work by the acronym TRAIN. The T stands for 'Tune', because the first thing you want to do is tune it up. And then R is 'Relief', meaning set the relief on the neck. A is 'Action'. The I stands for 'Intonation'. And finally the N stands

Every guitar-maintenance kit should include a decent ruler. Make sure you choose one without a margin at its vertical edge

"IF YOU'RE DOING WIRING, TAKE PICTURES OF IT FIRST BEFORE YOU REMOVE ANY PARTS..."

Matt Gleeson, Monty's Guitars

for ‘Noodle’, because you want to noodle around and see how the guitar plays and then you can backtrack as necessary. That’s the order to do these fine adjustments – if you swap them around, you’ll just end up chasing your own tail.”

TAKE NOTE

“The main mistake people make when they’re carrying out maintenance or setup adjustments at home is not making a note of where the setup started and what adjustments they made as they went along,” says Matt. “We’ve all been there: you attempt something on your guitar that you kind of half-know and then you get snowblinded by other problems that pop up – and then you’re completely lost. So make sure you adjust things methodically and always note down each adjustment you make. So if you’re turning screws just make the adjustment a quarter-turn at a time and make a note of how many times you’ve done it.

“Simple things like that will help you stay on track or retrace your steps if you need to go back.”

BE PRUDENT

Ron explains how a little prudence can save costly errors: “I try to avoid keeping my tools on the other side of the guitar I’m working on, so I don’t have to reach over the guitar to get them – and potentially drop them on it. Also, be extra careful with vintage-style slot-head screws. We actually have joke around here: we say that the Phillips-head screw was designed on day two of somebody trying to put a guitar together because they realised right away slot-head was a bad idea... So it’s important to be careful and use both hands to steady the screwdriver when working on slot-head screws.”

TAKE A PICTURE FIRST

“If you’re doing wiring or anything like that, take pictures of it on your phone or iPad before you remove any parts, so you have a reference,” Matt says. “If you don’t have a phone to hand you can even sketch it out with a pen and paper. That means if it all goes wrong, you can put everything back to how it was.”



GOING UP A GAUGE

“On a non-tremolo guitar, the main thing is to see how the neck has moved,” recommends Matt. “If you’re making a big step up in string gauge from something like nines to 13s or whatever, that is a huge shift in tension. The strings will be pulling the neck forward [into an upward, concave bow], so you’ll need to have a look at the truss rod and consider what adjustments you need to make there.

“You should also look at how the heavier strings sit in the nut slots – whether they’re sitting in slots properly and whether they now get stuck in the slots when you tune up. You can actually crack the nut if you try to force a string that’s too big to sit in there,

Making a note of pre-adjustment values is always a good idea in case you need to revert back to the original settings

“I AVOID KEEPING TOOLS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE GUITAR SO I DON’T HAVE TO REACH OVER IT”

Ron Thorn, Fender



A brand-new Bigsby can come with its own set of issues, so make sure it's functioning properly before you get any strings involved

“IF YOU DON’T HAVE A SPECIALIST PRODUCT TO HAND, TRY LIP BALM TO LUBRICATE THE SADDLE”

Jim DeCola, Gibson

which can then cause other issues – plus it means you’ve got to fit a new nut.

“If you have a tremolo, obviously you’ll have to change the tension of the springs in the back, and there are various ways to do that [see p62]. You may have to add springs to counteract the increased tension of heavier gauge strings or take them off if you’re going the other way.”

GETTING THE MOST FROM VIBROLAS

“For the Maestros, the key thing is making sure the saddles are smooth,” Gibson’s Jim DeCola advises of the notoriously tricky vibrato system. “You want to make sure there are no burrs or sharp edges and that each saddle has a proper back-notch, so you have a smooth break angle across the saddle from the vibrato, with a firm witness point where the string leaves the saddle but no burrs or anything like that at the contact point. I also like to lubricate the

saddles. There are various things you can use like Nut Sauce, but if you don’t have a specialist product to hand, you might want to try lip balm, basically a ChapStick, as a lube for nuts and saddles. Be careful to use neutral shades of lip balm, though, as red or cherry-coloured ones can potentially stain your nut...”

GETTING THE MOST FROM A BIGSBY

“If I’m fitting a Bigsby, I always check the function of the Bigsby without any strings or the spring on there first,” says Ron. “There are needle bearings that the shaft passes through and you need to see how that feels without any other load on it first. Because I’ve found with brand-new, fresh-out-of-the-package Bigsbys, sometimes there’s some binding issues going on, so you’re going to be fighting that resistance without even realising it once the string and the spring are

SOLVING TUNING ISSUES

Wandering tuning is one of the most irritating setup problems of all. Here, Matt Gleeson of Monty's Guitars explains how to diagnose and eliminate tuning troubles

"First port of call is actually to have a look at the machinehead – not the machinehead itself but how the strings are wound around it," Matt explains. "If there are too few winds then you can sometimes get a tendency for the strings to slip, depending on the model of machinehead. On the other hand if there are too many – and you haven't stretched the strings in properly – that can also cause slippage and wandering tuning."

"Once you've checked those things, it's time to look at every point of contact between the string and the guitar. Take a high E string on a Strat, for example: the ball-end goes into the block and then it comes out of the block and goes across the plate of the top of the tremolo and then it hits the saddle. Then it stretches all the way up to the nut, then it hits the string tree and finally the machinehead. If it's gripping or sticking at any one of those points – especially if you use the trem a lot – it's never going to stay in tune, it's always going to be moving around."

"Even worse, if you've got a guitar with a tremolo and it's doing that on one string, it's going to also put all the other strings out as well, because the tension will change on that one string, which then means the tremolo will move and cause issues. At the nut itself, Nut Sauce and lubricants like that can be really helpful. Elsewhere, those kinds of sticking points can be fixed by using some 1,200-grit sandpaper, to get rid of any little lumps and bumps that the string is binding on."

"On Les Pauls and other Gibson-style guitars, the strings go straight up the neck but flare out at quite an angle towards the machineheads once they pass over the nut – especially the G and D strings. This can cause problems that may require some form of nut lubrication. Again, it's all about reducing friction and the string not being allowed to move as it needs to," Matt continues.

"Changes in string gauge can also cause tuning issues. Typically, new guitars are shipped with nines and then people will want to put 10s or 11s or whatever on. In that scenario, treble strings aren't too much of an issue, but when you go to increase the gauge of the bass strings, they can fit really tightly in the nut slots, which can cause some issues."

How strings are wound is key – too few or too many winds can both result in slippage



engaged. My advice is to check that first and keep it lubricated and just make sure it's functioning properly before you get the strings on there.

"Also I feel that, a lot of times, a Bigsby can be fitted too close to the bridge. That leads to a really extreme break-angle from the [bar the strings pass under] to the bridge – it's almost to a right angle sometimes as the string passes up and over the saddles. It's too severe. So if you're building from scratch, my opinion is to keep the Bigsby as far back as possible – within reason."

"Now that Fender has Bigsby, there's been talk of doing some revamping – I don't mean modifying an existing model because we couldn't do that otherwise we'd all be strung up, pardon the pun. But there was talk of coming up with a refined or modernised version of it. And one of the things I would like to do would be to maybe have some height adjustment on that front roller so you can control that angle over the bridge a little bit more. That might be a nice little touch."

TRY A TUNING TRICK

"There's one thing actually that I got proved wrong about, and it was about two years ago," Matt confesses. "I think it's Jeff Beck who has the claw in the back of his Strat's [spring cavity] setup lopsided, so the bass side has more tension than the treble side. And I always thought that was complete rubbish and it just wouldn't do anything, until we had a Strat that I just couldn't get to stay in tune."

"One of the guys who was working with me was like, 'You should try it, just try it,' and I reluctantly did. And it worked. It was so annoying! It wasn't a very steep angle, it just provided a little bit more tension on the bass side. I don't know how, but it can help things stay in tune, especially if you have your trem set quite high – if you have a minor 3rd's worth of pullback on the G – then it really comes into its own. So if you can't get your Strat to stay in tune the traditional way, give that a go." **G**

LES PAUL SETUP

Gibson's Les Paul remains the Nashville company's most iconic guitar. Who better than master luthier Jim DeCola to tell us how to set one up to perfection? His step-by-step advice holds good for many other classic Gibsons, too

Words Jamie Dickson

1 STRINGS

"First off, fit a fresh set of strings," Jim DeCola advises. "If you're doing any kind of setup and you're going to really dial it in, you need fresh strings. Older strings can often have tiny kinks and wear spots and so you won't get true intonation and playability out of them. So that's key."

2 NECK RELIEF

"Second, check and, if necessary, adjust your neck relief," Jim continues. "The simple way to do this is to fit a capo at the 1st fret to hold down all the strings there, then hold down the strings where the neck joins the body, then inspect the gap between the top of the fret and the bottom of the strings at about the 8th fret. If the neck has a concave bow [namely, curving slightly upwards away from the body, as it normally would be], you'll see a slight gap between the top of the fret and the string being held down. If the neck has a convex bow, however, you won't have a gap. So then you'll need to loosen the [truss rod]."

"Ultimately, you want a slight amount of relief in that neck, by which I mean a slight amount of concave bow. So, measured as described at the 8th fret, Gibson's official spec looks for 10 and 12 thousandths of an inch [0.01 and 0.012-inch / 0.254 and 0.3048mm] there, which is a kind of 'happy medium' setting. If you don't have a set of thickness gauges you can use a piece of paper – which is around four thousandths of an inch thick – or a business card, which is about 13 thousandths of an inch thick. As long as the amount of relief measured at the 8th fret is between the thickness of a sheet of paper and a business card, you're in the right ballpark," Jim explains. "If that gap is too tight then you're going to have buzzing towards the nut and the open position for the first few frets. And if there's too much relief then you'll have buzzing as you play up the neck, from around the 12th fret onwards."

3 CHECK NUT HEIGHT

"Once your neck is adjusted, look at the action at the nut," Jim explains. "I'm not suggesting you should modify the height of

the nut yourself but you should check it, in case work needs to be done. At the 1st fret, we'll look to have $\frac{1}{64}$ th of an inch between the top of the fret and the bottom of the high E string. And then on the low E string, we look for $\frac{2}{64}$ th of an inch between the top of the fret and the bottom of the string. The other strings are graduated between those dimensions."

4 ACTION AT THE 12TH

"Once you've checked the nut height at the 1st fret, it's time to check the action at the 12th fret," Jim says. "On electrics, our official spec is $\frac{3}{64}$ ths of an inch. In other words, that's the gap we're looking for between the 12th fret and the bottom of the high E string. Then on the low E string, we're looking for a gap of $\frac{5}{64}$ ths of an inch from the top of the fret to the bottom of the low E string. Once you have those two sets of specs, you adjust your bridge [height] accordingly and that dials in your action. Of course, those are our factory specs and your taste may vary. You can adjust lower, for example, if you have lighter touch or play heavier strings – they don't tend to buzz as much as lighter-gauge strings do."

5 PICKUP HEIGHT

"Next, adjust the pickups," Jim advises. "To adjust the pickups, you hold both E strings down at the highest fret. In the case of the Les Paul or an SG, that would be the 22nd fret. Starting with the neck pickup, you hold the high E string down at the highest fret and then measure the distance from the bottom of the high E string to the top of the pickup polepiece – and then do the same with the low E string. Our official spec is $\frac{4}{64}$ th of an inch. Then repeat the same procedure for the bridge pickup, except here we adjust the bridge to $\frac{3}{64}$ ths of an inch."

"Those are just a happy medium settings. If you want a cleaner sound, you can lower those pickups. If you want a hotter sound, you can raise them up slightly."



Adjust the pickup height up for a hotter sound and down for cleaner tones

6 PICKUP POLEPIECES

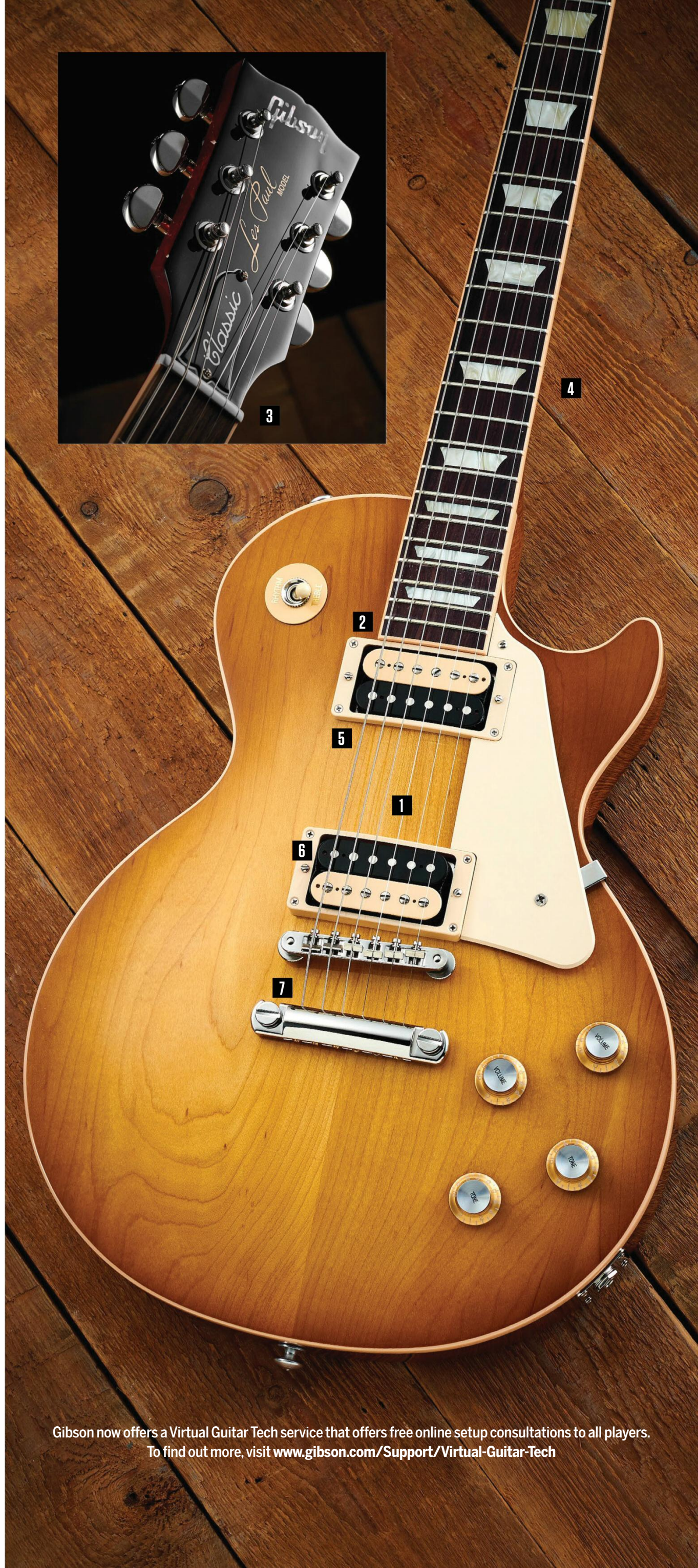
“Years ago, standard string sets would feature a wound G with a relatively thin core,” Jim says. “So your G was a lot weaker sounding than the B string and then the B string, being thicker than E, would overpower that. So, generally, pickup polepieces on the B string were set lower than the other strings. Today it’s not quite that critical.

“Our factory spec, when we make the pickups, they’re pretty flat with the top of the cover, or the top of the bobbin if they’re open pickups. And, again, that will perform fine. But if you want you can adjust them to conform to the radius of the fingerboard, which for Gibson is a 12-inch radius. I suggest, in that instance, leaving both the E strings polepieces flush with the pickup and then raising them in for the B, G, D and A to provide that radius, as measured with a ruler or a radius gauge.”

7 STOPBAR HEIGHT

“Another thing you can do is adjust the height of the stopbar tailpiece,” Jim says. “Some people like to adjust the stopbar all the way down the body, which will give the greatest possible break angle across the bridge. That will increase the angle from the bridge and provide a slightly stiffer feel to the strings – some people say sustain, too, but that’s a subtle thing. You could raise the bar up and that’ll reduce the string angle and make it feel a little bit slinkier. As long as it still has a positive break angle: you don’t want it so loose that the strings fall out of the saddles.

“Some people also like to insert the strings back-to-front, so they wrap over the stopbar tailpiece, and Duane Allman was a big proponent of that. Doing that allows you to adjust the tailpiece all the way down to the body, but it reduces the resulting string break angle because of the strings wrapping around and leaving from the top of the stopbar. So a lot of players are very passionate about that. But, again, there’s no right or wrong.” **G**



Gibson now offers a Virtual Guitar Tech service that offers free online setup consultations to all players. To find out more, visit www.gibson.com/Support/Virtual-Guitar-Tech

STRAT SETUP TIPS

Setup maestro Matt Gleeson of Monty's Guitars tells us how he sets up Leo's masterpiece

Words Jamie Dickson

1 SETTING A VIBRATO UNIT

"When you're setting up the trem [aka vibrato unit], I would get your guitar into tune first then tighten the screws [of the adjustable claw inside the cavity on the rear of the guitar that adjusts spring tension] until the underside of the bridge is just resting against the body – so you can touch the arm and it will move easily," Matt explains. "Then you keep methodically loosening the screws, adjusting them about a quarter- or a half-turn each time, both by the same amount – and retune your guitar after each adjustment. Keep doing that until the tremolo is in the position you want it to be in. Doing it in small adjustments is the key if you don't want to get lost in endless loop of adjusting and retuning."

"Another tip is to keep a running tally – on a piece of paper or on your phone – of how much you've adjusted the strings, so you can always take things back to where you started if you want to begin again."

2 A QUICK, EFFECTIVE WAY TO SET PICKUP HEIGHT

"The way I do it, and the way I recommend everybody should do it, is to start with the neck pickup," Matt says. "Raise that up until you can start hearing what I call 'wolf tones'. They happen when the pickup's magnetic field starts interfering with the vibration of the strings. So either you'll hear this wobble in the note or it will have no sustain – it will literally just sort of stop and your intonation will be all over the place. So find where that is and then drop the pickup just below until that goes away. That is the highest you could have that pickup. You could have it lower if you wanted. Depending on your gear setup and your taste, you might find that you prefer the sound of it a little bit lower, where it's not putting so much signal out, letting the pickups 'breathe' a little bit more."

"Moving on to the other two pickups, you'll want to set them to produce around

the same volume as the neck pickup for balance. Typically, the middle one will need to be a little bit higher than the neck one, and the bridge one will need to be a bit higher still. The reason for that is the string doesn't vibrate as much at the bridge as it does at the neck, so all things being equal it needs to be closer to the string to generate the same output. And because the string has less freedom to vibrate and move close to the bridge, you can have the pickup closer to the strings before the pickup's magnetic field starts affecting them adversely."

3 SETTING STRING HEIGHT

"Typically, the way I set the action – assuming a good all-round medium action is required – is to [adjust the saddle heights so the] top E string is about 1.5mm above the 12th fret," says Matt. "And then you want to come gradually up with each string until the bass strings are set at about 2mm, so you've got this slight rake going on. And I find that more comfortable: it means that the strings can breathe properly and vibrate and that you can hit the bass side

a little bit harder without them rattling, that kind of thing. You don't really want to keep them all at the same height across the radius: they need to be at different heights to be at their optimum. If you've got a guitar with a small, vintage-style radius, however, you might want to have the treble side a bit higher than that. That's the only time when I'd maybe go for around 2mm across the board. That's just so you can bend the higher strings without them choking out."

4 STRING TREE & BREAK ANGLE

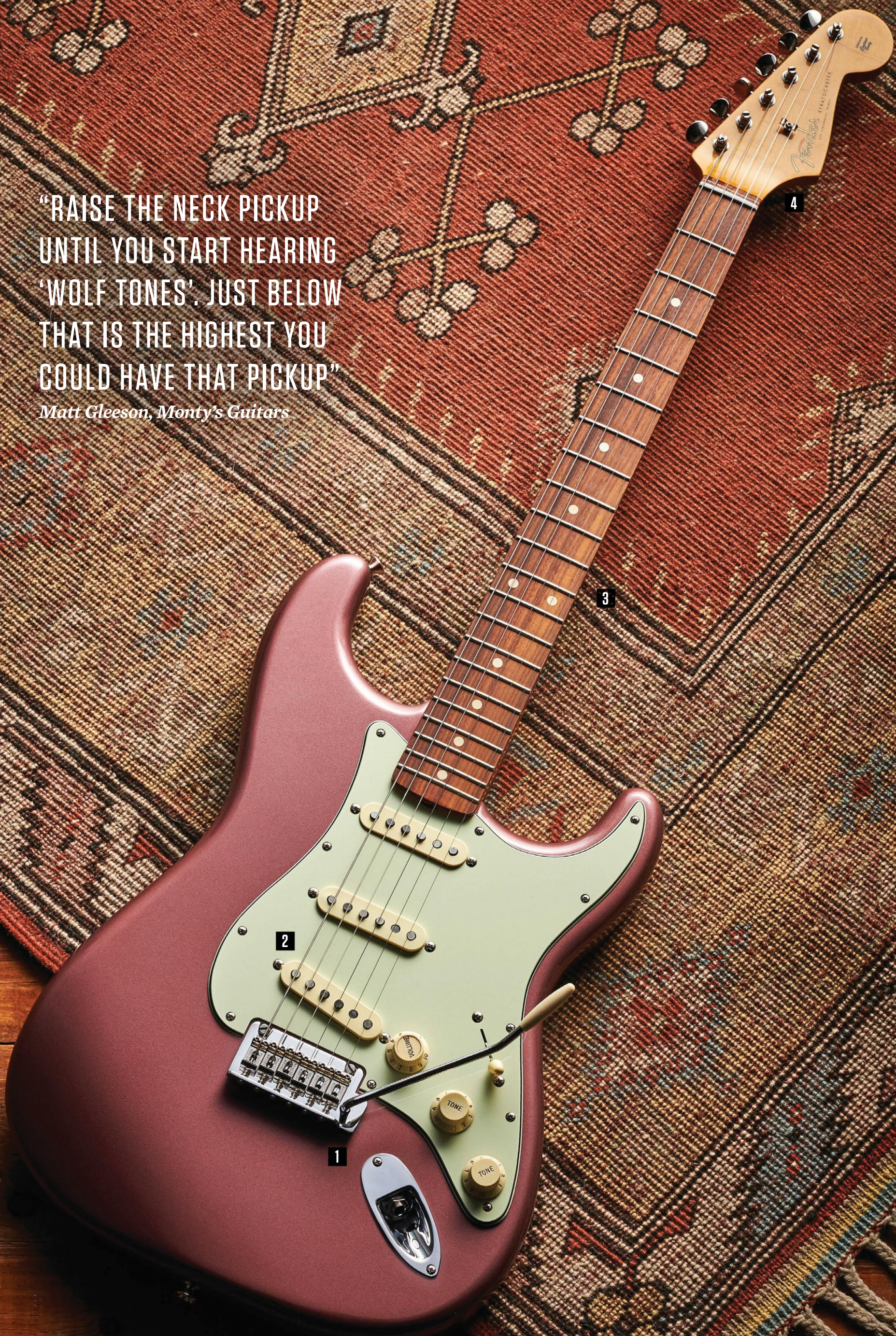
"I've never liked the string to have to angle down from the tuning post to the string tree and then angle back up to the nut," Matt says. "It goes back to that whole friction thing: you're adding another point of potential high friction there. So I typically put more winds [spooling from top to bottom] on the E and the B strings than on the G string. That way, the string will go down from the nut to the string tree but then it will usually end up being roughly level from the string tree to the post." **G**



For vibrato setups, get your guitar in tune first before making any adjustments to the screws

“RAISE THE NECK PICKUP
UNTIL YOU START HEARING
‘WOLF TONES’. JUST BELOW
THAT IS THE HIGHEST YOU
COULD HAVE THAT PICKUP”

Matt Gleeson, Monty's Guitars



TOP TWEAKS

The experts offer up final pieces of advice on how to keep your instrument in its best condition and working order

Words Jamie Dickson

EVH'S PICKUP TRICK

"In general, raising humbuckers higher will give you more output and high-end, while lowering them will clean your tone up and offer a smoother sound," says Gibson's Jim DeCola. "I designed Eddie Van Halen's Wolfgang guitar a few years ago and his approach involves lowering the pickups to about 1/8 inch from the strings, so they're very low. While that does reduce the output from the pickups, your high-end is now attenuated at a greater rate than the low-end, and he likes that low-end to predominate: it has a chunkier kind of sound. And then he makes up for the loss of output with the gain of his amps and effects."

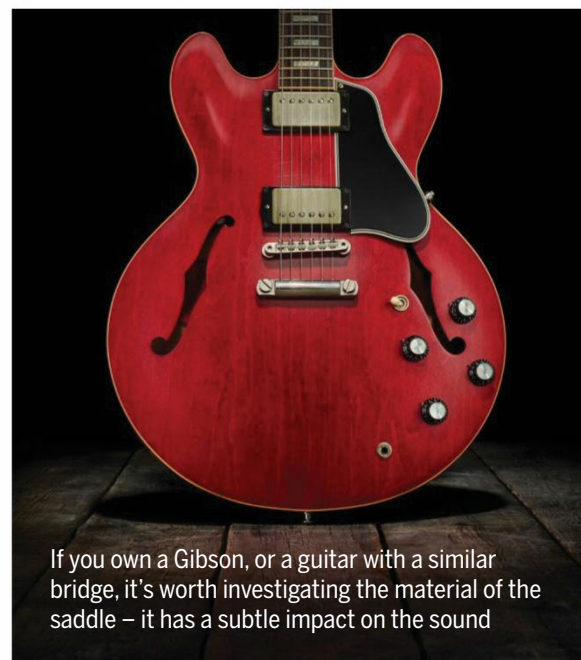
GOING FOR GOLD-FOILS

Gold-foil pickups are coming back into fashion and it's worth being aware that they can have slightly different setup needs than run-of-the-mill humbuckers or single coils. "Gold foils, Rickenbacker pickups and things like that," says Matt Gleeson. "A lot of them use rubber magnets, which are very weak, so you can get them physically much closer to the string."

However, many of those gold foil-type pickups haven't got any height adjustment. You can get humbucker mounts and things like that for them now, but if that isn't an option it's worth mucking about with padding them up [beneath] to see if you can find a way to raise them a little. You might have to think outside the box a little bit to get them to sound really good. They do sound great, though, when they're working right."

SADDLE UP

Over the years, Gibson guitars and other models with similar bridges have been fitted with saddles made of a variety of materials, each of which have their own qualities. Jim DeCola talks us through the different materials you can try out. "Over the years, we've used brass and nylon and then die-cast zinc, depending on the model and the era," he says. "Some players do like that nylon sound because it's got a softer attack and it's easier on string breakage. I've also heard of a few artists who will mix and match, where they'll have a nylon saddle for the E and B maybe and then the brass for the rest of the strings."



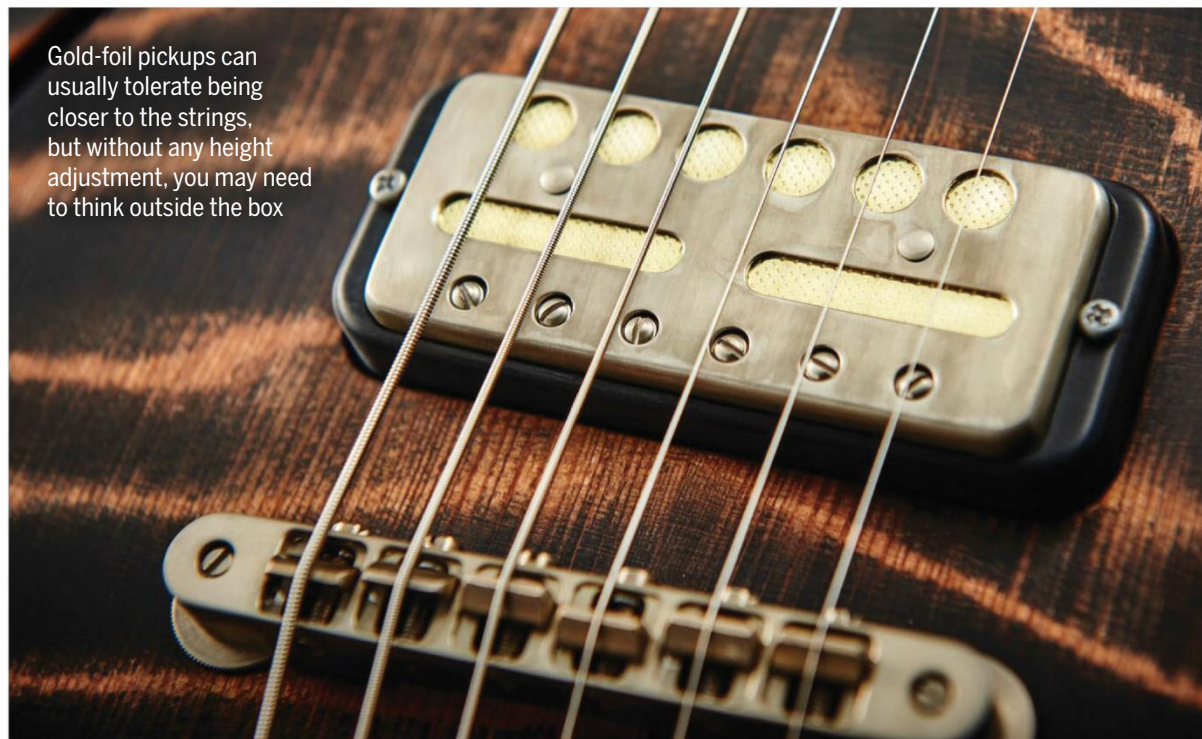
If you own a Gibson, or a guitar with a similar bridge, it's worth investigating the material of the saddle – it has a subtle impact on the sound

"Brass will offer more sustain than nylon but arguably has a smoother sound than zinc because brass is a softer metal. But you're dealing in real subtleties there. Personally, I do like the brass saddles on ABR, but the Nashville-style tune-o-matics have historically used the die-cast zinc for the entire assembly."

TWO TELE TIPS

"One important thing with the Telecaster is to make sure the bridge plate is screwed down flat against the body," says Matt Gleeson of Monty's Guitars. "Quite often, especially if you're swapping pickups in and out, it's easy for the string ground – which is the wire that comes up from the body and goes underneath the bridge plate – to move around and then the bridge plate itself can lift up a little. And that gives you things like microphonics that nobody really wants. So that would be one thing to look out for."

"Another thing that's really specific to Telecasters – especially for some late 90s/early Noughties models – is there can be very little break angle from the nut to the tuning post on the G string, so it's easy for the G to rattle in the nut because there's no force pulling it down, especially if there are only a couple of turns around



Gold-foil pickups can usually tolerate being closer to the strings, but without any height adjustment, you may need to think outside the box

CLEAN MACHINE

A clean instrument is more likely to play well and remain fault-free. It'll look and feel great, too. Matt Gleeson describes his preferred cleaning regime for guitars

"If the finish is grubby then I'll use something like a lighter fluid. You'll hear about it on YouTube and other places, where they'll call it 'naphtha', but it's basically the same thing. That gets rid of the gunge, but it doesn't do a good job of polishing the finish. There are loads of good polishes on the market, but here we use something called Muc-Off, which is [a range of products for bicycles, motorcycles and cars]. I stumbled across the bike polish when the workshop was in my garage. It works on everything.

"Don't use any abrasives like T-Cut to deal with scratches and blemishes unless you know what you're doing. If you've got little scratches and chips, I would just tend to leave them because nine times out of 10, unless you're going to be refinishing the guitar, you're just going to make it look worse. So just keep things nice and simple.

"When it gets to rosewood fingerboards, our cleaning regime is lighter fluid applied with an old toothbrush so you can get right underneath each fret and get all the gunk out of there. The naphtha will dry out the wood, so you need to moisturise it. We have various oils for that. Lemon oil itself is a type of mineral oil [containing little or no real lemon oil] and I find it's a better cleaner than it is a moisturiser. So I've developed a wax here – called Monty's Instrument Food – that we use. Before I had that, I was using a joiner's finishing wax. That gave great results, too, but it stank! A suitable wax will moisturise everything and seal it in, too, so your 'boards will look a lot better and will stay that way for a lot longer than if you just use a standard oil.

"I know some people who really like olive oil and all that kind of stuff on their 'board. All of that will work, you just don't want to put too much on. We did have one guy who put some kind of pure lemon essence rather than lemon oil on his fretboard, which then ate into the wood. It wasn't exactly the nicest stuff, so don't do that! But most oils or waxes will be fine for that kind of thing."



You can get your finish looking box-fresh with a combination of lighter fluid and suitable polishes

the tuning post. On my Telecaster, I like to have six or seven winds on there [spooling downwards from top to bottom], which means you've got a much better break angle over the nut, so you don't get that kind of weird singing, sitar-y noise you sometimes get."

BACK IN THE SADDLE

"Because of the angle of the saddle, the high E string on a traditional Tele bridge sometimes wants to slide 'downhill' and contact the height-adjustment screw," says Ron Thorn of Fender's Custom Shop. "That's unfortunate because, one, it's moving the high E even closer to the edge of the fretboard; and two, it's no longer breaking over the saddle but laterally contacting the thread of the set-screw – and I think that can really make things cruddy.

"On my personal Teles with traditional bridges I will put a string groove for the high E string – just a little notch on the back edge of the saddle, just to keep that in the right location. You may not want to do that to a vintage guitar, but if you have a modern guitar where you could easily replace the saddle, I would pass a nut-slot file through there just to keep the high E string in check."

JOIN THE VICE SQUAD

"If you've got a well-equipped workshop, great," offers our own Nev Marten, who has been an official repair tech for both Fender and Gibson. "But if not, it's worth getting a small vice that can act like a third 'hand' when it comes to certain operations, such as tinning wire prior to soldering, which is fiddly and annoying without it. There are some great 'hobby' vices that cost under £20 and will clamp to a table without damaging it – you might want to add a piece of card for extra padding and protection, though."

GET OUT OF A BIND

"Here's one thing that does happen quite a lot with Les Pauls and 335s with binding," says Matt Gleeson of Monty's Guitars. "You know the bit where the fret stops and you've got a little 'nubbin' of plastic that rises up to meet it at the end? Well, the strings can get stuck in there. You have to be careful, but you can put a dot of Super Glue or nail varnish in [the gap between the end of the fret and the plastic], then let it dry and carefully sand it down. And that will seal that area, so you're less likely for it to grip in there and cause embarrassments while you're on stage." **G**



TELEOLOGY

70 years on from the release of Fender's watershed design, we take a look at the Blackguard era of Esquires, Broadcasters, Nocasters and Telecasters with the creator of BlackguardLogs.com, Tele expert Richard diZerega

Words Rod Brakes Photography Joby Sessions & Olly Curtis

“I was always a Strat guy, but as I got more into vintage Fenders, I thought, ‘Blackguards are really where the history’s at,’” begins Richard diZerega. As a player, collector and avid researcher of vintage guitars, Richard’s deep fascination with Fender’s fledgling solidbody designs led to the creation of BlackguardLogs.com – a website dedicated to preserving Fender history by filling the gaps in factory records while identifying and detailing individual instruments. “What really drew me to Blackguards was the history,” he continues, “and once I got it, I was like, ‘What have I been missing out on?!’”

“There are so many myths surrounding Blackguards, including the hype that’s around the name Tadeo Gomez. A Tadeo-signed neck is considered by many to be the Holy Grail of Fender necks. Truth is, there’s no evidence to back up that narrative. He was an unskilled labourer responsible for finish sanding. For us to hold him in higher regard does a disservice to Leo [Fender]. Leo almost bankrupted himself by investing in new tooling so that they could hire someone who needed minimal training to help build a guitar. They wanted people to be productive within hours, not weeks. It’s like the Henry Ford approach: they didn’t want an engineer to step in at every point in production.

“The community sometimes gets very defensive at this perspective, saying I’m attacking Tadeo. I personally think the hype is self-serving to Tadeo neck owners,

but I own two Tadeo signed necks and I’ll be the first to say it’s hype.”

Although more and more pictorial and factual evidence is surfacing thanks to the concerted efforts of Fender historians worldwide, countless myths have arisen over the years in the absence of factory records – notably shipping figures and serial number information.

“The biggest myth bar none is that you can tell what year a Blackguard is based on the serial number,” reveals Richard. “They are all over the place. For example, BlackguardLogs.com has recently been posting guitars around the 2200-3000 range. Those are generally ’52 Telecasters, but Mike Campbell’s famous 1950 Broadcaster has a 29XX serial number. One of my favourite guitars is a guitar formerly owned by the great Redd Volkaert. It’s [serial number] 0065, which is a really low number, but it’s a [1951] Nocaster, not a Broadcaster. The biggest falsehood by far is that you can date a Blackguard based on its serial number.”

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“I think the Tele’s success over the years is down to its simplicity. They got a lot right from the get-go”

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In addition to a lack of factory records, the ability to identify original Blackguards is hampered by the numerous fakes and guitars with non-original parts.

“I love statistics,” enthuses Richard. “It’s always interesting to go and look at the min and max serial number by year, or min and max serial number by model. But the problem is these guitars are several decades old and it’s so easy to take a bridge off of one guitar and put it on another. [Serial numbers relocated from the bridge to the neck plate in late 1954.] There’s no telling what history has been harmed in that respect. There’s also a pretty big problem with fakes these days. It’s like that old joke: ‘Gibson built about 1,700 ’Bursts, but only 2,000 have been found.’ It’s similar for Blackguards, especially Broadcasters.

“BlackguardLogs.com already has 177 Broadcasters registered and we don’t know exactly how many Broadcasters were made, but some people will say the figure is as low as 200. Now, there’s no way we’ve captured that high a proportion! Some of them get converted to make it a more valuable thing – perhaps with a new decal or maybe with something more malicious. I see white-’guard guitars [Telecasters and Esquires from late ’54 onwards] converted to Blackguards all the time. I’ve caught several dealers out when I’ve had pictures of guitars – including their serial numbers – with white ’guards, that they’ve later advertised as Blackguards. It is a struggle. Any time there’s value in something, there will be people trying to cheat others.

A 1953 Telecaster and
wide-panel tweed '53
Fender Deluxe amp

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*“The '53 Tele was a workhorse
of Roy Buchanan, James
Burton and Danny Gatton.
'53 is a sweet spot year”*
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1. All Blackguards feature a bridge pickup with flat polepieces. Brass saddles were replaced by steel saddles in late 1954 when the serial number relocated to the neckplate and white pickguards became standard

2. With the selector switch in the back position, what we now consider to be a 'tone' knob functioned as a blend control between both pickups on Broadcasters,
- Nocasters and early Telecasters

3. 1950 Broadcaster with original 'thermometer' case, strap and bridge cover. These snap-on covers are often referred to as 'ash tray' covers on account of their alternative (and perhaps more practical!) use

4. A close-up of this 1950 Broadcaster shows the typical flaky finish with both vertical and horizontal checking

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“Blackguards have increased in value so much and it’s a hot market. More so than Strats, easily”

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Blackguards have increased in value so much and it’s a hot market right now. More so than Strats, easily. Somebody recently posted a ‘near mint’ ’53 online asking what people thought he could get for it and he’s now trying to sell it for \$65,000. I think he’s high, but he’s not that high. I think he could easily get \$55,000 for it.”

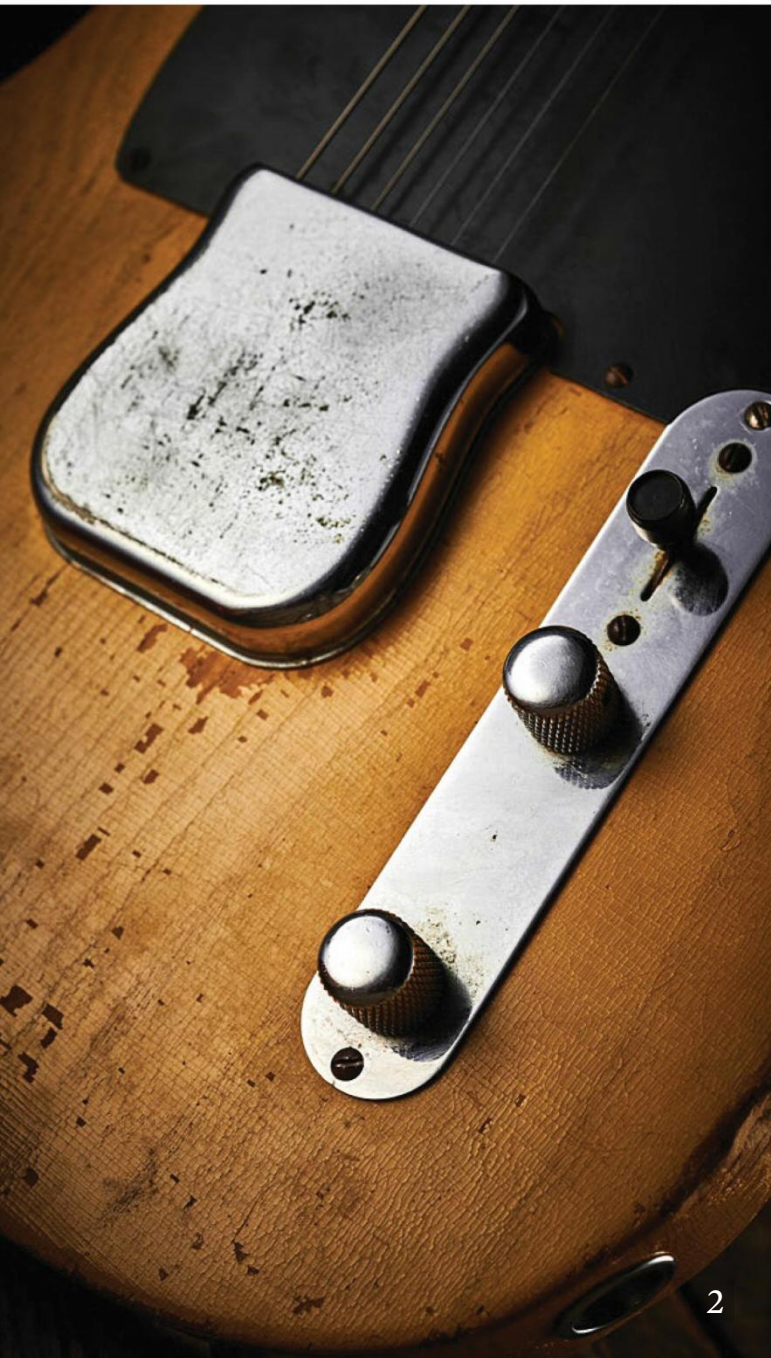
Although it’s not advisable to date Blackguards using serial numbers, an expert with a well-trained eye can provide an accurate assessment of originality and condition based on a range of details including body/routing, finish, neck profile, hardware, plastics, pickups, electronics, pot dates, and markings.

“A lot of the time, you can take a look at the finish and get an idea of what year the guitar is from,” Richard tells us. “They were constantly fine-tuning the finish. If you look at pics of Broadcasters that have an original finish, they’ll often appear very flaky and can have checking in both vertical and horizontal directions. I would say that was a defect of the Broadcaster into early ’51. My [May 1951 Nocaster] is a much lighter finish than [on] later [models]. In ’52 to ’53 the finish starts becoming thicker; it’s very easy to see that. I think the typical yellowing

has more to do with environmental factors than UV discolouration, such as sweat and tobacco. In the 50s, smoking was super common – virtually everyone smoked – and I think that especially contributed to the darkening of Blackguard finishes.”

The Blackguard’s iconic blonde finish, often referred to as ‘butterscotch’ on account of its aged yellow hue, is transparent and so reveals each guitar’s unique ash body grain ‘fingerprint’. Although Leo’s choice of wood may have ultimately been a matter of cost, the decision to use ash was also based on aesthetics.

“The earliest Blackguards had pine bodies, but I think wood was more easily available back then and pine was quickly replaced with ash, probably because of the grain,” reasons Richard. “Those old swamp ash bodies have a great-looking grain. Occasionally, you’ll see a quarter-sawn body where the grain looks completely different – it’ll be tighter because of how the board was sawn. One-piece bodies were present throughout the Blackguard run, but I feel like I see more in the early years. Two-piece bodies are more common and can even have a diagonal seam. This is sometimes

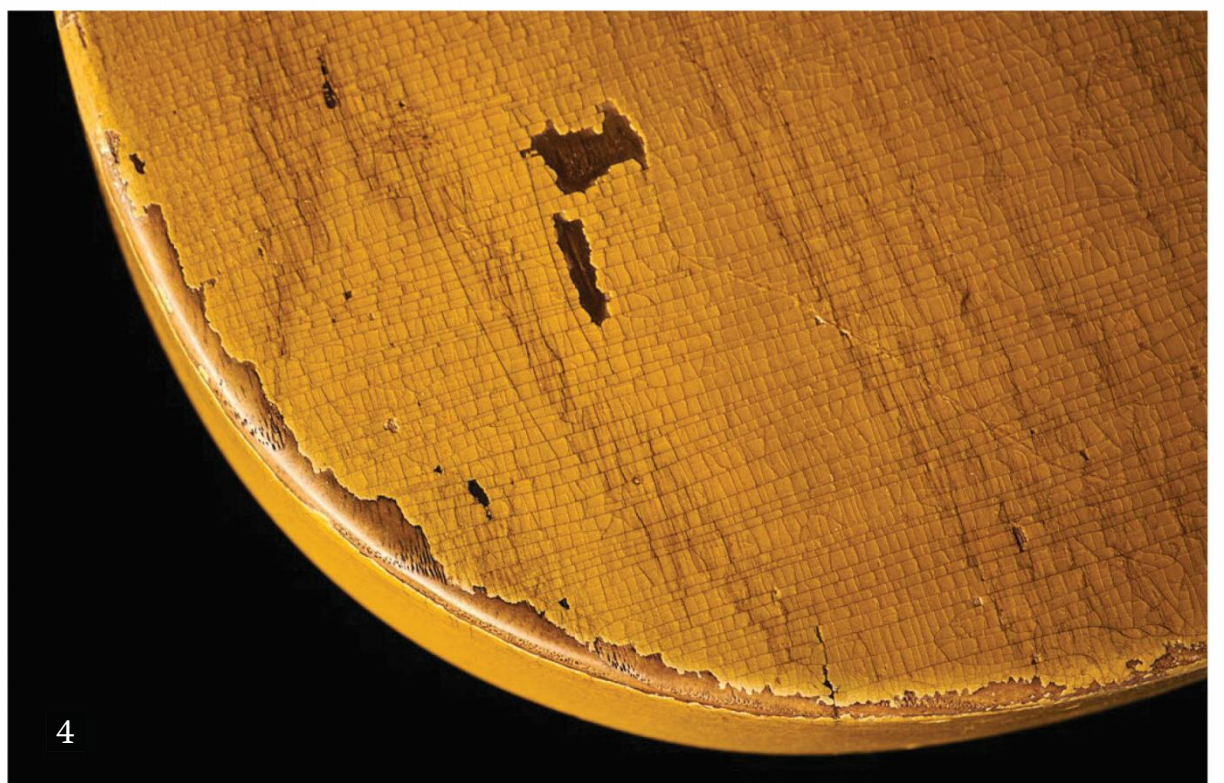


accentuated by the grain not being matched very well. It looks much more obvious when it's going in one direction and then it suddenly goes in another.

"There is something magical about Broadcasters, but most tend to be really heavy. It's not unheard of to find a Broadcaster weighing nine pounds – you're getting into Les Paul weight there! There's a lot of variation. At this point, Fender were fine-tuning things, certainly through '50 to '51, and in '51 they started to hit their stride. '52 is a good period and a lot of people feel that '53 is the year when things really came together. The '53 Tele was a workhorse of Roy Buchanan, James Burton and Danny Gatton. '53 is a sweet spot year. In my mind, that's when things got really consistent. I don't see as many '54 Blackguards, probably because Fender were investing so much in the Stratocaster in early '54, and switching [Teles] over to white 'guards."

Changing shape over time, the early Blackguard necks are renowned for their profiles, as Richard explains.

"Although profiles vary, I generally see bigger, thicker necks in the early Blackguard years. They probably got feedback from musicians that they were a little fatiguing



Featuring one or, rarely, two pickups, the earliest Fender solidbodies appeared under the Esquire moniker in the spring of 1950



By autumn 1950, dual-pickup models were labelled as Broadcasters while the Esquire designation was retained for their single-pickup counterparts



In early 1951, following a trademark objection from Gretsch, Fender briefly omitted a model name from the headstock, thus giving rise to the term 'Nocaster'



Later in spring 1951, Fender unveiled its rebranded model: the Telecaster, the name conceived just days after Gretsch objected to the Broadcaster name



to play for a long time. It's possible they made it thicker to begin with to give it some extra strength as Leo didn't want to put a truss rod in initially. I wouldn't call them baseball bat necks, but most early Blackguards have a very full profile. My '51 Nocaster has that kind of profile. When I first got it, it was fatiguing to play for a long period of time because I wasn't used to it – I was more used to playing Strats from '56 or '57 that were a soft 'V' profile. Profiles seemed to slim down in '52 and increase again in '53 through '54, but they are hard to generalise."

Blackguards are also notable for their unique pickups and control configurations.

"The Tele bridge pickup changed from flat to staggered polepieces in late '55, and I'd put the flat pole Blackguard bridge pickup up against a PAF any day," challenges Richard. "It has such a wide variety of tone. To me, it feels like the best of playing a Gibson and the best of playing a Strat. I feel like I can get much more of

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"You can often take a look at the finish and get an idea of what year the guitar is from. They were constantly fine-tuning it"

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a Gibson sound on the bridge pickup of a Blackguard than a Strat. But then you might say, 'Why don't you play a Gibson?' Well, I don't feel like I can get the same finesse out of a Gibson. Blackguards just have such a unique and agile sound.

"There are a lot of people who love those old controls, too. When it comes to the original circuits, with the switch in the back position, it allows you to blend in the neck pickup [with the bridge pickup] using the tone knob. There's no tone cap involved. You can go from all bridge and then blend in the neck. I pretty much always keep the bridge pickup wide open, but there are people who like it in between. It's really very subtle – maybe subtler than people imagine – but I think it adds more low-end and mids. The middle position is just the neck pickup with no tone adjustment whatsoever, and the forward position cuts out all the highs and is very muted. That was Leo's idea to cater to jazz musicians. And to use it as a bass sound. When the Broadcaster came out, there was not an electric bass yet – he invented that the next year!"



Fender's first custom colour guitar is believed to be this Ermine White '51 Nocaster with gold-plated parts (from the Songbirds museum) that belonged to Nat King Cole guitarist Oscar Moore

Although the dark-sounding front-position 'jazz tone' remained, in 1952 the Telecaster's electronics were modified to include a regular tone control/knob with the neck and bridge pickups individually selected in the middle and rear positions respectively. This design remained standard for Teles up until 1967 when it was changed to the more familiar format where the neck, bridge and both pickups are selected in the front, rear and middle positions respectively, with all three positions featuring a regular tone control. Despite such changes, however, the Telecaster's essential design has remained faithful to its original Blackguard incarnation up to the present day.

"I think the Telecaster's success over the years is down to its simplicity," concludes Richard. "They got a lot right from the get-go. Some of it was by genius and some of it was by luck. There were some really crazy ideas in the design – like the idea they could make a separate body and neck and just swap it out with some bolts. That's still used in pretty much every Fender guitar today, as are the pickups. Leo got a lot right. It was a

case of, 'I have a pickup that works great in a lap steel, so let's use that.' The bridge plate was a new holding mechanism to keep the pickup in place, and it allowed adjustment of string distance. The very earliest ones have a steel plate on the bottom that would later change to brass [in 1951], and some of them are potted differently. I think a lot of that change was them trying to see what would work well in this new form factor of a solidbody guitar.

"A lot of it sprang from the initial conversations with musicians that were along the lines of, 'I want a solidbody that's not going to feed back like crazy at high volumes.' The story of the Blackguards is really interesting. My understanding is all this started with a meeting between Les Paul, Paul Bigsby and Leo Fender. Les Paul was saying, 'All these hollowbodies feed back too much. I would really like a guitar that doesn't have this problem of so much feedback when I play live.' They were brainstorming over a solidbody guitar and Bigsby built a few. But he really didn't go commercial with it. Leo took it from there." **G**

STEVE HOWE

As a child of the 50s stirred by the spirit of rock 'n' roll, Steve Howe's rite of passage on the London gig circuit saw him come of age during the swinging 60s. Later rising from the ashes of flower power to join prog-rock trailblazers Yes in 1970, he then spent the next decade helping to cut a swathe of genre-defining classic albums. With his new autobiography – *All My Yesterdays: The Autobiography Of Steve Howe* – set for release later this year, we caught up with the man himself to take a look back at his prolific career as one of rock's most influential guitarists...

Words Rod Brakes

Guitars, Guitars, Guitars

"I wasn't immune to music before the rock 'n' roll revolution started. My parents had Les Paul and Mary Ford records on 78, you know, singing *How High The Moon* and *The World Is Waiting For The Sunrise*. Amazing recordings. I heard them and they were just part of my life. There was also a guy called Tennessee Ernie Ford and he had a couple of great players on his records called Jimmy Bryant and Speedy West. Those records were pretty exciting. And then rock 'n' roll and Chuck Berry came along and I was just thinking, 'Guitars, guitars, guitars...' I was moaning at my parents, 'I want a guitar! I want a guitar!' and I finally got one for Christmas in 1959, when I was 12 years old. It wasn't a Framus, but it looked like a Framus f-hole acoustic archtop."

Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar

"Chuck Berry was one of the big inspirations, but I liked all the rock 'n' roll acts. I started to notice that singers often had a good guitarist alongside them. Like Bill Hailey had great guitarists, Ricky

Nelson had James Burton, and Elvis Presley had Scotty Moore. So I modelled myself on being a guy like that – the guy who stood on stage and just played guitar while the singer did all the shaking about and all the yelling. I thought, 'I'd like that job,' and that's basically what happened. Standing there, playing the guitar became my whole life. That's where it started."

Electric Dreams

"The 60s were all about learning for me. For the first couple of years, I used that acoustic archtop. I screwed pickups on it, but it became horrible to play. It wasn't much good for me for stage work, and after a couple of years I realised if I really wanted to play the guitar, I'd need to get an electric. That's when I bought an Antoria from a friend – I also had an Antoria amp to go with it – but it had a tiny little body. After playing that for a while, I decided I wanted a big guitar, a full-body guitar, and when I was 17, my parents helped me buy the [1964] Gibson ES-175D. That was the guitar I loved the shape of and the one I really wanted to play."

Only My Gibson Is Good Enough

"The signature [Gibson Steve Howe ES-175] was a struggle to get right. After all, the '64 Gibson ES-175D is a very, very fine guitar and I wanted them to make one as good as that. It was a very nice relationship, but I was just put out by the fact that it was never going to be as good as my '64. But then an original '64 costs a lot more. When Gibson changed hands, some people got on to me and said, 'Steve, we want to do this guitar exactly like your '64,' and I said, 'Tell me about it!' The new guys are sweethearts. I've dealt with them and they're really nice."

"Martin have been amazing, too. I'm delighted to have a great working relationship with them. I have a '53 00-18 and they brought out the 00-18SH [Steve Howe] based on that, which is a very nice guitar. Then they brought out the MC-38 Steve Howe, which is a signature model based on the MC-28 – a guitar I played for many years."

Steve's first decade with Yes was spent experimenting with guitars and sounds that strayed far beyond the restraints of commercialism. Here he plays at the Rainbow Theatre in London on 17 December 1972





Steve's 1980 Gibson ES Artist is fitted with a powerful onboard compressor and Steve admits "being scared of it at first". It's pictured here with a vintage Gibson Explorer amp

Photo by Adam Gasson

On The Road With Vintage Guitars

"I play old guitars on stage because they're worth taking along. It doesn't hurt that something's worn in. It's like an old pair of slippers or an old sofa, you know, they do kind of caress you. I have another '64 ES-175D that I use a lot because my best one stays at home most of the time, mainly because of airlines and stupid rules. You can go to Spain with a guitar, but you can't come back with that same guitar. Are you nuts? I just came over with this guitar and nobody blinked an eyelid, but when I come back it's, 'Oh, no, you can't take that on the plane!' That's why my other 175D stays at home."

Digital Revelations

"I've got some great, great guitars, but what I don't use now are endless arrays of pedals. I mean, I did the pedalboard thing pretty early on. A lot of people sussed that if you stuck them on a 'board, you didn't have to set it up every day, they wouldn't break or fall apart so easily, and you wouldn't stumble over them. I had pedalboards like that for years and years, but now I don't. It's just passé to me. These days, my gear is incredibly streamlined. I like to press one button and radically

change my sound. I just press a button and it all happens at once. That is heaven, you know. Performing is all about preparation. It took me a while to get into programming, but the [Line 6] Helix can do everything I can possibly want and, therefore, that's all I want to use. Line 6 are one of the most accomplished and excellent companies doing electric guitar stuff. The Helix is amazing, and I've got nothing bad to say about Line 6. They're great guys, too."

Chain Reaction

"I've had so many [pedals] over the years: Big Muffs, Boomerang pedals, different sorts of wah-wahs and stuff from Maestro. Most of the stuff I've forgotten about, but I have it somewhere, or remnants of it. But the thing people often miss is – and this is important – is that it's not just about your guitarist, their guitar, the pedals, the amp, the microphone... It's also about the recording engineer who knows how to record a guitar. So I give credit where it's due, because there's a lot more to sound. There's a myriad of different things. The first thing is who's playing it and what that person thinks while he's planning to play something. It goes down that long chain and it ends up with a recording engineer sitting in a studio."

Junior Class

"When it comes to guitars, one of the biggest criteria for me is playability. I'm happy on 175s, I'm happy on 335s, and I'm happy on Les Pauls. The Les Paul Junior is a great guitar. The thing I like about Steinbergers and Les Paul Juniors and Telecasters is they're so simple. Nothing can go wrong. They're great guitars to explore your ideas with. My Les Paul Junior is an absolute beauty. It's featured a lot on *Tales From Topographic Oceans* and a fair amount of other things, so it goes out on tour with me. I love it. It's a great-sounding guitar. Great!"

Venturing Out Of The Shadows

"My first band started out more or less as a pop group called The Syndicats. We'd do what other bands did, which was play chart material in a pub, because that's all we knew we could do. Then I threw in some other weird tunes that nobody had ever heard before. We also did a lot of The Shadows and The Ventures and guitar-featured numbers. But we had a singer, so we had to do some songs. We did a lot of Chuck Berry, and that's where the R&B side of things took off. Eventually, I wanted to move on, and when The In-Crowd asked me if I wanted to play, I said yes. And that meant



“I enjoyed having people who had made thousands of records talking to me about what I should play. and that also educated me about being in a band”

•

“Tomorrow were so cocky. We thought we could play other people off the stage. And we enjoyed that egotism and cockiness”

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I was playing soul – Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett and that kind of stuff. That lasted a year or so. We had a hit record and I got to work with a top producer by the name of Joe Meek.”

Getting Smart

“Joe Meek was the first producer I had ever worked with in my life. He was complicated – a little crazy at times – but very nice and he was a talent. I wouldn’t say he was a genius like some do, but he was a talent. He thought that Phil Spector was stealing his ideas – as opposed to him stealing Phil Spector’s ideas, of course. Maybe. He was a bit difficult to work with at times, but then again a lot of people in the industry are.

“I wanted the producers I worked with to think I was adaptable. If they said to me, ‘Will you play that?’ then I’d say, ‘Oh, yes, I’ll play that.’ I enjoyed having people who were smart and had made thousands of records talking to me about what I should play. And that also educated me about being in a band. You really have to listen to somebody when they say, ‘Why don’t you play that? Don’t play this, play that.’ At first, it gets your back up and you might hate them and you feel a little hurt. And then you realise, ‘No, it’s a good idea.’ You’ve got to smarten up and not be a bag of emotional nerves.”

The Summer Of Love

“There were a lot of seeds planted in the 60s. We cared a lot about the world. We cared about love, we cared about flowers, we cared about ecology, we cared about food. The band I was in after I joined The Syndicats – The In-Crowd – lasted a while and then we converted ourselves into Tomorrow. I wrote a few bits and I improvised a lot, and we became a wild touring band. We opened for Pink Floyd, we opened for Jimi Hendrix, we opened for everybody. We were everybody’s opening act, but we didn’t mind that. We were climbing the ladder and I was delighted. We had a level of success that we could deal with.



Previously known as The In-Crowd, Tomorrow featured (left to right) John ‘Junior’ Wood, Steve Howe, John ‘Twink’ Alder and Keith West (front), and enjoyed short-lived success, playing with Hendrix and Pink Floyd

Photo by Gems/Redferns

“Tomorrow were so cocky. We thought we were the best band in the world. We played with Pink Floyd, Jimi Hendrix and Vanilla Fudge, and we thought nobody could play us off the stage. We thought we could play other people off the stage. And we enjoyed that egotism and cockiness. But then ’68 came along and flower power was kind of over, you know. It was like, ‘Okay, what’s next?’

Yes, I Do

“In 1970, I got a phone call from Chris Squire. He said, ‘Do you want to come down and play Jon [Anderson] and I a tune? We both like your playing. Come down and play with us.’ So we played and it worked. And we made *The Yes Album* in the countryside – basically, we were back on that kind of hippie thing, really. At the time, the ideal thing a band could do was escape to somewhere remote, write songs and record them. And that’s what we did. The 70s were an incredible decade, just years of making all different kinds of music.”

Decade Of Progression

“That 10 years was the most intense and most successful in my career. I wallow in the delight of great albums like *Tales From Topographic Oceans* and *Relayer* and *Fragile* and *Close To The Edge*. I really don’t have a favourite because I change my mind, but *Close To The Edge* is a phenomenal

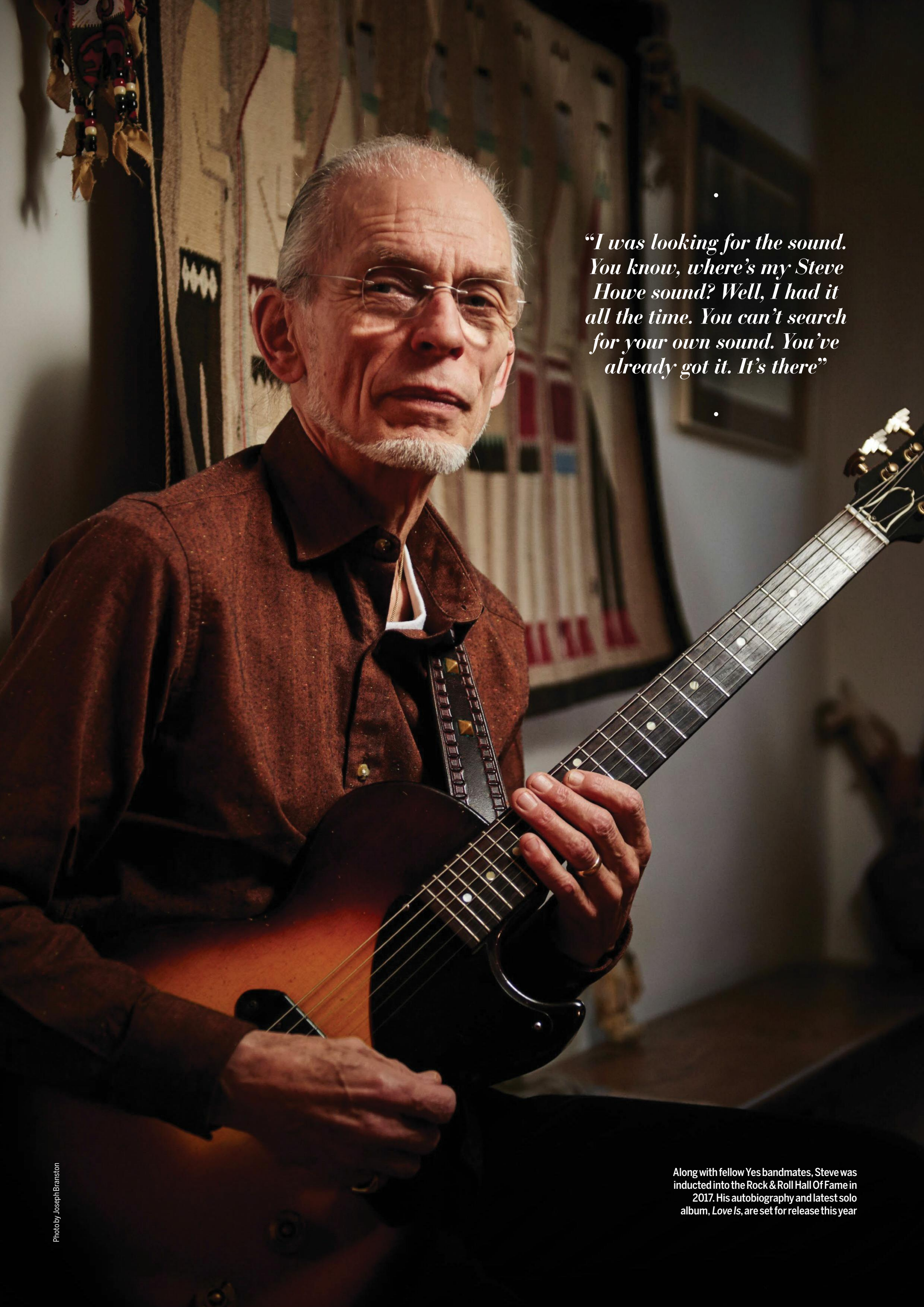
collection and was a new style of record. I mean, it’s astounding. Even I can see that. It gave us an interesting balance, which allowed us to expand our music without any regard for commercialisation whatsoever. We cared if people listened to it, but we didn’t want to fit into the box of being a three-and-a-half-minute hit band. We went in the opposite direction. Sometimes Yes purposely decommercialised music.”

Searching For The Sound

“Throughout that whole 10 years we changed all the time. And I changed guitars all the time. By the time we got to *Drama* [in 1980], my goodness, I was playing the Les Paul, I was playing 175s, I was playing steels, I was playing any kind of guitar I could grapple with, and loving it. Every album has got the 175 on it somewhere – some more predominantly than others – but it always had a new featured guitar. I was looking for the sound. You know, where’s my Steve Howe sound? What is it? Well, I had it all the time. You can’t search for your own sound. You’ve already got it. It’s there. It’s what you sound like.” **G**



All My Yesterdays: The Autobiography Of Steve Howe (Omnibus Press) is available now and a new solo album, *Love Is*, will be released on 31 July www.omnibuspress.com



•
“I was looking for the sound. You know, where’s my Steve Howe sound? Well, I had it all the time. You can’t search for your own sound. You’ve already got it. It’s there”
•

Along with fellow Yes bandmates, Steve was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame in 2017. His autobiography and latest solo album, *Love Is*, are set for release this year

Street Cred

Taylor's latest environmentalist strategy involves the use of a new wood, Urban Ash. How will it stack up against the established timber elite?

Words David Mead **Photography** Neil Godwin





TAYLOR BUILDER'S EDITION 324CE £3,239

CONTACT **Taylor Guitars** PHONE **+31 (0) 206 676030** WEB **www.taylorguitars.com**

What You Need To Know

1 What's 'Urban Ash' all about, then?

Also known as 'Shamel ash' or 'evergreen ash', the trees are found in cities across Southern California, providing shade, windbreaks, wildlife habitats and so on. After 70 years or so they reach the end of their cycle and need to be removed. Taylor's master designer Andy Powers experimented with various urban species and found that Shamel ash, "in almost every physical way I can measure it, is reminiscent of really good Honduran mahogany".

2 That's a big claim...

And it wasn't made lightly. There are many species that have reached the end of their lives as part of the "green infrastructure" of California's cities, and Andy Powers was invited to test a few. After several prototypes, he settled on Urban Ash to lead the charge of Taylor's latest initiative.

3 So, this is just a part of what Taylor is doing for the environment?

Yes. You might have heard of Taylor's Ebony Project that dates back to 2011 when the company became co-owner of a sawmill in Cameroon to ensure the wood's sustainability. Taylor has initiated a replanting programme to guarantee the least possible impact on resources. The Urban Ash programme is another step in the company's drive to go green.

One of the greatest obstacles a guitar company – or individual luthier, for that matter – has to face is to convince the eyes, ears, hearts and minds of its customer base that a new and ecologically sound wood the company is beginning to use is a good idea. After all, steel-string acoustic manufacture has been convincing us for generations that the tried-and-true timbers such as spruce, rosewood and mahogany are the tonal royal family and prospective usurpers are often treated with either complete disdain or a polite, "I'd rather not, thanks."

Traditional acoustic guitar woods have been in use for approximately 100 years, since Martin began its pioneering work with steel-strung instruments during the early part of the 20th century. The 'good vibrations' of spruce, rosewood and mahogany can be heard ringing out for as long as music has been recorded – and some of us look back with a glowing nostalgia at the works of Joni Mitchell, Crosby, Stills & Nash and their contemporaries whose timeless music was almost exclusively underpinned by Martin D-28s.



The fretboard is made using West African ebony



The 324ce's back and sides welcome in a new recruit to the timber brigade, but its top is the more familiar mahogany

But times have changed. We've never been more acutely aware of dwindling resources where wood is concerned, and the recent Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (aka CITES) mandate on rosewoods served as a much-needed wake-up call for the industry. Lesson learned.

Since then, we've seen companies across the globe begin to experiment with less threatened and more sustainable woods, gradually easing into our consciousness the message that the good times are far from over, as long as we're sensible, but, more importantly, that there is another way of doing things.

Bob Taylor has taken the message to heart and his company is one that is leading the field in finding an ecologically sound way forward for guitar making. Taylor's Ebony Project has been in place for nearly a decade, ensuring a properly managed resource for a timber that features on just about every acoustic it turns out. Now, the company has turned its attention to another supply that was under its nose all along – urban timber, from trees that form the green canopy in Taylor's hometown of El Cajon and beyond. Teaming up with the West Coast Arborists, the question was when trees they were seeing every day on their way to the factory reached the end of

THE RIVALS

The biggest rival here is Martin, and its Modern Deluxe OM-28 comes in at just over £3,661, but we've seen them street at £3,166, too. Also, the Martin Standard D-18 is a whole lotta guitar for £2,375, and well worth investigating. At this price, you're also nosing into the bespoke market with a Fylde Oberon (£3,500) or Orsino (£2,500). Alister Atkin's 000 models are priced around £2,399. If off-the-peg is your thing, then Yamaha's LS56 ARE II and LJ56 ARE II both come in at £3,495.



1. Our review model is fitted with a set of Elixir Phosphor Bronze light gauge strings

2. The Urban Ash's grain pattern is just visible through the 324ce's Tobacco Burst finish

There are 173 million trees in California's urban canopy, so why not do a few experiments?

their lives and had to be replaced owing to damage, weather or disease, where did they end up? And if the answer was either landfill or firewood, why not give them a second life as part of an instrument? After all, there are an estimated 173 million trees in California's urban canopy, so why not do a few experiments?

Enter Taylor's chief designer Andy Powers, who did just that, selecting a few examples of urban timber that looked most likely to fit the purpose and making guitars out of them. Urban Ash, Taylor's trademarked name for Shamel or evergreen ash, proved not only to be a contender but Andy noted that its qualities as a guitar-making wood were similar to Honduran mahogany. The first model Urban Ash has been used in is the very one we have before us today, the 324ce Builder's Edition. So let's take a look... and, more importantly, a listen.

Feel & Sounds

You're probably as eager as we were to see what Urban Ash actually looks like. To be honest, it's very difficult to give an accurate report as the Tobacco finish Taylor has used on the body and neck is very nearly opaque. Held under strong sunlight, some evidence of a grain pattern becomes apparent, but it's tricky to build an overall picture. From what we can see, however, there are a few characteristics that you might find on an ash Stratocaster – it's not a photofit, but it's certainly reminiscent. There appears to be quite an attractive cross-patterning, too, like you sometimes get with spruce tops – that offset vertical figuring that contrasts the horizontal grain structure. There might even be a hint of mahogany about its looks, too.

The mahogany top is more visible under the finish and everything there looks in good shape, the simple Italian acrylic rosette breaking the top's otherwise

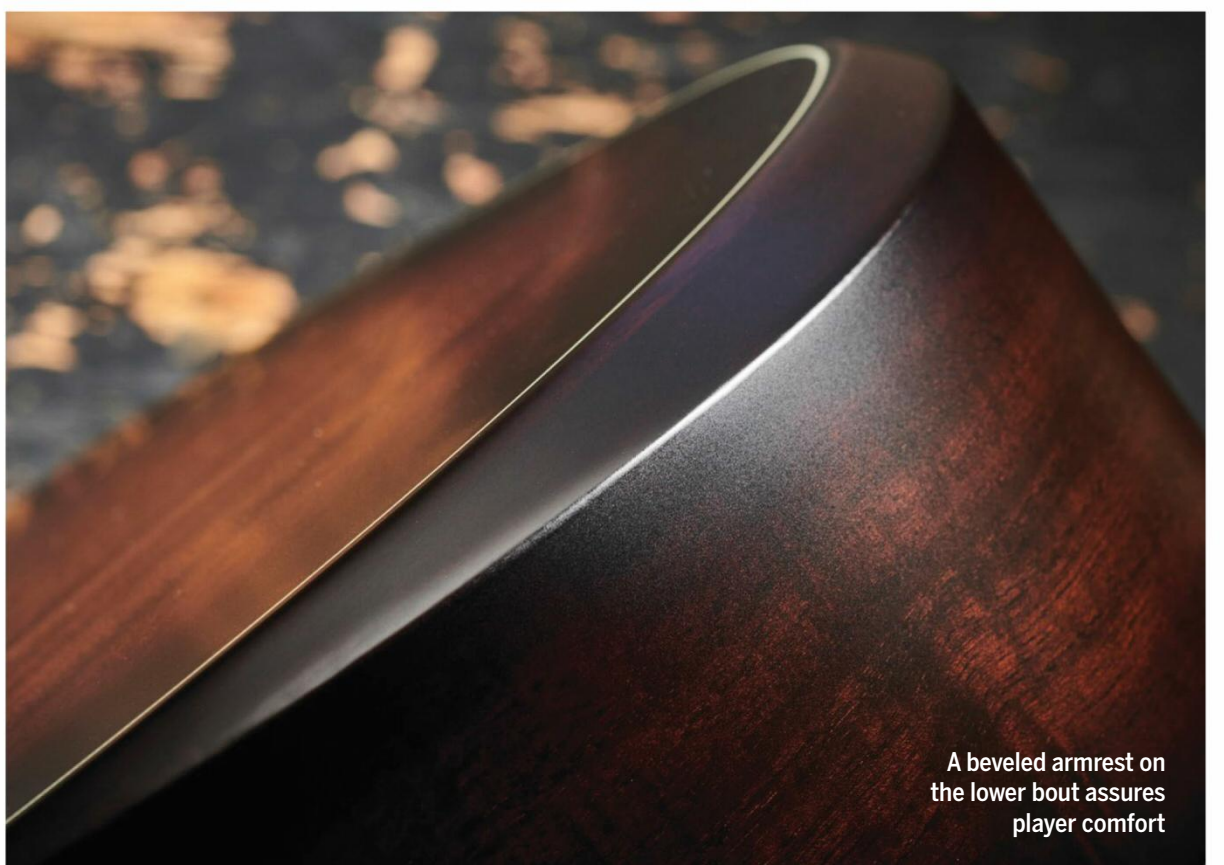


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austere appearance. There's an armrest atop the guitar's lower bout, mirrored by the bevelled cutaway diagonally opposite. There's no binding to the rim of the body, Taylor electing to offer a chamfered edge as an alternative, a simple ivoroid purfling providing the body's only other decoration.

Under the hood we find Taylor's trailblazing V bracing pattern, which the company is rolling out across its range and so it's no surprise to find it here, too. It may be that our ears – and that of many acoustic guitar players – still haven't fully assimilated the sound this bracing pattern has to offer, with X bracing still *de rigueur* for many manufacturers.

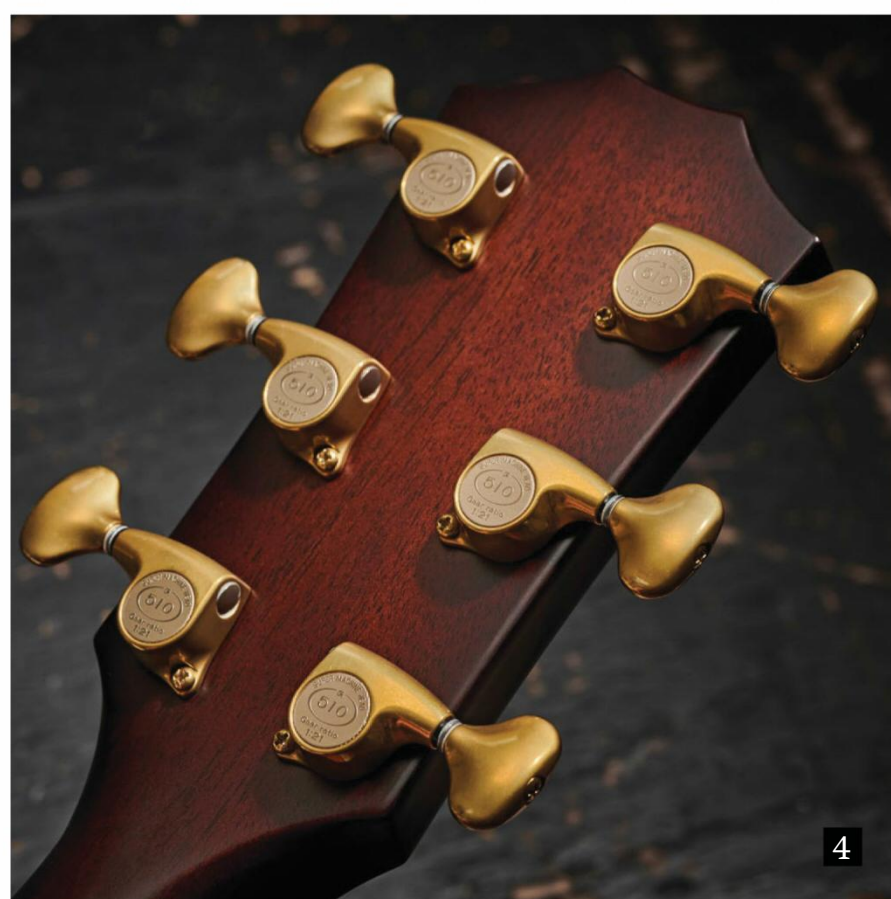
The 324ce's plain good looks extend to the instrument's mahogany neck, too, with the scarf joint below the headstock proving, once again, to be invisible under the finish. Gotoh's 510 tuners provide some contrast, with a fine antique gold finish offering a



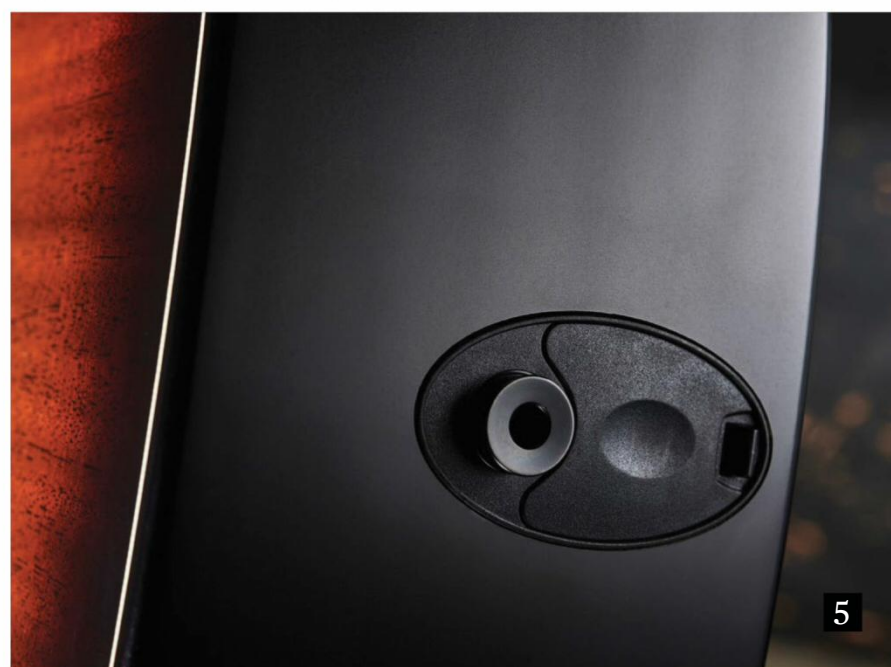
A beveled armrest on the lower bout assures player comfort



3



4



5

3. Live performance is ably handled by Taylor's Expression System 2 pickup and preamp

4. A set of Gotoh 510 Antique Gold tuners adds a touch of class to the guitar's headstock

5. The preamp's battery compartment is hidden away underneath the jack socket/endpin

6. The 324ce's voice is sweet and well balanced without any unnecessary mush in the midrange

This is a very well-behaved guitar. Nothing is out of place, no nasty sonic surprises...

little bit of regal bling at this point. Even the finely cut nut is made from black Tusq (an easy identifier of a model with the V-class bracing), in keeping with the 324ce's understated looks, and blends well with the ebony fingerboard and subtle acrylic faux pearl inlays.

In all probability, Taylor's message here is that the guitar's looks are not its most outstanding feature in this particular case. It knows how to build a guitar and everything here from a construction point of view is well up to scratch, even if some of it is buried beneath the finish. But perhaps this was never meant to be a feast for the eyes. The proof of this particular pudding is all about how it sounds and if the eyes aren't distracted by boisterous décor we stand a better chance of auditioning the new wood with pure objectivity.

The carve of the neck is what Taylor refers to as 'Standard' in its spec, with a 381mm (15-inch) radius to the fretboard

and a generous 44.5mm (1.75-inch) nut width. As with every Taylor acoustic we've played, the neck is a comfortable fit in the hand, the frets are seated, finished and trimmed perfectly, so that the playing experience is a breeze for the left hand.

So, what *does* it sound like? First impressions are very good. Note separation is excellent and free from any unnecessary 'mush' and even the midrange hump that you sometimes find on acoustics around the F/F# trouble spot area on the D string (roughly 175 to 185Hz) is noticeable by its absence. The bass isn't dreadnought fierce, even with the sixth string drop-tuned to D, but in very good balance with the somewhat demure trebles.

Tonally speaking, this is a very well-behaved guitar. Nothing is out of place, no nasty sonic surprises and our first few chords are clear and clean with a generous amount of sustain completing the picture. Does it sound like top-notch mahogany



is present as part of the sound picture? It definitely has a few of the qualities of mahogany and we don't know exactly what the V bracing is bringing to the sound party, either. But whatever it is, we like what we're hearing.

The 324ce is equipped with Taylor's Expression System 2 and, plugged into our AER Compact 60, it proves its worth with little or no colouration to the purity of the guitar's acoustic sound. In fact, we were able to leave the EQ on the guitar's preamp absolutely flat and still had a sound that we wouldn't mind gigging one bit.

Verdict

Adding all factors into the mix – that is, the sustainable nature of Urban Ash and the fact it would have ended up as firewood or in a landfill site had it not been repurposed as a guitar wood – we'd say it's another success for Taylor and the design sensibilities of Andy Powers.

It's a superbly made instrument with a voice that's simply enchanting, both acoustically and through an amp. It could work quite ably in the hands of a singer-songwriter and even hold its head up high in the instrumental field, too.

It's fairly pricey at north of three grand and might be out of the question for the casual strummer, while others may think an untried wood is taking too much of a risk considering the investment that's necessary here. But the more versatile a guitar is, the wider its appeal to the marketplace as a whole and we think that the 324ce Builder's Edition ticks a great many boxes. And, as a potential all-rounder, will still expect it to enchant both the hands and ears – and hearts – of a great many players. **G**

Turn to our Blueprint feature on p110 to read more about Taylor's journey with this sustainable new guitar-making wood



TAYLOR BUILDER'S EDITION 324CE

PRICE: £3,239 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: 14-fret Grand Auditorium electro cutaway

TOP: Mahogany

BACK/SIDES: Urban Ash

MAX RIM DEPTH: 117.4mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 406.4mm

NECK: Mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

TUNERS: Gotoh 510 Antique Gold

NUT/WIDTH: Black Tusq /44.8mm

FINGERBOARD: West African Ebony, Italian acrylic compass inlays

FRETS: 20, medium

BRIDGE/SPACING: West African Ebony w/ compensated Micarta saddle/56mm

ELECTRICS: Taylor Expression System 2 w/ volume, bass and treble controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.1/4.62

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: The Taylor Builder's Edition instruments range from the 324ce reviewed here through to the 517 (£2,999) and 517e (£3,179), the 652ce (£4,319) and extends to the 912ce (£6,479)

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: Tobacco Kona Burst Silent Satin

8/10

PROS A well-built, tonally satisfying instrument with its environmental credentials well in place

CONS No left-handers and the shock of the new might put some players off



A Turnstone TS acoustic made by Rosie Heydenrych featuring a UK-grown western red cedar top and Fenland black oak back and sides

Into The Woods

Experimentation with urban woods is a relatively new initiative among acoustic builders. Rosie Heydenrych tells us about the instruments she builds from alternative timbers

Words David Mead

Rosie Heydenrych of Turnstone Guitars in Surrey is a strong advocate for alternative timbers for her acoustic guitars, favouring woods that are indigenous to the UK. Acknowledging that it's not easy to tear up the rulebook, especially where die-hard traditionalists are concerned, she tells the story of building an acoustic for a customer in the US who is old-school to the point that most of the other guitars in his collection are Sitka spruce and rosewood. But Rosie built him an acoustic from (UK-grown) western red cedar and yew and now, months after delivery, he's still telling her it's one of his favourite instruments.

How did your work with alternative timbers first come about?

"It was initially environmental awareness that rosewoods were depleting. I knew that a lot of the people who are established are solely using things like rosewoods because that's what they built their reputations on, so that's what people expect them to build. I can understand how that's come about and why they have to keep doing that. But somebody like me, who hadn't established a reputation, could have the opportunity to experiment a bit more. If you make a dud guitar right at the start, you put that down to experience, whereas further down the line you start

to get a little more expensive, you're taking a bit more of a gamble.

"I was aware that resources were depleting, but also becoming aware of a lot of English woods that could potentially be used for different components of a guitar. I knew there were certain woods that had been used where the results were a little easier to anticipate and I started with those woods. From there I started to get a bit more experimental, using woods that weren't generally used and taking an educated guess. Soundboards generally need to have high tensile strength and so you think, 'Okay, which woods in other species have those characteristics?' Necks obviously

Rosie in her Surrey workshop: Turnstone's E Series guitars are made using woods indigenous to the UK, including walnut, yew, apple and London plane



TOP CHOICE

A few of Rosie's alternative choices for soundboards

YEW: "A little bit heavier than spruce but it has a sweet chime unique to that species of wood."

WESTERN RED CEDAR: "It has that typical cedar sound to it, but the grain lines are visibly wider because it's grown in England."

MONTEREY CYPRUS: "Actually native to California but grown in this country, it has a bit more bite than cedar, but in the remit of a slightly softer soundboard choice."

CEDAR OF LEBANON: "A harder cedar that's a halfway mark between cedar and yew."

LARCH: "I haven't tried it yet, but I think it's going to be great. It's one of the strongest tensile woods available and the closest to a spruce-y, pine-y soundboard choice."

need to be very stable and relatively light, and so I began applying those physical properties to alternative woods and started to feel my way through the options."

Is going ahead with a build the only real way of testing a new wood?

"From a tonal perspective it is; you basically have to build it to see how it turns out. But with regard to the structural aspects of the wood, obviously the acoustic guitar in particular is under a huge amount of tension for the size and thickness of some of the pieces of wood that you're using. So you have to take everything into account, as far as the bracing and the other woods you are using as structural support.

"Even in the alternative-wood department, the more widely used woods gave me a basis to start with where I knew they were fit for purpose – something like English walnut had been used a fair bit – and what you start to understand is the properties of alternative woods can correlate quite closely to the more traditional woods. For example, London plane and sycamore can correlate quite closely to something like maple, so

you know you're in the right ballpark. Obviously, what you do with that wood opens a whole new can of worms."

Which woods have you settled upon to include in your instruments?

"Some examples that I have personal experience of is Fenland black oak, aka bog oak. Density-wise, it correlates fairly closely to ebony and I would also say it has that same contribution to the overall colouration of the tone of the guitar. Another is English cherry, which is tonally like a sweeter mahogany – it's actually a little bit lighter than mahogany but has

"You start to understand how the properties of alternative woods correlate to more traditional woods"

Rosie Heydenrych

the same structural properties. It's fairly light and stable so it can be used for back and sides, but it can also be used for necks because you can get it with really nice straight grain.

"Relating to the stuff that Taylor's doing, I've used ash on necks a fair bit and I hadn't considered using it using it on back and sides just because I've been using other stuff. I could probably go on forever about all the different types of wood that aren't so widely used."

Have you experienced any surprises – good or bad – in your experiments?

"One of the back and sides that I've used is English yew, which is fairly light but you get told that you want a heavy back and sides to colour the tone. It was fairly early on in my career and I thought, 'I'm going to use a western red cedar English-grown top, which I'd used a number of times, but on the back I want to use another English wood that I'm interested in.' And it just so happened that I was at a supplier and he had some really beautiful back and side yew sets, so I decided to use it and it built into a beautiful instrument." 

Family Values

Nik Huber's latest solidbody is inspired by the offset fashion and named after his youngest son. The result is a very classy bolt-on

Words Dave Burrluck
Photography Neil Godwin







NIK HUBER PIET FROM £2,676

CONTACT **Nik Huber** PHONE +49 (0)61 0677 2166 WEB www.nikhuber-guitars.com

What You Need To Know

1 Doesn't Huber just made über-expensive custom guitars? These don't look very posh...

Nik Huber certainly established a well-earned reputation for that style of guitar, but when the relatively affordable, stripped-down Krautster appeared in 2009, it signalled quite a change in style. As you can see, the new Piet is from that mould: the first Huber bolt-on without a carved top.

2 Aren't they just cashing in on the offset trend?

The start-up Piet actually comes with Nik's own-design wrapover bridge, but, yes, the Piet moves into offset territory and, using the highly-regarded Mastery vibrato, it gives the guitar quite a different voice.

3 Where are Huber guitars made?

In Rodgau, 20km south of Frankfurt, in Germany. The small team makes around 240 guitars each year with an 'anything is possible' range of options. In the UK Huber has four dealers: World Guitars, GuitarGuitar, Peach and The North American Guitar.

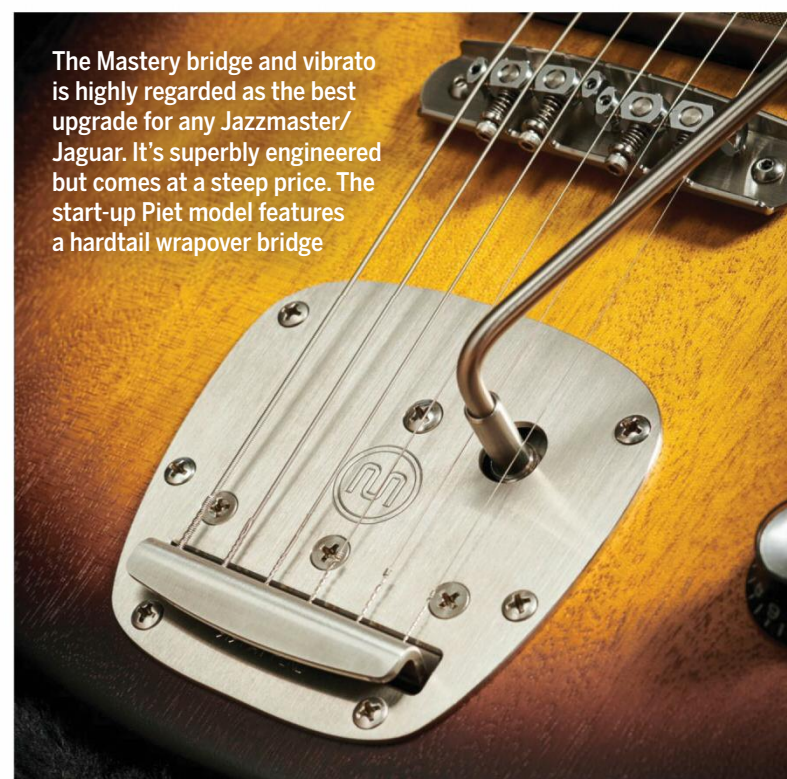
We've never played a Nik Huber guitar that's been anything other than spectacular. But within its surprisingly expansive range, there's a duality that not every maker can match. Nik seems equally at home with the 'posh' PRS-inspired aesthetic epitomised by the Dolphin and the blingier Orca models as he is with frankly superb rock 'n' roll guitars such as the Krautster. The new Piet, which we first saw at this year's NAMM Show in January, definitely drops into that latter style. This bolt-on has delicious forearm and rib-cage contours and quite a large edge radius that lends an almost moulded style to the body, stunning in the muted green turquoise semi-gloss. On the one hand it's standard bolt-on fare, but with so much skill, detail and quality on show there's nothing utilitarian about this build.

Based on that Dolphin shape, it appears almost Telecaster-ish, but next to the real thing you see its much more rounded lower bouts and there's a substantial nod to the Junior and Special, particularly with that Les Paul Junior-style pickguard. Like many modern makers, pulling disparate influences into a coherent design is something Nik does extremely well.

The diverse inspiration continues with the pickups and hardware. The former, by German maker Harry Häussel, look like perfectly cared for antiques: the Broad-N

at the neck has a beautifully dulled sheen to its cover and is very firmly mounted to that scratchplate; the 'foil' P-90 mounts like a typical soapbar and looks like it came off a pawn-shop prize from the 60s. Controls are simple, too, but it's not a typical 'offset' setup in the least.

"Well, I was looking at the bolt-on theme, plus, as you know, I'm a P-90 Junior guy," Nik explains. "I've been working on the gold-foil P-90 with Harry for six months...



The Mastery bridge and vibrato is highly regarded as the best upgrade for any Jazzmaster/Jaguar. It's superbly engineered but comes at a steep price. The start-up Piet model features a hardtail wrapover bridge



This custom Häussel P-90 combines the aesthetics of a gold-foil with the guts of a soapbar-style P-90

actually, way longer. At NAMM we had two Piets, one with two P-90s like that and the other with the Broad at the neck like you have there. I really like the sound of that neck pickup and I think it looks nicer. Looks aren't the main thing, but I do think it suits the shape better. But I'm also thinking of tweaking the pickups a little. We're still playing around with it."

But it's the Mastery vibrato here that substantially adds to the unique voice. This superb replacement for the Fender Jazzmaster/Jaguar vibrato not only cures the issues associated with the original but it looks like a work of art. It's especially evident with the bridge, with its two offset saddles held in place by two intonation screws per saddle. Unlike the originals, the bridge is solidly mounted and doesn't rock as the vibrato is moved.

We have two Piets here. Under the green turquoise finish is an alder body in keeping with the Fender bolt-on recipe, of course. Our sunburst model is identical except that the bodywood is switched to okoume (also known as Gabon from where it originates), a 'mahogany' variant that's used by an increasing number of makers, including Music Man and Eastman. Perhaps surprisingly the okoume Piet is even lighter than the alder version, and the thin nitro satin open-pore finish illustrates the range of Huber's finish options.

Fine details are everywhere: the aged but not reliced neckplate, tuners and metal output jack-plate. Even the plastic parts – the pickguard, truss rod cover and rear cavity plate – are de-sheened. There's a subtle but quite large flamed figure on the neck back and lovely flecked figuring to the face of the headstock. Simple, subtle but oh so elegant.

Feels & Sounds

Why do these so-called 'boutique' guitars cost so much? Well, one thing is the neck. Here it's a vintage tinted quarter-sawn maple. The tongue extends under the neck pickup and screws to the body with five (not four) screws passing through the recessed neck plate. The combination of the thin finish and a beautiful fairly deep shape has what you could describe as an almost soft 'V', meaning the shoulders are thinned, and we were surprised that the measured depth by the 12th fret is a meaty 25.5mm. It really doesn't feel it.

"I took the neck profile from my Twangmeister," says Nik, mentioning the only other bolt-on in the Huber range. "Again, it's more the Fender approach. Getting back to my Junior appreciation, in the 50s there were so many different neck shapes, but the one where the shoulders are taken away just so much before they become a V, that was the neck for me. It was done by

The Piet shows off a maker in his prime... This unique guitar is effortlessly playable, immaculately dressed and full of character

THE RIVALS

Fender is the home of the original offsets, the Jazzmaster and Jaguar. The Player Jazzmaster kicks things off at £609, the vintage-specific American Original is £1,749, then expect to pay from around £3,500 upwards if you fancy a Custom Shop model.

Deimel Guitarworks, another high-end German maker, has the classy offset Firestar (from around £3,500) that sort of melds a Jazzmaster with a non-reverse Firebird as well as the more Jazzmaster/Jaguar Bluestar model – both are available with myriad options.

Dennis Fano's Novo range, from around £3,000, offers plenty of offset style across the models. Superb distressed finishes, too, plus lots of options.

1. Made in Germany by Harry Häussel, this TE-Broad neck pickup combines Alnico V rod magnets with 43 gauge wire and uses a nickel silver cover. It has a DCR measured at output of 7.20kohms (the bridge unit measures 8.21k)

2. Like all the hardware here, these tuners are aged but not reliced. It's an extremely stable guitar in terms of tuning – we rarely touched these tuners



The combined talents of Huber, Häussel and Mastery produce a sound that's simply exceptional

hand and probably an accident. I used to own one just like that, which was stolen.”

Not everyone will get the back-angled three-a-side headstock on what is otherwise a six-in-a-line-style guitar, but the strings pass over the beautifully cut, polished bone nut to the Huber logo'd Gotoh tuners in a virtual straight line. Along with that Mastery bridge and vibrato, this is an ‘offset’ that plays and stays in tune.

Another plus is the headstock truss rod adjustment, although we'd be surprised if you need it. It's a stiff neck, for sure, and setup is perfectly considered, just like every other detail, with low string height and minimal relief. There's good meat on the frets – they are installed into slots routed into the fingerboard so you don't see the tangs at the edge of the 'board – which measure approximately 2.49mm wide with a good height of close to 1.3mm. The East Indian rosewood fingerboard with its classy circular sterling silver inlays is surprisingly flat for the style with Huber's standard



compound radius of 254 to 356mm (10 to 14 inches). And there is a distinct feel: the fingerboard sides are quite square, with only a little roll to the edge, unlike the in-turned and more heavily rounded edges of a well-used old Fender.

A quick unplugged strum reveals an almost funky low-tech response thanks to the low saddle-to-tailpiece string angle of the vibrato, plus there's a lot of ‘dead’ string between those points. In combination with the pickup set it doesn't suggest a dish we've tasted before. But prepare yourself: the combined talents of Huber, Häussel and Mastery produce a sound that's simply exceptional. Listening back to initial tracks we recorded with the Piet you'd swear that the neck pickup you're listening to is a good Strat but with beautiful clarity at no expense of depth. The bridge pickup is an inspired choice, too, giving definition and a little more rounded power to, say, a Tele or Strat. This is a nicely balanced set, both in terms of output and voicing.

“I have a stash of American maple that is not that heavy and not that hard compared with hard rock and Eastern maple,” offers Nik. “It's more lightweight and that might certainly help with that clarity you're hearing from the neck pickup. It's nice, fairly plain American maple but more on the lighter side – it's my Piet neck wood.”

Now, anyone who thinks bodywood doesn't make a difference to the amplified sound of a solidbody guitar, please turn the page now. It does – and here the alder body, compared with the okoume, is slightly scooped whereas the okoume pushes a bit more in the midrange but still with that musical clarity and note separation.

While the Mastery bridge colours what we hear and is serious fun for noiseniks everywhere (pluck behind the bridge for some very other-worldly sounds), leave the vibrato arm in the case and the Piet excels as a classic twin-pickup bolt-on with clarity and some added power if you need. The simple control setup is very well voiced, too.



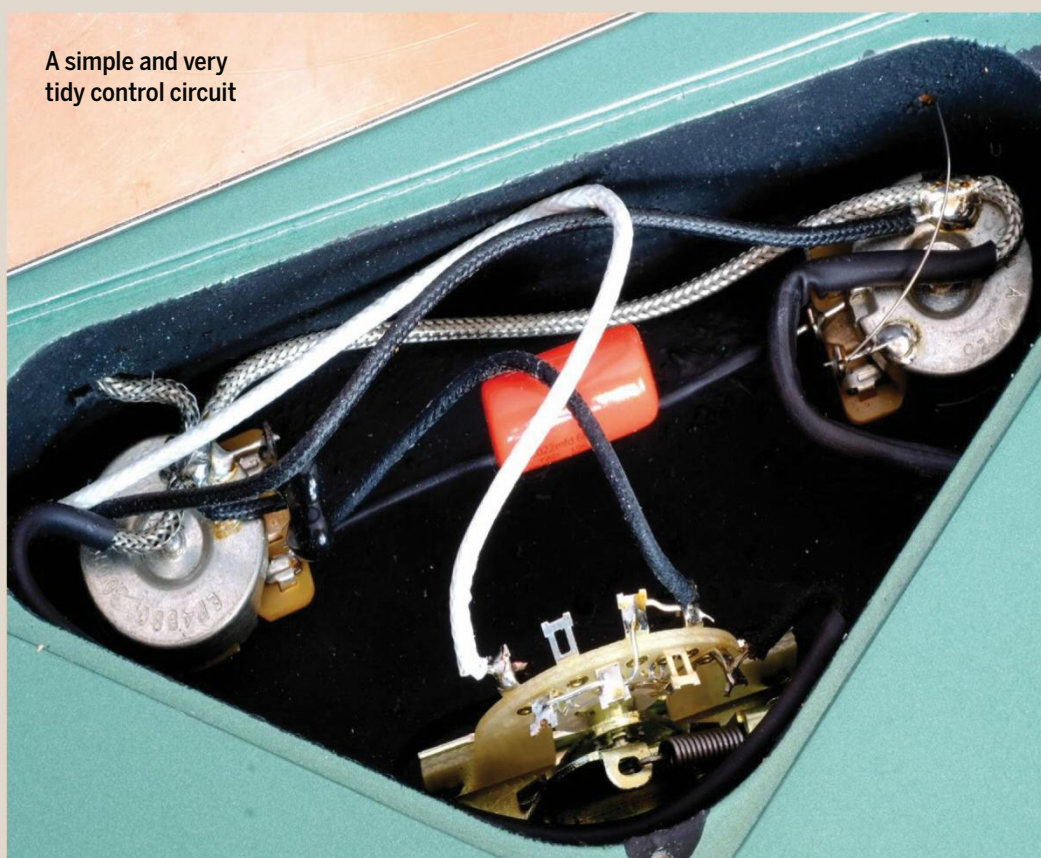
The geometry of Huber's neck join has a very specific style and uses five screws. The neck plate is recessed, too, and is given that aged treatment, of course

UNDER THE HOOD

The immaculate presentation continues in the circuitry

Unlike the complex circuitry of the Jazzmaster or Jaguar, the Piet goes for a very simple master volume and tone setup wired in modern style with a three-way lever pickup selector. Yet even this is immensely tidy, not least the fit of the recessed tortie cavity cover with its copper foil shielding. The cavity, too, is covered with black conductive paint that shows off the large 660V .022 microfarads Tube Amp Doctor (TAD) Sprague 'orange drop' tone capacitor. On close inspection you see the pots are valued at 300kohms and there's an unusual-style TAD treble bleed, a 250 picofarads silver mica capacitor.

A simple and very tidy control circuit





But it's not just the sound. Both Piet models here feel excellent on a strap or seated, and the guitar disappears in your hands – it's extremely absorbing. By design, it feels way less bulky than any offset we've played and considerably lighter, too.

Verdict

As we discuss with Nik over the page in this feature, an awful lot has changed since he began making guitars over two decades ago. The proliferation of small 'shop makers means that if you want to step away from the mainstream to this highly bespoke service, you now have a huge amount of choice. But experience counts and the Piet shows off a maker in his prime mixing up his inspired sonic references and ending up with a unique instrument that's effortlessly playable, immaculately dressed and, above all, full of character.

Yes, the offset-style vibrato is a very different drive from a wrapover bridge and therefore won't be for everyone. And while it might fall into the low tier of Huber instruments, it's far from a cheap date in terms of price. But then there is nothing cheap about this guitar, either in terms of its build or indeed the hugely evocative, characterful sounds we hear.

3. The classy, elegant headstock is used across the Huber range. The quarter-sawn maple stock is specifically chosen for this model



NIK HUBER PIET
#0 3263

PRICE: £3,745 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Germany
TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Red alder
NECK: 1-piece maple, Twangmeister 'standard V' profile, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42.39mm
FINGERBOARD: East Indian rosewood, sterling silver ring inlays, compound 254-356mm (10-14") radius
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: Mastery MV vibrato and M1 bridge w/ MT stainless thimbles, Nik Huber logo'd Gotoh 510 open-gear tuners with keystone buttons
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Häussel P-90 'foil style' single coil at bridge, Häussel Broad-N at neck, 3-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume and tone control
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.24/7.13
OPTIONS: The base price is £2,676. Upcharges here are the Mastery vibrato (£595), vintage neck tint (£237) and custom color (£237). Other options (£POA): "Whatever you want, a swamp ash body, oil finish on the body, I will do it," says Nik. "If I don't see the sense in the request, I'll decline."
RANGE OPTIONS: The other bolt-on is the Twangmeister from £3,226
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, same price
FINISHES: Custom green turquoise semi gloss (as reviewed) with vintage tint neck – nitro colour and clear coats (body); thin satin nitro (neck)



PROS Detailed build; high-level wood, hardware and pickups; diverse inspirations at play here

CONS The response of the offset-style vibrato won't suit everyone, and it's a serious investment



NIK HUBER PIET
#0 3290

PRICE: £3,508 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Germany
TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Okoume
NECK: 1-piece maple, Twangmeister 'standard V' profile, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42.39mm
FINGERBOARD: East Indian rosewood, sterling silver ring inlays, compound 254-356mm (10-14") radius
FRETS: 22, medium (Dunlop 6105-style)
HARDWARE: Mastery MV vibrato and M1 bridge w/ MT stainless thimbles, Nik Huber logo'd Gotoh 510 open-gear tuners with keystone buttons
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Häussel P-90 'foil style' single coil at bridge, Häussel Broad-N at neck, 3-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume and tone control
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.24/7.13
OPTIONS: The base price is £2,676. Upcharges here are the Mastery vibrato (£595) and vintage neck tint (£237). Other options see Piet #0 3263 (left)
RANGE OPTIONS: See Piet #0 3263
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, same price
FINISHES: Sunburst open-pore (as reviewed) with vintage tint neck – thin satin nitro



PROS Ditto the alder-body version but with this okoume body you'll hear a slightly more mid-focused voice – and it's even lighter

CONS Ditto the alder-body version with the vibrato and price

INTRODUCING



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The Long Game

Two decades on from his first ever product review in *Guitarist*, we catch up with Nik Huber. How things have changed...

Words Dave Burrluck

“Basically, what we do, is to turn beautiful pieces of wood into excellent guitars,” says Nik Huber on his company’s website, a statement that’s fundamental to the craft of the luthier. For the past two decades Nik and his ever-growing team haven’t changed the world nor challenged the heritage brands: they have just continued to make excellent guitar after excellent guitar.

Mentored by Paul Reed Smith prior to setting up his workshop in 1996 (see ‘Huber’s Helper’ box over the page), we first bumped into Nik at a UK music show later in that decade, leading to his first product review in *Guitarist* magazine in 2000. Quite a lot has changed since then.

“Don’t forget, back then there was no internet, no YouTube, nothing,” exclaims Nik today. “There was no know-how available. Now, well, the know-how is just there. And also back then there were relatively few guitar makers.”

It’s one of the biggest changes we’ve seen: the proliferation of independent – so-called ‘boutique’ – makers working solo or in small teams and offering a highly bespoke service. Nik Huber has certainly helped to reinforce that business model with ultra-high quality, small numbers and a lot more options than the larger production makers.

Yet none of this additional competition seems to bother Nik, who retains the exact same boyish enthusiasm that this writer remembers back in the 90s. However,

building a business, indeed starting in business, he admits is “really tough”.

“I always say that I’d not like to be in the position to start a guitar-making company nowadays,” says Nik. “I’m very thankful that I have 24 years behind me; we are a small brand. There was a time, 2006 or 2007 I think, when I came back from the NAMM Show – at the time we were making 70 to 80 years a year – with an order for 150 guitars, just from that one show. That meant I was immediately back-ordered for more than two years! Obviously, that’s changed, but I had to grow the company; I tripled my output. So now my back-order is less, but is that because we’re making more guitars or we have fewer orders because there are so many, many more makers out there?”

“It’s important to grow the company but not necessarily by increasing the number of guitars we make,” he adds. “Making a better guitar, maybe making more money from the guitars because of increased efficiency... Not moving forward is not an option. I’m a little bit crazy that way.”

Changing Style

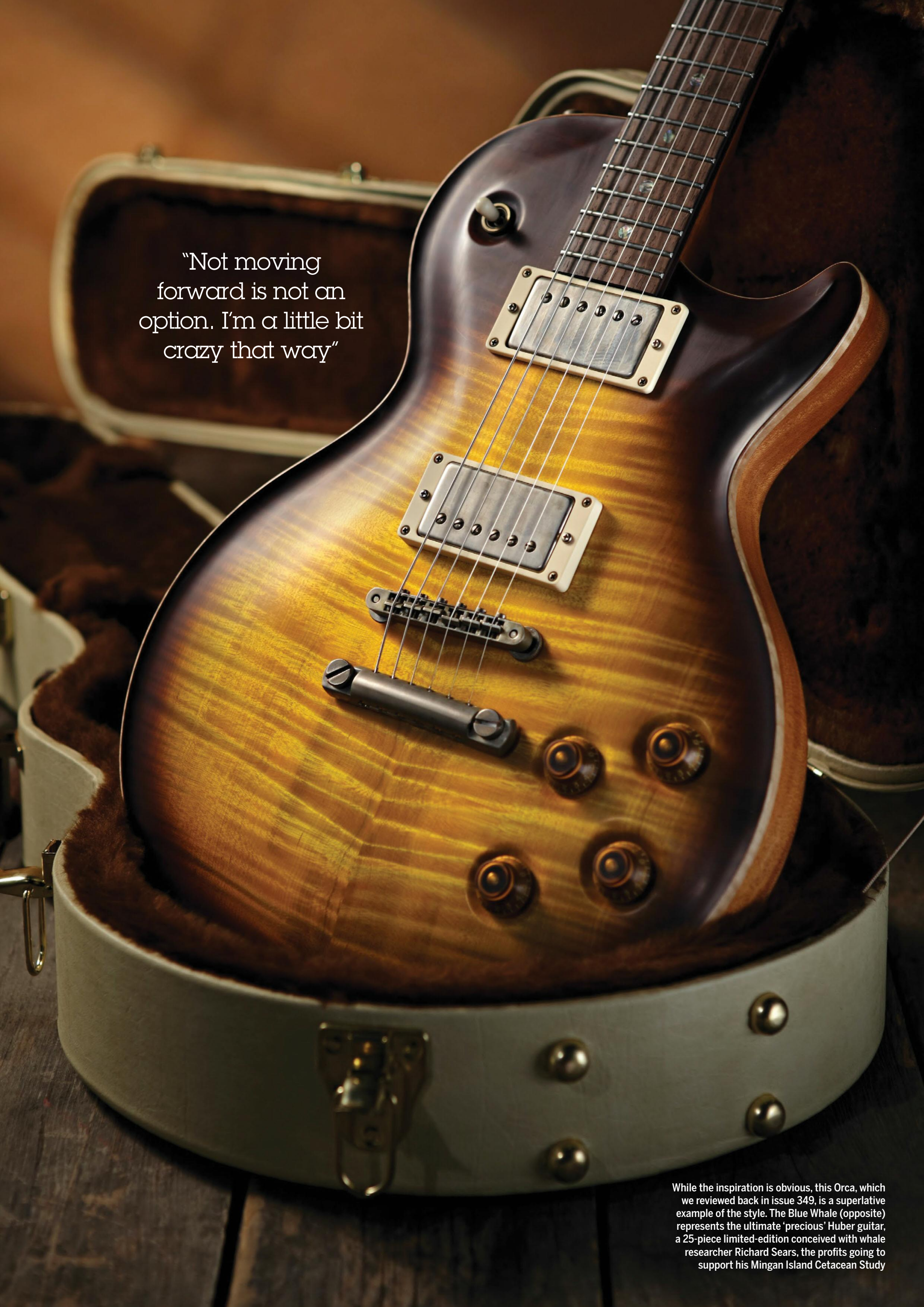
In that first decade the Huber business established itself as the absolute definition of the ‘posh’ guitar: wonderful, often rare and exotic woods, carved tops, inlays, gold-plating, own-design hardware and perfect mirror-like finishing. But then the stripped-down flat-top Krautster came along in 2009 and everything changed.

“It wasn’t really a plan,” concedes Nik of the guitar that opened up a different market. “I brought the guitar in because, personally, I’ve always been a big Junior fan – obviously, the Krautster is very Junior inspired! I was looking for a guitar I could play with my band: a good rock ‘n’ roll machine. When we came up with the design I thought, ‘Let’s do a gold and a black one.’ I thought nobody would want a guitar like this from me, but I could just keep some bodies in stock.”

“I never, ever thought the guitar would be so successful,” Nik admits. “I didn’t look at the market, I just wanted to make one. But it probably was the right time because people were moving more into reliced and vintage-type guitars.”

Today, the Krautster is the most-ordered Nik Huber guitar, but not at the expense of the sort of guitar that put them on the map, such as the Dolphin and the Orca.

“We still make those every month: very, very precious-looking. I’m very thankful for those orders because every high-end guitar that you make, well, I make a better living from those than I do the Krautster or the Piet. But that’s why I’m thankful that it’s kind of established that Huber can do *both* worlds. They serve completely different groups of human beings, which is great. We have a long list of musicians, especially in Germany, ordering the cooler-looking guitars. But other dealers like the higher-end guitars, which they get in and sell. It’s two different ways of making guitars.”



“Not moving
forward is not an
option. I’m a little bit
crazy that way”

While the inspiration is obvious, this Orca, which we reviewed back in issue 349, is a superlative example of the style. The Blue Whale (opposite) represents the ultimate ‘precious’ Huber guitar, a 25-piece limited-edition conceived with whale researcher Richard Sears, the profits going to support his Mingan Island Cetacean Study

Nik Huber is now quite a team with eight people working on the guitars from a workforce of 11 staff in total.

"I still make guitars, but the biggest difference is that I can make guitars when I want to. I also have to do a lot of things that have nothing to do with guitar making, but while I'm doing that guitars are still being made. That was a slow journey: gradually hiring people, making the team bigger. I never thought I'd have 11 people at a Christmas dinner table, but that's developed very slowly and comfortably," says Nick. "I thought if I stayed working on my own, what happens if I get sick, or want to take a vacation, or I break my leg and have to be in a wheelchair for three months? Bad news. I wanted to get rid of that fear and insecurity... especially when I have two kids."

Offset Origin

Which brings us nicely on to Nik's latest design, Piet (pronounced 'Pete'), named after his youngest son.

"To be honest, that [Jazzmaster-style] vibrato was pretty new to me with the long string behind the bridge and all the ambient sounds it produces. I've always adored Jazzmasters and you can't not have noticed that the 'offset' has got quite big. I like them a lot. We were getting enquiries for this kind of thing and people were also asking, 'Why don't you make a more simple bolt-on guitar? It would do well, we'd order it.'"

"There's a maker in Germany, Frank Deimel, who has one which I like. And I like Dennis Fano a lot, his Novo guitars, and he uses a lot of the offset themes. Clemens [Huber, no relation, who looks after sales and marketing] said, 'Yes, let's do a new offset shape.' But I said no; there are already many companies doing a great job with their own offset outlines, but I want to stick to *our*

"We make precious-looking guitars every month... but I'm thankful that Huber can do both worlds"

shape. We wondered if, with the Mastery vibrato plate, that the body should be a bit bigger, but that would require completely new tooling for the machines. So I said let's give it a try with the Dolphin shape and that's what we went for: exactly that shape. The Piet is not about making a more affordable model to sell more numbers. I just thought it was about time to make another bolt-on guitar."

The new guitar seems to have already connected with Huber's audience.

"It's funny, the Piet has not really been pushed" – aside from Nik's blog, there's no actual listing on the Huber website, for example – "but already we have a lot of orders. All the slots for this year are taken. But it's a new guitar, so you might expect that.

"I'm still tweaking the design," he admits. "The ones you have are really prototypes. One thing I've done is to recess the Mastery vibrato plate flush into the body and I've adjusted the pockets for the pickups, which are not quite correct on the ones you have. The problem was the manufacturer who makes the metal cover for that bridge pickup just changed its dimensions. So welcome to modern technology: you have your programs sitting there, but I cut, I don't know, 10 bodies with the wrong pocket dimensions. So we're still in final prototype mode, but I really want to ring the bell about this guitar." **G**



The game-changing Krautster, the most-ordered Huber guitar. "Its big neck, single pickup and volume control make it an uncompromising guitar," we said in issue 335

HUBER'S HELPER

How Paul Reed Smith elevated Nik's craft

Back in 2000 we ran a review of the Nik Huber Dolphin – Nik's first product review since he'd started building in 1996. This snippet from that review tells the story of his mentor...

Attending the Frankfurt music trade in 1994, Nik Huber, who'd just completed his first handmade electric guitar, managed to show the instrument – an oil 'n' wax-finished Les Paul-style – to Paul Reed Smith. "He said that I was talented but had to improve. He said he wanted me to 'dip the guitars in glass' and that he would teach me. I started asking him questions by letter and got the answers right away. He told me later that I reminded him of himself when he would ask Ted McCarty for help."

Huber showed Paul his next guitar a year later. "It was much better," remembers Nik, "but Paul said it still wasn't good enough to make a living from."

Huber continued improving and after a visit to the PRS factory – "I took as many pictures and asked as many questions as I could. I learned a lot!" – Nik finally, in '96, got the endorsement from Smith that he was hoping for: "He said, 'Now you're there, this is a real professional guitar.'"

"Paul gave me really hard but honest tuition – I probably wouldn't build guitars as a living if I hadn't met him. He's a great person."



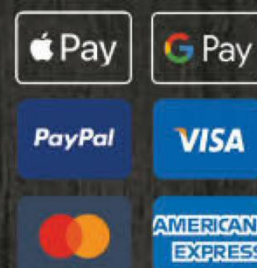
Nik Huber with his youngest son, Piet, and a pair of early prototypes of the model we have on review

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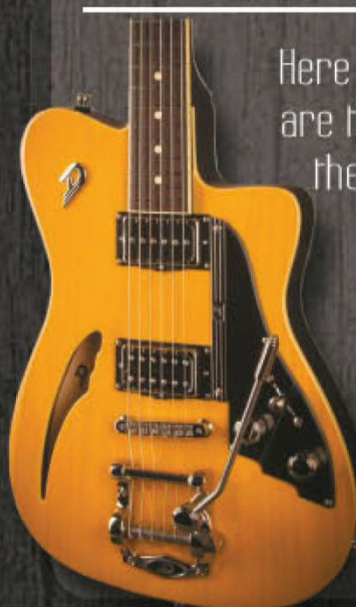


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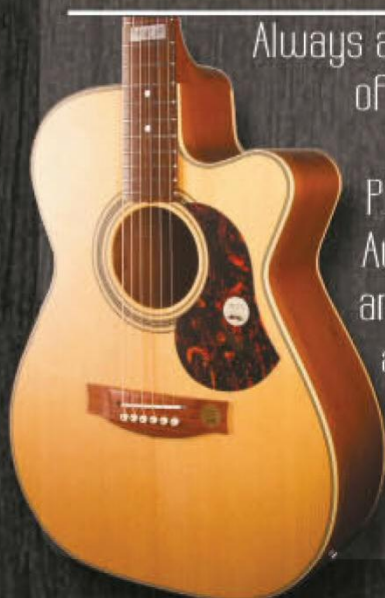
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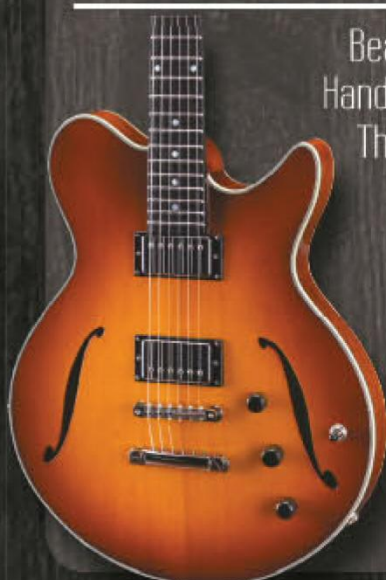
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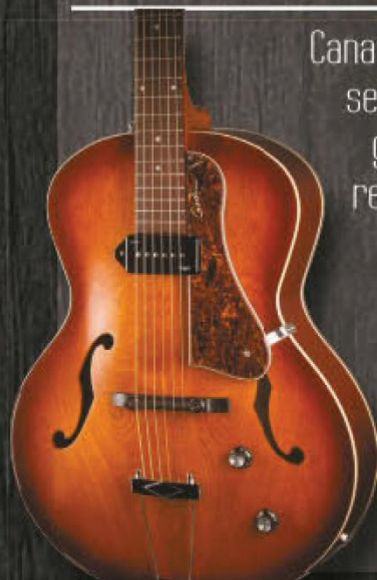
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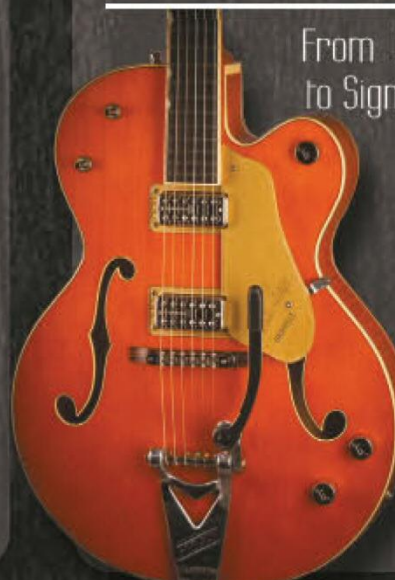
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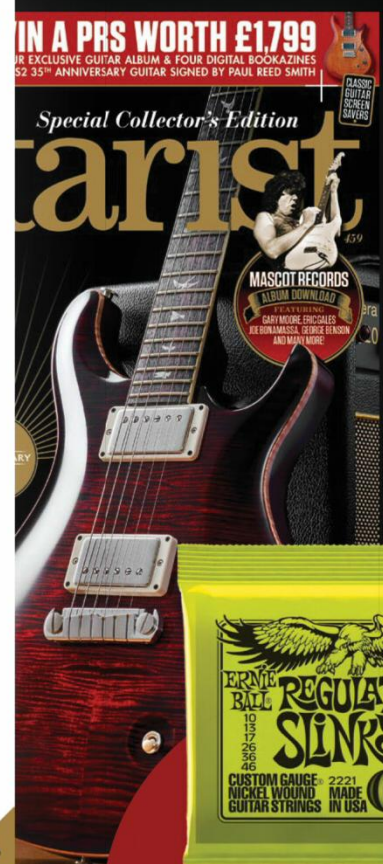
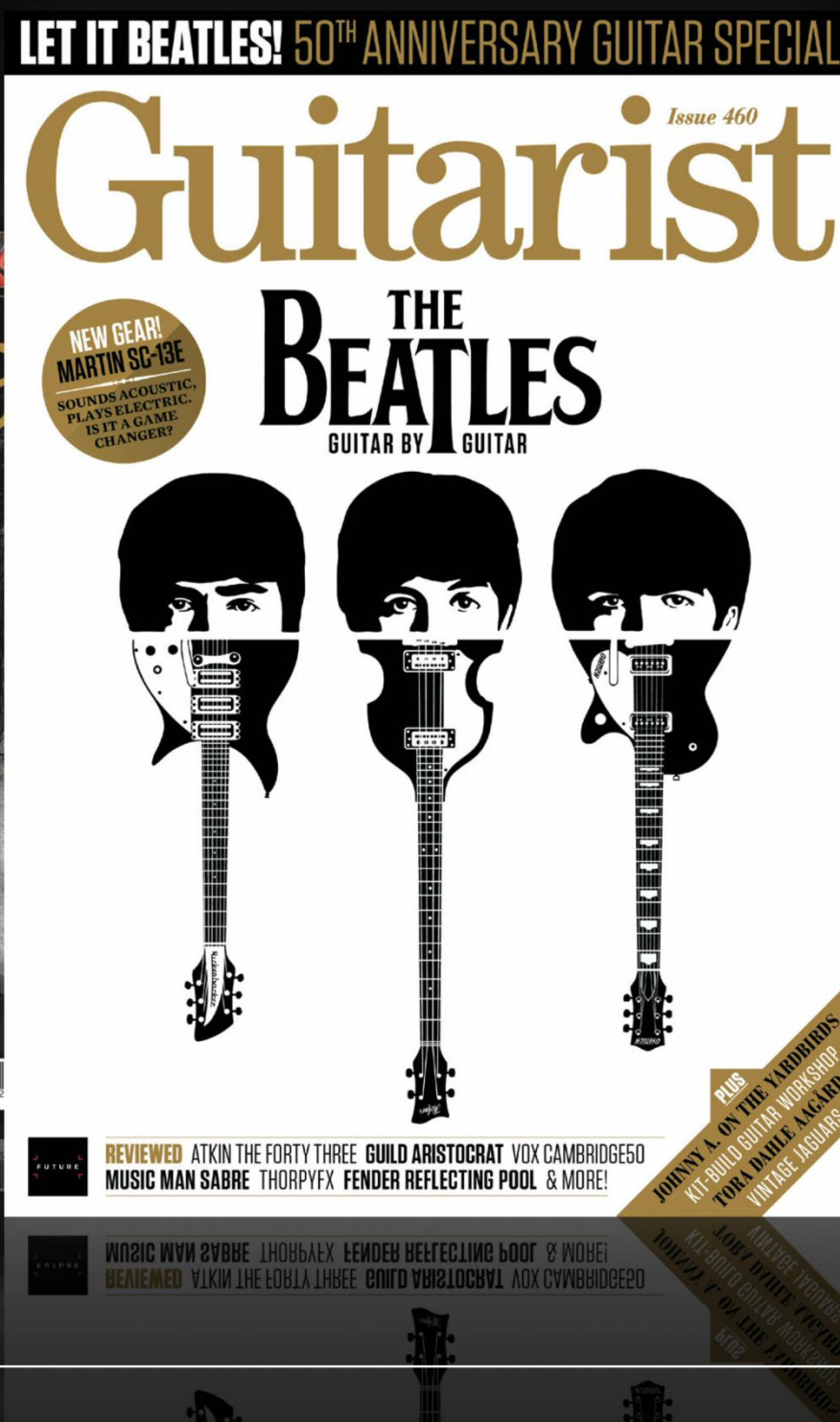
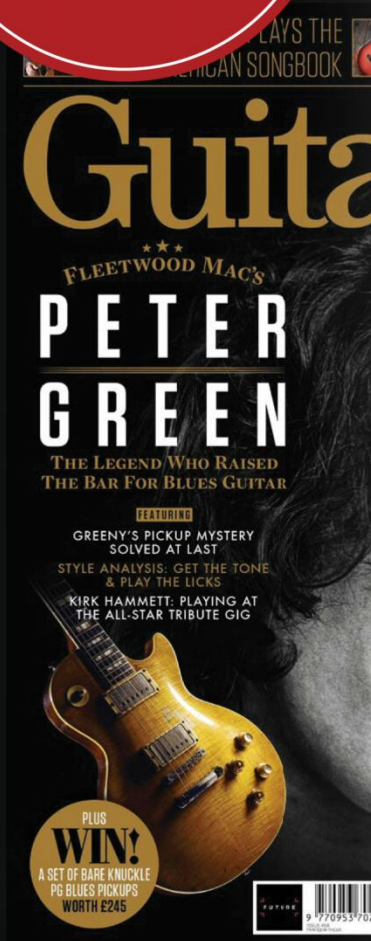
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STRYMON

Compadre

Could Strymon's latest be your amp's new front-end?

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

Arguably, there are two pedals that you can put before your amp to give you a range of practical tonal options without getting too far removed from its core sound – compression and boost. Strymon's new Compadre offers just this combination with digitally controlled, fully analogue audio signal processing, which delivers separately footswitchable boost and compression sections that you can choose to use individually or together.

The Boost section has options for targeting its frequency range, while the VCA-based compression section effectively provides two different compressors – one offering the type of compression you might expect from vintage studio rack compressors, the other for the harder squeeze associated with classic stompbox compressors.

Besides these, the Compadre has a facility for volume control (accessed by simply plugging an expression pedal into a dedicated rear-panel socket), giving you complete control over your volume without the tonal degradation that can occur when your signal passes through some volume pedals.

SOUNDS

The compressor comes first in the signal chain, and there's nothing complicated about it. You simply choose Studio or Squeeze mode and use the large knob to turn up the compression, which it does by lowering the threshold above which compression occurs. The Level knob adjusts the pedal's output when the compressor is engaged, cutting or boosting the level by up to 6dB. A Dry knob is becoming a must-have feature on

compression pedals, and here it mixes your dry signal in with the compressed.

The transparent subtlety of the Studio mode should be your choice if you're not looking to use compression as a blatant effect. Here, you can keep sound consistent and add smoothly decaying sustain without being too obvious, especially if you mix in some dry sound to retain the natural feel of your note attack. It's classy tone strengthening and conditioning that doesn't jump out at you but that you'd miss it if it was bypassed.

By contrast, the Squeeze mode, while still capable of subtlety in evening out the sound and increasing sustain, can go further into compression as an effect, with an obvious clamping down on note transients that works brilliantly for a country player doing some chicken pickin' and pedal-steel-style bends.

01. BOOST EQ SWITCH

Focus the frequency of your boost here: Flat is a full-range boost, Mid brings the midrange forward, and Treble will push the top and tighten up the bottom-end

02. COMP TYPE SWITCH

Select your type of compression here from either a transparent studio smoothing or the more obviously squeezed sound of a pedal compressor

03. DRY KNOB

This lets you set a blend between your dry signal and the compressed sound to keep your attack more natural while still adding evenness and sustain

04. BOOST TYPE SWITCH

Do you want your boost clean or dirty? The Dirty setting brings in soft clipping for a touch of overdrive

05. FAV/MIDI SOCKET

The Compadre supports 300 presets that you can access through this jack with a single footswitch for just one preset, a triple footswitch for three, or a MIDI device for access to all of them



Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Compressor and boost pedal

FEATURES: Selectable true or buffered bypass, Class A JFET input circuit, 300 presets, MIDI control

CONTROLS: Boost, Compression, Dry, Level, Boost EQ selector switch, Comp Type selector switch, Boost footswitch, Comp footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, Volume, FAV/MIDI

POWER: Supplied 9V DC adaptor, 150mA

DIMENSIONS: 102 (w) x 114 (d) x 44mm (h)

Guitarist
CHOICE

9/10

The Boost offers up to 14dB in its Flat EQ setting, delivering straight volume boosts and plenty of full-range amp-driving capability, but the two extra EQ options greatly increase the flexibility. The Treble setting is classic treble booster, pushing upper mid and high frequencies and tightening up the bottom-end, while the Mid setting brings forward midrange frequencies that will fatten up any tone and is particularly effective in getting a richer drive sound from an amp that's already cooking. If you yearn for something a little grittier than a straight clean boost, a rear-panel switch selects between that and a soft clipping boost circuit. Switch it to Dirt and the boost becomes more of an overdrive, conspicuously Tube Screamer-like in the Mid setting.

Nicely responsive to touch, Strymon's Compadre feels very natural to play

through and offers many options whether you wish to switch in the different sections when needed or set up a sound that particularly suits you and leave it inline. The compression and boost sections mesh together extremely well and can combine to create a front-end that brings the very best out of your amp.

It's dead easy to use in a WYSIWYG way, tweaking knobs as necessary, but it does have presets if you're happy to connect up some external gear to access them. You can save the settings of all the pedal's knobs and toggle switches, including the rear Boost Type switch, plus the bypass state of both Boost and Compressor. Like the Strymon pedals that sport a Favorite footswitch, you can store a Favorite setting here that can be accessed by connecting a Strymon MiniSwitch or another external latching

footswitch. Alternatively, Strymon's MultiSwitch Plus three-button footswitch will give you access to three presets. Much more is available via MIDI where you can not only access a full 300 presets but remotely control patch parameters, too.

VERDICT

A unique design that shows real grown-up thinking, the Compadre's three-pronged (if you add the expression pedal for volume control) practicality could make it the essential link between your guitar and your amp – its perfect companion, as the name suggests. **G**

PROS Two compression types; three boost types; Dry blend control; practical size for a twin-footswitch pedal; expression pedal volume control; presets

CONS Nothing

ROUND-UP

Vahlbruch pedals

A new trio of pedals from Germany designed by a professor of physics

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

Whoever said making stompboxes isn't rocket science obviously hadn't heard of Vahlbruch pedals, which are actually designed by a rocket scientist. Well, perhaps not a rocket scientist exactly, but Dr Henning Vahlbruch is professor of Gravitational Physics at the Albert Einstein Institute, and you don't get a rocket off the ground without a deep knowledge of gravity...

Hand-built in Germany, the range currently comprises 13 different designs and features a unique switching technology designed by the prof. The Magnetic Transducer Button (MagTraB)

switching works as follows: as you push the footswitch button the position of a magnet inside it is measured by a sensor; this sensor sends information via a micro-controller to a relay that does the actual switching.

The MagTraB system is said to be indestructible and capable of an almost infinite number of switching cycles, all with no mechanical switch clicks. Another feature is that you can set a pedal so that it powers up either on or bypassed – very practical for 'always on' pedals or any in switcher loops.



Kaluna High Voltage Tube Drive £295

The Kaluna is a valve-based overdrive that runs from a nine-volt supply, although you'll need a 500mA output on your power distributor to get its ECC83/12AX7 glowing away through the grille. With Drive at minimum, the Volume knob will give you a decent cleanish boost in about the last third of its range, but the Drive knob is capable of many shades of drive through to saturation as it pushes the valve. A powerful three-band EQ – Bass, Middle and Treble, each with up to 12dB of cut and boost – offers plenty of sonic sculpting capability, particularly in the midrange, to place the drive in the mix or to tune it to perfectly complement your amp.

Although there are some really driven tones available from the pedal, our preference is with the Drive at lower levels (and the rest set accordingly) in that role of transparently adding an extra switchable channel to our amp, all with a sensitive amp-like response to pick attack. **G**

VERDICT It ain't cheap, but it's real valve overdrive that can easily slot onto a pedalboard



SpaceTimeTap £235

The SpaceTimeTap features digital repeats, while the dry signal remains resolutely analogue in a parallel path through the pedal so there's no messing with your original tone. While the Time, Repeats and Mix knob are standard for any delay pedal, you do get some adjustment of the sound of the repeats via a three-way tone switch that reduces top-end. The Bright setting gives you the most clarity with repeats that naturally mimic your guitar tone, while the Mellow and Dark settings are progressively less bright and melt away really nicely into the ether.

With probably the three most-used time divisions, the tap tempo footswitch is a practical asset and its MagTraB switching works brilliantly in a tap tempo context, delivering what might just be the smoothest we've seen in a delay pedal. While you could get a decent multi-program delay pedal for the same price, this pedal's virtue is that it just does the essential but does it so very well. **G**

VERDICT Basic facilities for the price, but it scores on sound quality and simplicity of use



Quantum £195

What do you like at the front-end of your signal chain? A compressor? A buffer? Well, the Quantum can fulfil both functions. It's a compressor, but you can set it up for true or buffered bypass (it has an extra LED to let you know that it's in buffered mode). There are standard knobs for compression and output volume – with loads of leeway to add boost – but the photocell-based compressor has two modes of operation: standard serial compression or parallel compression, basically mixing dry sound with the compressed signal. You'd have more control over this with a Dry knob dialling in the exact mix of dry and compressed, but the setting that's been chosen here seems to strike the right balance between keeping your front-end dynamics and adding the benefits of compression. If you want Dyna Comp-style squashiness, it's all there in Serial mode, but you may be tempted to keep that Parallel mode's subtle tone conditioning on all the time. **G**

VERDICT A practical two-in-one pedal with plenty of options as to how you use it

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: Germany

TYPE: Drive pedal

FEATURES: True bypass,
ECC83/12AX7 valve

CONTROLS: Drive, Volume, Bass,
Middle, Treble, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input,
standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor
(not supplied) 500mA

DIMENSIONS: 120 (w) x 100 (d) x
48mm (h)

8/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: Germany

TYPE: Delay pedal

FEATURES: Selectable true or buffered
bypass, selectable trails, 600ms max delay
time, tap tempo, available with either
creme or black knobs

CONTROLS: Time, Repeats, Mix-Level,
Tap Division switch (eighth, quarter,
dotted eighth), Tone switch (Mellow, Bright,
Dark), Tap Tempo footswitch, Bypass
footswitch, internal true/buffered bypass
switch, internal 'kill dry' switch,
internal 'trails on' switch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input,
standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor
(not supplied) 60mA

DIMENSIONS: 120 (w) x 100(d) x
48mm (h)

8/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: Germany

TYPE: Compression pedal

FEATURES: Selectable true or buffered
bypass, buffer on LED, dynamic
processing LED

CONTROLS: Compression/Sustain,
Volume, Serial/Parallel switch,
Bypass footswitch, internal
true/buffered bypass switch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input,
standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not
supplied) 40mA

DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 115 (d) x
48mm (h)

9/10

Guitarist
CHOICE



EFFECTRODE

Blue Bottle Inductorized Booster

Midrange valve boost to fatten up your single coils

Words

Trevor Curwen

Photography

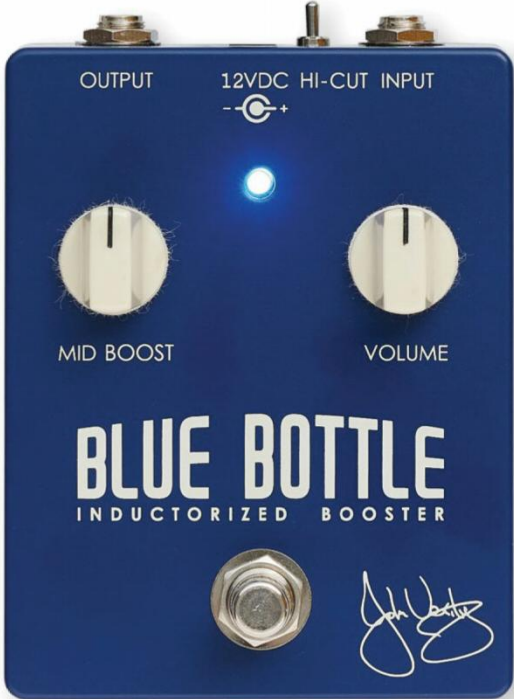
Olly Curtis

Effectrode, the UK company that specialises in valve-based pedals, has come up with a new limited-edition booster pedal. The Blue Bottle is a signature pedal designed for Argent guitarist John Verity who specifically requested a pedal that could fatten up the tone of the single-coil pickups on his Strat. The pedal draws its inspiration from the valve-based Pultec equalisers found in high-end recording studios and, as such, features a real inductor in the circuitry alongside its new-old-stock Sylvania 6021 sub-miniature triode valve. The Volume knob delivers up to 18dB of gain, while the mid-boost is dialled in with a separate knob that offers a flat response at its lowest position but can add up to 12dB of midrange boost centred around a frequency of 500Hz.

Without the Mid Boost knob in play, the Volume control seems to hit unity gain at around the 11 o'clock position and from that point will give you a boost, plenty enough to drive a clean amp into gritty break-up in its higher positions.

It also brings in a pleasing degree of sweet top-end enhancement, although you do have options to tailor the top-end with a rear-panel switch offering high-frequency cut via a -6dB/octave low-pass filter that rolls off top-end above 6kHz or 3kHz. The Mid knob progressively turns up the midrange, delivering warmth and thickening – exactly what you need to add girth to a Strat’s pickup per the original design brief, as we found when using it to coax something a little richer from our Strat, Tele and P-90-equipped Gibson. It’s not just about fattening single coils, though, as we enjoyed using it with a Les Paul, too. Regardless of what guitar you might be playing, that combination of extra midrange and a fulsome boost in front of an amp on the edge of break-up will get you smoothly singing lead sounds that should appeal to blues players in particular.

VERDICT
Offering midrange boost alongside an increase in clarity, the Blue Bottle is one of those pedals that simply improves



your tone and would perfectly suit the ‘always on’ role, making an essential permanent contribution. **G**

PROS Classy tone enhancement; loads of boost on tap; satisfying midrange fattening
CONS None really, unless you don’t want to add another power adaptor to your ‘board

ALSO TRY...



EFFECTRODE

Fire Bottle £205

An older Effectrode design, this has up to 30dB of gain available, but the tone control is basically a 1940s Fender Harvard amp tone control with internal ‘Q’ adjustment to fine-tune the response.



AUDIO KITCHEN

The Small Trees £321

An all-valve Class A clean boost based around a single ECC82 and powered by a 12-volt adaptor. There’s 16dB of clean boost on tap here dialled in with the single gain knob.



SEYMOUR DUNCAN

Pickup Booster £140

Not a valve in sight, but this pedal’s knob offers up to 25dB of boost, while its Resonance switch offers a pair of options to beef up single coils for more of a humbucker vibe.

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Boost pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Mid Boost,
Volume, Hi-Cut switch,
Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input,
standard output

POWER: Supplied 12V
DC adaptor, 600mA

DIMENSIONS: 92 (w) x
125 (d) x 55mm (h)

**Guitarist
CHOICE**

9/10





Plug In & Play

This month, Adrian Thorpe helps a reader play during the day and record her rig silently during lockdown

THE BACKGROUND

LAURA MICHAELS, *via email*

During lockdown I have been unable to make music during the day out of respect for my neighbour who is a key worker and works nightshifts. My usual practice location is closed, so I've been recording ideas through plug-ins on my Mac. This works to a point, but I miss my amp and pedalboard, plus some of the sounds I use aren't available as plug-ins. I tried plugging my 'board directly into my interface, but it didn't sound or feel right. Is this as good as it gets?

THE QUESTIONS

- 1 IS THIS AS GOOD AS IT GETS?
- 2 HOW DO I RECORD MY RIG SILENTLY – WITH AN AMP?
- 3 HOW DO I RECORD MY RIG SILENTLY – WITHOUT AN AMP?

THE ANSWERS

What you are chasing is the panacea for recording guitarists. It's no exaggeration to state that, as guitarists, we generally want to have our cake and eat it. Recording a rig silently and hoping it will sound as good as if it were cranked and interactive is *hard*. However, things have improved markedly over the last few years so I can now recommend several solutions that, to my mind, are close to perfect.

01. In short, no – this is not as good as it gets. But the difficulties you have integrating your pedalboard to your DAW continue to be difficult for many guitarists wishing to record their instruments and rigs.

02. I'll start by treating your rig as a whole and including the amp as the final part of your chain before it hits the DAW. This makes things easy in that the response of your amp to your pedals is no different to what you're used to. The big difficulty with this, though, is that you can't just plug your amplifier into your DAW. A valve amp typically requires a speaker to act as a load on the output transformer and prevent the amp killing itself. To work speaker-less your amplifier needs to be plugged into an attenuator or reactive load.



Boss's Waza Tube Amp Expander (above) is feature-packed, and players can get a truly silent amp-less rig with Two Notes' Torpedo C.A.B. M (right)

These come in very different configurations. For a straight up attenuator with basic DI out, try the Suhr Reactive Load. For a fully featured attenuator with enhanced outputs and effects, including a Class D power amp, the Boss Waza Tube Amp Expander springs to mind. As you don't need the power amp part I'd also suggest Two Notes' Torpedo Captor X, a reactive load box with everything post-amplifier digitised and emulated through a digital plug-in. This lets you simulate a cab, mic placement, effects, reverb and so on before sending it to your DAW. This is essentially the golden bullet for your needs.

03. Want to go one step further and dispense with your amp as well? Try a speaker emulator such as the GFI System Cabzeus or Neunaber



Iconoclast. In my experience, these systems will need a preamp pedal (ideally valve-based) to sit between your pedalboard and the speaker emulator to sound optimal. A compromise but a worthy one. That said, Two Notes' Torpedo C.A.B. M offers all of the digitised functionality, including a simulated preamp, power amp, speaker cab and mics, enabling you to connect your pedalboard into a simulated amp and cab before being presented to your DAW. This is the least bulky option and gives you a truly silent rig that can be used live to go amp-less when you get back to gigging.

Whichever solution you end up choosing, you'll be able to record your ideas rather than constantly tweaking you interface to fit a square peg (pedalboard) into a round hole (DAW). Good luck.

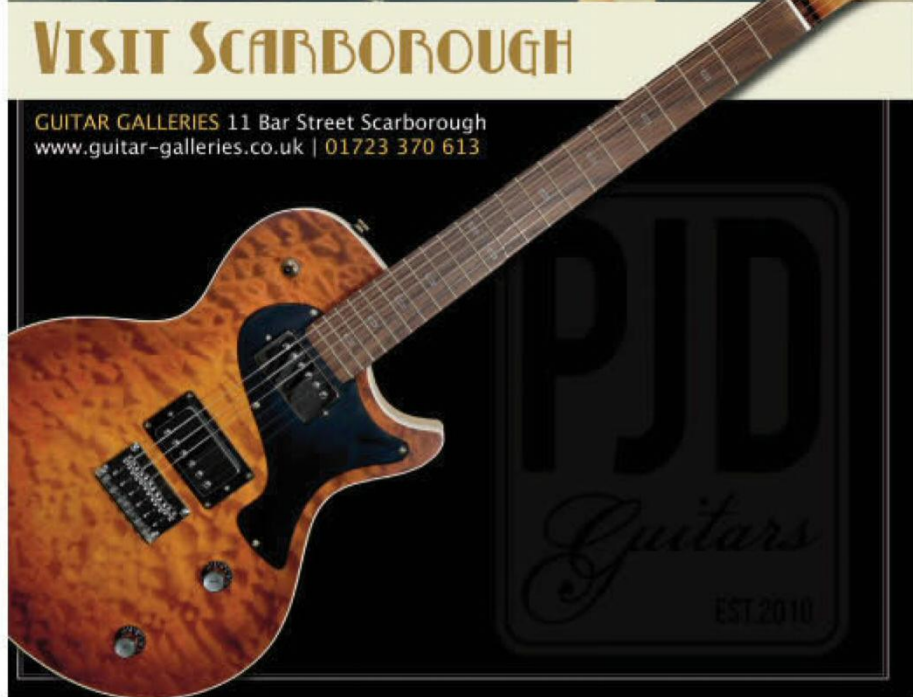
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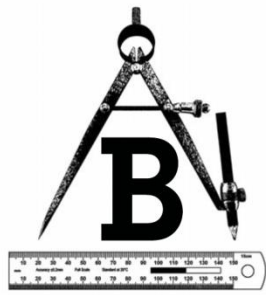
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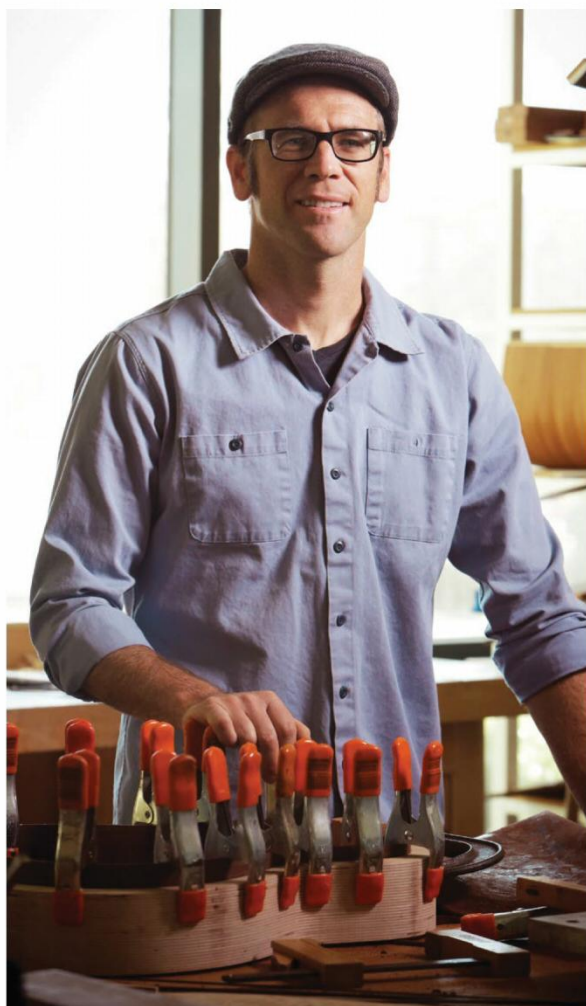


« BLUEPRINT »

STREETS AHEAD

Taylor has searched the Earth for sustainable tonewoods – so it’s ironic that the company has now discovered a promising new guitar-making wood growing right on its doorstep, among the streets of California’s big cities. Master luthier Andy Powers tells us how he and company founder, Bob Taylor, hit the town to build the stunning new 324ce acoustic

Words Jamie Dickson



Master luthier Andy Powers hit upon the idea of using urban woods in guitars when he and his team discovered that, eventually, much of this wood is ground into mulch

Guitarists are notoriously conservative, but Taylor – as a brand that started life in 1972 not 1872 – has always enjoyed the freedom to create the guitars that it wants to make, not the guitars that tradition dictates it should build. Over the years, founder Bob Taylor has made good use of that freedom to move the guitar maker’s art forwards – usually in the direction of greater sustainability and an open-mindedness about tonewoods.

Bob Taylor may have taken a step back from hands-on guitar design at the Californian company in recent years, but Taylor’s master luthier Andy Powers has embraced the same mission to work with progressive materials and minimise the company’s impact on pristine forests. Taylor is already well known for its efforts to make ebony and koa supplies from Cameroon and Hawaii more sustainable. Now it has gone a step further to harvest high-quality guitar-making wood from the very streets of California’s cities.

Taylor’s brand-new Builder’s Edition 324ce looks stunning, with its low-key aesthetic and tactile contours (see review,

p78). Less obvious is that its back and sides are made of a wood called Shamel ash, which is more commonly found in California’s parks and residential streets than it is on high-end guitars. We caught up with Andy to learn how Taylor came to be using this novel tonewood – and he explained that the ‘lightbulb moment’ came almost out of the blue.

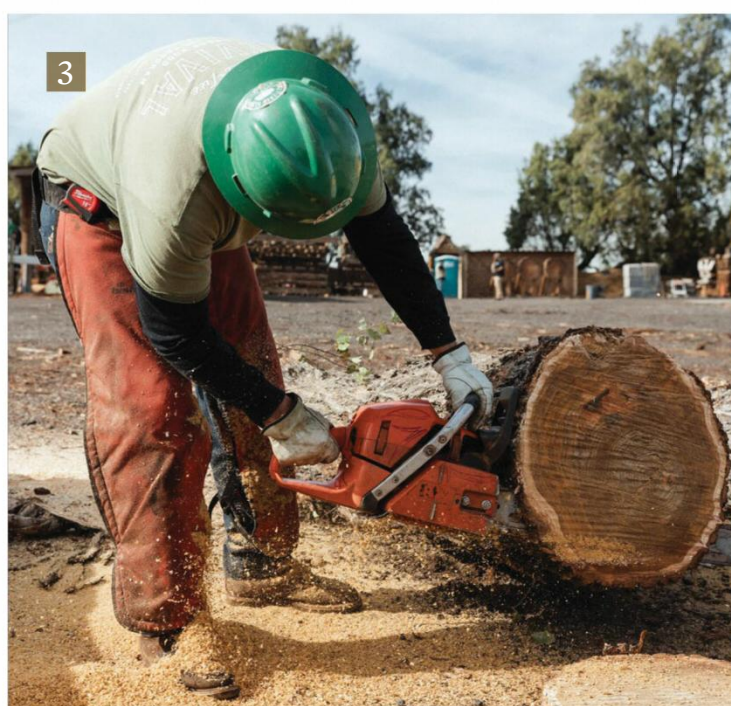
“I have a musician friend who lives in the Los Angeles area,” Andy recalls. “He found an urban wood reseller, and these guys would find little bits and pieces of things and they’d cut slabs of it for people to make tabletops out of. I thought it was interesting, so I said, ‘Oh, that is cool. What woods do they have?’ and he named a few species that I had never worked with. I guess I wasn’t thinking too much of it at the time, but it was pretty interesting.

“At the same time Bob [Taylor] was taking a fresh look at forestry projects. The idea is that we are transitioning from the ‘hunter-gatherer’ era of wood procurement into being farmers of wood, which is a big transition. So we took that idea and we started to look at all the trees around us and we thought, ‘Well, wait a minute.’ There are trees that are planted every day

Taylor's stunning Builder's Edition 324ce was chosen to debut Urban Ash, otherwise known as Shamel ash, as it is the "most accessible guitar" in this limited series

⌘
"[Shamel ash] could go in a lot of different directions, but for the 324 Builder's Edition guitar, it is voiced to be very central in term of usage"
⌘





1. When Taylor discovered the stockpiles of a company called the West Coast Arborists, an outfit that maintains the urban trees in Californian cities, it was curious to know if the timber could be used for guitars

2. From left to right: John Mahoney (WCA), Bob Taylor and Scott Paul, Taylor's director of natural resource sustainability

3. The West Coast Arborists took a look at their felled trees like Shamel ash and thought they were too good to grind into mulch, thinking instead that one day the timber might be of use elsewhere

all over every city in the world. Those trees are maintained, they are watered, they are fertilised, they are trimmed, they are cared for, and yet every one of them gets removed out at some point when they become too large or obstructive for their position by a road or what have you. Then what happens? Well, we know what happens: most of the time, rather than being utilised for high-value purposes, those trees just get turned into mulch, which is the stuff you hope becomes dirt.

"So we started thinking about that and going, 'Well, wait a minute. If we were building violins back in Cremona 300 years ago, we'd look around at what trees we had locally available and start working from those. We would design the instruments that we built with those trees in mind. Why don't we return to some of that same concept? Let's look at the trees that are right around us and work from there.'"

All that remained was to find a supplier who could provide the quality and volume of urban tonewoods that the company was looking for. Fittingly, it simply took a

drive around the streets of Taylor's home district to find a solution.

"We saw some guys maintaining trees here in El Cajon, so we pulled the truck over and start talking to them, going, 'Hey, what are you planning on doing with that?' It literally started as simply as that. We started talking to these guys and we came to find out there is a company here in southern California, an amazing company called West Coast Arborists, and they maintain all of the city trees in almost every city throughout the entire state. We talked to them and found out that, well,

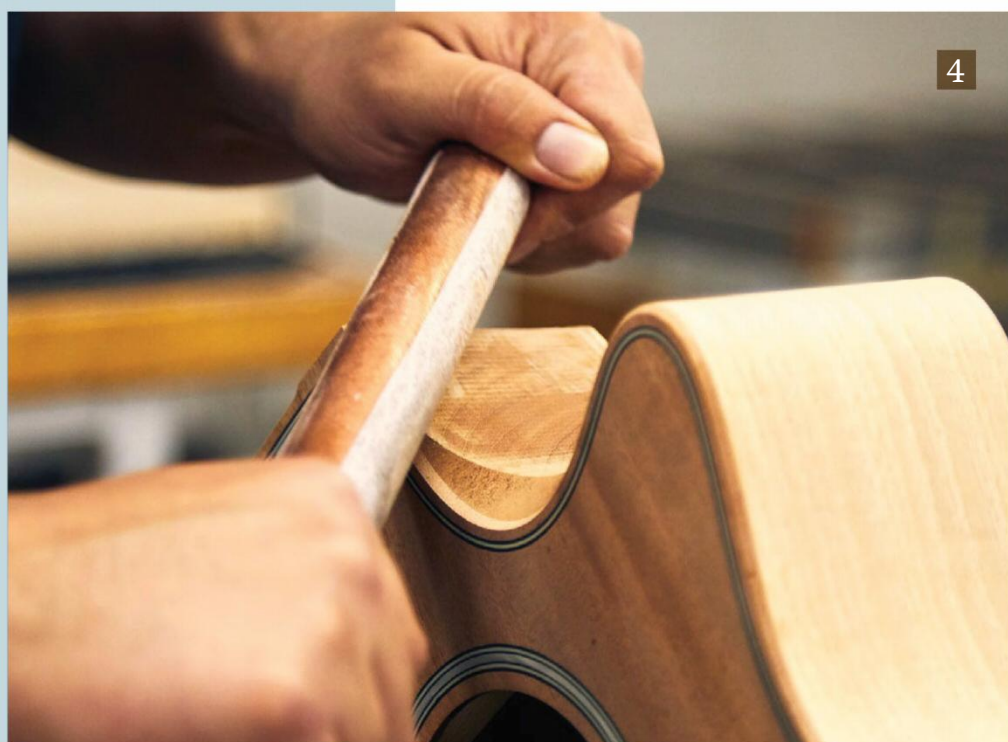
"We saw some guys maintaining trees here in El Cajon and asked, 'What are you planning on doing with that?'"

they are pretty forward-thinking. They are thinking along similar lines about the trees they handle, even though no-one was really doing anything with them yet. They had a huge log yard where they were looking at these trees and going, 'You know, that just seems like it is too big, too nice a tree to grind into mulch. Let's keep the log just in case someday somebody can use it.'

"We started working with them and went through their yard. It was full of trees that I'd never worked with and that Bob had never worked with. But we took a look at a few things and said, 'Okay, well, that looks like it could have usable wood in it. Let's take a sample of that: let's get a chainsaw and cut a chunk off that one.' We got to do some taste-testing [laughs]."

The 'Goldilocks' Wood

Like the story of Goldilocks and the three bears, Bob and Andy discovered several types of urban wood that might be suitable for guitar making – but one in particular was 'just right'.



4. The Taylor Builder's Edition 324ce uses Shamel ash for its back and sides, making use of its mahogany-like properties in both tone and craftability

5. The 324ce also boasts high-end refinements such as comfort-enhancing bevels, making for effortless playing and understated but classy contours

6. Initially, Andy's concerns for using any new wood in Taylor's guitars began at a very basic level: "Can you saw it? Can you dry it? Can you glue it? Can you sand it?"



"Shamel ash caught my attention because it looked like it had all the right characteristics," Andy says of the tonewood that eventually went into the 324ce Builder's Edition. "By right characteristics, I mean the practical things. Can you saw it? Can you dry it? Can you glue it? Can you sand it? Can you finish it? Is it dimensionally stable? Those kinds of things.

"Shamel ash was so easy to start using because it had so much in common with guitar-making woods that we really love, particularly mahogany. Mahogany is the king of the woods because you can make anything from it. It is very dimensionally stable and it has amazing working characteristics. Because of that, we build all sorts of things, like boats and guitars and everything out of it."

Trees are sometimes misleadingly named so, given that Shamel ash has many of the characteristics of mahogany, how does it relate – if at all – to the kinds of ash most guitarists are familiar with from Telecasters and the like?

"There are two types of ash that guitarists are familiar with," Andy explains. "First, you have the ultra-lightweight stuff – what people call swamp ash. It's real soft, kind of spongy but a very lively-sounding ash. Then you have the much-maligned, ultra-heavy northern ash: what I call baseball-bat ash, the real heavy, dense, hard ash that you would make a table out of. Electric guitars were made out of that type of ash back in the 70s and they weighed 30lbs [laughs]. They just felt like anchors. But this Shamel ash that we discovered is not really like either of those. It has a colour that is similar to both of those familiar types of ash, but it's somewhere in between in terms of density, grain structure, growth characteristics and dimensional stability.

"It is pretty exciting because we are still in a phase of discovery with it, and other urban species as well, because while I fell in love with the Shamel ash it certainly isn't the only wood that is appropriate. It was just really the best one to be introduced to first. So we are using

it for backs and sides to begin with and it works fantastic for those. I believe it would work for tops, too, but I'm still discovering exactly the kind of characteristics that we want because right now these trees, they really reflect the location that they grew in.

"So, let's say, if a Shamel ash grew right on the side of a roadway, it will tend to be a real good sawlog because when it was young all of its branches were pruned off to keep roadway clearance. As that tree gets old it will have a real nice straight, knot-free, real clean and clear chunk that you can take great wood from. A top would work really good from a tree like that. On the other hand, if that tree got too much water, the grain lines would tend to be a little bigger than I would want for a top. So it is a process of discovery. But I believe we could make tops out of it – and we could probably make necks out of it. We are still researching how best to introduce this wood into other areas of guitar making, but for now it has been working great as a back and side wood, so that's where we are starting."



7. The other timbers in use on the Taylor 324ce Builder's Edition steer a more familiar course with a mahogany neck and a West African ebony fingerboard

8. The key question regarding the use of any new wood on a guitar is, 'How does it sound?' Our review of the 324ce (see p78) found a marked evenness between basses and trebles and that it ticks many boxes, making it a good contender for being a splendid all-rounder



Director's Cut

It's clear that Shamel ash has some pretty versatile properties – but because it is unfamiliar to most guitar players, Andy decided that the 324ce was the right place to debut it, as the Builder's Edition collection that it forms part of was created to show off a kind of 'director's cut' of progressive guitar designs.

"For the moment we are introducing it on the 324ce Builder's Edition guitar as a pretty unique piece because it is our most accessible guitar within that Builder's Edition series where you have the contour cutaway and all the unique aspects that we have incorporated into those guitars. That seemed like the perfect place to introduce a new species [of wood]. With the 324ce we paired the Shamel ash back and sides with a mahogany top – because they have certain similarities, they play off each other really well. So we are introducing it there, but that certainly isn't going to be the only model that we ever build with this. It will be expanding to some other

new guitars that we haven't introduced yet but will in the near future.

"Shamel ash actually has a real easy-going set of characteristics, so there are a lot of different tonal colours that you could derive from it. It could go in a lot of different directions, but for the 324 Builder's Edition guitar, it is voiced to be very central in term of usage. If you want to strum chords on that guitar, it works great as a rhythm guitar. If you want to use it as a lead instrument, it works great for that. It is right in the middle zone of what a modern acoustic guitar player would want to get out of that instrument."

As mentioned before, this isn't the first time that Taylor has used tonewoods in non-traditional ways. Its 600 Series, for example, was built around the idea of making maple – which is in plentiful supply – more viable as an all-round guitar making wood. The 600 Series featured maple back and sides and its bracing (among other things) was specially adapted to produce a more balanced tonal response than you might ordinarily expect

from maple, which is often associated with bright, zingy tones. Does Shamel ash require similar tweaking to give of its best?

"We made a few small changes," Andy says, "because, to me, there is a difference between just 'working' – and working really well. So we could put [a traditional] set of braces on this back, and, yes, it works. But with a few small adjustments to the profiles and whatnot we find that it works better. With this one, the back of the guitar is tuned a little – in fact, it's very similar to the way I would tune a koa back because, again, the Shamel ash has some similar characteristics.

"Let's face it, a piece of wood doesn't really sound like anything by itself," Andy reflects as we conclude our chat. "It is not until you turn it into an instrument that you can appreciate its unique attributes, the sounds that it makes – and even in that context you are never listening to just the material. You are listening to the material, the design, the workmanship, and then what the musician is bringing to it." **G** www.taylorguitars.com

6 String Acoustics



19453 - Art & Lutherie Roadhouse Parbur, T. Red
18341 - Atkin Essential D Dreadnought Acoustic
18281 - Atkin Essential OOO Handmade in England
18340 - Atkin The Forty-Three J43, Aged Finish
19361 - Bedel OH-12-G Parlour Guitar Secondhand
18269 - Breedlove Guitar Acoustic Strings
13910 - The Cort AF510OP Acoustic Folk Guitar
15233 - Faith FKN Naked Neptune Acoustic Guitar
18896 - Faith FKR Naked Mars FKR, Natural
18240 - Faith FN Natural Neptune
19764 - Fender Sonoran Mini, Natural, 3/4 Guitar
14615 - Gibson Dobro, circa 1961, Original Vintage
19761 - Gibson J30 Acoustic Guitar, Secondhand
19120 - Gibson Vintage Ultimate J45 Ltd Ed, Used
18948 - Yairi NY65VNT Acoustic Parlour Guitar
18950 - Yairi YBR2 Baritone Acoustic Guitar
15900 - Lakewood A22 Custom Made, Secondhand
15310 - Martin 00015M Mahogany Acoustic, Used
6009 - Martin 00018 standard Series Acoustic
13824 - Martin 00028EC Eric Clapton, Natural
13064 - Martin D18 Dreadnought, Secondhand
5702 - Martin D28 Dreadnought, Natural
6008 - Martin D35 Dreadnought, Natural
5835 - Martin Backpacker Acoustic Travel Guitar
19459 - Martin LX1RE Acoustic Guitar
6007 - Martin OM21 Orchestra, Natural
19126 - Martin OM28 Reimagined
19804 - Martin SC-13E Guitar
9185 - Seagull S6 Acoustic Guitar
16585 - Stonebridge G23CR, Cutaway
15491 - Tanglewood TW40PD Sundance Delta Parlour
14943 - Tanglewood TW40 SD VS
14947 - Tanglewood TWCR O Crossroads
19462 - Tanglewood TWJPS Parlour Acoustic Guitar
17056 - Tanglewood TWU D Union Dreadnought
18602 - Vintage LHV3000FT Acoustic Lefthand, Nat
13271 - Vintage VTG100 Travel Guitar in Natural
13128 - Vintage VTR800PB Viator Travel Guitar

6 String Electro Acoustics



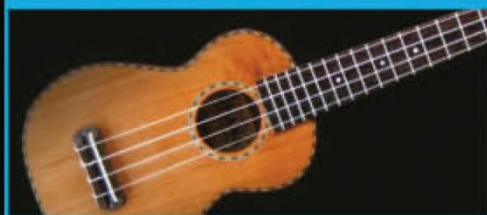
19525 - Maestro Original Series Singa WE CSB C
19530 - Maestro Private Coll. Victoria PH CSB AX
18265 - Maestro Singa FM-CSB-A Custom Series
19531 - Maestro Special Build Trad. Series D-CO
12225 - Martin & Co 000X1AE Electro Acoustic
12222 - Martin & Co DX1AE Electro Acoustic
19244 - Martin 000-10E Guitar
19714 - Martin 000CJR10E, Cherry Stain B&S
15592 - Martin 0015E Retro Non-Cutaway Electro
19403 - Martin 00X1AE Guitar
19716 - Martin D-X1E Koa Guitar
19390 - Martin D10E Electro Acoustic Guitar
19489 - Martin DJR-10E Jnr Electro-Acoustic
19805 - Martin DX Johnny Cash Guitar
12418 - Martin & Co DX1AEL Acoustic Guitar
16139 - Martin Ed Sheeran 3 ÷ Signature Edition
19717 - Martin GPC-X2E Rosewood Guitar
19050 - Martin GPC11E Electro Acoustic
15591 - Martin GPC18E Electro Acoustic Guitar
15486 - Martin GPCPA4 Electro Acoustic Shaded
8039 - Martin GPCPA4 Electro Acoustic, Natural
16116 - Martin GPCX1AE Electro Acoustic Guitar
7320 - Martin LX1E, Electro Travel Guitar
19458 - Martin LX1RE Electro Acoustic Guitar
18517 - Martin OMC15ME Electro-Acoustic Guitar
19497 - Maton EBG808L in Satin Natural
12438 - Northwood Custom Myrtle 80 Dreadnought
18167 - Northwood M80 OMV Cutaway
17418 - Northwood Auditorium With Hard Case
19283 - Ovation 1512, Secondhand
19113 - Ovation 1627 Balladeer Glen Campbell Sig.
18952 - Ovation 1761 USA Made Electro Acoustic
19339 - Ovation 1771V-1GC Glen Campbell Legend
19341 - Ovation 2771STR-MB Main Street
11087 - Ovation Standard Elite 6778LX Black
19347 - Ovation C2078AXP-KOA Exoticwood Elite
19343 - Ovation C2078AXP2-PB Exoticwood Elite
19344 - Ovation CE44L-5 Celebrity Elite - Left Hand
19346 - Ovation CS24-4 Celebrity Standard, Nat
19338 - Ovation 1771STG-ES
14913 - PJ Eggle Linville Outaway Elec/Acoustic
14914 - PJ Eggle Linville Electro Acoustic
19554 - RainSong APSE
10094 - RainSong BI-OM1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
10038 - RainSong BI-WS1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
17657 - RainSong CHPA1000NS Concert Hybrid
17659 - RainSong CO-DR1000N2 Concert Series
9821 - RainSong CO-JM1000N2
9819 - RainSong CO-OM1000N2
9818 - RainSong CO-WS1000N2
19557 - RainSong CO-WS1005NSM
19555 - RainSong NJM1000N2X
19556 - RainSong VDR1000N2X
18051 - RainSong WS1000N2 Graphite Guitar, USED
7974 - RainSong WS1000N2 Graphite Guitar
18316 - Seagull Entourage Autumn Burst CW QIT
18504 - Seagull Entourage Folk Burst Umber QIT
19672 - Seagull Performer Mini-Jumbo Flame Maple
19671 - Seagull S6 Cedar Original Slim QIT
19676 - Simon & Patrick Trek SG Dreadnought, Nat.
19571 - Simon & Patrick Woodland Parlour, Used
15376 - Takamine EF360GF Glen Frey Model
15481 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR D E
19547 - Tanglewood DBT PE HR Electro-Acoustic
15494 - Tanglewood DBT SFCE PW
15869 - Tanglewood Discovery DBT SFCE OV
14952 - Tanglewood TSF CE Black
19099 - Tanglewood TSP 15 CE
15866 - Tanglewood TSR 2 Masterdesign Electro
18366 - Tanglewood TW E Mini Koa
19114 - Tanglewood TW4 E WB LH, Left-handed
15582 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk CE
15832 - Tanglewood TW40PD Sundance Delta Parlour
18214 - Tanglewood TW4ER, Electro Acoustic, Red
8293 - Tanglewood TW55NS, Nat, Secondhand
16524 - Tanglewood TWCR OE Crossroads
12305 - Tanglewood TWJF E
19548 - Tanglewood TWR2 SFCE Electro Acoustic
15979 - Tanglewood Sundance Perf. Pro X47E
19660 - Taylor 220ce K DLX Guitar, Used
12317 - Taylor GC8 Grand Concert Acoustic Guitar
18789 - Vintage LVEC501N Dreadnought, Satin Nat.
18786 - Vintage VE300N Electro-Acoustic, Natural
14397 - Vintage VE8000PB Paul Brett 6-String
18788 - Vintage VEC501N Dreadnought, Satin Nat.
18791 - Vintage VGA900N Electro-Acoustic, Nat.
18790 - Vintage VGE800N Gemini P. Brett Baritone
19802 - Yamaha A3R Electro Acoustic, Black
19802 - Yamaha LLTA TransAcoustic Vintage Tint
19165 - Yamaha SLG200NW Silent Guitar, Nylon
15619 - Yamaha SLG200S Steel Silent Guitar Nat

Classical Guitars



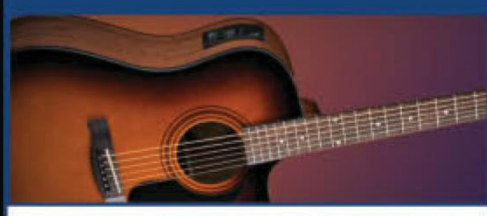
19742 - A Burguet Model 2F Flamenco Guitar, Used
19743 - A Burguet Model 3F Flamenco Guitar, Used
19128 - Asturias by Kodaira 3340 Classical, Used
13864 - Breedlove Pursuit Nylon Electro Acoustic
15547 - David Pelter Handmade Classical Guitar
19210 - Hanika 50 KF-N Studio Line, Secondhand
18946 - Yairi CE1 Electro Classical Guitar
19800 - Yairi CY62CE Electro Acoustic Classical Guitar
18947 - Yairi YC6 NS Classical Guitar
18949 - Yairi YCT8 Classical Guitar
0000 - Mendieta - 20 Models In Stock Now
12178 - Protection Packet Class Gtr Case Dlx
6913 - Raimundo 630E Electro Classical Guitar
5360 - Ramirez 130 Year Anniversary Classical
6029 - Ramirez 1NE Classical Guitar
15239 - Ramirez 2NCWE Classical Guitar
18906 - Ramirez 2NE Classical Guitar
15236 - Ramirez 4NE Classical Guitar
12760 - Ramirez FL1 Flamenco Guitar
5644 - Ramirez George Harrison Model Classical
15237 - Ramirez RA Classical Guitar
15238 - Ramirez RB Classical Guitar
6027 - Ramirez S1 Classical Guitar
12761 - Ramirez SP Classical Guitar
16060 - Stagg C410 1/2 Size Classical Guitar
15290 - Stagg C430 3/4 Classical Guitar, Black
15289 - Stagg C130 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
17107 - Stagg C440M Classical Guitar
17106 - Stagg C440M Classical Guitar
17109 - Stagg C440M Classical Guitar
19470 - Stagg SCL50 3/4N Pack, Natural
19471 - Stagg SCL50 4/4N Pack, Natural
8352 - Westcoast Student 4/4 Classical, Natural
14720 - Yamaha - 4 Models In Stock Now

Ukuleles



19887 - Austin Naupaka Mahogany Sop. Uke With Bag
19872 - Austin Naupaka Soprano Ukulele With Bag
16390 - Baton Rouge UR11S Soprano Ukulele
16227 - Baton Rouge UR4S Soprano Ukulele
18052 - Baton Rouge UR51S Soprano Ukulele
19915 - Elvis Hanauna Mahogany Sop Uke With Bag
19913 - Elvis Hawaii Student Sop Uke In With Bag
19886 - Flight Nus310 Blackbird Sop Uke With Bag
19888 - Flight NUS310 Soprano Ukulele With Bag
19883 - Flight Nus350dc Dreamcatcher Sop Uke
16458 - Iberica SC Classic Sop Uke, Solid Acacia
19306 - Kai KSI10 10 Series Sop. Ukulele, Mahogany
16794 - Kala KA-15S-S Satin Spruce Soprano
15833 - Korala UKS32 Soprano Ukulele
19464 - Mahalo Halloween Soprano Ukulele Pumpkin
18195 - Mahalo MK1 Kahiko Soprano Ukulele, Blue
18196 - Mahalo MK1 Kahiko Soprano Ukulele, Brown
18197 - Mahalo MK1 Kahiko Sop Uke, Butterscotch
18198 - Mahalo MK1 Kahiko Soprano Ukulele, Red
15691 - Mahalo MR1 Soprano Ukulele, Black
19480 - Mahalo Snowflake Soprano Ukulele
18199 - Mahalo Union Jack Soprano Uke
19885 - Malibu 21s Soprano Ukulele With Bag
10909 - Martin OXK Soprano Ukulele
19884 - Martin Romas MR01F Sop. Ukulele With Bag
8128 - Martin S1 Soprano Ukulele with Gig Bag
13679 - Nukulele "Abbotts Digi" Bottle Ukulele
13684 - Nukulele Autumn Gold Bottle Ukulele
13680 - Nukulele "Brown Ale" Bottle Ukulele
13683 - Nukulele Lemonade Bottle Ukulele
13682 - Nukulele Sainte Bottle Ukulele
8508 - Ohana PK10S Soprano Ukulele Pineapple
4711 - Ohana SK20 Soprano Ukulele Uke
14210 - Ohana SK21 Premium Mahogany Soprano
4710 - Ohana SK25 Soprano Ukulele
15957 - Ohana SK28 Soprano Uke
9052 - Ohana SK38 Soprano Uke, Mahogany
9051 - Ohana SK50 Soprano Uke
7108 - Ohana SK70MG Soprano Ukulele
12390 - Ohana Soprano Uke Gig Bag
16017 - Ohana Ukuleles SK-30M Large Neck Soprano
19914 - Radiotone Sop. Uke in Mahogany With Bag
12740 - ResoVile Weeki Wachee Resonator Ukulele
16199 - Risa Electric Soprano Ukulele, Black
17059 - Tanglewood TW1T Tiare Soprano Uke in Satin
17062 - Tanglewood TW1T4 Soprano Ukulele
17090 - Tanglewood Tiare TWT SP Soprano Ukulele
16454 - Uluru Koa I All Solid Koa Soprano Uke
19912 - Aloha Concert Uke With Inlaid Soundhole
19899 - Aloha Concert Uke With Engraved Soundhole
19893 - Aloha Concert Ukulele With Spruce Top
19901 - Aloha Shiny Model Concert Ukulele in Mahog.
19911 - Aloha Student Concert Mahogany Ukulele
19695 - Barnes & Mullins Concert Uke, BMUK8C
19664 - B&M BMUK5CE Concert Electro Uke
15931 - Baton Rouge UR21C Concert Ukulele
19709 - Baton Rouge VX2/C-OR Concert Uke Orange
19707 - Baton Rouge VX2/C-SR Concert Uke Sunrise
18975 - Breedlove Lu'au Concert Nat Shadow E Uke
18973 - Lu'au Concert Uke Ghost Burst Myrtlewood
19890 - Elvis Princeville Custom Concert Ukulele
19873 - Factory Prototype Concert Uke With Black Bag
19881 - Factory Prototype Concert Uke With Black Bag
19894 - Factory Prototype Con. Uke - Layered Head
19882 - Factory Prototype Con. Uke With Sapele Top
19917 - Factory Prototype Funky Top Concert Ukulele
19916 - Factory Prototype Mahogany Concert Ukulele
19918 - Factory Prototype Mahogany Concert Ukulele
19897 - Factory Prototype Reverse Headstock Concert
19868 - Flight Nuc310 Concert Ukulele With Black Bag
19877 - Flight Prototype Concert Uke With Sapele Top
19876 - Flight Prototype Concert Uke With Spruce Top
19891 - Flight Red Mahogany Concert Outaway Uke
19869 - Giannini Custom Concert Ukulele Spruce Top
19880 - Giannini Custom Concert Ukulele With Bag
18166 - Kai KCI 100M Concert Ukulele
18833 - Kiwaya KSU1 Mahogany Student Sop Uke
18524 - Kiwaya KSU1L Long Neck Soprano Uke
16835 - AAMaestro UC-IR-SB-C Concert El -Acoustic
13086 - Magic Fluke M40 Mango Concert Uke, USED
18203 - Mahalo MH2CE ElectroAcoustic Concert Uke
19867 - Malibu 23s Concert Ukulele With Bag
19875 - Malibu C26 Deluxe Concert Ukulele With Bag
12224 - Martin & Co C1K Koa Concert Ukulele
19896 - Martin Romas MR02F Concert Ukulele
19016 - Ohana CK14E Electro Mahogany Concert Uke
9050 - Ohana CK20CE Concert Uke
13639 - Ohana CK22Z Concert Ukulele, Zebrawood
15958 - Ohana CK28 Concert Ukulele
12604 - Ohana CK35 Concert Ukulele
12603 - Ohana CK38 Concert Ukulele
19020 - Ohana CK70 A6
19021 - Ohana CK70M Solid Spruce Concert Ukulele
19022 - Ohana CK70R Spruce/Rosewood Concert
19023 - Ohana CK70M Solid Spruce Concert Ukulele
0000 - Many More Tenor, Bari & Bass Ukes In Stock

6 String Electro Acoustics



19673 - Art & Lutherie Legacy HG Q-DISCRI Burst
19446 - Art & Lutherie Roadhouse Indigo Burst HG
19661 - Breedlove Pursuit Exotic Concert CE AB
18895 - Breedlove Pursuit Exotic Concert CE
10285 - Breedlove Pursuit Concert AB SB
15887 - Breedlove Stage Dreadnought, Natural
10068 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Cherry
19795 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Natural
13911 - Cort AF510EOP Electro Acoustic Guitar
18875 - D'Angelico Excel Tammany OM Electro
18886 - D'Angelico Premier Gramercy Acoustic
19448 - Eastman AC508CE Electro Acoustic, Used
19542 - Faith FNBCEHG HiGloss Baritone Neptune
18897 - Faith Neptune Classic Burst FNCESB45
19136 - Faith FPNECG Nexus Neptune Elect. Cognac
18899 - Faith FRESB45L Dreadnought Electro Lefty
16783 - Faith FVBMB Blood Moon Venus Cutaway
18798 - Faith FVBMB Blood Moon Venus LEFT-H
19572 - Fender American Acoustasonic Strat, Red
19573 - Fender Am. Acoustasonic Strat, Sunburst
19574 - Fender American Acoustasonic Strat Black
19575 - Fender American Acoustasonic Strat, Nat.
19576 - Fender Am Acoustasonic Strat, TS Blue
18564 - Fender American Acoustasonic Tele, Black
18565 - Fender American Acoustasonic Tele, Nat.
19760 - Fender CD60CE, Electro, Nat, Secondhand
16862 - Fender CP140SE Electro-Acoustic Sunburst
19260 - Fender Malibu Player, Burgandy Satin
16889 - Fender PM1 E Ltd Adirondack Dreadnought
18939 - Godin A6 Ultra A6 Natural SG
19801 - Yairi BM65CE Electro Acoustic Guitar
5602 - K Yairi WY1 Natural
19069 - Klos F DAE Deluxe Electro Acoustic
19065 - Klos T AE Electro Acoustic Travel
19064 - Klos F AE Electro Acoustic
19070 - Klos T A Acoustic Travel
19691 - Lariwee D03 Dreadnought ElectroAcoustic
19524 - Maestro Custom Series LE Paffles KOCBAU
19523 - Maestro Custom Series Singa KO CSB K
19528 - Maestro Double Top Series Paffles IRCSBD
18258 - Maestro OO-IR Traditional Series Guitar

Acoustic Amplification



5712 - AER Alpha - 40W, 1x8"
5193 - AER Alpha Plus - 50W, 1x8"
18514 - AER Compact 60 Mk 4
5710 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Hardwood - 60W, 1x8
14504 - AER Compact 60 SLOPE
15913 - AER Tommy Emmanuel Sig. Compact 60
5707 - AER Compact Classic Pro - 60W, 1x8"
5708 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Mobile - 60W, 1x8
4945 - AER Compact XL - 200W, 2x8"
9028 - AER Domino 3 200w Watt Acoustic Amp
15917 - Boss Acoustic Singer Live Acoustic Amp
15918 - Boss Acoustic Singer Pro Acoustic Amp
10496 - Fender Acoustasonic 15 Acoustic Amp
18243 - Fender Acoustasonic 40
6770 - Marshall AS100D - 50W+50W, 2x8"
13956 - Marshall AS50D - 50W, 2x8"
19483 - Orange Crush Acoustic 30, Black
4976 - Roland AC33 30W - 1x5"
9358 - Roland AC33, Rosewood
11129 - Roland AC40 Acoustic Guitar Amplifier
6505 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Amp - 30w, 2x6.5
9383 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Guitar Combo, RW
5597 - Roland AC90 - 90W, 2x8"
16903 - Roland Cube Street 2.5+2.5W, 6.5
13029 - Roland Cube Street EX Stereo Amplifier
14371 - MOBILE AC Acoustic Chorus, Portable Amp
5618 - Roland Mobile Cube (2.5W+2.5W, 4x2)
13018 - Tanglewood T3 30W Acoustic Amplifier
10937 - Yamaha THR5A Acoustic Amp

12 Strings



18336 - Breedlove Pursuit Exotic CE 12-String
18730 - Cort Natural Glossy MR710F, 12-String
19715 - Martin D-X2E 12 String Guitar
18807 - Vintage VE5000SB12 Electro 12 String
14349 - Vintage VE8000PB-12 Paul Brett

Longtermers

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



**Knaggs Choptank &
Fret-King Country**
Squire Semitone Special
with Dave Burrluck

The Knaggs Choptank is a monster guitar but subsequently comes at a monster price

Writer

DAVE BURRLUCK
Guitarist, Gear Reviews Editor



In our final part of this disparate two-guitar test, our reviews editor considers the real price of the artisan-made guitar

This year's NAMM Show in January – where the world's guitar brands large and small display their wares – was one of the busiest I can remember in recent years. It was impossible even over four days to see every exhibitor, but I couldn't help noticing the continued rise (in terms of numbers, at least) of small makers. A unifying theme is that the guitars these craftspeople are producing are not cheap. In writing up our show report for issue 457, with limited time and limited space, I realised I could have written the same number of words again purely focused on this high-end artisan market. There was a time when Paul Reed Smith's guitars were, seemingly, so expensive only 'doctors, dentists and lawyers' could afford them. As of 2020, a classic USA Core-level Custom 24, which is the epitome of 35-plus years of high-level guitar making, costs from £3,549 at full retail. You'd be lucky to snare one of those artisan-made instruments of anything approaching a similar specification for that money.

"Choice is great but finding your fit – and deciding what to buy – is probably harder than it's ever been"

While I'm sure many readers would balk at paying sums like these for a guitar, it's easy to get into this price point and above with mainstream brands from Fender's and Gibson's Custom Shops, Martin, Taylor... Pioneers of quality, detailed making like Collings, again with an awful lot of experience, will cost substantially more. Quality craft from hugely experienced makers, or even new kids on the block that you've never heard of, costs.

This is the area in which Knaggs operates. A small workshop of 10 (not all full-time) staff means for this world they make quite a few instruments, around 40 per month, which is about what PRS makes of its Core set-necks every day, and around a 10th of what Gibson USA produces in the same time. Nik Huber and his small team, one of the more



Our lowly Fret-King. Which is best? Simply whichever suits you and your budget

established 'boutique' makers, have still never made more than 300 instruments in a year.

So, how can we compare and contrast an artisan-built instrument against a production factory build? With difficulty. They are both, outwardly, perfectly good guitars but with considerable contrast on virtually every level, from the business model that they'd made and sold, to the raw materials and their cost, the hardware, pickups and electronics, and, ultimately, the feel and sound quality. Yet the build of the Fret-King is tantalisingly good, like many lower-ticket guitars these days. Yes, we'd be tempted to look at the electronics side, maybe upgrade the pots and experiment with the wiring, and we might upgrade the tuners and the bridge as well. If we did that, despite adding cost, it would narrow the gap still further.

But it's more of a lifestyle choice, isn't it? You simply might prefer the backstory of the Knaggs, the experience of the craftspeople who made it, the players who use guitars like this on stages around the world. You're buying into a top-level world, even if your musical abilities are far from professional. Aside from the fact the Fret-King was originally designed by Trev Wilkinson – whose world-class hardware is used by some of the industry's top makers including, most recently, John Suhr – and that it's factory-made in India, there is little else to go on. Yes, a smattering of artists have enjoyed Fret-King over the years,

but there really is little backstory and zero marketing to sell the dream.

Then there's the real-world choice we all have in today's market. Both brands face colossal competition at their respective price points and style. The Fret-King holds its own rather well, and the Knaggs is a very good example of the artisan or boutique build. Even though our specific model is a celebratory limited run of just 11 guitars, the standard unrelaxed Choptank, which starts around £3,700, is just as good from our experience.

Sadly, neither brand will have the resale value of more mainstream names: a Tele style from Fender's Vintera range would probably sell faster than a Fret-King; a Fender Custom Shop reliced Tele would probably be the same over the more niche Knaggs.

You don't *need* to enter the small workshop world of the boutique builds to enjoy a great guitar, especially as you simply may not be able to justify the cost. If you don't 'get it', don't buy it. When it comes to choice, we've never had it better, though sadly this is a time where simply popping into your local music shop to try and find that guitar that speaks to you is getting harder by the day. And it's those special guitars that we'll wager become an important part of your playing life irrespective of origin or price... or even what your mates tell you. Choice is great but finding your fit – and deciding what to buy – is probably harder than it's ever been. **G**

Fret-King Black Label Country Squire Semitone Special Reviewed 455 Price £599 (inc gigbag) On Test Since November 2019 Studio Sessions Yes Gigged Yes Mods No
Knaggs Chesapeake Choptank Joe's Guitar Reviewed 455 Price £4,100 (inc case) On Test Since November 2019 Studio Sessions Yes Gigged Yes Mods No



ADRIAN VANDENBERG

The ex-Whitesnake guitarist displays a fondness for Gibson Les Pauls and regret at selling an original Marshall Plexi...



What was the first serious guitar you bought with your own money?

"It was a Fender Telecaster and it was probably in the mid-70s. I couldn't afford a Stratocaster at the time, but I did have a Marshall amp. But with the Telecaster, even though I could put a distortion unit between the guitar and the amp, it didn't sound anything like what I was hearing from Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton and all the great players, but I got along with it. At the time – I was about 16 or 17 – I didn't have the experience to get a good sound out of it, because at that age you kinda think if you've got a good guitar through a good amp, you're going to sound like Jimi Hendrix."

What was the last guitar you bought and why?

"The last guitar I bought was a Gibson Les Paul. In 2009 Gibson released the 'Gold Book' series, a celebration of the holy grail of Les Pauls, the '59, and, if I'm not mistaken, they released 250 in Darkburst and 250 in Cherry Sunburst. I found a 2009 Sunburst with an unusual grain in that, between the pickups, it looked like there was a little fire going on and it's pretty regular tiger-striped, too. It was in showroom condition; the guy just played it at home or something. So I called him

"At 16 you kinda think if you've got a good guitar through a good amp, you're going to sound like Jimi Hendrix"

up. He lived a two-hour drive away, so I drove up to see him and, as every guitar player knows, if you check a guitar without plugging it in, that's when you hear the real quality of it. It sounded amazing unplugged – very resonant, great tone. So I took it home and when I plugged it in it sounded even more amazing. I'm the lucky owner of an original 1958 Les Paul and it sounded as good but slightly different, of course."

What's the most incredible find or bargain you've had when buying a guitar?

"The 1958 Les Paul in original Sunburst. It was a relative bargain, because at the time I think I bought it for \$10,000 and I bought it in 1990. But parts of it weren't original: the tuning pegs, the case isn't original, the pickup rings aren't original, nor are the knobs. As you probably know, these parts are ridiculously expensive... it's a joke. I mean, the pickup rings for a guitar like this are around \$1,000 – a little piece of shitty plastic, y'know? So I never bothered to change it, but it was a bargain because, right now, it would cost a fortune."

PHOTO BY STEFAN SCHIPPER

What's the strongest case of buyer's remorse you've had after buying a piece of kit?

"Selling an original Marshall Plexi in order to buy a Marshall first series Master Volume amp. I thought, 'Oh great, I can get more gain out of it...' and I sold an original 100-watt Plexi. Those Marshall Master Volume amps were all right for their time, but at the time I wasn't experienced enough to judge the tone. So, yeah. Remorse. I also had an original Plexi 50-watt when I was about 18 and I thought that 100 watts was better than a 50-watt – what did I know at that age? – so I sold the original Plexi in order to buy a [Marshall] 100-watt JCM. And the 50-watt looked like new. Man, I could cry..."

Have you ever sold a guitar that you now intensely regret letting go of?

"Oh yeah... a few. The guitar I probably regret the most would be an SG. I bought a Gibson SG, it was a Les Paul SG – early 60s – and it looked like it was new. But finally I bought a 70s Tobacco Sunburst Les Paul, and in the 70s Gibson quality was awful and it sounded completely dead. I had to sell the SG in order to buy it. It was a great SG and I even recorded with it at the time – that SG into the 100-watt Plexi just sounded amazing."

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"If you're lucky, you can pick up a good regular Les Paul, if you know what you want to hear... If you have the opportunity to compare about 10 of them, there's always going to be at least one really good-sounding one. And you can buy it for £1,900 or something. If you go to a collector, you'll pay six or seven thousand and my experience is there's only a few of them that do sound really, really good for the money."

When was the last time you stopped to stare in a guitar shop window and what were you looking at?

"I was in Denmark Street about two years ago. Dutch National TV made a documentary about my career so far, and the documentary maker was a music lover who knew about the history of all the stuff we love, like Clapton and all those other heroes. We went to Denmark Street just to talk about those early days and stuff – The Marquee Club and all the history – and we went by a couple of those shops and in one of them there was this beautiful Gibson Les Paul with the perfect flame and the perfect shade of sunburst, and I said, 'Oh, man, I want to buy that sucker...' It was pure Gear Acquisition Syndrome where you have more than enough stuff but you still get excited when you see a perfect Marshall Plexi or a Les Paul."

If forced to make a choice, would you rather buy a really good guitar and a cheap amp or a cheap guitar and a really expensive amp?

"The expensive guitar. I think that's more important, because cheap amps these days are not that bad and



PHOTO BY NIGEL OSBOURNE/REDFERNS

"Every once in a while I have the urge to play my Strat and throw around some SRV licks"

if you put a cheap amp on a clean setting, there are so many great distortion units these days that you can use. The guitar is the first part of the chain."

If you could choose humbuckers or single coils for the rest of your career, which one would you choose and why? (And we think we know the answer to this one!)

"And I think you're right [laughs]! Yeah, it's got to be the humbucker. Even though I love a single coil on a Strat – every once in a while I have the urge to play my Strat for a couple of days and try to throw around some Stevie Ray Vaughan or Hendrix licks – I always keep going back to my Les Paul. It has everything to do with my early heroes. Hendrix is a huge hero and still is my main guy, but the majority of the other guys – Page, Clapton, Kossoff and all those guys – they all had Les Pauls. So it's the quantity of those guys versus a couple who made a Strat sound heavenly, you know?" **[DM]**

"My main guitar for 40 years now is a Les Paul Heritage that I bought brand-new in 1980 and I saved up for it by working in factories," says Adrian of his guitar, which is the same year as the Heritage model pictured above. "I've played it ever since, apart from a short period where I designed a guitar for Peavey – I played that one for a couple of years – but I always go back to my Gibson Heritage"



Adrian Vandenberg's new album, 2020, is available now via Mascot Records

www.vandenbergband.com

GIBSON FIREBIRDS

With eight designs, four models and two body shapes, Gibson's Firebirds were anything but one and the same...

There have been numerous Firebird reincarnations since they were discontinued in 1970, but during their original run at Gibson's Kalamazoo factory in the 60s, the Firebird I, III, V and VII models appeared in two different forms widely known as 'reverse' and 'non-reverse'. The Explorer-like reverse Firebirds appeared first in 1963 and were superseded by their non-reverse counterparts in 1965.

As if eight different Firebirds emerging within this short time isn't convoluted enough, the waters muddy even further with some instruments having left the factory during the '65 transition phase with both reverse and non-reverse specs. Nevertheless, in this issue's Dazed & Confused – the first of our two-part focus

on Firebirds – we aim to clear things up and make it simple to identify all four of the early reverse-style 'Birds at a glance.

Announced in the spring of '63, they were intended to compete directly with Fender and boost Gibson's flagging solidbody sales. However, Fender argued the Firebirds' "new style offset body" mirrored its own patented "off-set waist" body shape and, following talks, Gibson decided to change the design – albeit to a far more Fender-like one! We'll be looking at those later non-reverse models next time, but for now here's a rundown of Gibson's original Firebird line-up... **[RB]**

Guitarist would like to thank ATB Guitars in Cheltenham and Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath

1 FIREBIRD I

Much like Gibson's Junior/TV, Special, Standard and Custom models represented different price points within the original Les Paul and SG solidbody lines, the Firebird range comprised four instruments at various levels of spec and ornamentation. And as per the style of Junior and TV models, the reverse Firebird I features an unbound dot inlay rosewood fingerboard and a single pickup with volume and tone controls. This particular model was also the least expensive instrument in the range with a list price of \$189.50.

A Sunburst finish was standard across the board, but in order to help Gibson shake off its staid, old-fashioned image and appeal to the more forward-thinking younger generation, all Firebirds were offered in a choice of 10 custom colours for an extra \$15. Along with Frost Blue, Ember Red, Cardinal Red, Kerry Green and Polaris White, these included five metallic ("Poly") shades called Golden Mist, Silver Mist, Pelham Blue, Heather and Inverness Green.

2 FIREBIRD III

In the same vein as the Les Paul/SG Special, the \$249.50 reverse Firebird III features dual pickups with individual tone and volume controls and a single-bound rosewood fretboard with dot inlays. These models are sometimes confused with the equally twin mini-humbucker-loaded Firebird V but can be easily differentiated by their dot fretboard markers, compensated bar bridge and short flat-arm Vibrola (Firebird Vs have trapezoid inlays, a Tune-o-matic bridge and Deluxe Vibrolas as standard).

All instruments in the reverse line-up feature bespoke Firebird pickups, whereas the later non-reverse Firebird I and III models came with two and three black 'soapbar' P-90 pickups respectively. The original Firebird pickup is a unique device that evolved from the Kalamazoo-era Epiphone mini-humbucker – itself derived from the Seth Lover-designed PAF humbucker. Distinguished by its solid metal cover, it was constructed using blade magnets (as opposed to passive screws and slugs) along with inductance-enhancing ferrous reflector plates.

3 FIREBIRD V

In the style of Les Paul and SG Standards, the reverse Firebird V sat one step below the top of the pecking order while sporting a single-bound rosewood fretboard with trapezoid inlays and dual pickups featuring separate volume and tone controls. Although identical to the reverse Firebird III in terms of pickups and electronics, an extra \$75.50 would buy you an altogether fancier guitar with a 'leaf-and-lyre'-engraved Deluxe Vibrola and a fully adjustable Tune-o-matic bridge.

In terms of body/neck construction, the reverse Firebirds utilised a unique neck-through-body design with wings glued on either side. They were, however, troublesome guitars to build and were notorious for suffering headstock fractures. An inherent weak spot behind the nut coupled with heavy banjo-style tuners (located along the treble side of the headstock) meant that breaks even occurred inside the case. Consequently, guitars with broken headstocks became so common they are often referred to as having 'Firebird disease'.

4 FIREBIRD VII

At the top of the line sat the \$445 Firebird VII resplendent with Les Paul/SG Custom-style gold-plated hardware, three humbucking pickups and a single-bound ebony fretboard with pearl block inlays. As per the Firebird V, these flagship 'Birds boasted a 'leaf-and-lyre'-engraved Deluxe Vibrola and fully adjustable Tune-o-matic bridge. The other models in the line came with nickel-plated hardware and rosewood 'boards, but VII's perched well above the rest with their blingier upmarket appointments and triple mini-humbucker configuration.

Famously used by Johnny Winter, Eric Clapton and Brian Jones, reverse Firebirds have a unique tone that sits somewhere between a Fender single coil and a PAF humbucker guitar. This tone is known for its midrange bite and can be up front and assertive with a good balance between thickness and sparkle. Although various reverse Firebird reissues have been released over the years, unfaithful pickup reproductions mean they don't sound quite the same as these originals.



HOME-GROWN TONE PART 2

Dave Burrluck continues working away at his kitchen table to produce a professional-level bolt-on electric... hopefully!

I don't think I've ever asked a Master Builder at Fender – or indeed any other luthier – whether, after years of making guitars, they still get excited about the prospect of the outcome. I can honestly say, even though I built my first electric guitar back in the early 70s, the excitement is still there. The temptation to throw it all together bish, bash, bosh Jamie Oliver-style is very strong, but even with a basic build like this vintage-style 'T', I'm reminded by previous cock-ups to take my time.

In our last issue I'd prepared the neck and body, which boded well – the apparent quality of both parts is extremely high. With my aim to simply evaluate the kit, I'd left behind thoughts of a posh sprayed or reliced finish and I'd applied a quick (and reversible) sealing finish: oil/wax to the neck and a thin French polish to the body. It's time to start the assembly.

In Build

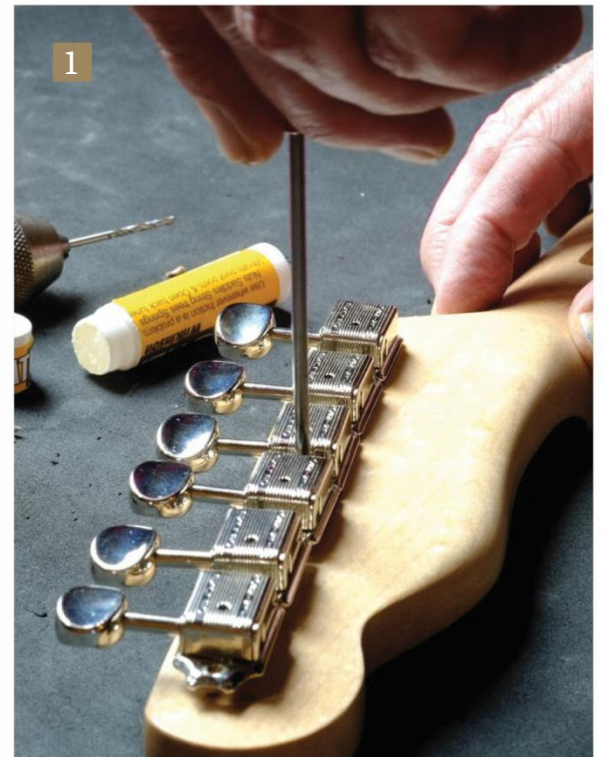
The beauty of Leo Fender's groundbreaking blueprint means that you don't have to be a luthier to create an electric guitar. So long as you have basic practical skills and some similarly basic DIY hand tools, you're good to go, even if your 'workshop' is your kitchen table.

The hardest part – and, again, it isn't really that difficult – is to attach the neck to the body. The supplied instructions clearly tell you how to tap the vintage-style grommets into the headstock, line up the

tuners, mark and drill the holes for the retaining screws, apply some lube and screw 'em in [pic 1]. Finally, you push the supplied nut into its slot; ours is on the tight side, so I lightly sand one side with 400-grit paper on a flat surface and that's enough to just make it a snug push-fit. The nut has light grooves and, though we'll come back to properly adjusting the depth of those in a while, it's good enough for its initial purpose of helping to line up the neck and body ready to drill the holes in the neck for the four 'bolts', which are actually screws, of course.

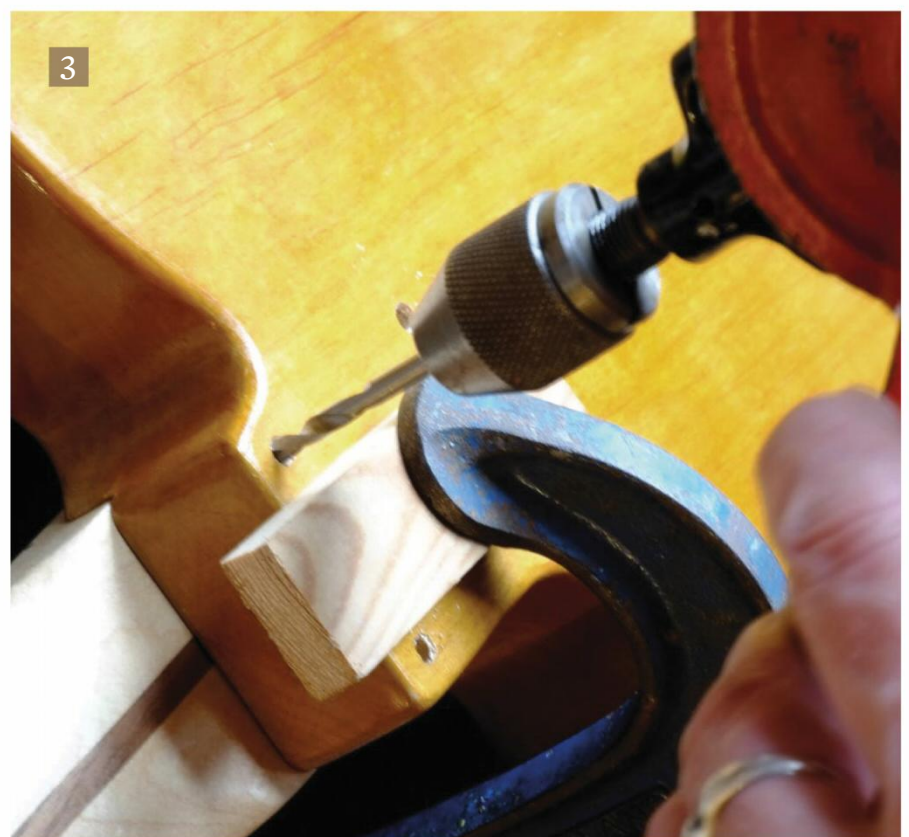
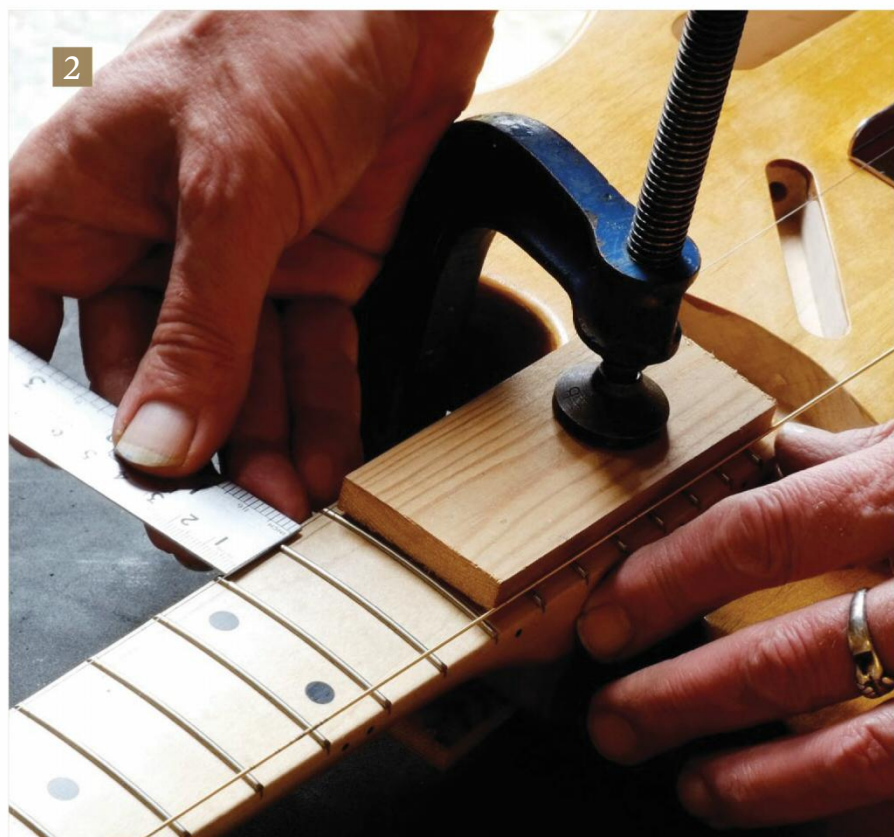
Next, you need to mount the bridge plate with just the two outer screws. The neck fits the body pocket beautifully and you need to hold it with a G-clamp: always use small wood blocks between the pads of the clamp and the neck/body. Using a couple of old strings, string up the outer E strings and check they sit equidistant to the edge of the fingerboard [pic 2]. If they don't, you need to slightly reduce the pressure on the clamp and move the neck sideways. Once you're happy, tighten the clamp and turn the guitar over. Use a drill bit to mark the holes for the neck then disassemble [pic 3].

Secure it to your bench, or in our case table, then drill the four holes for the neck screws. If you have a drill press, that's preferable, but you can use a hand drill with a sharp drill bit and use a square to check by eye that you're drilling as upright as possible. You only need to drill to a depth



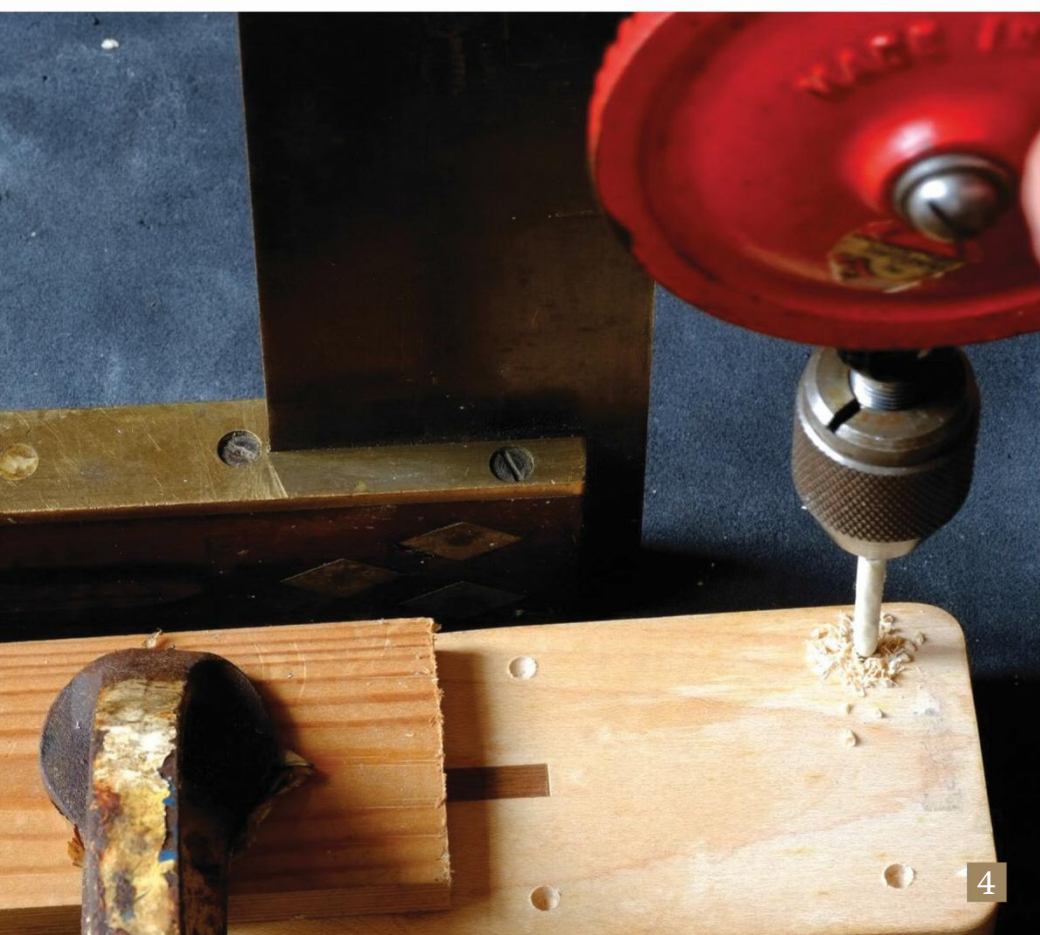
of approximately 17mm, so measure the tip of the drill bit and just wrap a piece of masking tape around it to indicate your stop point [pic 4].

The actual holes in the body are drilled a little smaller in diameter than they need to be, which helps with the proper marking of the holes you've drilled into the neck. But you now need to open those out to the diameter of the screws you're using – no more, no less [pic 5]. The neck screws should be a tight push-fit through the body and *only* screw into the neck. Refit the neck and place the four screws





The finished kit build, all set up and ready to go. Let's hope it gets to see a stage sometime soon...



SLIPPERY CUSTOMER

Even if you have zero plans to build your own guitar, I'm going to give a shout out to the SlipStick by Wilkinson, which comes included in this kit. As you can see, SlipStick is housed in a lip salve-like container and as its name suggests it's a 'solid' or dry lubricant and is available in natural or graphite. Trev Wilkinson passed on a couple of prototype SlipSticks to me probably about a decade ago and both are all but done. I've used them on countless makeovers and repairs, from simple lubing of the string grooves in nuts or saddles, to open-back tuners and neck screws – in fact, *any* screw threads. A makeover of a Parsons White B-Bender Tele a couple of years back used up quite a bit, and it's pretty handy about the house, too: it's a friction inhibitor par excellence.

Trust us, SlipStick is one of the best additions to your maintenance and setup tool kit we can think of. While you're at it, buy a few for your gigbags, too.

SlipStick will be available individually (approx. £6.99) or in a twin natural/graphite pack at approximately £10.99.



(lube those threads!) through the neck plate and through the body. Screw 'em down a little at a time moving in a diagonal fashion from top to bottom corners [pic 6].

Load The Parts

I continue my build by firstly loading in the bridge pickup to the bridge plate [pic 7] then simply wiring in the output jack to the control plate. Both need holes to be drilled to mount them and just lay on the very nice black-sprayed Bakelite pickguard while you line up the control plate [pic 8]. At this stage, I leave off the neck pickup – simply so I can easily access the truss rod – which can be wired in later. The instructions tell you to place a ground wire under the bridge plate [pic 9] before you mount it. This isn't really necessary, because the bridge is grounded by the metal plate under the bridge pickup. However, I do it anyway just in case I fit a bridge pickup without a baseplate further down the line. Wire in the bridge pickup and screw down the control plate.

The nut grooves are still too high, but don't worry about that at the moment. The next step is to string up, but use some cheap strings, because these are really for a guide and will be replaced once we're done fettling and adjusting. Now capo at the 1st fret. Next, you can set the rough height of the saddles. As ever, never raise a saddle under full string tension; just relax the relevant string beforehand. If you have a radius gauge, you can set the string height of the outer strings – I start with 1.6mm (1/16-inch) – then raise or lower the saddles to match that radius. Alternatively, just measure each string to that same

height from the top of the 12th fret to the underside of the string.

The neck, as we said last issue, has a single-action truss rod. In build, a slight 0.020-inch relief is built in without any tension on the rod. This is a relatively big neck, and once strung with 0.010 to 0.046-gauge strings and left for a couple of days under tension, I have just enough relief for a clean buzz-free action. At this stage, I haven't touched the frets at all.

Nut Adjustment

Back in the mid-90s I was asked to write a book about guitar setup and maintenance. Veteran guitar repairer Bill Puplett was my technical mentor and we both agreed that we wouldn't cover cutting a nut: it was a pro's job. Today, *everyone* thinks they have the skills to do it. How times have changed.

The nut here is already grooved, but to maximise the action you'll need to deepen them. I used proper nut files for the low four strings and an X-Acto razor saw for the two high strings [pic 10]. Fret files are expensive and unless you plan to fettle more nuts in the future they're not worth the one-off expense. Maybe you can borrow some from a friend? Alternately, you can use needle files – a knife taper and fine round are especially useful. A set of feeler gauges can be used to provide a stop point, too: basically the height of the fret plus 0.012-inch on the treble side and 0.020-inch on the bass side are good starting points. Of course, the old-school method is simply to check the height of the string over the 1st fret after you've fretted the string at the 3rd fret – it should just clear the top of the 1st fret.

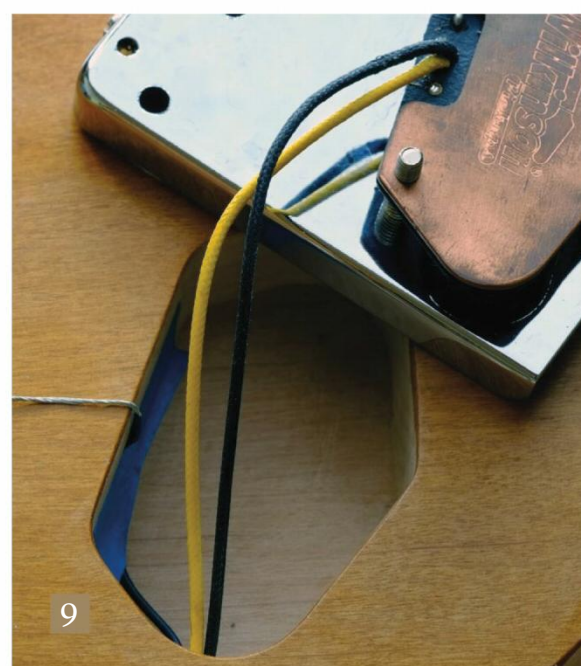
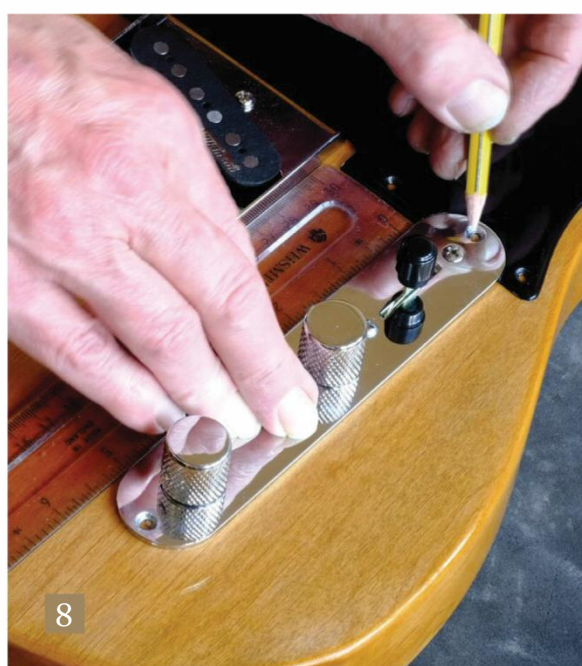


Typically, I'll get the grooves close to correct then I'll clean up the nut with fine abrasive paper and make sure the strings don't sit too far into the nut – they really should sit in grooves that are half the diameter of the string in depth, certainly no deeper than the full diameter of the string itself [pic 11]. Once all is clean and tidy, a couple of drops of Super Glue will hold the nut in place.

Nearly There

A couple of days later and after a couple of hours' play time I have a minimal 'final list' to work through. The fretting here is seriously good, level, and the frets themselves are pretty well polished. The ends are a little sharp, so I tape up the 'board and just use a small pillar file to round the edges of each fret [pic 12]. A light rub with 800- then 1000-grit wet and dry paper on a hard wood block (which is straight) polishes the fret tops further, moving across the frets from bass to treble side [pic 13]. Then, again with both grades, you can rub the fret ends by hand. Finally, a polish with an ultra-fine abrasive pad followed by 0000 wire wool (as ever with the pickup taped up) has them mirror-shiny and ultra-smooth [pic 14].

Finally, I load in the neck pickup and solder it to the three-way switch. Now's the time to adjust the pickup heights when you're plugged in and generally let the guitar settle in a bit – it's getting used to being a guitar. While you'll no doubt be hugely proud of your achievement, this is also the time to evaluate it, not least comparing it to other similar guitars you or your mates might have. In fact, all I need





to do is dial in those string grooves at the nut and double-check the intonation.

I then hammer in the string ferrules so I can through-string the guitar, and I put on a fresh set of strings. Finally, I mark the holes for the pickguard, drill them and screw it down. Job done!

Final Thoughts

This is a fantastic kit. You need only basic DIY tools, although a set of fret files, as discussed, will certainly help. Provided that you have some practical skills, it really shouldn't be a problem to put it together. The caveat is the final setup: you might need some help from a friend – but even if you paid a professional it would be worth it. Put together well, the quality here far exceeds the price and I think it's fair that you're looking at the equivalent of a £1k-plus Fender by comparison. Of course, if you have the skills to spray and/or relic an instrument, not to mention fettle and fine-tune like the Patrick James Eggles of this world, you could really produce something of enormous quality.

But it really is an open book. Purposely, I'd put the kit together with a simple finish, as is. I could have gone down the relic route, added different pickups,



control circuit, changed the neck shape, added body contours... and on it goes. However, as I did, you could simply build it, play it and then do any of the above mods. The truth is, only a few hours after putting on the fresh strings I was using the Wilkinson 'T' to record some guitar parts. There's a lovely resonance, quite dry and almost acoustic-y and raw, that does a pretty good impersonation of the real thing when married to the WVOB bridge pickup. The control circuit is excellent with

smooth pot tapers and a very well-voiced treble bleed. I'm seriously impressed.

Ultimately, a great kit such as this is a great learning resource, and with such a quality foundation it's going to be pretty hard not to build yourself a fine example of Fender's original solidbody guitar. Thanks to Leo's original blueprint, the hugely experienced detail of Trev Wilkinson, and the superb craft of Harmony Musical Instruments, we can all be guitar makers – even with minimal skills. **G**

MOD SPEC

PRODUCT: Wilkinson by HMI TE 52 guitar kit

COST: £500 (approx)

TYPE: Excellent quality all-in-one guitar kit, all you need is strings

PARTS: Alder body, maple neck w/ 184mm 'board radius; Wilkinson hardware and pickups; CRL/CTS electrical components

SKILL LEVEL: Intermediate; needs some experience for nut, setup and finish

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PROS & CONS

PROS Superb quality wood parts, hardware and electrics

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Guitarist GOLD 10/10

That should give you something to think about till our next issue.

In the meantime, if you have any modding questions, or suggestions, drop us a line – The Mod Squad.

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TOP 40 AND FUNK with Jason Sidwell



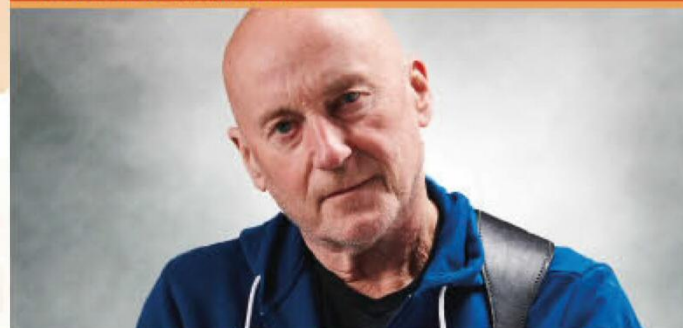
This course is for guitarists that are in bands or are planning to be in one; we will cover typical techniques & theories that will make you a better team player. From picking approaches to band relevant chord voicings.

MODERN BLUES with Gianluca Corona



This will give a fresh perspective on how to add drive, style and invention to the blues, as well as tips to hone your playing including a nod to the likes of Robben Ford, Larry Carlton and Gary Moore. Studying masters like these will help uncover a treasure trove of ideas for today's guitarists.

BLUES SONGS with Neville Marten



The aim for this course is to cover a range of blues tunes from classic to more modern. The onus is on great blues songs that everyone will know and enjoy playing. Guitarists of every level will be able to join in, whether you can improvise full solos or just play chords and a few licks.

ACOUSTIC SONGS with Chris Quinn



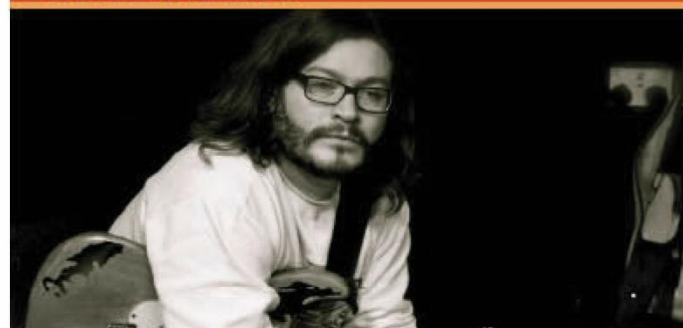
This course focuses on roots based music, ranging from folk to blues songs. You will study guitar techniques used by some of the greats of popular songwriting and also touch on useful fingerstyle methods and open tunings.

'70S ROCK & INDIE ROCK with Jon Bishop



This course will cover many of the main components that guitarists use, ranging from scales and chord riffing through to string bending and use of harmonics. Lots of classic rock and indie riffs will be looked at with iconic songs.

MODERN ROCK with Tolis Zavaliaris



The focus of this course will be on relevant techniques, from picking to legato, and to improve and supercharge your rock guitar playing. Guitarists covered will range from Randy Rhoads to Paul Gilbert, Yngwie Malmsteen to Steve Vai.

JAZZ with Gianluca Corona



This course will cover the basics (extended chords, simple diatonic licks, swing feel, blues) through to more advanced concepts and devices (chord substitution, modal phrasing, outside playing).

GYPSY JAZZ with John Wheatcroft



This course will help to get your playing 'campfire jam' ready, with a hands on look at the fundamentals of this inclusive and engaging style – from using the correct chords and mastering 'La Pompe' to adding authentic licks and lines.

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PICKUP LINES

Sweeten The Pot

In the first part of our focus on pickup controls, Bare Knuckle Pickups' tech support ace Tim Bartle explains why not all pots were created equal...

Some players will only touch their guitar volume control to check it's turned up full, while others constantly rely on it for a variety of tones and techniques. In either case, the humble potentiometer that resides beneath the knob, out of sight (and often out of mind) plays a vital role in the sonic picture. To find out how different types of potentiometer can bring out the best in our pickups and performance we spoke with Bare Knuckle Pickups' resident expert Tim Bartle.

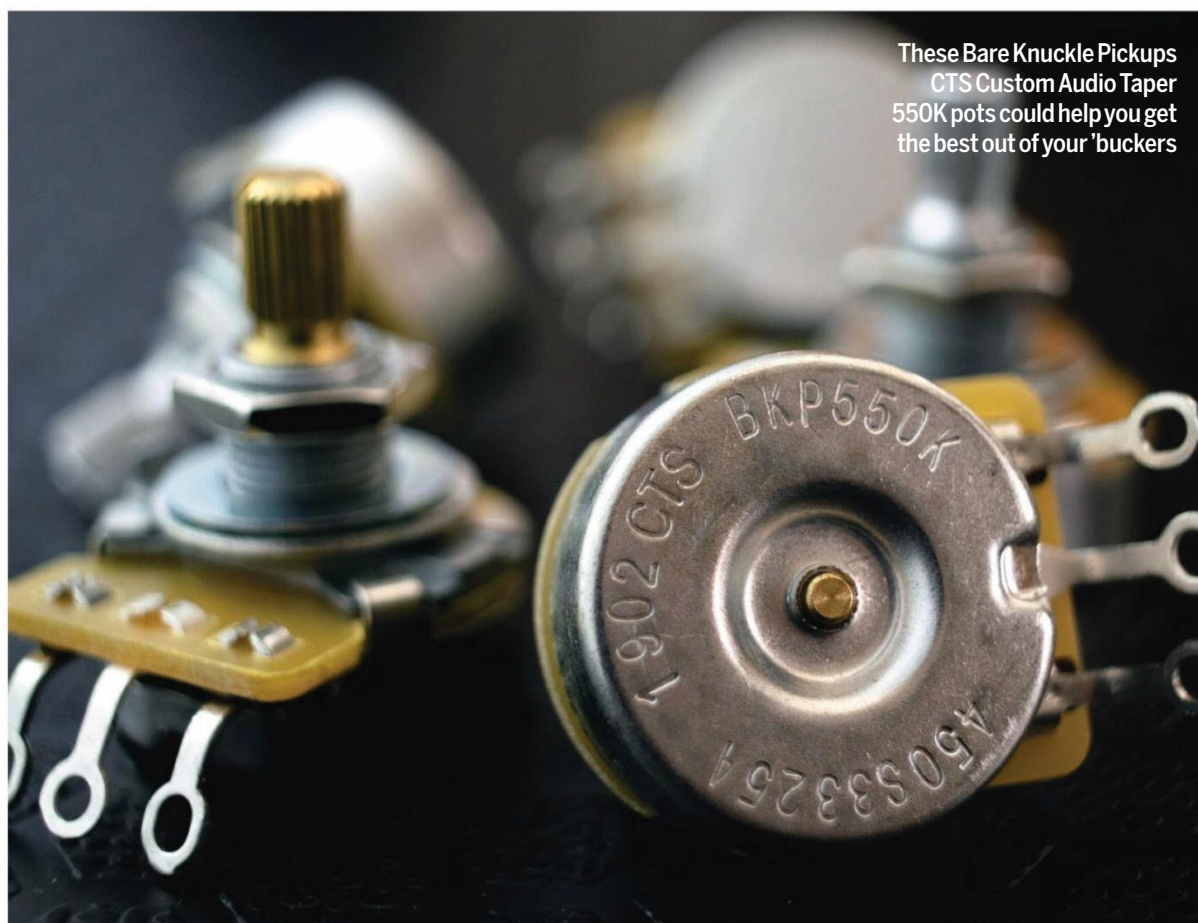
"Potentiometers, or 'pots', are a type of resistor," begins Tim. "There's a fixed resistance between the outer contacts,

"Logarithmic pots are great because you can get a large swell of volume with less than a quarter turn"

but the middle contact is a wiper that can slide from one end to the other and take a split from anywhere in the middle. In other words, you've got a fixed resistance between two points but you're able to tap it at any point in between. So, with the pickup attached at one end and the ground attached at the other, you can get anything from full signal down to zero signal with the output from the middle contact."

The way in which the resistance of a pot changes as the wiper is moved – namely, the knob is turned – is known as 'taper'. The two most common types of potentiometer used in electric guitars are linear and logarithmic (also known as audio) taper pots – each being preferred in a variety of different situations.

"Taper means the way the resistance changes from one end of the pot to the other," says Tim. "In a linear pot, it changes at an even rate: halfway across the resistor means half the resistance. It's a straight line. Whereas a logarithmic potentiometer is a curve: from zero, you get a much flatter rise in resistance and then the curve gets



These Bare Knuckle Pickups CTS Custom Audio Taper 550K pots could help you get the best out of your 'buckers

steeper towards 10. There's also a reverse logarithmic pot with a steep curve from zero, which flattens out towards 10.

"Different types of pot tend to suit some playing styles better than others. For example, linear pots feel like a smoother progression. As you roll up from zero, it will be a very even and gradual rise to full volume. So if you prefer to have your volume rolled quite far back – maybe set at half volume for some low-gain work – a linear pot will probably be easier to control and dial into that medium range. But then if you wanted to do swelling effects, having a logarithmic pot is great because you can get a really large swell of volume with less than a quarter turn. A typical application for a reverse logarithmic taper pot would be for left-handed players where they want the pot to work as a regular logarithmic pot.

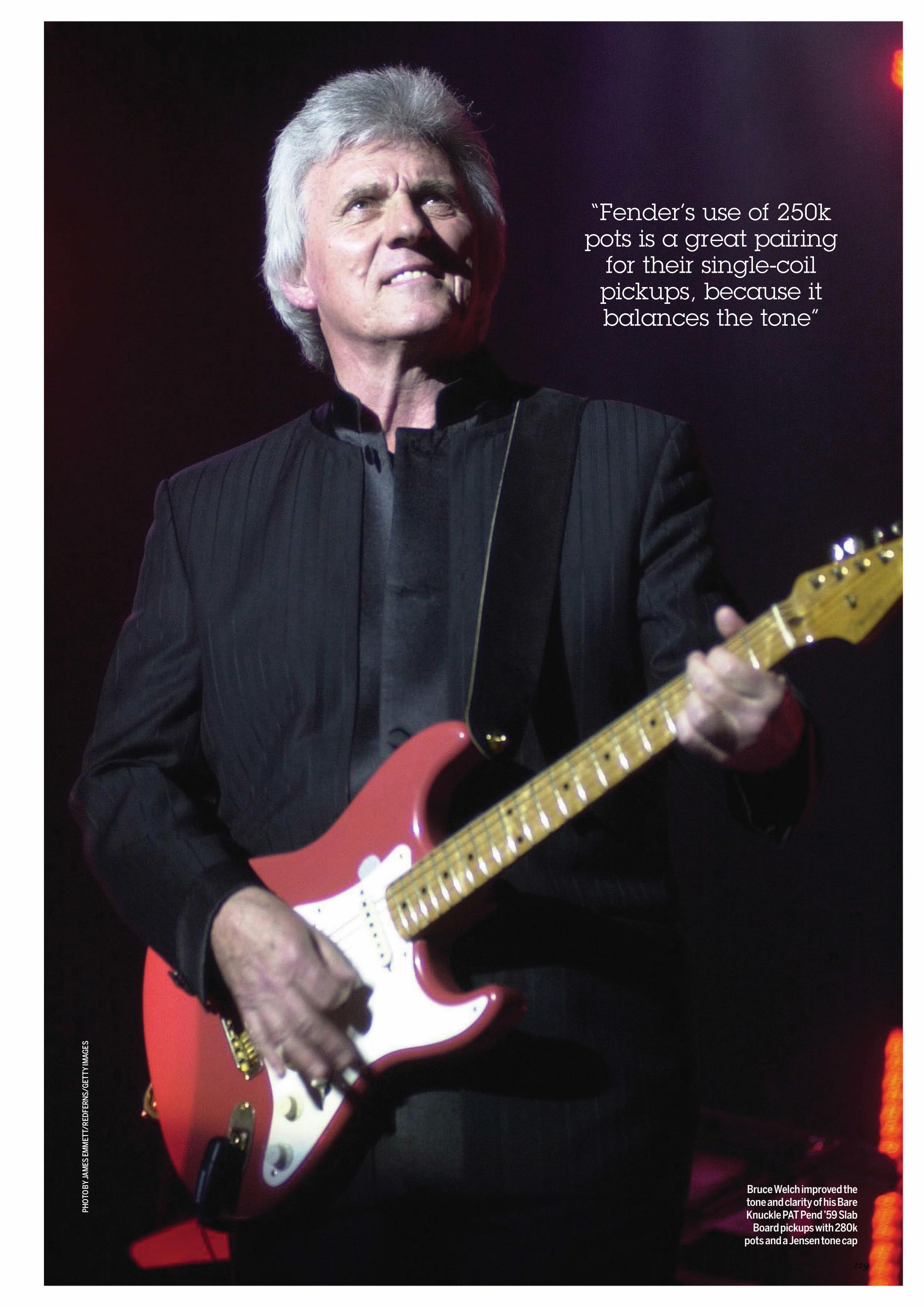
"Pot values have become standard in different guitars because that's what they used in the vintage classics, although I'm sure they didn't arrive at those values by accident. The resistance value of a pot has a significant effect on the overall brightness

of the guitar. The input of your amp, pedals, cables, pot resistance and the inductance and capacitance in the pickup all work together almost like a filter control. By changing the resistance value of the pot, you're modifying the overall load on the pickup. With a higher resistance [pot value] you're shifting that filter frequency upwards, so you hear a fuller range of the pickup. And as you bring the pot resistance down, you're allowing more of those higher frequencies to leak off.

"Fender's use of 250k pots is a great pairing for their single-coil pickups because it balances the tone. And, likewise, with Gibson-style humbuckers, a 500k pot can give you a more balanced sound as the tone is naturally fatter. We have our [550k/280kohms] CTS pots custom made. The slightly higher resistance opens out some of the higher frequencies, revealing more treble detail from our pickups. Of all the great-sounding vintage pots we tested, the ones with the most vibrancy always had a higher resistance." [RB]

www.bareknucklepickups.co.uk

PHOTO BY TIM BARTLE

A full-page photograph of Bruce Welch, an older man with grey hair, wearing a black pinstriped jacket over a black shirt. He is playing a red Fender electric guitar with a white pickguard and a maple neck. He is looking upwards and to the right with a slight smile. The background is dark with some red stage lighting visible on the right side.

"Fender's use of 250k pots is a great pairing for their single-coil pickups, because it balances the tone"

Bruce Welch improved the tone and clarity of his Bare Knuckle PAT Pend '59 Slab Board pickups with 280k pots and a Jensen tone cap

classicGear

The thinline hollowbodies that helped revolutionise Gibson design

Gibson ES-225

By the mid 50s, the demand for electric guitars had gained serious momentum. In 1954, Gibson's electric models outsold its acoustics for the first time, and it became clear that big changes were afoot in the guitar world. In the first half of the decade, Gibson introduced the 1¾-inch-deep Les Paul range alongside its standard 3 ⅜-inch-depth electric archtops, and the new solidbody form began to dominate the market. Nevertheless, opinions remained divided between the heavier – albeit sturdier, thinner and less feedback-prone – Les Pauls and the more traditional hollowbody electric archtops that many players still enjoyed.

In an effort to reach a happy medium, company president Ted McCarty and his team set about prototyping the first Gibson thinlines with feedback (no pun intended) from some of the leading electric guitarists of the day – notably Billy Byrd and Hank Garland. Unveiled at the July 1955 NAMM Show, the seminal Thin series appeared in the guise of three models. At the top of the pecking order sat the \$550 Sunburst/\$565 Natural ('N') finish carved-top Byrdland (a portmanteau of endorsees Byrd and Garland's surnames), while the laminated maple-body ES-350T/N sat in the middle priced \$155 less. "In the popular price field" was the ES-225T – a \$179.50 no-frills Sunburst guitar uniquely sporting a single pickup positioned midway between the bridge and the end of the fretboard.

Deriving their laminated maple form from the 16¼-inch-wide by 20¼-inch-

long single Florentine cutaway ES-175 and ES-295 models (released earlier in 1949 and 1952 respectively), ES-225s are a full half-inch thinner than the Byrdland and ES-350T guitars, measuring 1¾ inches deep – the same depth as Gibson's groundbreaking double-cutaway thinline ES-335T released later in 1958. Similarly, whereas Byrdlands and ES-350Ts have a laminated maple/mahogany neck with a shorter 23½-inch scale length, ES-225s feature a one-piece mahogany neck with a standard 24¾-inch scale length and a single-bound/dot inlay rosewood fretboard. They are perhaps most easily identifiable by their Les Paul combination bridge/trapeze tailpiece – a feature also common to the all-gold finish ES-295.

Gibson prototyped the thinlines with feedback from Billy Byrd and Hank Garland

In 1956, the single-pickup ES-225T was joined by its dual-pickup sibling, the ES-225TD (Thin Dual pickups). Both models were available in either Sunburst or Natural finishes from 1956, with Natural examples being significantly rarer. Of the 8,000-odd instruments shipped between 1955 and 1959, the single-pickup versions are far more numerous than their dual-pickup counterparts combined, accounting for around two-thirds of production overall.

Both the ES-225T and ES-225TD stayed in production and without undergoing any significant spec changes until 1959. At this point, the new double-cutaway thinlines (ES-330/335/345/355) were firmly in the spotlight and both ES-225 models were discontinued, despite their relative success in terms of sales. However, the following year, the single Florentine cutaway thinline hollowbody electric archtop design was renewed in the form of the ES-125TC and ES-125TCD models (the ES-125TCD was renamed the ES-125TDC in 1961). As per their ES-225 predecessors, sales of both ES-125 models were relatively strong but dwindled during the late 60s as popular musical styles further evolved. They were eventually discontinued at the beginning of the 70s. **[RB]**

The Evolution of the Gibson ES-225

1923

First f-hole archtop (L-5)

1936

First electric f-hole archtop (ES-150)

1952

ES-295 released (same body width & length, Florentine cutaway, combination bridge/tailpiece)

1955

Single pickup ES-225T released; c. 470 guitars shipped

1956

Dual pickup ES-225TD released; c. 1,800 guitars shipped (both models)

1957

c. 2,000 instruments shipped (both models)

1958

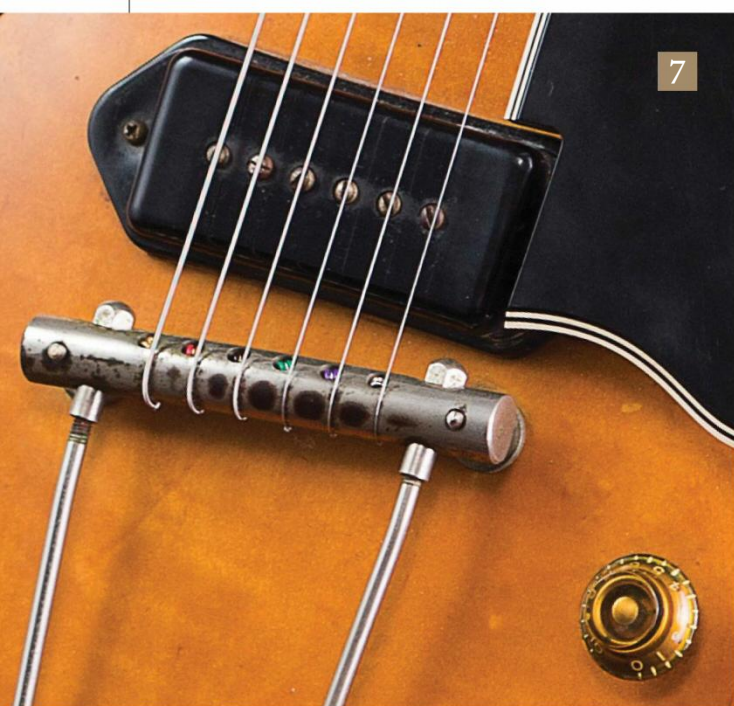
c. 2,000 instruments shipped (both models)

1959

Production declines: c. 1,700 instruments shipped (both models)

1960

Discontinued; superseded by ES-125TC and ES-125TCD models



This 1956 Gibson ES-225TD was previously owned by Adrian Utley

1956 Gibson ES-225TD

1. SERIAL NUMBER

Factory order number prefixed with 'V' (denoting 1956) ink-stamped on interior side of back

2. HEADSTOCK

Unbound; no ornamentation; Gibson logo pearl inlay; black nitrocellulose finish

3. HARDWARE

Nickel-plated hardware: Les Paul combination bridge/trapeze tailpiece; individual single-line Kluson Deluxe tuners

4. NECK

One-piece mahogany neck; 24¾-inch scale length; single-bound 20-fret Brazilian rosewood fingerboard with pearl dot inlays; 14th fret body join; nitrocellulose finish

5. BODY

Arched laminated maple top; two unbound f-holes; single Florentine cutaway; laminated maple back and sides; 16¼ inches wide; 20¼ inches long; 1¾ inches deep; single-bound top and back; Sunburst nitrocellulose finish

6. PLASTICS

White oval tuner buttons; two-ply (b/w) 'bell' truss rod cover; two black 'dog-ear' P-90 pickup covers; five-ply (b/w/b/w/b) bevelled edge pickguard; four gold bonnet knobs; white selector switch tip

7. PICKUPS & ELECTRONICS

Two 'dog-ear' P-90 pickups with adjustable polepieces; four 500kohms pots (individual pickup volume and tone); two tone capacitors; three-way Switchcraft pickup selector switch; side-mounted Switchcraft jack

ReverbRarities

Dan Orkin of Reverb.com finds an iconic Blackguard Tele

1954 Fender Telecaster



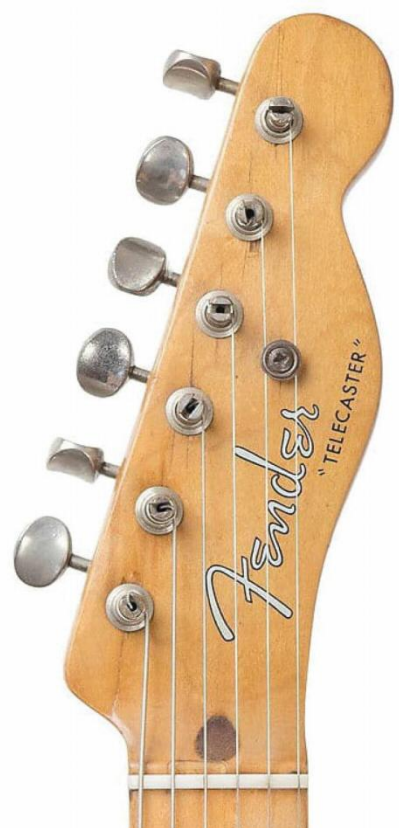
In the pantheon of all-time classic guitar models, it doesn't get much more iconic than a Blackguard Tele from the 1950s. Comprising early Telecasters, highly coveted pre-Tele Broadcasters and 'Nocasters' made during the first four years of production, Fender's 'Blackguard' label serves as shorthand for the absolute top shelf of the vintage Telecaster library. It was in mid-1954 that Fender switched from a black to a white pickguard on this and other models, making today's featured guitar one of the last specimens from the original Blackguard era.

This particular example, which is currently listed on Reverb by No.Tom Guitars of London's Denmark Street, has

experienced some modifications in its lifetime that take it out of that top-shelf pristine category of collector fare. As No.Tom describes in the listing, "the ash body has been refinished... [and] the neck has also been refinished and refretted." There's also a small repaired crack in the headstock and a few small part replacements, all of which help determine its ultimate collectability and price.

That said, this guitar remains an icon of the highest grade. It's an instrument that's been well loved and played, but judging from the pictures it's one that still has a lot of playing ahead of it.

To find the full listing, head to: <https://bit.ly/Reverb54Tele>



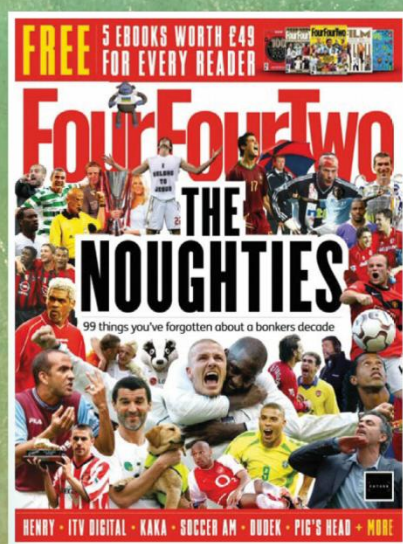
Dan Orkin is director of content and international marketing at Reverb, a leading website and app for buying and selling new, used and vintage music gear and go-to resource for gear history, sales trends and pricing data. Dan edits the Reverb Price Guide and leads the Reverb team that produces daily videos and articles

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Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks

Difficulty ★★★★★

15 mins per example

Tutor: Richard Barrett | **Gear used:** Knaggs SSC, Audient Sono, Friedman BE-OD, Mad Professor Sweet Honey Overdrive Deluxe



Lynyrd Skynyrd's
Gary Rossington preps
for his grandstand

Peak Intensity



SOMETIMES, WE WANT TO MAKE A BOLD STATEMENT in a solo.

This could be either as a dynamic device to take centre-stage before settling into a more laid-back melody line, or to assert our presence against a dense mix, as I'm doing here. The idea behind these examples is to demonstrate long sequences across the strings and/or the fretboard that might form the pinnacle of a solo.

With this in mind, I've played four examples, rather than stuff too much information into one overwhelming solo. The examples are drawn from different ideas: pentatonic shapes, arpeggio fragments, angular intervals and classic blues licks – and often a mixture of more than one of these. There are several approaches that could work tonally (a twanging Telecaster would certainly cut through, for instance), but the driven humbucker sound I've chosen offers a good platform for the kind of 'grandstanding' we're going for. Think Joe Bonamassa, Dickey Betts, or Lynyrd Skynyrd's Gary Rossington and Ed King.

In the first instance, bringing set pieces like this into supposedly improvised solos may feel contrived, but this need not be the case any more than when we use scales or other patterns. It's what we do once we've internalised these concepts that counts. The chances are you will prefer some ideas to others, or that you might find variations that work better under your fingers. Which is great; there's no need for you stick rigidly to anything here.

Finally, remember that these pieces are 'vocabulary' and not the blueprint for a whole solo. Keep in mind that if silence or a single sustained note are the opposite numbers to these ideas then there are 100 shades in between. Hope you enjoy these licks and see you next time!

Example 1

THE SLIDE DOWN THE LOW E STRING is a statement in itself, but starting low, with some selective palm muting, this example also asserts itself early on by taking up a lot of sonic space in the bass register. It subsequently moves up through a sequence of sliding intervals, which are taken directly from the five minor pentatonic shapes. This allows you to 'walk' up the fretboard to a position that allows the final flurry up to the held string bend.

Example 2

PLAYED IN GROUPS OF SIX, this example moves quickly through two octaves across the strings, superimposing both F and G major arpeggios/triads over the G chord on the backing track, mixing this with a short scale run (G Mixolydian) to finish. Starting on C over a G chord like this is counterintuitive. Moving swiftly to the rest of an F arpeggio then G in this way allows you to superimpose this as a 'passing chord' type movement.

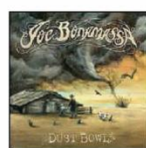
Example 3

WE'RE USING GROUPS OF SIX AGAIN, but this time descending through the D blues scale across the beat, set up with a held bend at the beginning. There are lots of alternative ideas hidden away in this phrase, which you may only wish to use a part of, rather than continue all the way across the strings, but that's an artistic choice I'll leave to you! You could try reversing this whole idea, too...

[illegible]

THIS FINAL EXAMPLE builds more of a musical context in, with some repeated high-register bends setting us up for the G Mixolydian run starting in bar 2. Note that while this is Mixolydian, you can also view it as a G minor pentatonic with every B_b raised to B... Taking an angular intervallic approach to ascending back for a final held note, we're dabbling with superimposed harmony again: root/5th root on F, G and C. A final touch is to use C# rather than C before that final bend. C probably could have worked just as well, but I wanted to acknowledge the 'major' feel and be unpredictable!

Dust Bowl



This album sits between blues, rock and country in the same way I was going for with the examples. Check out *Black Lung*, *Heartache* with its acoustic/mandolin intro and *Heartbreaker*, with its shades of Free and Deep Purple – no doubt helped by Glenn Hughes on vocals! Finally, *Prisoner* takes a more laid-back but no less epic approach; it takes a confident soloist to ‘bring the fight’ to arrangements and production like this.

Live at Rockpalast 2008



Dickey brings driven, sustained notes and intricate phrasing with careful note choices to tracks such as *Nothing You Can Do* and *Blue Sky*, which has some tricky harmony guitar, too! *Havin' A Good Time* also demonstrates a soloing style, which takes as much from country and rock as it does from blues – lots of major pentatonics and scale fragments that offer an alternative approach to the more common minor-based approach.

Pronounced 'Lěh-'nérd 'Skin-'nérd

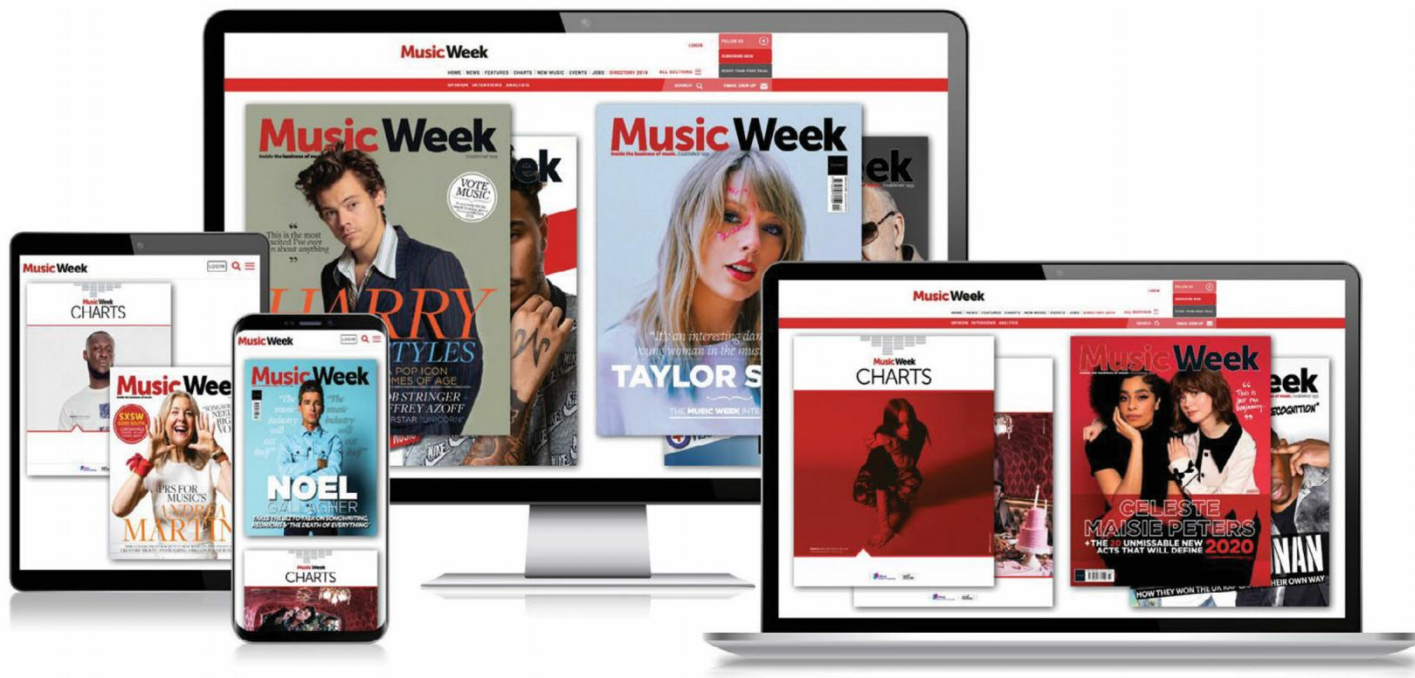


I think we all know about *Freebird*, but before we move on, check out the ferocity of that final solo – double-tracking also adds a layer of intensity, especially when some variations creep into the faster licks, but this is an excellent template for the idea of impressive blues-based licks. *Simple Man* and *Tuesdays*'s *Gone* also throw down the gauntlet to any soloist. If you're going to step up here, it has to be good!

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