Guitarist

Issue 480

JANUARY 2022

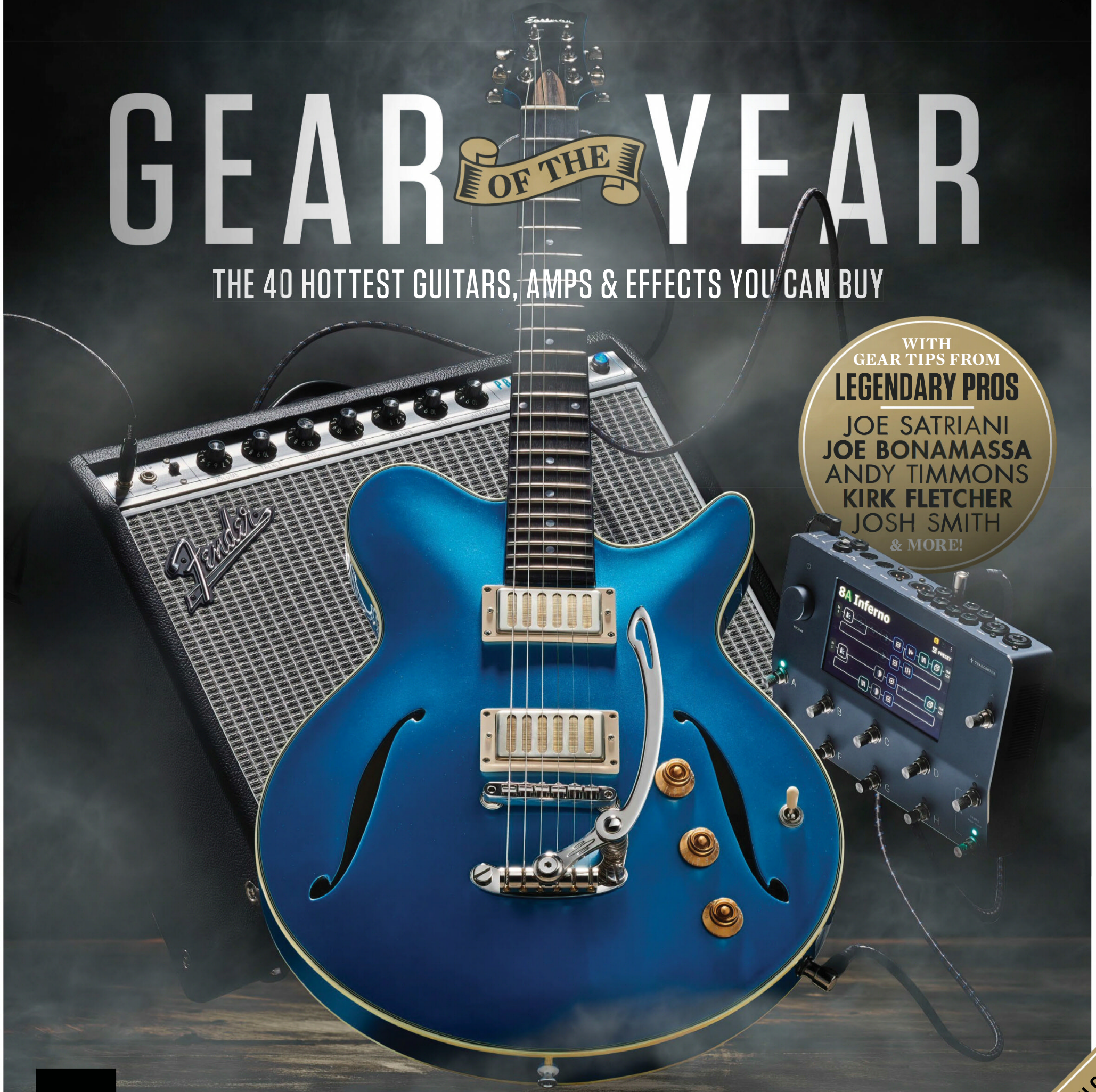
GEAR OF THE YEAR

THE 40 HOTTEST GUITARS, AMPS & EFFECTS YOU CAN BUY

WITH GEAR TIPS FROM

LEGENDARY PROS

JOE SATRIANI
JOE BONAMASSA
ANDY TIMMONS
KIRK FLETCHER
JOSH SMITH
& MORE!



FUTURE

FEATURING

FENDER TAYLOR **GIBSON** LINE 6 **LOWDEN** BOSS **GRETSCH** NE
633 GORDON SMITH **KITHARA** EVENTIDE **LANEY** CREAM T
EPIPHONE **PJE** BLACKSTAR **PRS** EASTMAN **YAMAHA** VOX

PLUS
JERRY CANTRELL TALKS LES PAULS
'58 FENDER PRECISION
STEVE GUNN

BORN TO PLAY

Sheeran BY Lowden

MADE IN BY Lowden IRELAND

SheeranGuitars.com

Guitarist

Future Publishing Limited, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA11UA
Telephone 01225 442244 Email guitarist@futurenet.com Online www.guitarist.co.uk

Essential Connection

This year's beautiful crop of award-winning instruments in our Gear Of The Year feature (page 60) highlights that, for all the right reasons, it's harder than ever to decide how to spend your budget when it comes to upgrading your rig. Not only is the range of quality guitar brands wider than ever, but the quality of entry-level gear is frankly astonishing. Guitars such as those in Gretsch's Streamliner range or Epiphone's Crestwood Custom really do make you wonder if you need much more to get the job done. And yet, at the top end of the market, there are guitars that offer possibly the best performance and tone from a new guitar there's ever been, including during the 50s golden era of the big USA makers.

The PRS Paul's Guitar or Patrick James Eggle's Macon are instruments that upwardly redefine how good an electric can be – if you get the chance, you should try one. So, where does that leave the 'quality workhorse' part of the market that exists between about £500 and 1,500? Well, Reverb.com recently published its list of the best-selling electric guitars of 2021. The top three bestsellers were, in this order, Fender's Player Telecaster and Player Stratocaster, with third place going to the PRS Silver Sky. While the Players from Fender aren't premium guitars, they're not entry-level Squiers, either. The moral of this? First, you can get great instruments at any price-point these days, which places all the more emphasis on identifying guitars that you really connect with. If something 'clicks' it's worth buying – and that includes if it is cheaper than what you thought you might buy. Because it's that sense of affinity with a guitar that really leads to great music and is, as such, priceless. Enjoy the issue.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights

Wes Is More

Veteran British jazz guitarist Nigel Price has fascinating reflections on reimagining Wes Montgomery's towering body of work on **p36**

Sword Play

The classic British Rapier electric returns in updated form, courtesy of designer Alan Entwistle. His Rapier 33 is reviewed on **p22**

When Rivers Meet

Here's a band who show how big and bold an amplified blues duo can sound – Grace and Aaron Bond join us on **p86**

Guitarist

Future Publishing Limited, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA11UA
Telephone 01225 442244 Email guitarist@futurenet.com Online www.guitarist.co.uk

EDITORIAL

Editor-In-Chief
Jamie Dickson
jamie.dickson@futurenet.com

Art Editor
Darren Phillips
darren.phillips@futurenet.com

Deputy Editor
David Mead
david.mead@futurenet.com

Reviews Editor
Dave Burrluck
dave@daveburrluck.com

Managing Editor
Lucy Rice
lucy.rice@futurenet.com

Senior Music Editor
Jason Sidwell
jason.sidwell@futurenet.com

Content Director, Music
Scott Rowley
scott.rowley@futurenet.com

Contributors
Richard Barrett, Alex Bishop, Rod Brakes, Trevor Curwen, David Davidson, Stefan Fast, Adam Goldsmith, Nick Guppy, Martin Holmes, Richard Hood, Rob Laing, Neville Marten, Davina Rungasamy, Gary Stuckey, Stuart Williams, Henry Yates

In-House Photography
Phil Barker, Joseph Branston, Olly Curtis, Neil Godwin

ADVERTISING
MEDIA PACKS ARE AVAILABLE ON REQUEST
CHIEF REVENUE DIRECTOR Zack Sullivan zack.sullivan@futurenet.com
UK COMMERCIAL SALES DIRECTOR Clare Dove clare.dove@futurenet.com
ADVERTISING SALES DIRECTOR Lara Jaggon lara.jaggon@futurenet.com
ACCOUNT SALES DIRECTOR Alison Watson alison.watson@futurenet.com
ACCOUNT SALES DIRECTOR Guy Meredith guy.meredith@futurenet.com

MARKETING
MAGAZINE MARKETING DIRECTOR Sharon Todd sharon.todd@futurenet.com
HEAD OF ACQUISITIONS Helen Harding helen.harding@futurenet.com
ACQUISITIONS CAMPAIGN MANAGER Faith Wardle faith.wardle@futurenet.com
ACQUISITIONS MARKETING EXECUTIVE Sally Sebesta sally.sebesta@futurenet.com

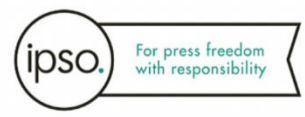
PRINT & PRODUCTION
HEAD OF PRODUCTION UK & US Mark Constance mark.constance@futurenet.com
PRODUCTION PROJECT MANAGER Clare Scott clare.scott@futurenet.com
PRODUCTION MANAGER Frances Twentyman frances.twentyman@futurenet.com
SENIOR AD PRODUCTION MANAGER Jo Crosby jo.crosby@futurenet.com
DIGITAL EDITIONS CONTROLLER Jason Hudson jason.hudson@futurenet.com

INTERNATIONAL LICENSING & SYNDICATION
GUITARIST IS AVAILABLE FOR LICENSING AND SYNDICATION. TO FIND OUR MORE CONTACT US AT LICENSING@FUTURENET.COM OR VIEW OUR AVAILABLE CONTENT AT WWW.FUTURECONTENTHUB.COM
HEAD OF PRINT LICENSING Rachel Shaw licensing@futurenet.com

CIRCULATION
HEAD OF NEWSTRADE Tim Mathers

MANAGEMENT
CHIEF CONTENT OFFICER Aaron Asadi aaron.asadi@futurenet.com
BRAND DIRECTOR Stuart Williams stuart.williams1@futurenet.com
COMMERCIAL FINANCE DIRECTOR Dan Jotcham dan.jotcham@futurenet.com
HEAD OF ART & DESIGN Rodney Dive rodney.dive@futurenet.com
HEAD OF DESIGN (MUSIC) Brad Merrett brad.merrett@futurenet.com
GROUP ART DIRECTOR Graham Dalzell graham.dalzell@futurenet.com

CUSTOMER SERVICES
APP SUPPORT apps@futurenet.com



Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief executive **Zillah Byng-Thorne**
Non-executive chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief financial officer **Penny Ladkin-Brand**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

All contents © 2022 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

If you submit material to us, you warrant that you own the material and/or have the necessary rights/permissions to supply the material and you automatically grant Future and its licensees a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part in any/all issues and/or editions of publications, in any format published worldwide and on associated websites, social media channels and associated products. Any material you submit is sent at your own risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents, subcontractors or licensees shall be liable for loss or damage. We assume all unsolicited material is for publication unless otherwise stated, and reserve the right to edit, amend, adapt all submissions.

Fiore

PLAY IN FULL BLOOM

MARK LETTIERI SIGNATURE MODEL

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

- Mark Lettieri

PRS PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS

© 2021 PRS Guitars / Photo by Hunter Selman

Contents

ISSUE 480 JANUARY 2022

COVER FEATURE

GEAR OF THE YEAR

60 The 40 finest guitars, effects and amps, hand-picked from our top-scoring review gear of 2021. From high-end acoustics to stellar overdrives, if it's darn good, it's here

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY
Neil Godwin

REGULARS

030.....Gas Supply
032.....The Lineup
034.....New Music
036.....Tones Behind The Tracks
038.....Opinion
046.....Substitute
048.....Feedback
052.....Competition
100.....Subscribe
108.....Tonal Teamwork
118.....Longtermers
120.....Bought & Sold
122.....The Mod Squad
128.....Competition
130.....Classic Gear
132.....Vintage Icons
138.....Next Month

SUBSCRIBE TO **GUITARIST** **FOR 6 MONTHS** & GET A **FREE** BLACKSTAR FLY 3 MINI AMP **WORTH £65!**
See p100 for details

FEATURES

054.....Jerry Cantrell
060.....Gear Of The Year
086..... When Rivers Meet
110.....Blueprint: Gibson Jim James ES-335

NEW GEAR

010.....**ESP** E-II Eclipse Full Thickness
016.....**Supro** Delta King 12 1x12 combo
022.....**Rapier** 33
028.....**Oopegg** Supreme Trailbreaker Mark-I
092.....**Cream T** Aurora Standard 2PS
102.....**Aclam Guitars** The Windmiller Preamp
104.....**Blackstar** Dept. 10 Dual Drive & Dual Distortion
106.....**Fredric Effects** The Accomplished Badger MKII

TECHNIQUES

134.....Blues Headlines with Richard Barrett

VIDEO

Please note: to enjoy all of the video content in this issue, you will need a WiFi connection

INSEPA

WWW.THOMANN.DE

RABLE

th•mann

ESP E-II ECLIPSE FULL THICKNESS
£2,499

WHAT IS IT? A single-cutaway solidbody electric with a mix of both classic and contemporary features

Solar Powered

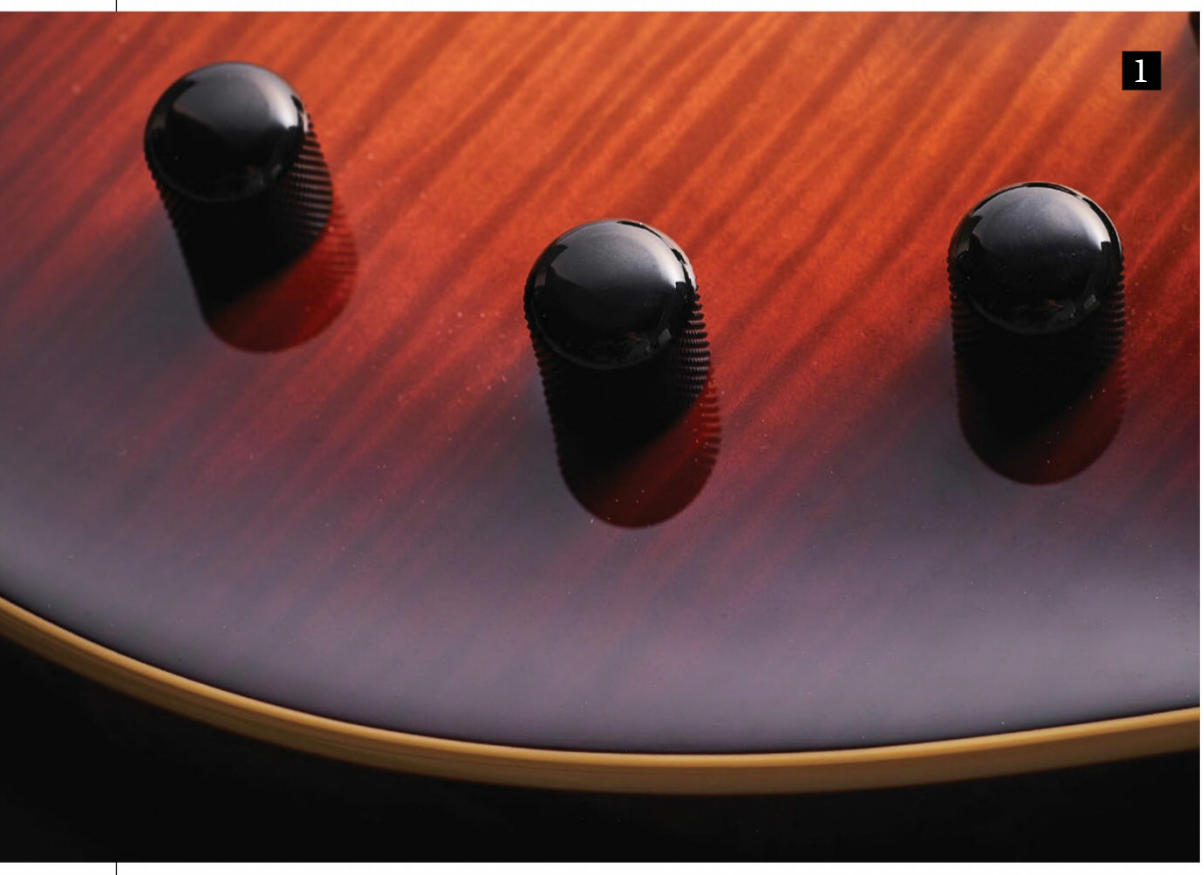
ESP's E-II Eclipse takes a turn for tradition with a thick-sliced body, Fishman Fluence Classics and, gulp, a sunburst finish. Is the single-cut brat reaching for its pipe and slippers?

Words Stuart Williams **Photography** Phil Barker

Picture a modern take on the single-cut and there's every chance that what springs to mind is ESP's Eclipse – a refined example of the classic format where the fat has been trimmed and slick, glossy precision replaces dust and mojo. The ESP Eclipse is the single-cut for people who are less interested in tradition and, as with much of the brand's identity, has attracted a number of players who spend their time on the 'red channel'; James Hetfield, Alex Skolnik, Lamb Of God's Will Adler and Mastodon's Bill Kelliher are all examples of players who have chosen a blackout over a 'Burst. Except the Eclipse is no longer the new kid on the block, as evidenced by our review guitar, the ESP E-II Eclipse Full Thickness.

As part of the E-II line-up, which replaced the ESP Standard range back in 2014, it sits between the company's more affordable LTD guitars and more expensive USA models, but a quick look at the price tag should be confirmation enough that this is by no means a 'second-tier' model. Just like the ESP Standards, the E-II series is built in Japan, and our Eclipse is host to a number

ESP


1

2

3

of premium features throughout. From the headstock down we get black Gotoh Magnum Lock-equipped tuners, a bone nut, Dunlop strap locks, and a black Gotoh tune-o-matic-style bridge and tailpiece.

But you might be wondering about that 'Full Thickness' in the model name. This refers to the body depth, which is thicker than that regular Eclipse and built from mahogany, a maple cap and a flamed maple veneer to give a combined 'Full Thickness' of 60mm, as found on vintage single-cut guitars, as opposed to the standard overall thickness of 50mm. "Wait, what? Tradition?!" Yep, it's a heavyweight both in terms of its form and actual mass. Of course, this isn't a new concept for ESP as the Full Thickness body has been around for a number of years.

What is new is the finish and pickup configuration in which ESP has made this guitar available. Our Tobacco Sunburst model comes fitted with active Fishman Fluence Open Core Classics and was released earlier this year alongside the also-new Vintage Honey Burst version (Seymour Duncan JB/59) and the existing Black Natural Burst (EMG 66/57).

Feel & Sounds

Despite the name of the finish, opening the included hardcase reveals an altogether more red-ish, Coke-in-the-sun tint across the body. It looks great and combined with the black hardware hints towards a '70s Les Paul Custom sort-of vibe. The body, fingerboard and front face of the headstock are clad with a single-ply cream binding, while the flamed top is beautifully even and nicely matched, and with the gloss paint job on top 'rich' sums things up nicely.

The neat finishing continues across the rest of the guitar, with the set-through mahogany neck covered in an equally immaculate and even dark cherry satin finish. Obviously, neck finishes are a personal preference, but this ranks among one of the finest we've played of late – silky smooth without the glossy feel. Then there's the ebony fingerboard. As we'd expect from this type of guitar, it's a 628mm (24.75-inch) scale with 22 frets. In this case they're highly polished and extra jumbo sized. It's almost a shame that so much of the fretboard is populated with ESP's 'flag' inlays because the dark, consistent nature of the wood is so good. But it is, as they say, what it is.

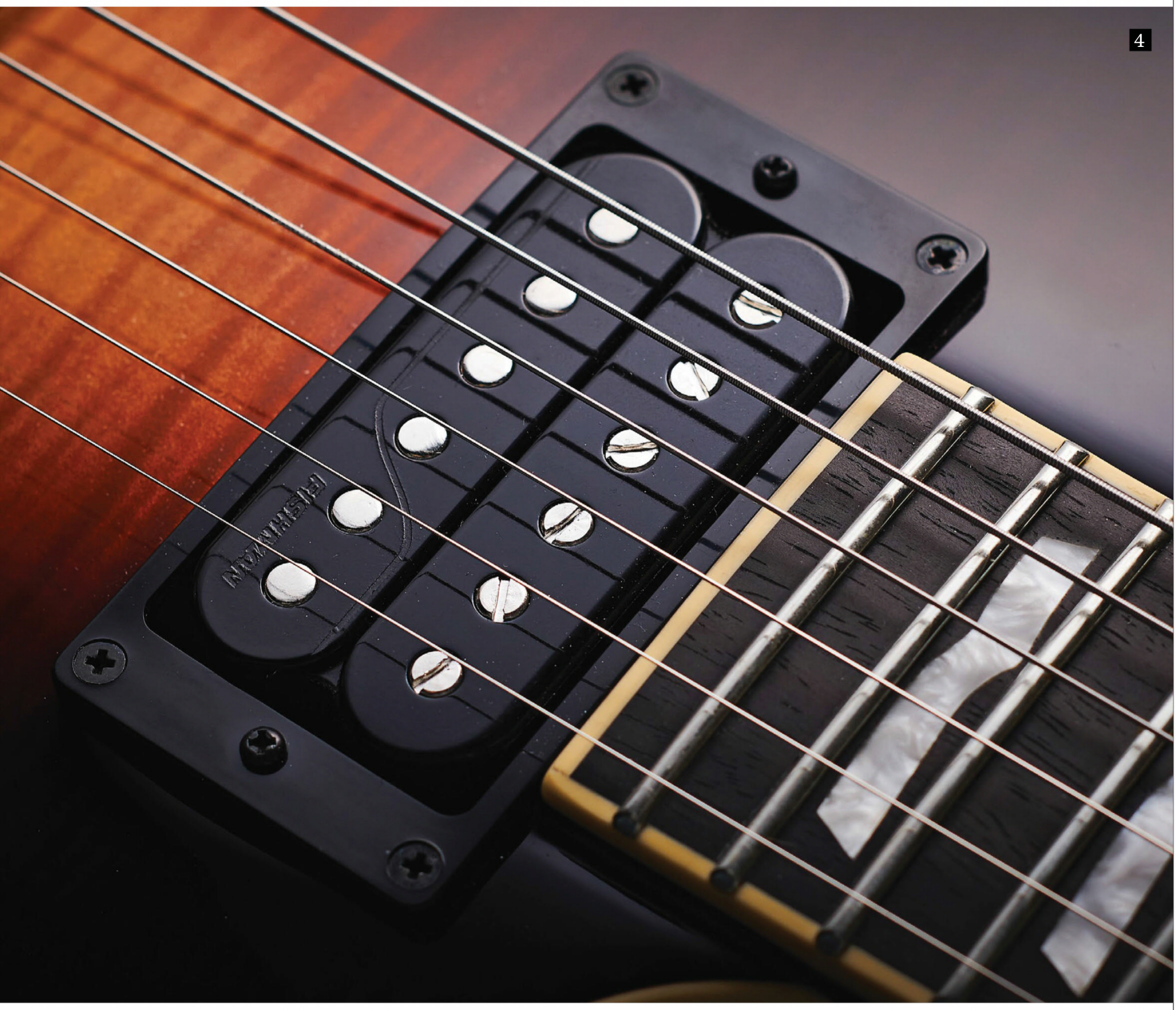
Picking it up you'll notice the weight. It's well balanced, but at just under 4kg it

1. ESP Eclipse models feature a reverse positioning for the bridge/neck volume controls. On this Fluence-equipped version, the Fishmans' additional voices are selected via the neck/tone control push-pull pots, giving you two humbucker voicings and some very convincing single-coil sounds

2. The mahogany neck has such an immaculate finish that we can't help but wish those ESP flag inlays didn't obscure so much of it. Nevertheless, its silky touch is a joy to experience

3. The Fishman Fluence Classics are powered by a nine-volt battery – nothing new here. However, the battery is housed within the quick-access revolving battery compartment. No screws or plastic tabs! Just spin the door round and you're there

4. The E-II Eclipse Full Thickness in Tobacco Sunburst gives you a modern precision single-cutaway, which is met by some vintage character from the extra-thick body, classy finish and hardware styling, and Open Core Fishman Fluence Classics voicings



may not be ideal for two-hour marathons. The upshot of all that mass is that it seems to contribute to the lively natural resonance. Your ears will thank you – even if your spine won't be quite so happy.

It feels great to play, though, with that neck delivering comfort and speed from the 'Thin U' profile (that's not actually that thin), offering a decent palmful that's more palm-filler than modern shredder. Likewise, the extra jumbo frets are less noticeable in practice than on paper. Their highly polished finish makes string bends feel like you're skating, and they're nicely rounded, avoiding the speed bump effect you can sometimes get with frets of this size.

Despite the traditional scale length and 0.010 to 0.046-gauge strings that the guitar

The styling and additional voices make this an even more versatile Eclipse

ships with, there's a tension to this Eclipse (whether implied or real) that we found reacted nicely, even if you're heavy on the picking hand. Open strings stay in their lane, pitch-wise, and it also appears to help with lower tunings, too. We took it down to drop C comfortably with the factory fitted Elixir Nanowebs and the tuning remained stable.

So, what of those pickups, then? Well, first we should note that the volume controls are mounted in reverse order to what you might expect, a nod to the fact that ESP is expecting you to stay parked in the bridge position for a lot of the time. Each pickup gives you three voices, selectable via the push-pull neck volume and master tone controls. Voice 1 is based on a vintage PAF, Voice 2 for the neck position is described by Fishman as "clear, airy chime", while the bridge humbucker turns into a Classic Hot Rod, and Voice 3 on both provides a coil-split, aiming for clarity in the neck and a hotter, overwound single coil in the bridge. Confusingly, ESP appears to have taken a similar approach with the voice selection as it has done with the control layout, opting to give you the full-bore bridge and extra punchy neck tones of both second voices as your starting

There's luxury all round on the E-II Eclipse with black Gotoh locking tuners, a black Gotoh 10 bridge and tailpiece, and Dunlop strap locks. The fretboard is a beautiful piece of ebony, while the neck is finished in a smooth satin

point. Pulling on the tone control reverts the pickups to what Fishman calls Voice 1, and the neck volume engages the single-coil modes on both.

Regardless of what you call them, what you have here are three brilliant voicings, all of which are geared towards the rockier end of things. In the default (knobs pushed down) position, you get a more scooped neck tone, removing some of the wool, and the bridge is roaring with more output, increased attack, with an additional bite to both pickups. That's not to say the PAF voices are lacking, but after playing on the brighter, more aggressive default settings for a while, they lose some of their immediacy. That said, this voicing will definitely have its place for the bluesier/more traditional end of the rock spectrum. We have to remove our trilby for the coil-split of Voice 3, though. It's an excellent representation of a raunchy single-coil sound in both positions with the neck revealing a deep, woody tone that sounds brilliant under a bit of gain (think Tom Morello), and the bridge position split giving us some great midrange-y, quacky vintage funk sounds.

> The neck finish ranks among one of the finest we've played – silky smooth without the glossy feel

Verdict

We hate to break it to you, but The Black Album is 30 years old, your baggy trousers from 25 years ago are now back in fashion, and yes, the Karate Kid really did just celebrate his 60th birthday. The point is, maturing is okay and the Eclipse Full Thickness is the proof. It does what the Eclipse has always done: offers an alternative to vintage-inspired guitars of this type. In this guise, it's had its metaphorical edges mellowed slightly, but what remains is still a fire-breathed tool of hard rocking. The styling and, in particular, the additional voices from the Fluence Classics just make it even more versatile. If the rivals are a road too-well travelled for you, but you don't want a guitar that is a gateway to middle-aged facial piercings, either, we think it sits just right.

ESP E-II ECLIPSE FULL THICKNESS

PRICE: £2,499 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Japan
TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany with maple cap/flamed maple veneer
NECK: Mahogany, set-through
SCALE LENGTH: 628mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony with Flag inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, extra jumbo
HARDWARE: Gotoh tune-o-matic-style bridge and tailpiece, Gotoh Magnum Lock locking tuners, Dunlop strap locks – black-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 50mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Fishman Fluence Classic Open Core, bridge volume, neck volume, master tone – pull-push pots access the extra sounds
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.84/8.45
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Vintage Honeyburst version w/ Seymour Duncan 59/JB and Black Natural Burst w/ EMG 66TW/57TW (both £2,220)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Tobacco Sunburst (as reviewed) – high gloss with satin neck back

Sound Service
+49 (0)30 7071 300
www.espguitars.com

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Sits nicely between vintage and modern styling; exciting third-party features; stunning visuals, even better sounds

CONS Pickup choice is limited to Tobacco Burst finish if you want to stick with the (rather heavy) Full Thickness body; control layout/pickup voicing is confusing at first

THE NEW HYBRID

Fender

ACOUSTASONIC® PLAYER TELECASTER®

Streamlined and stage-ready, this shape-shifting hybrid goes from acoustic to electric with something new at every turn.

The **ACOUSTASONIC PLAYER TELECASTER** shown in Butterscotch Blonde.
Iconic acoustic voicings. Big electric tones. One powerful Blend Knob.

©2021 Fender Musical Instruments Corporation. All Rights Reserved. FENDER (standard and in stylized form), ACOUSTASONIC and TELECASTER are trademarks of Fender Musical Instruments Corporation and/or its affiliates, registered in the U.S. and other countries.

Supro

SUPRO DELTA KING 12 1X12 COMBO
£599

WHAT IS IT? A slightly modified version of Supro's 2019 Blues King that blends vintage styling and single-ended vintage Class A tone with a modern preamp that adds great versatility

Delta Muse

Supro's single-ended combo blends modern high-gain tones with vintage style

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Olly Curtis

One of the original pioneers of electric guitar, the Supro brand dates back as far as the mid-1930s, although it was in the early 40s that Supro amplification really began to take off, riding on the popular wave of Hawaiian music. By the late 50s and early 60s, Supro was one of America's biggest names in amplification and can lay fair claim to being the sound of Chicago blues, as many prominent players from that era used its amps. Later on, this filtered through into mainstream rock, with Jimmy Page reputed to have used a Supro on many early Led Zep recordings.

The Supro brand disappeared in the late 60s and was owned for a while by Fender Custom Shop guru Bruce Zinky, who used it for a few limited-production runs. However, it wasn't until 2014 that the brand was fully revitalised under the ownership of Absara Audio, well known for the Pigtronix range of pedals. Last year, Supro and Pigtronix were

1

1. The Delta King 12's control panel mimics the original Supro style with traditional mains and standby toggle switches. The smaller toggles operate the amp's boost and drive functions, which can also be footswitched remotely

2. The custom-designed DK loudspeaker is unique to Supro and reputedly emulates the unique characteristics of field-coil loudspeakers that are found on very early Supro amps

bought by Bond Audio (joining D'Angelico Guitars in the stable), heralding the start of another exciting chapter for this historic brand. This issue, we're taking a look at an interesting combo from Supro's catalogue, the Delta King 12.

The Delta King draws on vintage Supro styling, with a flush front baffle and a truncated loudspeaker opening. The cabinet is made out of poplar, a lightweight and very resonant timber that's a 'secret sauce' for several top boutique builders. The covering on this sample is a fetching two-tone mix of black vinyl and a distinctive mustard tweed fabric, and includes four 'go faster' stripes that wrap around the cabinet from top to bottom. The loudspeaker onboard is a single 12-inch Supro DK75. It has been designed to approximate the tones of the field-coil drivers that would have been fitted to early era Supros but with modern power handling and reliability.

While the Delta King's styling is as vintage as you can get, the electronics are reassuringly modern

While the styling is as vintage as you can get, the electronics are reassuringly modern, with a robust steel tray chassis supporting two decently large transformers. Inside, most of the smaller components are mounted on a large high-quality through-plated PCB. This board also supports the front-panel controls and sockets for the Delta King's two valves: a 12AX7 preamp and a single 6L6 in the output stage. Component quality is good and you'll find that metal film resistors are used throughout to minimise hiss. As well as old-school valve electronics, there are several op-amps used for the Delta King's boost and overdrive, along with a small amp on a chip to power the spring reverb effect.

The top-panel controls are simple enough to get by with a cursory glance of the manual. Next to the input there's a volume control followed by a pair of small toggle switches used to activate the Boost and Drive functions, followed by Treble, Mid, Bass, reverb level and a master volume.

On the Delta King's rear panel there's a footswitch socket together with a line out and power amp in. The line out is buffered and can drive another amplifier input or a console, while the power amp input allows you to use the Delta King 12's Class A power section with your choice of pedals or modelling preamps. This is an amp that looks the part and comes with solid build quality and decent components.

Feel & Sounds

We auditioned the Delta King 12 with our regular guitars: a Les Paul Standard fitted with old PAFs and a Strat loaded with Duncan Alnico Pro units. We also

3

borrowed a superb Gibson '63 ES-335 reissue – a certified blues machine that would have often been plugged into original Supros back in their heyday. Used without the solid-state effects, the Delta King is responsive and very dynamic, and has a warm midrange and restrained treble that work best with single coils and brighter PAF-style humbuckers. Turning up the volume and master controls adds a distinctive bite, not as aggressive as a tweed Champ maybe but with more clarity and plenty of attitude to enable us to pull off some authentically vintage-sounding blues solos with the 335.

Activating the Pigtronix-designed Boost and Drive effects catapults the Delta King forward several decades, the boost adding a fat greasy midrange and mild overdrive, while the overdrive adds serious gain for

4

3. Supro was one of the very first amp brands to feature a reverb effect, and the Delta King continues the tradition with a built-in spring for authentic vintage reverb sounds

4. The famous Supro lightning bolt logo sits on a highly resonant poplar cabinet, covered in a blend of orange tweed and black vinyl that pushes all the right vintage buttons for us

The boost and overdrive effects are footswitchable, all you need is a standard latching two-button switch to plug into the rear-panel socket. There's also a buffered line out and power amp input

Activating the Pigtronix-designed Boost and Drive effects catapults it forward several decades

more modern soloing styles, giving the Delta King enough heat to handle blues-metal and more. While the built-in effects are a good idea that saves using a couple of external pedals, it's a little disappointing that there's no individual control over gain and level. The boost level is just about right for stepping up from rhythm to lead, but some might find the high-gain overdrive a little too fierce for their tastes. The effects apparently borrow from Pigtronix's early Futuristic Analog Technology cascaded gain drive pedals, which means they're very responsive to player dynamics. The spring reverb is a little disappointing – it's fed with too much level and becomes irritatingly pingy at higher settings – but when used sparingly it adds a pleasant warm ambience to your sound.

Verdict

Supro fans may have already noted that the Delta King isn't far removed from the Blues King range introduced a couple of years ago, with the same controls and a similar set of tones. We still like the 'wolf in sheep's clothing' idea of a small vintage-styled valve combo that's capable of breathing fire at the touch of a button, and yet there's no proper control over the boost and drive effects; a pair of gain and level presets would have made a world of difference without adding too much to the cost. The reverb just needs a little more tweaking to reduce the input level and perhaps slightly brighten the tone, and to bring some of those bigger Americana sounds within reach.

With the effects switched off, the Delta King's warm Class A valve tones are more rewarding, and for Chicago-style blues it certainly sounds the part when cranked up. These minor gripes apart, this is a portable and potent small combo that's capable of enough volume to handle small gigs as well as practice and recording – and it's affordable, too, just like its 50s ancestors. If you want to channel some Delta mojo into your playing, check it out. G

SUPRO DELTA KING 12 1X12 COMBO

PRICE: £599
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Valve preamp and valve power amp
OUTPUT: 12W
VALVES: 1x 12AX7, 1x 6L6
DIMENSIONS: 430 (h) x 410 (w) x 190mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 13/28
CABINET: Poplar
LOUDSPEAKERS: 1 Supro DK12 12"
CHANNELS: 1
CONTROLS: Volume, Treble, Mid, Bass, Reverb, Master, Boost on/off, Drive on/off
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Built-in spring reverb, footswitchable boost and drive
OPTIONS: Also available in black with white stripes
RANGE OPTIONS: The 1W no-reverb Delta King 8 costs around £399; 5W 6V6-powered Delta King 10 is £499

info@suprousa.com
www.suprousa.com

8/10

PROS Built-in boost and drive features expand this combo's versatility, together with a traditional spring reverb; we like the vintage styling and portability, too

CONS The reverb is slightly over-gained and sounds pingy at higher levels; there's no individual control of boost and drive effects

A BRAND OF
GEWA
GUITARS

ovationguitars
ovationguitarsofficial
theovationguitars
// ovationguitars.com

Ovation
GUITARS

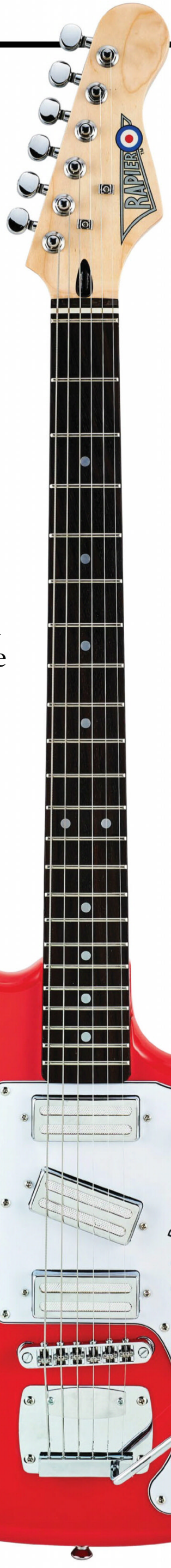
RAPIER 33
£429

WHAT IS IT? A modern Chinese-made repro of the British-made Watkins Rapier, a stalwart of homegrown players of the 60s

Second Charge

A blast from the past in the form of a new version of a British-made guitar that first appeared in the late 50s. Is it still valid after all these years?

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis



Gentlefolk of a certain age might well remember Watkins' Rapier models the first time around. For the rest of us, they're a footnote, a nod back to the time when us Brits made guitars in considerable numbers. But like any modern retro repro, the backstory is irrelevant to the quality and price of the instrument on offer – and that's what we're concentrating on here. Although at a lowly full list price of £429, this new Chinese-made Rapier 33 doesn't exactly inspire confidence...

Well, let's scotch that right here and now: this is not only a very tidily made guitar, it also has a very in-tune vibrato system and one of the most creatively bonkers control circuits we've ever encountered. Straight out of the box it plays really well, it's nice and light in weight, and has oodles of off-kilter pawn-shop style.

The woodcraft is simple. The body looks like an artist's impression of a Stratocaster – close but not the same. With slightly pulled-in horns, the 'almost there' impression is aided by the depth, which, at 38mm, is slimmer than the standard 45mm of a Fender. There are no contours, either, just a large edge radius. Wood choice might seem unusual as the body is made

VIDEO DEMO ▶ http://bit.ly/guitaristextra

1

2

1. The headstock outline is more like Vintage's redrawing of the Fender outline than the original Watkins style. The Rapier logo is borrowed from the originals with the additional RAF roundel

2. The very retro-looking knobs emulate those used by Eko back in the day and certainly suit the vibe. Don't forget you have two volumes here and a master tone. This is not a Stratocaster!

from okoume (also known as Gabon from where it originates), known as a 'mahogany' variant used by an increasing number of makers such as Music Man, Nik Huber and Eastman – a trio of names that gives it serious credibility. We have no idea what's under the polyester finish, but, as we said, it's light in weight and there's nothing odd about its part in the acoustic response. It's a lively guitar.

The Fender-scale bolt-on neck is a more generic, untinted maple with an all over gloss finish, while the rosewood fingerboard is a deep, dark chocolate colour. The fingerboard radius ties in with that roller saddle tune-o-matic with a measurement of 305mm (12 inches), and the headstock is based more on JHS's Vintage line than the original, longer Watkins outline (probably a wise choice). But we do have a polarising zero fret here, and a Graph Tech NuBone string guide. It might be period correct, but zero frets can wear, especially with vibratos, and we'd question why the design doesn't feature a standard nut. The thing is, that's about the only thing we can find to criticise.

The unusual pickup switching and dual-volume controls give considerable scope

The simple-looking vibrato is based on the original's 'Hi-Lo' type with an anchor bar into which the arm screws – we look at that in more detail in Under The Hood. But it's the scratchplate-mounted pickups and controls that draw our attention. What on Earth is going on?

As designer Alan Entwistle tells us, the pickups here don't ape the originals – these are dual-blade mini-humbuckers, with partial covers showing off the silver foil-covered tops, and are height-adjustable in the usual manner. The middle pickup is slanted, like the originals, and in theory that increases both the treble and bass response as well as giving a strong visual statement: this is *not* a Stratocaster.

In typical modular style, the pickups, controls and output jack are all mounted on the three-ply scratchplate with a standard-looking toggle switch, two smaller slide switches and three rotary controls with rather flashy looking chromed knobs with rubber grips. But what do they all do?

Starting with both mini-switches pushed down away from the strings, the 33 acts as a two-pickup guitar with just neck and bridge pickups selected by the toggle switch in the usual fashion. The upper rotary control is a volume (let's call it volume 1), the lower knob a master tone. Slide the neck-facing mini-switch up and the middle pickup is introduced and controlled in level by that middle rotary, volume 2, while the upper volume 1 does the same for the bridge and neck pickups. Pulling up the bridge-facing mini-switch introduces a bass-cut, like a Jaguar, but for the bridge and neck pickups only. We think Rapier needs to supply an instruction sheet!

Feel & Sounds

To be fair, once we worked out what the controls actually do, the drive isn't as difficult as it might seem. Basically, the

IN DESIGN

Just how did a cult British-made guitar end up being reproduced in China? Let's find out

It's fair to say Alan Entwistle is a walking encyclopaedia of the electric guitar with considerable knowledge of the instrument's early years. But rather like Trev Wilkinson (the pair have considerable shared history), until the pandemic Alan spent most of his time working in China, designing and developing guitars for a number of brands.

"I constantly travel back and forth from China," Alan tells us, "although currently I can't get back due to the pandemic. I work with a couple of factories in China: the main one produces Burns and Revelation, and the other one produces the high-end Burns guitars. I've been doing that for about a decade now. I was working with Tanglewood, too, but that stopped, which is why I revived the Revelation brand, including a version of the original Hohner Revelation – where we first met all those years ago. They do very well."

"The original had an unusual single coil, so we went with mini-humbucker and a bass-cut switch"

Like the originals and many European guitars of the time, the Rapier uses a zero fret (a larger gauge piece of fret wire) to save production time in cutting the correct nut slots. The 'nut', then, is actually a string guide

How did the Rapier project start?
"I'd bought a couple original Watkins Rapier models over here in the UK when I was visiting from China – a 33 and a 44. At that time, it wasn't my intention to remake them, it was pure nostalgia. I thought, 'Okay, I used to have one of those.' But I got them back to China and began to think maybe it would work to make a contemporary version. We built a couple of prototypes and they sounded good once we'd sorted out a half-sensible wiring system."

We understand that, because Watkins still exists, you couldn't use that name. But you did purchase the rights to the name Rapier after the previous owner had let them lapse...
"Yes, that was about three years ago, I think. The registration of the body design – which wasn't actually legal because it wasn't a new body design – lapsed in 2014. If you look on the models after about 1969, instead of having Watkins on the headstock they had Rapier. I borrowed that logo and added the RAF roundel for good measure and went from there. So, basically, it's the Rapier Guitar Company because we do plan to do more repros of some of the other Watkins models."

Why use okoume for the body?
"I prefer it to what is referred to as 'basswood' in China, which, frankly, can be anything. It's a little bit cheaper than Gabon mahogany. It's very resonant, as you can probably tell, and it's kinda like mahogany – the same kind of structure, I suppose you'd say. It's also very clean, so you don't get loads of knots in it. We use okoume on the current Revelation guitars. I believe it's also used on some of the Vintage guitars, too."

Why go with mini-humbuckers?
"I wanted it to be a fairly low-noise guitar. The original pickup was an unusual single coil [see Under The Hood over the page] so I thought, 'No, let's do it with a mini-humbucker that doesn't have a large DCR and then use a bass-cut switch to get more jangle.' I thought that would have a broader appeal."

Where did you find those control knobs?
"They're actually in the style of the old Eko-made Vox knobs. One of the factories I work with was doing some stuff for Eko a few years ago and I saw these and said, 'Right, we're having them!' They look so right."

And the vibrato looks very similar to the original unit, doesn't it?
"Yes, it's re-engineered from the two originals I took to China. It's a good vibrato and I wouldn't mind using it on other things, to be honest, but the only drawback is that – like the original – it isn't adjustable [in terms of tension]. I did consider making it adjustable, but then I thought, 'Should I?' Obviously, you can add an extra spring, but you do have to take the vibrato off the guitar to do that – it's easy enough and, of course, that's the same with the original vibratos."

What's next?
"We do plan to offer versions of other Watkins guitars and basses from this period, but I'm just hoping that early next year the Chinese government is going to say, 'Okay guys, you can come back.' Because when I'm not in China I can't inspect stuff – I've been inspecting it on Zoom! – and until the time that they allow us back in, that's an ongoing problem. I have an apartment in China and a workshop there... so we'll see."

For more on the history of Watkins and original Rapier guitars, go to www.watkinsguitars.co.uk

UNDER THE HOOD

Despite the complex switching options, this is a pretty simple guitar

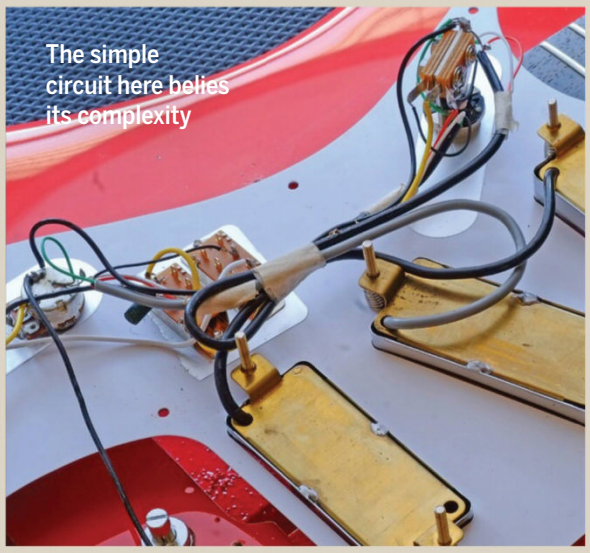
Removing the scratchplate, you can see that the body machining underneath is a little rudimentary and there's a 'swimming pool' rout, which certainly indicates future two- and maybe even four-pickup versions. There's no ID on the pickup bases, but the wiring is really pretty tidy using 500k mini-pots, a single .015 microfarads (153J) tone capacitor and a .002 microfarads (222J) bass-cut capacitor, both common green Mylar polyester film types. Bearing in mind the seemingly complex control system, it's actually a very simple circuit.

Under those pickup covers we have a standard humbucker, although Alan Entwistle tells us that each coil uses a steel blade polepiece and a ceramic bar magnet, and they're wound with 44 AWG wire. Measuring the DCRs at output we get 7.59kohms (bridge), 6.99k (middle) and 6.93k (neck). Like the guitar, the pickups are made in China, a part of the expansive Entwistle range.

The original Watkins Rapier single coils pickups were very different. "They kind of have a relationship with the Burns Tri-Sonic," says Alan of the original pickups, "in that they used a bobbin-less coil – a very messy one at that – and a magnetic baseplate. But the resemblance ends there; they certainly didn't sound like a Tri-Sonic. They used four large Alcamax magnets and one smaller magnet with reverse polarity, which, in practice, gives a kind of 'out of phase' sound to the G, B and E strings. It almost worked, except that there was, understandably, some output loss on the top strings."

The vibrato is pretty simple here, too, with three small springs to counter the string tension. While there's no tension adjustment, Alan tells us it's good for standard 0.009 and 0.010 string gauges, although if you're thinking of stringing up with heavier gauges you'll need to add one or two more springs – as you would with a Strat-style vibrato.

The Rapier's large body rout means it's set up for future two- and four-pickup models


The simple circuit here belies its complexity

With the vibrato removed, you can see the springs on the underside

33 functions as either a two-pickup or three-pickup guitar, and with both mini-switches down the mini-humbuckers are well voiced. The neck is nice and Fender-y but with a smooth attack, and its narrow aperture typically provides a leaner single-coil-like snap. The bridge has more kick and adds some humbucker thickness, but, again, it's narrower sounding than a full-size humbucker – and the mix works really well, too. Played clean, the guitar covers a lot of ground: the neck does jazz if you need, the mix is rich and bouncy (both are really good rounded funk tones, too), and that bridge pickup moves from older-style biting blues to a Rickenbacker-like clean punch. The pickups don't sound like they're heavily potted – which may be a problem if you're using high gains – but it adds to the lively nature of the instrument, particularly if you're chasing more retro-y lower-gain sounds.

Engage the bass-cut and, well, it's not called the 'strangle switch' for nothing! In this two-pickup mode it really thins out the sound, producing a wire-y, almost out-of-phase character begging you to kick in a fuzz or gnarly overdrive. Bring the middle pickup into play here and immediately

The simple vibrato here features a screw-in arm and is re-engineered from the original Hi-Lo vibrato. Thankfully, a modern roller saddle tune-o-matic is used, which also lightly rocks on its posts as you use the vibrato

These Entwistle mini-humbuckers certainly suit the retro vibe but are hum-cancelling, unlike the original single coils. The large toggle switch selects the neck, both and bridge pickups only

things thicken up as you wind it into any of the pickup selections – with or without that bass-cut. There are considerable subtle shades to play with as you adjust the volumes playing off the bridge and neck (volume 1) with the middle (volume 2). If you're into your parallel pickup combinations, you'll have a field day here – especially with the bass-cut engaged.

It's a perfectly good player, too. Our sample is well set up, and while you can hear a few 'pings' from that zero fret as you bend strings when you're unplugged, plugged in they're just not audible. The 'offset' vibrato brings its own character – bends seem to take a little longer to hit the note and sustain appears slightly short, again Jazzmaster-like.

The neck is a little thicker in depth than you might expect – 21.8mm at the 1st fret thickening up to 24mm by the 12th – with a well-shaped C profile. The fingerboard edges are lightly rounded and the fretwork is perfectly competent, even though the string guide's edges are left rather sharp. The vibrato is light and smooth and, with the strings stretched, holds its tuning. We've been left with a very positive impression: irrespective of its past, this is a perfectly valid guitar that's a good player with plenty of good sounds.

Verdict

This new Rapier is heavily inspired by its 60s forerunner and may simply be another slice of nostalgia. But not unlike Danelectro or even Gretsch, the appeal isn't just for those old enough to remember the originals. Far from it. Aside from the style, the unusual pickup switching and dual-volume controls give considerable scope – with or without the bass-cut engaged. It does take a little while to get your head around the possibilities, particularly because your head expects a more Strat-like function.

For the price, though, the simple build is rather good. It's a great little player, and while the zero fret might be a retro step too far, in reality it doesn't affect anything plugged in and the vibrato has a light, expressive feel with really very good out-of-the box stability and return-to-pitch. So, nicely retro with expansive and diverse sounds that are all hum-cancelling. You can't help thinking you're getting a lot of guitar for the money, and it's a refreshing change to the multitude of more standard Strat-inspired electrics out there. G

RAPIER 33

PRICE: £429
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric bolt-on
BODY: Okoume
NECK: Canadian maple, soft 'C' profile, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech NuBone/ 42.9mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, pearloid dot markers, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium, plus larger gauge zero fret
HARDWARE: Original-style Rapier Hi Lo vibrato with roller saddle tune-o-matic-style bridge, Wilkinson E-Z-Lok tuners – chromed-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: 3x Alan Entwistle EWR64 mini-humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector, 2x slide switch (middle pickup on/off; bass-cut), volume 1 (bridge and neck), volume 2 (middle), master tone
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.44/7.58
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: None
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Fiesta Red (as reviewed), 3 Tone Sunburst, Arctic White, Daphne Blue – all gloss including neck back and headstock

John Hornby Skewes & Co. Ltd
01132 865381
www.jhs.co.uk

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Good build; excellent feel to the neck with slick playability and stable vibrato; nicely voiced hum-cancelling pickups; lots of sounds beyond the 60s clichés

CONS We'd prefer a standard nut rather than the zero fret; here's hoping that Rapier doesn't ignore the left-handed player

the Wishlist

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

Oopegg Supreme Trailbreaker Mark-I £2,949

CONTACT **Andertons Music Co** PHONE **+44 (0)1364 653751** WEB **http://oopegg.com** WORDS **Dave Burrluck** PHOTOGRAPHY **Olly Curtis**

We'd be very wary to attach the country of a guitar's origin to its style or quality level, but if you've long-considered Japan to be the home of excellent, detailed quality then you can add this Tokyo-made slice of boutique-style Oopegg guitar to that generalisation. "A 'neo-bizarre' guitar? That's what they label their flagship Trailbreaker Mark-I model," says Andertons. Why not?

Alongside the obvious quality, there's a very current, fashionable style. The worn-looking humbucker covers mix with the brushed aluminium of the separate control plate, and then there's the brushed steel finish of the Descendant vibrato and Halon bridge, which is balanced by the classy red tortoiseshell pickguard and our lightly metallic gloss finish. As you'd expect, it's a bolt-on, but check out the striking triangular neckplate and the two-plus-four tuner layout on the reverse headstock. It's a playful yet effortlessly efficient design.

Despite its bolt-on style, the Trailbreaker uses a Gibson-style scale length with a typical 305mm (12-inch) fingerboard radius. The 'modern D' neck profile is more like a classic C with fuller shoulders, which gives it a sense of girth without being over-big. The immaculate fretting is from a medium jumbo gauge and, thanks in part to the satin polyurethane finish, it all feels like a much older guitar than it actually is.

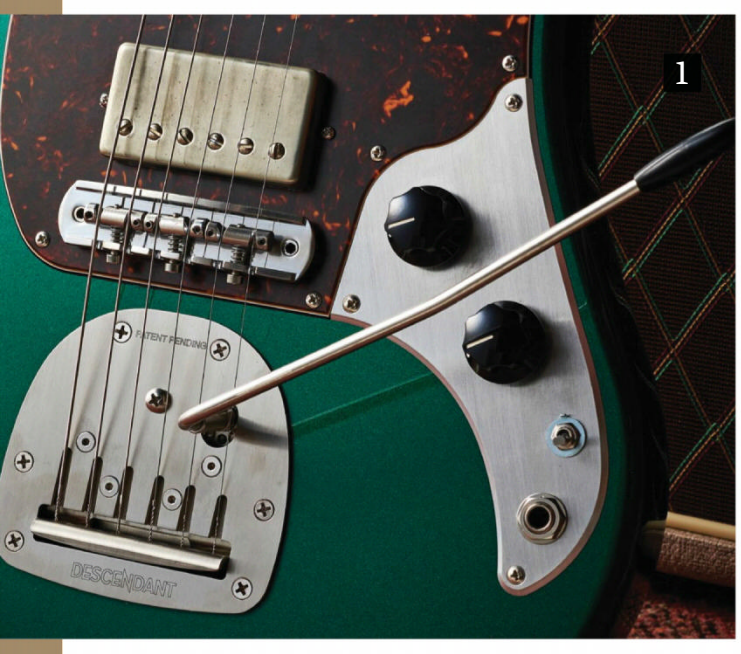
The sounds on offer from the Magneto Design Lab pickups and tricky circuit (immaculately wired to a very vintage-looking high spec) reflect the diverse inspirations. It's another spin on the three-pickup HSH wiring. That middle single coil is separately switched into the circuit via a small-lever three-way mini-toggle placed close to the output jack and tone control: switched up it solos the middle pickup; switched down it removes it from the circuit, leaving the three-way lever to select bridge, neck or both humbuckers; and in the centre position introduces the middle pickup to all three of those selections. Further spice is added by the pull-switch on the tone control (one of those posh circuit board CTS types), which operates a partial resistor split – like PRS – leaving some of the dumped slug coil in the split sound.

You'll not be short of sounds here. Both humbuckers are well voiced and easily cover typically thicker jazz to classic rock voices. The coil-splits are nicely rounded, while that middle single coil adds edgier sparkle. A very responsive guitar, with a superbly smooth and in-tune vibrato system, that covers an awful lot of ground. G

1. The Descendant vibrato from Swope Guitars aims to improve Fender's original offset version by allowing the player to adjust the unit's depth and increase downward string tension at the bridge. The cold-rolled 1060 steel Halon bridge is equally forward-looking, designed and made in Greece

2. This reverse headstock is back-angled and the two-plus-four tuner layout allows straight string-pull over the bone nut. The Gotoh SD90-MG-T tuners have a rear-lock wheel and are based on a Kluson-style housing

3. A triangular steel neckplate allows the heel to be chamfered for comfortable access to the top frets. It's typical of the detail of this build



4. The neck here is a five-piece design centring on three quarter-sawn pieces of maple with thin walnut strips in between. The 305mm (12-inch) radius maple fingerboard is edge bound with figured maple and has Luminlay dots inlaid on the bass side, while the face has larger black pearloid dots

5. The pickups are by Magneto Design Lab, based in the Blue Ridge mountains of western North Carolina: two Custom Humbuckers at the neck and bridge, and a 2-5-SC single coil in the middle position. A three-way lever gives the usual twin-humbucker selections, and the middle pickup can be solo'd, added to the humbucker selections or switched out

6. "Neo bizarre"? We're not sure about that, but you can spot a host of inspirations here. The Trailbreaker Mark-I is offered in some 16 colours – this one is Dark Green Metallic over its alder body. It's a good weight, too, at 3.55kg (7.8lb)

THE LINEUP

Gas Supply

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

Gretsch G6636-RF/G6636T-RF Richard Fortus Falcon from £3,049

CONTACT **Fender Musical Instruments EMEA** PHONE **01342 331700** WEBSITE **www.gretschguitars.com**

JARGON CRUNCHING

No-load tone pot

You might be familiar with a treble-bleed circuit, which stops the tone becoming darker as you decrease your volume control, but what about the no-load tone pot? This essentially removes the tone pot from the guitar's circuit when it's set to its max position, meaning the signal isn't coloured by the tone pot at all – almost like a reverse true bypass for your guitar controls.

Whoa! Should I fetch my binoculars?

Thankfully, you won't be needing them for these birds. What we have here is a brace of signature models for Guns N' Roses guitarist and longtime Gretsch player Richard Fortus, and yes, they are Falcons.

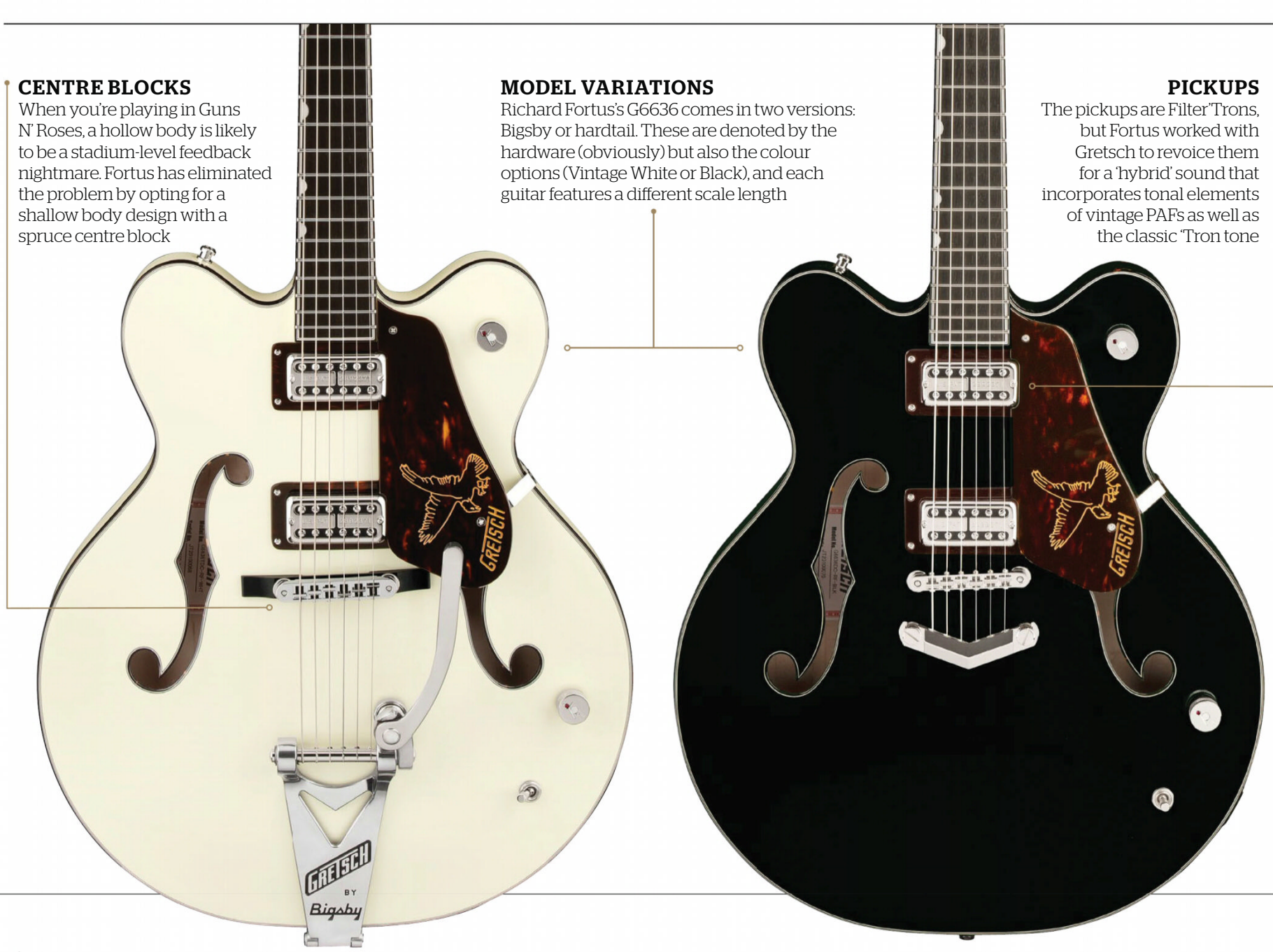
But I thought the Falcon was a big-bodied single-cutaway?

You're thinking of the 6136 model, which is the most recognisable of the Falcon flock (and still produced in various formats within the Gretsch catalogue today). Richard's guitars are the double-cut Falcon, based around the 6636 model and, demonstrating that birds of a feather can rock together, he's designed two of them.

I can see that – so different finishes, then?

Well, yes. But there's more to it than colour options. The Vintage White model is obviously equipped with a Bigsby (of the B6 variety), while the Black version is a hardtail, but each model features different scale lengths, too: 648mm (25.5 inches) for the vibrato-loaded version; 625mm (24.6 inches) on the hardtail.

That aside, both guitars are based around the same base construction and materials, that being a laminated maple body (with arched back and top), which is slimmer than the 6136 White Falcon, measuring 44.5mm rather than 63.5mm. But it's definitely not lacking in width, with a 431.8mm (17-inch) wingspan across the body.



It's great when a signature guitar displays real consideration, and we think that's exactly what these two do. From the strap button positioning to the treble bleed and no-load tone pots, there are plenty of excellent details

Both guitars are also fitted with centre blocks, which, when combined with the shallower body depth, help combat feedback and eliminate the need for bracing. The necks are set maple, both with a U-shaped profile, and have an ebony fingerboard fitted with pearloid Neo-Classic thumbnail marker inlays.

What's the hardware?

Each of the guitars uses Grover Rotomatic tuners and both are fitted with TonePros bridges. In the case of the Bigsby-equipped G6636T, you'll find a TonePros TP6R onboard with roller saddles to keep everything moving freely when you use the vibrato. Meanwhile, the black hardtail G6636 model is fitted with a regular TP6 Tune-o-Matic and V-shaped stoptail. Interestingly, Richard has mounted the upper strap button on the edge of the horn rather than the traditional rear-mounted position.

You haven't mentioned the pickups yet...

The pickups are Filter'Trons but custom-wound to Richard's preference. In a promotional interview with Gretsch, Richard explains that it was important to retain the chime and low-end of vintage Filter'Tron but with a twist. "The Filter'Tron, to me, is the sound of rock 'n' roll in a lot of ways," he says. "I wanted to retain that but with a centre block, which definitely changes the character of the tone overall. But also I wanted a bit more midrange for soloing. So what we ended up with was something that's never been done before – it's a hybrid between a vintage PAF and a classic Filter'Tron sound. In my opinion, it's what really sets this guitar apart from anything else that's out there."

What are the controls?

Fortus has kept things pretty sparse in that regard, with a three-position selector switch, master volume control mounted on the horn and a master tone control. The volume control is wired with a treble-bleed circuit, and the tone control uses a no-load pot.

Sounds like he's thought about a lot of the details. What's the damage?

These are USA Gretches and they're clocking in as such. The G6636T-RF costs £3,199, while the hardtail G6636-RF is £3,049. **[SW]**

ALSO OUT NOW...

FENDER 30TH ANNIVERSARY SCREAMADELICA STRATOCASTER £1,229

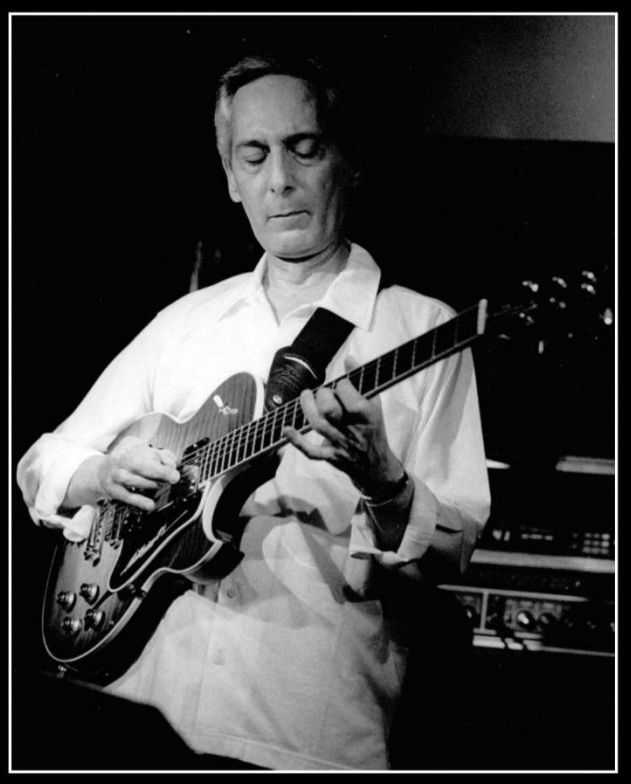
It's been 30 years since the indie world was insisting it wanted "to be free to do what we want to do... and get loaded". And Fender is celebrating that by decorating a Strat with the artwork from Primal Scream's era-defining album, *Screamadelica*. The guitar features the iconic painting (which was also featured as a postage stamp in 2010) from Creation Records designer Paul Cannell, who apparently found his unlikely muse in a damp spot on the record company's office ceiling after ingesting some LSD...

The configuration itself is much less hallucinogenic, featuring an alder body, maple C-shaped neck, a trio of vintage-voiced Alnico V single coils, two-point vibrato and a Screamadelica neckplate. It's available now, priced at £1,229.
www.fender.com

PRS MARK TREMONTI X JOE FENTON LIMITED EDITION £12,750

Sticking with the signature/anniversary custom-painted theme is this intricately painted and extremely limited-edition PRS Tremonti. It's been 20 years since the Alter Bridge icon first released his hugely popular signature model with the brand and to celebrate he and PRS have enlisted the talents of British artist Joe Fenton (who Tremonti commissioned to paint one of his stage guitars in 2013) to hand-paint 20 guitars, each with a unique design in Fenton's gothic style. With more than 100 hours spent on each guitar, the finishes have been built up with layers of "acrylic paints and other acrylic mediums", and the guitars share the same core spec as Tremonti's regular signature model. There are only 20 pieces worldwide, so you're going to need to be quick.

Peach Guitars is listed as a dealer in the UK. You can check the PRS blog for information on US and European retailers who will also be receiving the guitar.
www.prsguitars.com



Pat Martino

1944-2021

The revered jazz guitarist set a high bar for his contemporaries and showed extraordinary resilience when he suffered and subsequently overcame a memory-erasing aneurysm in the late 1970s

Pat Martino died on 1 November 2021, at the age of 77, after suffering with chronic respiratory disorder, which had forced him to stop performing back in 2018. He leaves a legacy of being one of the greatest jazz guitarists of all time, and also achieved one of the most remarkable comebacks for any musician.

Some 13 years after his 1967 debut album as a bandleader with *El Hombre* and a run of seminal albums including 1974's *Consciousness*, Martino suffered an aneurysm and the resulting surgery left him with amnesia and no recollection of his career or how to play guitar. His long recovery and comeback, marked by 1987 live album *The Return*, was remarkable, and is traced in the acclaimed 2008 documentary, *Martino Unstrung*.

A Philadelphia native, Martino was introduced to jazz by his father and picked up the guitar at the age of 12. He was mentored by Dennis Sandole, who also taught John Coltrane. By the time Martino arrived in New York in the early 60s, his impact on the jazz scene was enough to startle a 19-year-old George Benson who famously recalled his first contact with Martino's playing: "I was out on the town, thinking I had conquered New York," Benson says in an archive YouTube clip. "I walked into [club] Smalls Paradise and I saw this young kid on the guitar... all of a sudden they came to a break in the music and this guitar leaped out of nowhere, playing some of the most incredible lines I had ever heard. It had everything in it – great tone, great articulation – and the whole crowd, they went crazy. And I said to myself, 'If this is a sample of what New York is like, I'm getting out of here!'"

Although Martino's playing never crossed over to more mainstream audiences at the level of Benson or Wes Montgomery, his influence on fellow jazz players is difficult to overestimate.

"Martino was one of the greatest who ever lived," UK jazz guitarist Ant Law tells *Guitarist*. "The first tune I heard was *Mac Tough* – played not by Pat but by local musicians. I asked, 'What was that tune?' and the response was, 'Wow, you don't know Pat Martino? You *really* need to check him out.' I listened to the *Live At Yoshi's*, *El Hombre* and *Impressions* albums, learning much of what Pat played note for note.

"I love his guitar sound – big and thick, in part due to extremely high-gauge strings," Ant continues, "yet he got around the neck with incredible virtuosity. Martino hugely influenced the sonic characteristics of every living jazz guitar player, whether they are even aware of it or not. It is with great sadness that we say goodbye to Pat."

John Scofield wrote in tribute: "My teenage hero, and still when I hear him I try to play guitar like that, but it can't be done. He was such a nice man to us younger players – thank you, Pat."

Celebrated jazz organist, trumpeter and vocalist Joey DeFrancesco played with Martino frequently over the years, including the masterful performance of *Sunny* as part of the Pat Martino Trio with Scofield at the 2002 Umbria Jazz Festival. He said of Martino: "He's gonna be missed – he certainly left us an incredible legacy of music and will always be remembered as one of the greatest guitarists of all time." **[RL]**

Photos by Heritage Images / Getty Images

Manson

GUITAR WORKS

MA EVO
MIDI
SUSTAINIAC

MA EVO
FLOYD ROSE

MA EVO

Find out more at mansonguitarworks.com

THE LINEUP

Albums

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

Eric Gales reigns supreme with his latest album

PHOTO BY KATRENA WIZE

Eric Gales
Crown
Provogue **10/10**

A soul-soaked coronation for the new king of blues guitar
At a music show in London a couple of years ago, many of the staff at *Guitarist*, plus our colleagues from *Total Guitar* and *Guitar Techniques*, witnessed an unforgettable, jaw-dropping solo live performance from Eric Gales. Even without a band to accompany him – just a looper and, eventually, a bass player – the man was simply amazing. The guitar writer's collective agreed then that it was only a matter of time before we saw Eric's ascension to the stratospheric heights of six-string superstardom – and this latest studio album could be the one that puts him there.

Produced by Joe Bonamassa and Josh Smith, *Crown* is Gales' most personal album to date, dealing with the topics of substance abuse, racism and the hope for continuing sobriety and explosive creativity in the future. It's not all contemplative, though – check out the tongue-in-cheek duel between JoBo and Gales on the title track (which Eric wins by a mile!).

While we're on the subject of the guitar playing on this album, it's quite likely that a new benchmark has been set here. Comparisons to Jimi Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan for sheer power alone are inevitable with the Strat-y tone of Gales' Magneto Raw Dog signature guitar poured over every track like a rich syrup. Listen to tracks such as *You Don't Know The Blues* or the mini-track *Rattlin' Change* for their sheer overdriven firepower, or the clean tone balladry of *Too Close To The Fire* for majestic control. All hail the king! **[DM]**

Standout track: *Survivor*
For fans of: Jimi Hendrix, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Robert Cray

JD Simo
Mind Control
InsideOut Music **9/10**

The US rocker mixes it up
Nashville-based JD Simo sure knows how to blend genres within an overdub trio format (guitar, bass and drums). The 70s-tinged funk riffer *Go Away Satan* drips with reverb, wah and stinging guitar lines, while *I'm In Love* could easily be the opener for a Tarantino movie with swaggering drums, gnarly guitar tones and exclamatory vocals. *Let Go* has a bluesy hip-hop feel with a nostalgic production vibe (tape saturation, dripping reverb) that enhances the fuzzy guitar riffing and slide licks. *Know It All* offers a trippy blues groove vibe, as if Gil Scott-Heron was jamming with Peter Green. Further down the tracklist, *Devil Is Always Watchin'* has the band sounding like Band Of Gypsys-period Hendrix, with the angular riffs and searing lead lines nodding towards Funkadelic – a bombastic standout for the album. If you're after blues-rock with a strong late-60s/early 70s edge, *Mind Control* is highly recommended. **[JS]**

Standout track: *Devil Is Always Watchin'*
For fans of: Mike Zito, Gov't Mule

Carolyn Wonderland
Tempting Fate
Alligator Records **8/10**

Fiery solo debut for ex-Bluesbreaker
Singer/guitarist Carolyn Wonderland is a vibrant blues/Americana artist, and with *Tempting Fate* she's on fire. Having played with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers band, she brings 10 tracks to life in her debut for Alligator Records that span up-tempo stompers – *Fragile Peace And Certain War* – through to laidback jazzy groovers such as *On My Feet Again.* Her fingerpicking style is equally at home comping riffs as well as soaring lead lines, while her country-rock playing on *Texas Girl And Her Boots* is just one track that shows her six-string chops. *Broken-Hearted Blues* features rich lead guitar lines and some stunning bends in the solo. Her chord skills and pedal-steel lines are very full sounding as her Jimmie Dale Gilmore duet-cover of Bob Dylan's *It Takes A Lot To Laugh, It Takes A Train To Cry* testifies. Great rootsy music, played fantastically. **[JS]**

Standout track: *On My Feet Again*
For fans of: John Mayall, Samantha Fish

Robert Fripp quietly bringing it all together

Robert Fripp
Music For Quiet Moments

Panegyric

9/10

Mammoth ambient soundscape project from King Crimson courtier

Let's face it, the stay-at-home days of lockdown were hard on every one of us and so any bit of colour amid that period of social greyness was a welcome relief. One such unexpected delight was Robert Fripp's decision to release weekly soundscapes on social media under the banner *Music For Quiet Moments*. For those unfamiliar with the soundscape concept, this is an enterprise in which Fripp has been engaged for decades and essentially takes the form of looping solo guitar via all manner of outboard gear, layer upon layer, building to a mesmerising symphonic wash. Taken from live recordings across the globe, this eight-CD package features 52 tracks about which the ever-enigmatic Fripp notes, "Quiet moments of my musical life, expressed in soundscapes, are deeply personal yet utterly impersonal: they address the concerns we share within our common humanity." All we know is that they are exceptionally beautiful. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Requiem*
For fans of: King Crimson, Brian Eno

Seth Lakeman
Make Your Mark

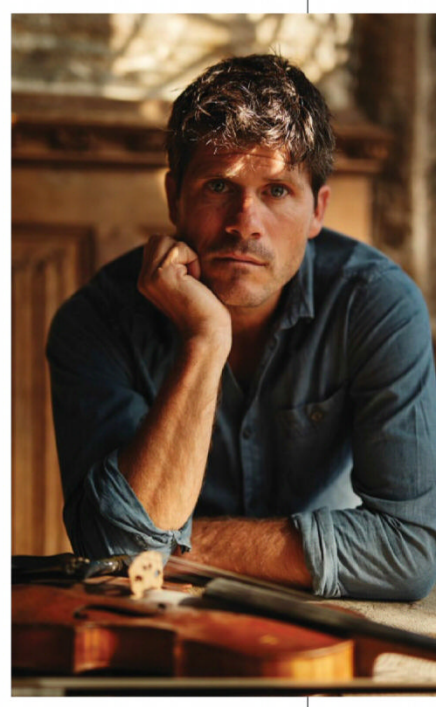
Honour Oak Records

8/10

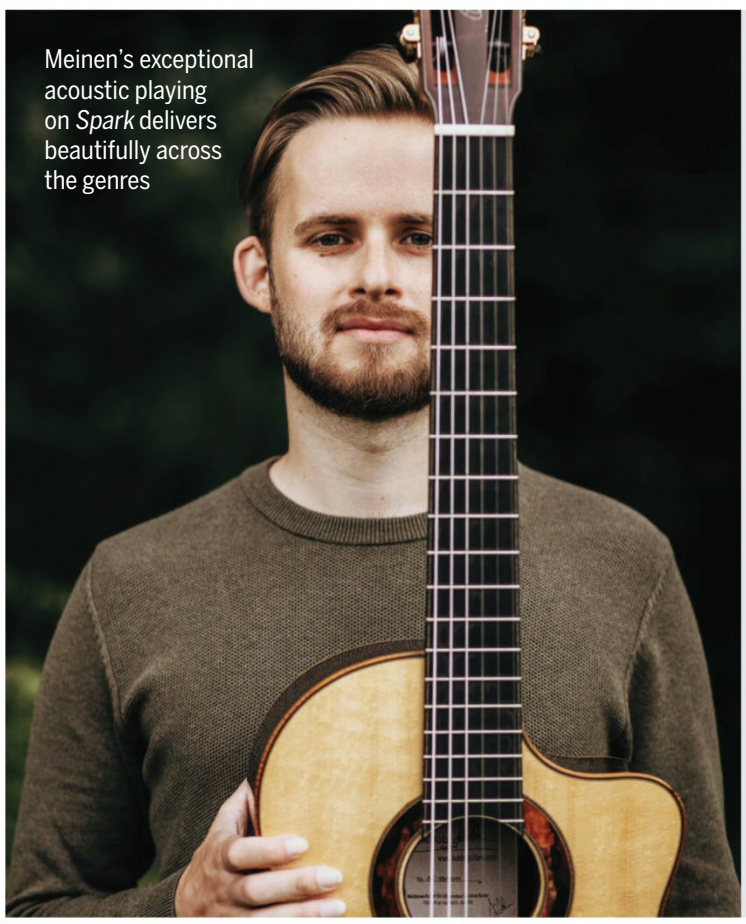
Multi-instrumental folky delivers powerful new material

"The pandemic gave me a real determination to come out musically stronger and I really dug deep into myself for this album," says Seth of *Make Your Mark*. "Being able to record and play with the band again was really quite spiritual." It seems that the recent period of enforced hibernation had a surprisingly positive effect for many artists. And, in Seth's case, he used the 18 months to write what is possibly one of his most powerful releases to date. Recorded in Devon as restrictions eased, Seth surrounded himself with top-class folk musicians, including Bellowhead's Benji Kirkpatrick, Ben Nicholls and Alex Hart, for 14 songs covering diverse topics, such as the environment, love, death and self-belief. Guitars, fiddles, bouzouki, banjo and mandolin come together, creating a dramatic backdrop for Seth's vocals, which are particularly effective on tracks such as *Coming For You Soon*, *The Lark* and *Love Will Still Remain*. Wonderful stuff. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Love Will Still Remain*
For fans of: Eliza Carthy, Kate Rusby



Evocative and strong, Lakeman's latest album includes a diverse range of both instruments and topics



Meinen's exceptional acoustic playing on *Spark* delivers beautifully across the genres

PHOTO BY DOVILE SERMOKAS

START ME UP

Sönke Meinen Spark

Independent Release

8/10

Second album from solo acoustic guitar master

Sönke Meinen's debut album, *Perpetuum Mobile*, was a top-seller with almost two million plays on streaming platforms as well as very healthy physical sales. He's also a prize-winning instrumentalist as well as a seasoned performer, and here he's taken on the roles of composer, player and producer of his follow-up release, *Spark*. The album trips across many genres, the lilting new-age resonance of the opener *Prologue* is contrasted with the athletic thrust of *Sparklemuffin* and the classically influenced tour de force *Harlequin's Waltz*. The bulk of the album was recorded using a specially built crossover nylon-string guitar, with just two tracks on steel-string. Meanwhile, there are beautiful string arrangements accompanying tracks *Song For The Dreamers* and *Heartland*, which add further depth and colour to Sönke's faultless fretwork. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Song For The Dreamers*
For fans of: Clive Carroll, Will McNicol

THE LINEUP

Tones Behind The Tracks

UK jazz guitarist **Nigel Price**'s new album looks at the legacy of Wes Montgomery and imagines what could have been

Artist: Nigel Price Organ Trio

Album: Wes Reimagined (Ubuntu Music)

Nigel Price refers to this album as "a different take" on Wes Montgomery's music and legacy

Wes is such a wonderful inspiration for so many players – what was your motivation for doing the album?

"Wes has been such an inspiration to so many generations of jazz guitar players. He just had a very direct, sort of melodic approach. And he's such a massive, massive entity. I think that sooner or later, every jazz guitarist is going to be confronted by his legacy – it's pure and honest and open. When it all boils down to it, he's the man, basically. I guess I've sort of been known as the Wes guy for years and years. And I was never really that guy – not really – it's just that I was kind of keeping people happy [laughs]. I'm not saying I'll never play any Wes again, but I just thought it was a nice way of saying, 'Yeah, okay, I am into it,' but this is a different take on it, rather than being some kind of tribute band. Nobody wants that."

PHOTO BY CARL HYDE

Did you feel it was an opportunity to examine Wes's style in even greater detail?

"No, not at all. I have been influenced by his style, of course. But he's a thumb player and I'm not. There are some very specific things that I've taken from him. But I didn't really want to dive too far into Wes, weirdly. I just wanted to do my take – or our take – on what potentially could have been. And it just seemed like a good idea."

Wes was a never ending stream of melodic invention. Where do you think the roots are for that kind of musical fecundity?

"I know this sounds quite technical, but I think there's a reason why he had such a forward motion because it's about the fluidity, isn't it? Because he's just got downstrokes, it means that when he's hitting a note, he's potentially having to slide to get that next note as he's not got an upstroke, which means that it kind of naturally leads onto forward motion. It's like driving an automatic car; it just wants to go, you know? All the slides and the hammer-ons and all that sort of thing were his limitation, the way his limitations had an effect on his own playing – a positive effect."

Where was the album recorded?

"There's a great place up in Willesden called the Fish Factory – it's actually a converted fish factory. It's got massively high ceilings, two floors and it looks like what I would imagine the old Motown studios would have looked like. There are loads and loads of amazing vintage microphones and a Neve desk that they had flown in from California. It's just got this amazing stuff and I've recorded there lots of times. It feels comfortable. We went in and did the whole thing live, and the percussion – we got [British percussionist] Snowboy in – was added later. I knew strings were coming in and we left a few gaps for that sort of stuff. I had a lot of time to think about it, to be honest, last year, you know? So I went back to The Fish Factory and on the third session overdubbed the string quartet. But essentially the core was literally live."

Who's playing on the album?

"We've got the most incredible musician, Ross Stanley, on Hammond organ. He's one of the greatest musicians the UK has ever produced – and he uses

PHOTOS BY DAN REDDING

a real Hammond organ, too, a B3, which he takes out on the road with two Leslies, I might add. Of late we've been using this amazing young drummer called Joel Barford and he's got this boundless energy. He's a big Bill Stewart fan, but he's not a copyist; he just loves that way of playing. We got Vasilis Xenopoulos [saxophone] in – we're kindred spirits. I've been playing with him in my band and our own quartet and all sorts of other stuff for about 12 years now. I also needed an alto saxophone to cover the Cannonball Adderley side of things and I've been crossing paths with Tony Kofi quite a lot the last few years and just waiting for the right time, the right moment, and it all fell into place. He was available for the session and so that was it, really.

"I just gave the guys a brief of the concept and I was very specific about the feels that I chose from my favourite records. I sent the guys links to those tracks and said, 'Look, I'm going to put this feel on this Wes track...' and then sent them the parts as well. And we didn't rehearse – well, me, Ross and Joel rehearsed just to get some of the rhythm section syncopation down – but everyone else sort of turned up on the day and it was literally the first or second take and that was it."

What was your choice of guitar for recording the new album?

"Well, I have an endorsement going on with Fibonacci. I was driving around one day and the phone goes and it's Martin Taylor who I know a bit, but it's still a nice phone call to get. We just spoke about this new guitar company [with whom he has a signature] – they were looking for people to endorse their guitars – and I was totally bowled over to be asked. I checked the guitars out and they are wonderful, absolutely ridiculous.

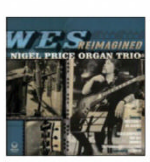
"I like quite a wide body, like a big old jazz guitar, and they just didn't do anything like that, and the guy who runs the company said, 'Well, what would you have, then?' And I said, 'You really want to know?' and he said, 'Yeah.' So I gave him every dimension – every tiny dimension – and that was based on years of trying out different guitars, having guitars made, loads and loads of different stuff. And although it looks fairly traditional there are some quite unique things on there, such as it having a 15th-fret neck joint instead of a 12th or 14th or whatever. So there's a lot of neck and you can really reach in there. I was totally vibed up by them making this guitar, totally knocked out. So I've now got a signature guitar [called The Londoner], which is an amazing thing to have.

"It also led to doing some research about what makes a good pickup and I went on a search for the Holy Grail and that led me to this guy, [London-based amp maker] Jon Dickinson. And between us, we just came up with this pickup [the hand-wound Jon Dickinson Big Ben] and it sounds fantastic. It's like one of the PAFs but a modern take on it." **[JD]**

Above: The Nigel Price Organ trio – with Ross Stanley on Hammond organ (above middle) and Joel Barford on drums – were joined in the studio by Tony Kofi on sax (above right) and a string quartet

Below: Nigel's Fibonacci signature, The Londoner, was made to his exacting specifications

> "Sooner or later, every jazz guitarist is going to be confronted by Wes Montgomery's legacy – it's pure and honest and open. He's the man"



Nigel Price Organ Trio's *Wes Reimagined* album is now available via Ubuntu Music. For touring details, check out Nigel Price's website at ***https://nigethejazzer.com***

SESSION DIARY

Taking Stock

As **Adam Goldsmith** embarks upon an end-of-year clear-out of his gear, he considers what value really means to him

In keeping with this issue's theme of Gear Of The Year, I've been thinking about the imminent task of selling some semi-redundant gear. This was catalysed by the fact I've recently given up a fairly large storage facility, which I've had for a while. So now is the time to decide which bits of gear are totally essential to my work as a professional musician, and which were more 'want' rather than 'need' purchases...

My latest purchase is a new Fender hand-wired '64 Custom Deluxe Reverb. For me, the Fender amp sound is the perfect platform on which to build everything else. I very rarely play any metal that's extreme enough to warrant owning a Diezel or similar head, and most overdriven sounds that I need in my working life can easily be achieved via pedals through an amp such as this. However, my recent experience with newly built stock Fenders has been rather mixed. For years, I owned a great knotty pine Princeton that I then sold to my friend Chris, who engineers at Abbey Road Studios. It provided me with years of loyal and uninterrupted service, and, to this day, I have no idea why I sold it. I then replaced it with a fine-sounding '68 Custom Vibrolux, which I'd heard sound fantastic in the hands of Paul Stacey every night when we were on tour together a few years ago. It then immediately blew up after I bought it off him, just before the big guitar solo in an orchestral rendition of Prince's *Purple Rain*, which consequently sounded like someone playing the kazoo after a few light ales...

"I once had an amp blow up just before the guitar solo in an orchestral rendition of *Purple Rain*... It sounded like someone playing the kazoo"

My current West End pit gig, *The Drifters Girl* at the Garrick Theatre, has provided me with another amp from the '68 Custom line in the shape of the 40-watt Pro Reverb. This amp sounds and plays absolutely brilliantly, and hasn't made a single squeak or unwelcome noise since I started using it every day two months ago. However, my experience with the Vibrolux – and I'm aware this doesn't make sense in logical terms – has slightly undermined my confidence in the reliability of stock base-model Fenders. My aforementioned purchase of the hand-wired Deluxe was an attempt to combat this lack of confidence while retaining the classic Fender sound. And alas, if I'm honest, because of the look. Apart from the slight technical differences between them, the two amps are still under the same broad category for me: lovely clean Fender sparkliness in a small portable combo, loud enough for most bar gigs without a mic and PA.

This begs the question, is the price difference really worth it? The Pro Reverb was around £1,349, and the hand-wired Deluxe clocks in at over a grand more at around £2,649. That's a big price gap for what amounts to a very similar sound.

There is a slight variaton in detail and quality of sound with the more expensive amp, but seeing as the Pro Reverb is already a fantastic-sounding amp, is the difference worth a considerable percentage increase in price? I decided it was, and the reason is simply that the added confidence I had from thinking it wouldn't break made the expense a no-brainer (whether or not this is reflected in reality). I used the hand-wired Deluxe, which sounded fabulous on its maiden voyage, on an ITV special *All Star Musicals* (of which the first show of two airs around Christmas time) and didn't think twice during the recording about its reliability – which, for a situation like that, is priceless. G

Fender's '68 Custom Pro Reverb (left) versus the hand-wired '64 Custom Deluxe Reverb: a grand difference in every sense of the word for Adam

BEST BRANDS · EVERY GUITAR SETUP IN STORE · BEST PRICES · GREAT SERVICE

V12 Retail Finance

musicstreet

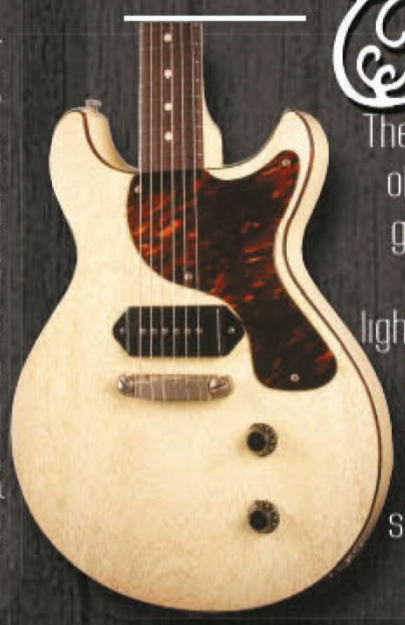
10 CHEQUIERS COURT · HUNTINGDON · CAMBRIDGESHIRE · PE29 3LJ

Apple Pay · Google Pay · PayPal · VISA · MasterCard · American Express

PRS PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS

Possibly the most PRS guitars under one roof in the UK always around 70+ models From SE to Private Stock and hand picked Wood Library & Core Models

Patrick James Eggle



These have to be some of the most beautiful guitars we've had in. Patrick picks the lightest, most resonant tonewoods and handwound pickups to create these stunning instruments

Collings GUITARS AUSTIN TEXAS

We have in store some of the finest built guitars ever made .Collings guitars are exquisitely.hand crafted in Texas USA without compromise featured i30LC Faded Cherry

YAMAHA

As one of the UK's major stockists of Japanese Yamaha instruments we keep nearly every model in stock or on order at all times,including SA, SG, Revstar and signature model electric & basses. plus their superb Acoustic guitars.

DUESENBERG

Here at Musicstreet we are the UK Flagship for these Premium grade stylish guitars from Germany. Joe Walsh, Elvis Costello, John Mayer all play Duesy's

H.S.Anderson

Every HS Anderson Madcat guitar is handbuilt in the original Moridaira Factory by Japanese craftsmen. We are the UK's exclusiive dealer for Madcat £2579

Lowden

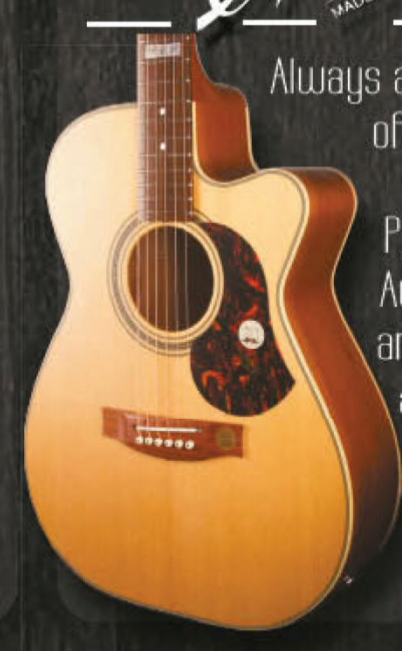
We are honoured to be one of the handful of UK Authorised dealers for Lowden Guitars. Each collection in the Lowden Range features distinctive appointments with a selection of tone woods and custom options

Eastman

Beautiful, Affordable Handcrafted Archtops, Thinline Semi's, and LP Style Guitars

Featured is the new uniquely designed Romeo LA

Maton MADE IN AUSTRALIA



Always a great selection of Maton in store.

Plug one of these Aussie beauties in and find out what all the fuss is about

Featured Tommy Emmanuel EBG808CE-TE £2299

REAL-TIME STOCK ONLINE | PART EXCHANGE WELCOME | NEXT DAY DELIIVERY

sign up to our newsletter online for exclusive deals and priority notification of workshops & masterclasses

WWW.MUSICSTREET.CO.UK - TELEPHONE 01480 431222

NEVILLE'S ADVOCATE

Double Date

Neville Marten admits to slightly quaking in the boots over a gig – a kind of 'Blues Headlines live', with some fine players on show

You may recall that last year I recorded the first ever album of my own compositions and called it *The Blues Headlines*. I had a bunch of CDs made up and Mick is still kindly selling them from the *That Pedal Show* shop. My mate Adrian Nash, who played all the keys and sang harmonies on my album, has produced one of his own, called *Straight Lines*, with many of the musicians overlapping. So we had an idea...

Another friend does the marketing for Komedia, an immensely cool venue in Bath, and she suggested we have a combined album launch event where we play both of them live with a full band. Both albums will go up on the streaming platforms that day, too.

"With fewer than 100 days until the show as I write this, I'd better start practising singing and playing the songs at the same time..."

The band will feature Richard Pardy, the wonderful saxophonist who played on both albums; Jim Martin, another old friend and an excellent pedal steel and fiddle player; and the amazing Richard Barrett, who you'll know from his columns and video demos in this very magazine, as well as the *Guitarist* Tone Lounges that we do online together. The rhythm section is fab, too – featuring Neil Robinson on drums and Jon Durno on bass – and all the musicians are busy playing with some of the top names around. We'll even have backing singers (Adrian's daughters Sophie and Victoria), so it'll be a full 10-piece band.

Singing Ade's songs is American vocalist Sara Brimer Davey, who spent several years with the amazing Swingles a cappella group. Ade's stuff is more like sophisticated pop, with rock and country leanings, while mine pushes quite a bit more into the bluesier side of things. They sit very comfortably together, though, and we are both flattered to have such immense talents contributing.

Sadly, Roger Newell, who played bass on most of my album, and Dee Hunter who did backing vocals on both and some piano on Adrian's, have both passed away since the recordings, so the gig will be tinged with sadness. But I know they'd both tell us to give 'em hell, so we'll do our best to live up to their much-missed talents and personalities.

The date, now confirmed, is Sunday 27 February. We'd rather not play to three people and a dog, so I'd love it if as many folk came as possible. Yes, of course, it's something of a vanity project, but it's very exciting (not to mention rather scary) for me to be doing such a thing at this time of my life. Tickets are already on sale at www.komedia.co.uk.

I'm already sweating over which guitars to use. On both albums I played my red Strat and butterscotch Tele, plus I'll probably get a system put in my Martin OM-42 to use on the strummy numbers. Quite coincidentally, all three instruments feature in the *Guitarist* calendar that comes with this issue. I'll have to blag my Goldtop Tom Murphy Les Paul back from Mick, who's still wowing his *TPS* fans with it. Or should I take the 335? And whether to use an actual backline amp, my Helix or indeed the new 'board that Mick and Dan are in the process of building for me, I've not yet decided.

With fewer than 100 days until the show as I write this (not that I'm counting!), I'd better start practising singing and playing the songs at the same time; I've not actually done that yet because guitars and vocals were recorded separately. We'll set up a Facebook page for the event, hopefully with song clips, updates and more information about the players involved. And if you do come, Richard and I will be more than happy to talk nerdy guitar stuff with any *Guitarist* or *Guitar Techniques* readers.

On a related topic, Jamie and I are also talking with Komedia about the creation of 'The 12-Bar Club', a possible monthly jam event that we would host. If things can be worked out, it would be great to do it with a regular house band so people could put their name down to get up and have a play, and maybe even have some special guests. Watch this space. See you next time (and maybe even in February). G

GAS OF THE MONTH

At The Crossroads

What? Cordoba C9 'Crossover' Cedar Top, Slim Neck
Where seen? www.gak.co.uk **Price?** £747

Many players love the sound of a nylon-string guitar but are put off by their large necks and wide, flat fingerboards. Several manufacturers now make 'crossover' guitars – essentially classical in style and sound but with narrower necks and radiused 'boards. Cordoba has a great reputation for hand-building quality classicals at very reasonable prices. So if you're thinking of taking the plunge, GAK online currently has the C9 Cedar for a very reasonable £747. It features a solid cedar top, solid mahogany back and sides with rosewood binding, and that much more playable mahogany neck with rosewood fingerboard. It's a purely acoustic instrument, so you'd need to fit a pickup system should you want to use it live, but why not just while away these chilly evenings noodling in front of the fire?

GOOD TO GO
WHENEVER · WHEREVER
Safari
A passion for playing means that inspiration can strike anytime, anywhere. With Elixir® Strings you know that when you pick up your guitar it's going to sound great—time and time again. That's because our featherweight coating protects your strings from the elements, keeping corrosion away and allowing your tone to sound great for longer, in any environment.
Elixir STRINGS
Elixir Strings. Performance-ready with long-lasting tone.
GORE, *Together, improving life,* ELIXIR, NANOWEB, POLYWEB, OPTIWEB, GREAT TONE • LONG LIFE, "e" icon, and designs are trademarks of W. L. Gore & Associates. ©2009-2021 W. L. Gore & Associates, Inc.

CONFESSIONS OF A LUTHIER

Comfort Zone

This issue **Alex Bishop** considers the advantages – and challenges – of adding comfort bevels to the body of an acoustic guitar

Recently, I saw the conclusion of a special guitar that I was commissioned to build almost a year ago. I was challenged to build what was essentially a traditional fingerstyle guitar using an elegantly figured set of English walnut coupled with a dramatic 'bearclaw' Sitka spruce soundboard. This was to be combined with a fingerboard decorated with hand-cut geometric inlays and an asymmetric soundhole rosette. As if that wasn't enough, I was also encouraged to find some creative ways to make the guitar more ergonomic.

"Once you have acquired the technical skills necessary to build a musical instrument, one is obliged to probe the boundaries of the craft"

Readers of this column will likely know by now that I have fairly strong feelings towards innovation in hand-built guitar making. Once you have acquired the multitude of technical skills necessary to build a musical instrument – especially something as complex as an acoustic guitar – one is obliged to probe the boundaries of the craft. At the same time, however, it is extremely difficult to play with any classic guitar design without destroying some of the mysterious mojo that made it so iconic in the first place.

With this in mind, one subtle feature relatively unique to the modern hand-built acoustic guitar is the humble comfort bevel. This concept adds a chamfer to one or more corners of the instrument, usually where the picking arm rests on the bass side of the lower bout, eliminating the discomfort caused by the corner of the guitar jabbing into the forearm. This is nothing new to players of many solidbody electric guitars, but for an acoustic guitar the idea provides some serious construction challenges, and as such production guitar companies have only recently started incorporating them into their higher end models.

Up until now I have always used a 'transitional' arm bevel, whereby the binding on the corner of the body gradually tapers into and out of a 45-degree bevel, creating a smooth seamless look. The unseen challenge here for the maker is to ensure that the decorative purfling lines either side of the binding separate and merge again without any discernible break or join. A matching veneer is overlaid to the outside to create the effect of the binding flowing into and out of the bevel.

In addition to the arm bevel, I decided on this guitar to include a second bevel, this time at the waist on the bass side of the back. This is essentially an acoustic guitar 'belly cut', removing the discomfort of the corners of the guitar poking you in the ribs. Every bevel requires a perfectly fitted internal block, which is very challenging to accurately cut and fit given the undulating curves of the shape of the guitar. I also opted for what I've called 'parallel' bevels, which require mitring multiple pieces of purfling and binding together, significantly increasing the difficulty of the joinery. The result, however, is a bevel that works equally well for players who place their arms in different areas of the guitar, and something that looks that little bit extra special.

On this particular guitar it wasn't just bevels that added to the ergonomics of the guitar. As a regular player of guitars with tailpieces and floating bridges, I've always been a fan of any system that dispenses with the need for bridge pins, in my opinion the nemeses of anyone who has suffered the ignominy of a string change mid-gig. I opted instead for my own take on a fixed pinless bridge, happily finding that there were no apparent sonic implications, either.

The result is a guitar that looks fairly conventional in the hands of the player, displaying all the familiar features and components you might expect. And yet from the point of view of the player, a whole new level of comfort is attained, with the combination of both arm and body bevels providing new levels of comfort that are easily missed when compared with a regular guitar. It's a lot of work for a small gain, I admit, but if it contributes towards pushing guitar design into the 21st century, I'm all for it. G

PHOTO BY ALEX BISHOP

Alex's latest build is an English walnut fingerstyle acoustic that incorporates arm and body bevels for ergonomic benefits and a fixed pinless bridge

Cream T

GUITARS PICKUPS

DESIGNED BY BILLY F GIBBONS & THOMAS NILSEN BUILT IN THE UK

FEATURING PICKUP SWAPPING TECHNOLOGY

CREAMTGUITARS.COM

RAISING THE TONE

Music To Your Ears

Jamie Dickson joins Tom Trones of Minuendo to learn how to avoid the tone-conscious guitarist's worst enemy: hearing loss

Normally, this column focuses on maximising your guitar tone, from fitting new pickups to tweaking amplifier settings. But what if your very ability to hear the sound of your guitar in detail started slipping away? Sadly, that's exactly what happens to too many players – including luminaries such as Brian Setzer and Paul Gilbert – and often it is a permanent condition.

Hearing damage is an occupational hazard for anyone who likes to play loud, but its legacy can be a lifetime of being dogged by tinnitus (intrusive 'phantom' sounds, such as persistent ringing in the ears) or the permanent loss of important parts of your hearing range. It's a nightmare scenario for any musician, but it's also totally avoidable, says Tom Trones, the Norwegian founder of Minuendo, a maker of specialist hearing protection for musicians.

"Damage to your hearing is caused by too-high noise levels over too-long periods," Tom explains. "For musicians, that's typically going to be a risk in rehearsals as they can last up to eight hours a day. Or if you're in the studio tracking, you could be doing 12 hours at a time. It could even be a problem if you are just sitting in your room and practising with the amp cranked up regularly. That can be hours on hours with relatively high noise levels, so over time that really adds up," Tom explains.

So, what is a safe volume level that our ears can tolerate without damage over the course of a working day?

"We can quite safely handle around 85dB over a period of eight hours per day, if the rest of the day is relatively quiet and you can rest your ears," Tom explains. "Having periods in between high-noise exposure to rest your ears is really important. So if you've been rehearsing all day, but then you listen to music quite loud on your earphones on the way home, those are the kinds of situations that can really tip you over the edge in terms of what exposure dosage you had during the day."

For anyone wondering what 85dB sounds like in real-world terms, Tom explains that it's at the upper level of what we might regard as typical daily noise levels.

"It's far away from the pain threshold, but for some it can feel uncomfortable. Normal conversation is around 65dB, perhaps. A rock concert can easily be 100dB to 115dB in some extreme cases. 85dB would be very loud traffic noise, for example, or a regular rehearsal without heavily amplified music or instruments. There are several charts [available online] that show examples of these kinds of decibel level that you can check if you're not sure."

"Imagine a tea kettle going off in your head, 24/7," said Brian Setzer of his "maddening" tinnitus. An audiologist helped him find relief, but his advice to all players? "Please wear some earplugs, now"

Too Much Of A Good Thing

Tom stresses again that hearing damage is usually caused by lengthy exposure to high sound levels, not a single very loud event – even if this runs contrary to musicians' instincts.

"What we tend to hear from musicians is that they have a very specific event that they blame for the onset of tinnitus or hearing damage," he says. "They might say, 'It was that time at soundcheck when the drummer suddenly just blasted the cymbals next to my ear,' or 'That sudden trumpet blaring from behind…' So even though a lot of the damage that we see is actually caused by longterm build-up [of hearing damage], most people have this specific incident that they attribute it to, which may not be entirely correct – but maybe for them that was the last thing that happened before they experienced a noticeable change in either tinnitus or permanent loss of hearing in a specific frequency range."

Tom does add, however, that high-energy midrange and treble frequencies pose a greater threat than bass.

"Generally, a cymbal will be potentially more tinnitus-inducing than a bass drum that is just way too loud. We're able to handle low-frequency noise a lot better as well, so it's not really considered as dangerous," he explains.

Likewise, when hearing damage does occur it's usually not receptivity to bass frequencies that we lose. Instead, it's all the detailed treble that makes music sparkle with clarity and definition, which can have serious consequences that go beyond not being able to enjoy music.

"It's the higher frequencies that go first," Tom says. "That's particularly the case when you get older. There's something called age-induced hearing loss and [any additional damage] speeds that up a bit. So, typically,

Protecting your ears during loud gigs is a no-brainer, but you should also be aware of the risks from regular exposures to high noise levels, such as at band rehearsals or in the recording studio

you'd lose your higher frequencies and that affects how well you perceive language quite rapidly. That really can cause a loss in quality of life as you are not able to be social and communicate in the same way that you're used to."

Alas, as all too many guitarists can confirm, it's not just outright damage to hearing that we risk by not protecting our ears properly. Tinnitus, those irritating phantom sounds that signal we have abused our ears too much, can be a lifelong problem and maddeningly intrusive. Tom explains that nearly all of us will have experienced a temporary form of tinnitus: the ringing in your ears after leaving a loud rehearsal or gig. Thankfully, that usually goes away after an hour or two – but push your hearing too far and tinnitus could become a permanent presence in your life, he explains.

Nagging Noises

"Tinnitus is very highly correlated to hearing loss," Tom says. "So one way of looking at it is: if you have tinnitus, that's a sign that hearing loss has begun in some form. Although it may not be directly measurable, it can either be the start of, or the result of, some form of hearing loss, and that's one of the things that also really deprives people of quality of life."

So, what can guitarists do to protect their ears while still playing hard? As Tom says, taking regular breaks from continuous loud noise is an essential first step, but it's far from the only protective measure you should consider.

> "Musicians tend to blame a very specific event for the onset of hearing damage... but a lot of damage is caused by longterm build-up"

"There are the things like being aware of where you place yourself... just be aware if you're right next to the drums, for example. Breaks, being aware of how you schedule rehearsals, these kind of things are important..."

Of course, protective earplugs can also help a lot and they've come a long way from the crude foam plugs of old. The latest designs, including Minuendo's own lossless hearing protection earplugs, keep the timbre, tone and detail of what you're hearing intact while reducing sound pressure on your eardrums to safe levels. Minuendo's ones are even more flexible because they offer variable attenuation of 7dB to 25db, which is adjusted via a small slider on the earplugs, like a volume control.

While Minuendo's lossless earplugs aren't the only ones on the market that are custom-made for musicians (brands such as Vibes, Alpine and Flare Audio all offer specialist hearing protection), they should definitely be on your list to try out if you want to protect your greatest tonal asset of all: your ability to hear. G

THREE TO GET READY

Gadgets to help protect your hearing

Minuendo Lossless Adjustable Earplugs £128

These next-gen earplugs from Minuendo offer a natural listening experience with a flat frequency response while attenuating loud environments by up to 25dB, though the level is adjustable like a volume control. Minuendo says they stay firmly in place while singing or talking, too.

Two Notes Torpedo Captor X £459

This "all-in-one load box, attenuator, cab simulator, IR loader and more" is great for guitarists who want full-bore valve tone at lower volume levels. Its reactive load attenuator mimics the complex dynamics between an amp and speaker, allowing you to run the amp flat out for juicy tone while turning the audible output down to easy-on-the-ear levels. Sophisticated cab simulators make it a great direct-to-DAW recording tool that could replace loud volumes and mics in your studio.

Yamaha THR5 Modelling Guitar Combo £164

Another route to great tone at modest volumes for practice sessions is a small, high-quality modelling combo. Yamaha started the whole genre with its THR range and this 10-watter is perfect for keeping the sounds hot but the output low. It features five "switchable modelling presets that vary between Clean, Modern, Lead, Brit Hi and Modern amp tones", plus a raft of effects, tuner, a USB 2.0 interface so you can use it for recording into your DAW, and natty, minimalist styling.

Consolidated 9ths

Richard Barrett continues his look at extended chords by focusing in on the different musical varieties of 7ths and 9ths and their usage

Just in case you were wondering, 'consolidated' is not a theoretical term – though I thought it might be a good idea to bring a few different 9ths together in one place, highlighting their differences and similarities both in music theory and on the fretboard. This can help when dealing with all manner of extended chords and harmony in a variety of genres.

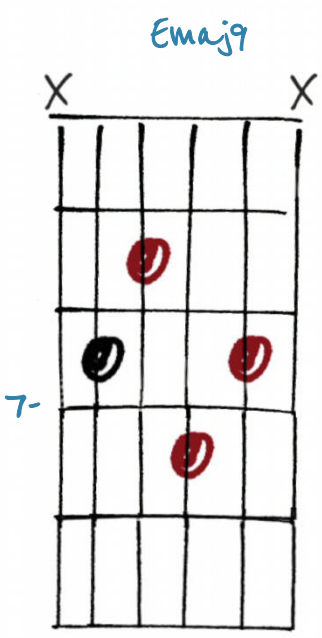
I'm dealing with a couple of different sub-categories here. Major or minor is something I'll assume we're all familiar with. However, major or minor 7ths are also very significant once we start extending chords. With no disrespect intended to the 6th, 7ths really are the bedrock of extended chords. While the 9th, 11th and 13th add detail and melody, unless these are raised or lowered (known as 'altered'), it could be argued that the 7th/major 7th provides the essence of the harmony along with the major/minor 3rd. These examples walk through some possibilities step by step, with a hint of how voice-leading works as an added bonus. G

PHOTO BY NATIONAL JAZZ ARCHIVE/HERITAGE IMAGES VIA GETTY IMAGES

Right: Tal Farlow's chord vocabulary included many variations and different voicings for 7ths and 9ths

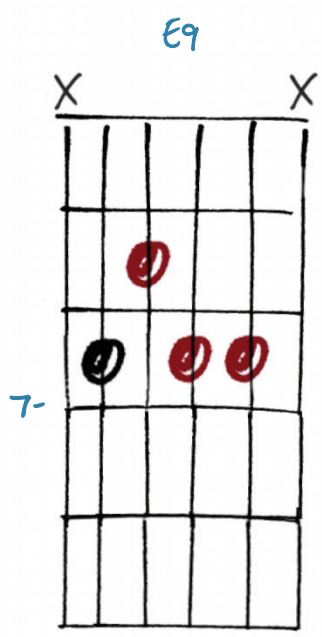
Example 1

In this Emaj9 chord, the 'maj' is referring to the 7th, not the chord itself, which is major unless specified otherwise – this saves having long, unwieldy chord names. We'll deal with adding the major 7th to a minor chord later. As with all of these examples, the highest note is F#, the 9th.



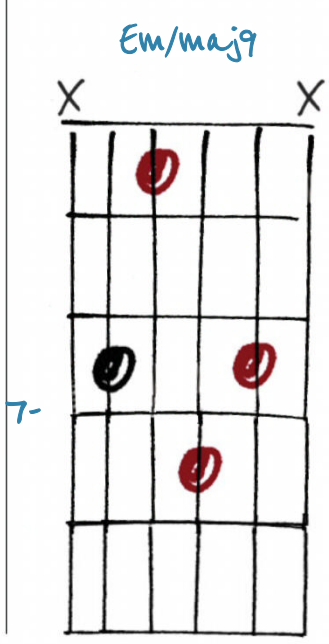
Example 2

Commonly called E9, this chord is built on the foundation of an E dominant 7th, which is another way of describing a ♭7th without getting into the potentially confusing territory of E(♭7) versus E♭7... However, we always name chords such as this from their highest extension, so this is where the 9th comes in. It's very different from an add9, which does not contain any kind of 7th!



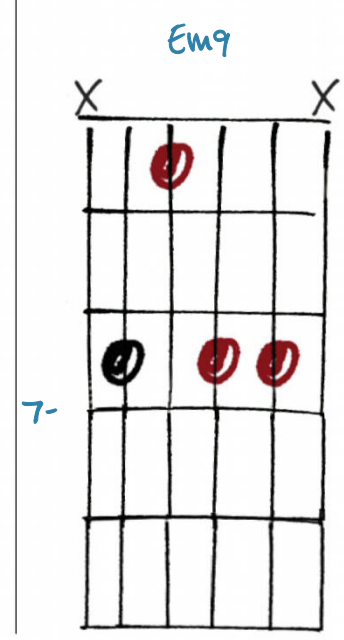
Example 3

As promised, here is what happens when you add a major 7th to a minor chord. This Em/maj9 would be an Em/maj7 if we took the F#/9th away. This is unusually detailed for a chord name because slang terms can develop over time, such as 'the Hendrix chord'. I predict that future generations will refer to this example as 'the Bond chord'!



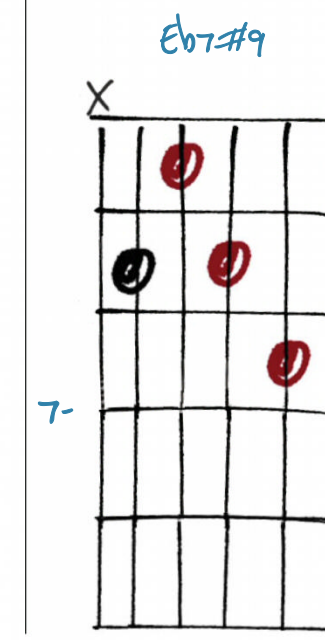
Example 4

Flatten the major 7th of Em/maj9 to a dominant 7th and you get Em9. Remove the F# and this gives you Em7 – less harmonically detailed but basically interchangeable with its jazzier counterpart, as I was explaining earlier. Still, it's interesting how fundamentally we can change the chord elsewhere by simply raising or lowering a semitone...



Example 5

Stepping slightly outside my original premise, this E♭7#9 moves everything but the top note. In the context of the E♭7 triad on the A, D and G strings, F# is now a #9th (not a 9th). This is a nice opportunity to show how moving shapes like this step by step can give an effect similar to the classical device of voice-leading. Also, try 'resolving' to a Dmaj9 using the shape from Example 1.



Phantom Books present...

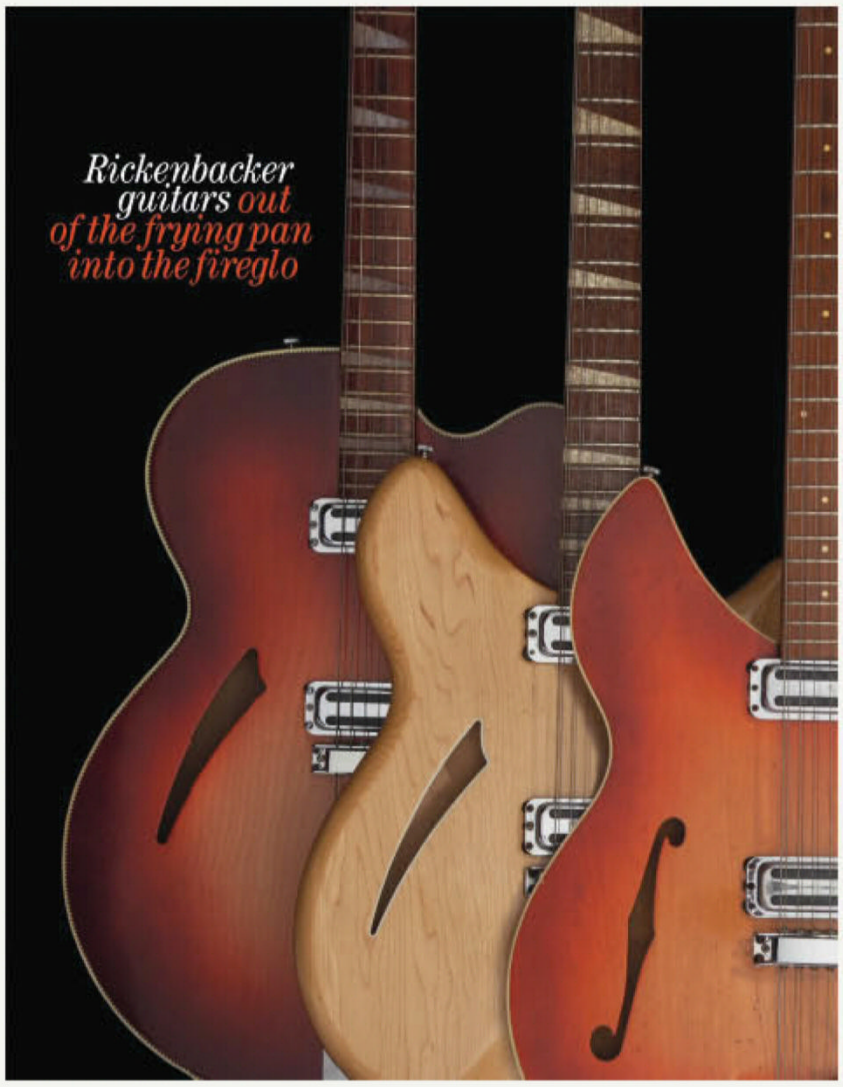
Rickenbacker guitars out of the frying pan into the fireglo

The long anticipated follow up to
Fender The Golden Age 1946-1970
by Martin and Paul Kelly

Available in two editions:
Standard – 336 page soft back
Super Deluxe – limited edition two volume set

Including over 350 original instruments – including all 7 surviving Beatles owned Rickenbackers – plus a wealth of original artifacts and ephemera. The authors have been given unprecedented access to the company archives to make this book the most comprehensive history of the brand to date and a must for all guitar enthusiasts.

Both editions available exclusively from Phantom Books
www.phantombooks.com @rickenbacker_book



Johnny Marr "Knowing Martin and Paul Kelly's perfectionism and attention to detail it's no surprise that this is the ultimate and complete story of all things Rickenbacker."

Phantom Books

Feedback

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

STAR LETTER

SETTING THE TONE

During the lockdown I needed to make space to work from home and, seeing the spare room was full of gear, I had a bit of a clear-out. I sold a USA Tele Standard, Epi Casino and my gigging amp – a Mesa/Boogie Express with 1x12 extension cab. Even on five watts it was proving a bit much for the house...

With the Mesa gone, I was left to play with my Boss Katana Mk1 practice amp. I know these things are good, and I have even gigged with mine on a couple of occasions. However, where I struggled was getting a nice lead tone from the amp... then I had an idea. Whose lead tone would I like and can I dial it in? On went *Ghosts* by Big Wreck and I went in search of some Ian Thornley tones. Armed with my Custom 24 in drop D♭ I started to dial in while streaming a couple of tracks. The result? I was able to dial in a really great tone, much more driven and less wiry than before. I'm really happy with the preset now named 'Ghost'.

So, if you're struggling to find the right tone, stick on the music you love as a reference point and give it a go. Worked for me!

Matthew Abbott, via email

Great idea, and the highly adaptable Katana is an ideal vehicle for tonal exploration. Copying the tone on favourite tracks is an interesting one as the recorded tone will usually have been fed through rackmount compressors, EQ and so on. So we're not necessarily hearing the tone the guitarist would have heard in the room. Another interesting thing to consider is, if you isolate the guitar track from the rest of the mix, you'll learn that tone gets sculpted to sit in the mix nicely, not always to sound incredible in isolation.

For all that, it's still valuable to emulate tones as we hear them on records: they are the sounds we fall in love with, the sounds the mind perceives as being natural and exciting. With a great recording as a template, we can home in on the right amount of gain, mids, bass, treble and so on to please our ears. And to help you sound even better, we're sending you this fantastic Korg tuner!

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

The Blade RH-15C ticks all the boxes for reader Dave Kirkpatrick

PRAISE FOR BLADE

I'd like to give a mention to Blade guitars, which seem to be somewhat under-represented in the guitar press. I bought a Blade RH-15C from Guitar Village a few months ago. It's a great guitar and plays so well with a wealth of excellent tones, straight or via the built-in VSC preamp. It's a well-made instrument, too, typical of other Korean guitars I've played. I have some more expensive instruments – and I've also played many guitars over a 61-year playing career – but I keep going back to this one. It's a keeper.

Dave Kirkpatrick, via email

Thanks for the welcome reminder of the benefits of a Blade, Dave. The editor of this mag was a happy owner of one of the company's Delta model T-style electrics for many years and found it a really capable workhorse, with its Variable Spectrum Control circuit great for covering everything from classic single-coil tones to PAF-like fat overdrive. We reviewed a Blade RH-4 Classic 30th Anniversary DMG back in 2019 and found the solid Blade build and versatile functionality as relevant as ever. Do any other readers have any brands that are relatively unsung but reckon deserve to be used more widely?

MOD THOSE ROCKERS!

For years, I have used the clean channel on my trusty [Marshall] TSL601 combo and have employed overdrives/distortions/boosters, etc, to colour the sound as necessary. Until, that is, the covers band I'm in (Harris Tweed & The Mystery Machine) did a gig at Ferryhill in County Durham in October to say a big 'thank you' to the NHS. There was a punk band

CIRRUS

SPATIAL-TEMPORAL MODIFIER

Floating above your head, delicate and elusive, yet dreamy and sweeping.

Always in motion, until it dissolves and merges with the all immersive atmosphere around it.

Just close your eyes and let the **KMA Machines' Cirrus Delay and Reverb** carry you across the open sky, onto its sonic cloudscapes.

KMA MACHINES
BERLIN

www.kma-machines.com

Audio Distribution Group

Worldwide Distribution by Audio Distribution Group - **Building Brands Together**

sales@audiodistributiongroup.com

Douglas Mummery's 'board was chock-full of dirt pedals until he had a mod and re-valve on his Marshall amp for £200 and discovered a wealth of pristine and luscious tone

(The Fused) on after us and as I heard the guitarist tune up, I saw a Stoneham amp. I was amazed and, as my trusted Marshall was overdue for a pit-stop, I called Martin Ballinger at Stoneham to book it in and ask if he could make it sound like one of his. 'Yes to everything,' he said. 'Bring it in.' When I got it back, I had a totally new and radically revoiced amplifier. I then removed all but one of my many dirt pedals from my 'board and started to tinker with the new and reimagined channels on the amp instead.

The new sounds I'm hearing can only be described as pristine, sublime and luscious. I have discovered rich harmonics and overtones I have never heard in my playing – all because I took the leap and had my amp modded by a guy who is passionate about the Holy Grail that is tone. A mod and total re-valve was only £200.

The lesson here is this: examine what your amp can do. It's probably got most of the sounds you will ever need already available to you. I sold some of my war-torn effects for far more than I paid Stoneham for this simple mod. So start experimenting, your amp will probably surprise you.

Douglas Mummery, via email

Thanks, Douglas. While we're big fans of pedals here at the mag, there's a wealth of tone within any good amp, much as there is a wealth of sounds within a good guitar. You're right to suggest that the standard route to getting drive tones dialled in these days is often overdrive pedals – but when you consider that most of the really great drive tones from the 60s and 70s were achieved without much more than a treble booster pedal or fuzz at most, it opens your eyes to the power of working with the amp to get those girthy, three-dimensional gain tones going. Now, with the advent of sophisticated attenuators, you don't have to bust your eardrums to get the amp working in its sweet spot, either.

Great tip about Stoneham amps. We've featured them on our YouTube channel before – but we promise to look into them for our review pages now, too.

BIG IN JAPAN

In 2016, I was looking for a Les Paul Junior. I naturally avoided the harshly criticised 2015 robot-tuner-brass-nutted-baseball-necked ones that Gibson had released the year before, even if listed relatively cheap online. I ended up on the website of a famous Brighton-based retailer where a mysteriously named 'Gibson USA 2016 Limited Les Paul Junior (Vintage Sunburst) available for the Japanese market only' was for sale, brand-new.

The LPJ in question looks like a '57-spec model with wraparound bridge (not compensated). Here's the only specs I've been able to find out: mahogany body, mahogany neck, nut width 1.69 inches, fingerboard width at 12th fret 2.06 inches, neck thickness at 1st fret 0.81 inches, neck thickness at 12th fret 0.89 inches, vintage white machineheads, single P-90 pickup, and fitted brown Gibson USA hardshell case.

To this day, I have never regretted my choice and this guitar is a proper beast and a favourite in my ever-growing collection. This whole story makes me wonder how it could be possible in this age of the internet that not a single page or review on the world wide web was dedicated to this guitar, even on US or Japanese websites or video streaming channels.

Is this normal practice for Gibson? Is the Japanese market so important and huge that some models are issued for that market only? And how, in this case, this particular model made its way to the UK market, being sold as a brand-new guitar?

Marco Lima, via email

The Japanese market has, as you say, been treated to some really special Japan-only models over the years, especially Gibsons. And yes, its size and consumer tastes mean Japan warrants this treatment. At one stage, it even had its own Japan-built, Gibson-derived electrics in the guise of the Orville (as in Orville Gibson) brand of instruments, which has a cult following. How did it make its way to England? We'd need more info to guess how it came to be sold new here, but the retailer might be able to put you in the picture. Perhaps it was the guitar equivalent of the so-called grey imports found in the car world, where specialist Japan-only products are brought into the UK outside of the normal distribution network. Has anyone else got a rare Japan-only electric that readers might like to see? Or any good stories about bringing back nice guitars from Japan?

REQUESTS...

Want to see something in the mag? Tell us at guitarist@futurenet.com

Perhaps *Guitarist* magazine could occasionally feature a spot called 'Reader's Rigs' where readers could provide details and pictures of their guitar setups for other readers' general interest?

Tony Bilny, via email

Great idea, Tony, we'll give it a whirl. If you fancy sending your rig in to be featured in these pages, send us a clear, high-resolution digital pic by email of your guitar, amp and pedalboard setup along with up to 100 words on why it puts a smile on your face when you play. We'll print the best here.

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

THE FUTURE OF GREAT BRITISH GUITARS NEEDS YOU

2022 is going to be an exciting year for Gordon Smith and Auden guitars as we bring the production of both brands under one roof in a brand new workshop.

As part of this move we are growing our team of guitar builders and support staff.

WE ARE RECRUITING

- CAD Designers
- Woodworkers
- Luthiers
- Electronics Experts
- Spray Room Operatives
- Sales Manager
- Marketing Manager
- Administrator/ Sales Support Staff
- Apprentices

All positions will be based in East Northants with starting dates throughout 2022

Gordon Smith

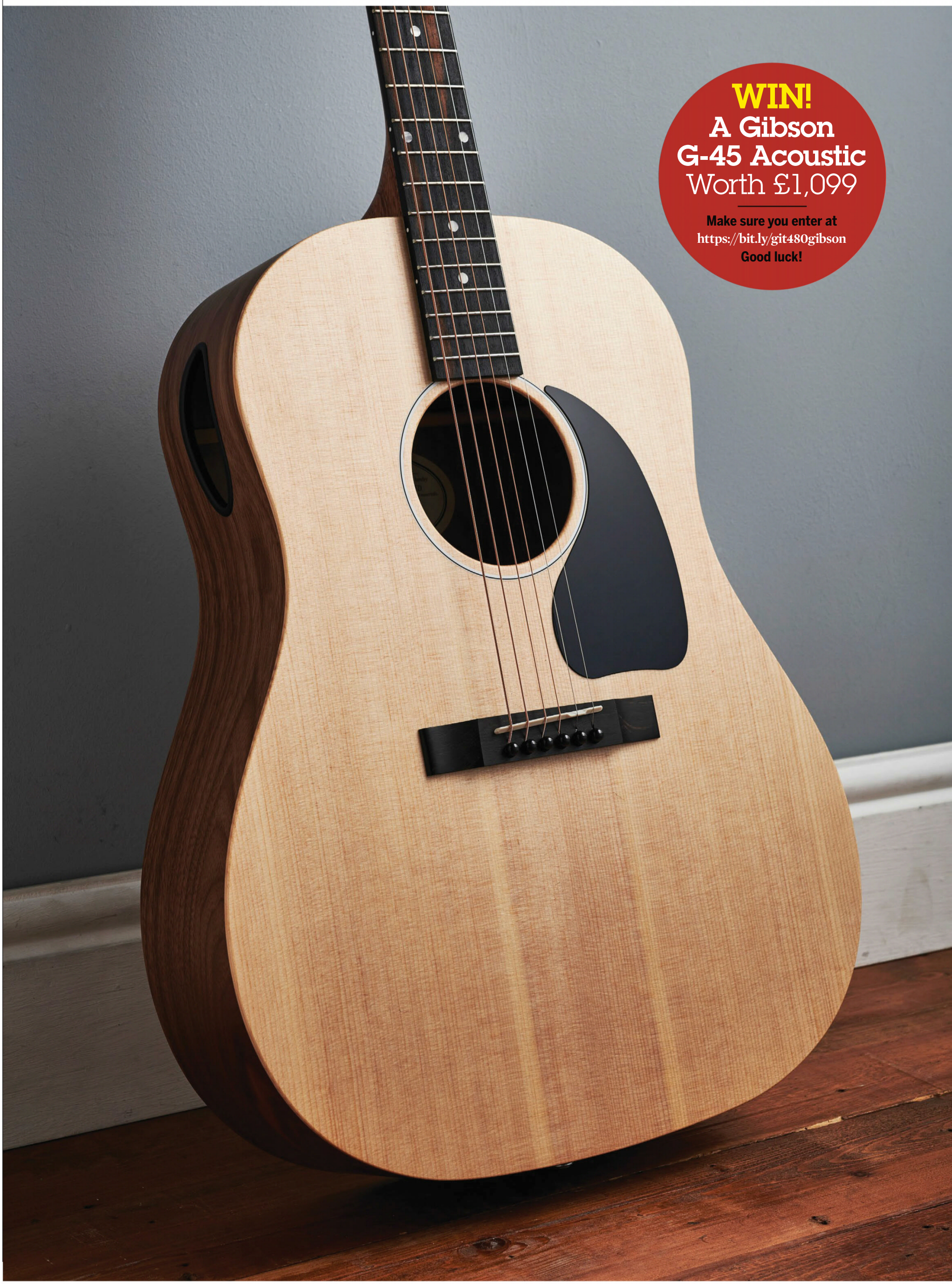
TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THESE ROLES AND APPLY, VISIT:

www.gordonsmithguitars.com/join-us

www.audenguitars.com/join-us

No Agencies

AUDEN


WIN!
A Gibson
G-45 Acoustic
Worth £1,099
Make sure you enter at
https://bit.ly/git480gibson
Good luck!

Gibson

WIN!

A Gibson G-45 Acoustic

Worth £1,099

CLOSING DATE:
4 February 2022

MAKE SURE YOU ENTER AT https://bit.ly/git480gibson BEFORE THE CLOSING DATE GOOD LUCK!

Take home this next-generation acoustic built in Bozeman, Montana

One of the only drawbacks of a traditional acoustic guitar is that the player never gets to hear it in the same way as someone in the audience will. With Gibson's Generation Collection of acoustic guitars, however, all that changes. Inspired by a 1964 blueprint recently unearthed from Gibson's archive, the new Generation Collection guitars feature a 'Player Port' that is, effectively, a second soundhole on the side of the guitar that immerses the player in the full voice of the guitar as they play. Now, one of these fantastic new acoustics could be yours, if you enter our competition to win a G-45 acoustic worth £1,099 from the Generation Collection.

Taking its timeless outline from Gibson's celebrated J-45 round-shouldered dreadnought, the G-45 updates this classic design with the addition of the Player Port and a raft of contemporary design tweaks, offering easy strumming and picking and an expansive sound you have to experience. Built in Bozeman, Montana, alongside Gibson's heritage models, the G-45 has back and sides built of lightweight, attractively grained walnut complemented by a Sitka spruce top for a crisply defined yet warm tone. Playability is also enhanced by a flatter fingerboard than traditional designs married to a fast, slim neck profile.

Whether you're just noodling on the sofa at home or recording an unplugged album, the G-45 brings you a little closer to the heart of the guitar's tone. In his review of the Generation Collection, *Guitarist*'s David Mead added this of the versatile G-45: "It has an open airiness with great definition and clarity – and an extra helping of bass that doesn't muddy up, even with some heavy-handed strumming. There's plenty of volume on hand, too. A quality acoustic."

To be in with a chance of becoming the proud owner of a brand-new G-45, answer the question below correctly. Good luck!

In what year was Gibson's classic J-45 first built?

A) 1940
B) 1942
C) 1952

UK entrants only. To enter and for full T&Cs, head to the link above.

JERRY CANTRELL

Guitarist catches up with the Alice In Chains founder who is currently riding high with a brand-new solo album, *Brighten*, in the can, along with his very own Gibson signature model, the Jerry Cantrell 'Wino' Les Paul Custom

Words Rod Brakes

Jerry Cantrell is speaking to *Guitarist* from Los Angeles where, earlier this year, he finished work on his latest solo album, *Brighten*. Following up 2002's *Degradation Trip*, the 'lockdown record' was a colossal team effort that spanned the breadth of the country from LA to New York during some of the most challenging times the music industry has ever faced. But then again, "I don't remember any record I've made being easy," says the Alice In Chains guitarist. "When you've been doing this as long as we have, you've got the benefit of knowing you've got there before. So when there are moments of doubt, you recognise that it's just part of the process."

How do you maintain your excitement for Alice In Chains?

"It'll be 34 years in December [2021]. I like to think some things have changed, obviously. But at the core, the reasons I do it and how I go about doing it are pretty intact. You go with what you feel. I felt like this was something I wanted to do, and once we started doing it, I felt it was something I wanted to get better at. I was and still am part of an amazing band in two different chapters of life."

Not to mention your multiple collaborations and solo records...

"I've been able to play with a lot of cool people outside of the band. I've made three [solo] records now and I've also been able to do some cool shit on other people's records and soundtracks. I guess the thing I like about it all is that no matter what you've done, you always have to start from zero. It's a blank chalkboard every time. You cannot rely on what you did before. You can't try to recreate something you did – that's done. It's over.

"People ask themselves, 'Can I do this again?' And that can be daunting. I try not to spend too much time thinking about it because it can be a mental impediment if you're trying to beat something or compete with something from the past."

How do you know when the music is working for you?

"There is an equation: if it hits the same satisfaction that you got writing those other songs and it brings an emotion out of you in the same way then you're going to be fine. And I still feel that way."

Is songwriting is your central focus?

"There are different facets. There's the young kid in me that just wants to plug in and rock out and play guitar. And I kind of developed a songwriting style along with that. And then I developed into being a singer as well, so it's a mix of all three. But the highest bar I'm always shooting for is to write a good song – trying to make a good tune."

What's your process? How do you go about writing a song?

"My process is kind of a collection process. But that process takes a while – and after a while you've got a basketful of ideas. And you start sifting through that, like, 'Okay, what can I make out of this? Take this, take that, grab this, fuckin' mix it all together and see what it makes.' Y'know what I mean?

"But I'll document stuff. If there is something that makes my head do the RCA dog thing and tilt to the side, like, 'What the fuck's that? That's cool!' Y'know what I mean? That's something I have that I can rely on, and so I'm very thankful for that. I try to listen to that. If I'm getting that vibe on something, it's worth checking out and exploring."

When it comes to making an album, that's when the hard work starts...

"There is something to say for just hard fuckin' work and grinding it out

“No matter what you’ve done, you always have to start from zero. It’s a blank chalkboard every time. You cannot rely on what you did before”

PHOTO BY JONATHAN WEINER

and being committed to something. That is a huge part of being good at anything. And you've got to throw in a big chunk of luck. You mix all that up and that's what makes it possible to do what I do."

The recording process for your new album, *Brighten*, was unusual. Tell us about that.
"Yeah, well, we had to do some tracking by sharing files [due to global lockdowns], which I'd never really done before. Usually, we're all stuck in a room together. But it was really good. Abe [Laboriel Jr, drummer] was locked down in New York, and of course I was here in Los Angeles. But, luckily, we had the guide tracks because [drummer] Gil Sharone tracked them with me. And then he did a fantastic job on the record as well. I think it's a really nice split between Gil and Abe.

"We sent tracks back and forth between us a few times. But everybody on this record is a pro. You don't need to prod them too much; it's just finding the language together. It feels like a band. Even though it's two bands' worth of people on the record. It takes a lot of people to make a record, going through that journey starting from a zero. It's not just me. My buddies Tyler Bates and Paul Figueroa co-produced it with me. And Joe Barresi did an excellent mix."

"If [new music] hits the same satisfaction you got writing other songs and brings an emotion out of you then you're going to be fine"

The mix sounds great.
"It sure does. Joe is a badass. One of these days, I'm going to let him produce a record. He's mixed the last two. We need to explore that. I'd like to work with him on that. I like the production end of it, too – putting it all together. It's something I've always enjoyed and been a part of."

The sound of the acoustic guitar on *Black Hearts And Evil Done* is beautiful. How did you capture that tone on record?
"*Black Hearts And Evil Done* was recorded using the Gibson Songwriter, and I had to re-record that at the last minute because Barresi wasn't having it, man. He wasn't having the fuckin' track that Fig[ueroa] and I recorded for him. He was like, 'I can hear this chair squeaking, man! I can't have this. You guys didn't hear that?!" [Laughs]

"He was like, 'Sit down and record that again. And I think we need to take this down to more of a sombre, cleaner one-guitar approach.' And, you know what? He was right. I recut it on the spot. It's just that one track in the verses."

1. The G&L Rampage has been a part of Jerry's sound for decades. His signature version is a stripped-down model that "could be [EVH] Frankenstein's nephew", he says

2. On stage with William DuVall and Alice In Chains, the band he co-founded back in 1987

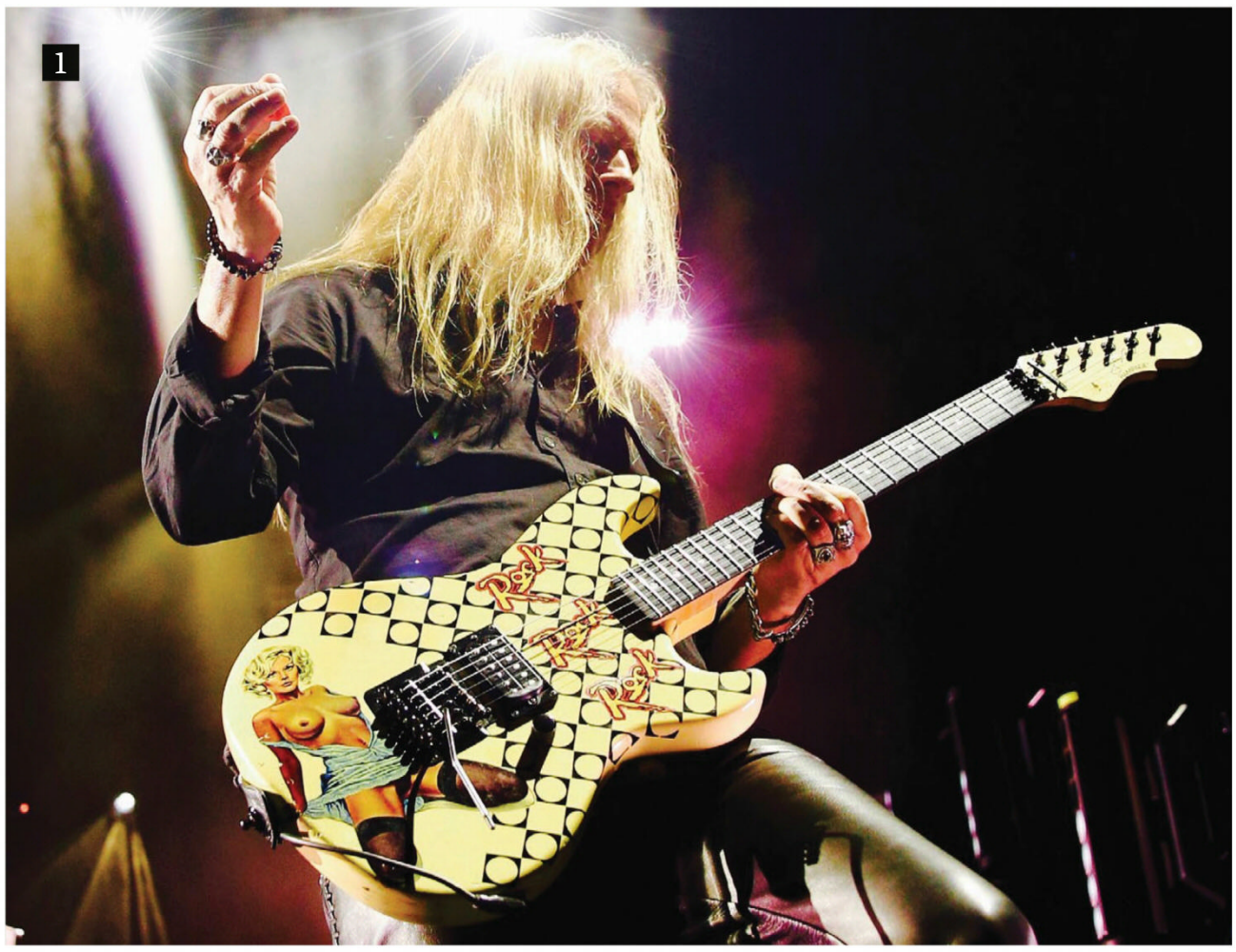


PHOTO BY SCOTT DACHROEDEN

***Siren Song* also has some great-sounding guitar parts, with a bit of a Morricone vibe thrown in.**
"Yeah, that's a sexy tune, man. There's a real richness to that. People really react to *Siren Song*. And [first single] *Atone*. They're completely different songs and have nothing to do with one another, but they feel related. They both evoke really rich imagery. I see different takes on a movie every time I listen, depending on what mood I'm in. They're both very visual songs."

It's a very unique-sounding album. And it was a unique experience by all accounts...
"It was a unique experience and I think it's a unique record in my career. I'm really grateful it turned out as good as it did, and for all the players to rally like they did through that difficulty. And for me to make a lot of new friends, while getting to rock again with some old ones."

Speaking of old friends, your signature Les Paul looks interesting, particularly the Fishman Powerbridge piezo pickup.
"I give a lot of credit for that design to my guitar tech, Brian Herb. We do a lot of acoustic type stuff and I thought it would be nice to get a little bit more of an acoustic sound but with an electric feel. So Brian put that together for me and it's been really cool. You can go back and forth between acoustic and electric vibes. Gibson ended up incorporating that into the design – because that's how the guitar is set up now and has been for a number of years."

The controls are slightly different, too, aren't they?
"They are. It's a little weird. I'm neither the luthier nor the designer that Eddie Van Halen was, but I always appreciated the fact that he tinkered with his guitars. And I tinker with mine in my limited way. My G&L [Rampage signature] might not be Frankenstein, but it could be Frankenstein's nephew. It's got a Kahler tremolo system but a Floyd Rose nut. And it's gone through a couple of different pickups."

Have G&L and Gibson guitars always been your instruments of choice?
"I've always been a big admirer of Gibson guitars. I've played them for most of my career alongside G&L

"I'll document stuff. If something makes my head do the RCA dog thing and tilt to the side… If I'm getting that vibe, it's worth exploring"

2

PHOTO BY SCOTT DACHROEDEEN

guitars. A lot of my sound is the blend between the two, y'know? But I love Les Pauls. In the late 70s, I asked my dad for a Les Paul – kids aren't known for being that realistic, right? I wrote on a little piece of paper, 'This is all I want.' [Laughs] Come Christmas, there was a guitar-shaped present underneath the tree. Unfortunately, it was an acoustic guitar, which didn't really hold my interest. But a Les Paul was something I always wanted – and now I have my own model!"

When did you get your first Les Paul?
"I ordered four from Gibson in the early 90s. I went from not being able to afford one to all of a sudden buying four. I was making up for lost time. I still have those original four that I bought in '92 or '93. They're all different colours: white, black, blue and red."

You must have felt as if all your Christmases came at once. How do they compare?
"They sound pretty close, but they all have little personalities. It also depends on what guitars go through. I mean, finger sweat, gigs, additions, tweaks, injuries... broken headstocks! I think out of the four, the Wino is the only one that hasn't had its headstock broken off multiple times. The other three have had at least two decapitations each."

Some people swear a headstock break improves a Les Paul...
"Sometimes, yeah. It's like what they say when you break your arm or leg: it's stronger there when it's healed than it is around the surrounding healthy area. The white one, I actually did the whole writing session for *Degradation Trip* on that guitar when it had a cracked neck. I mean, you could see through the break, but it held together well enough to hold tune. I spent three or four months writing on that guitar. I was like, 'Okay, you're in this with me, I'm in this with you. I don't know how you're holding it together, and I don't know how I'm holding it together.' It got fixed before I did, but I got fixed pretty quick after that. We both needed a little recovery – the guitar and me [laughs]."

PHOTO BY GIBSON

3. Jerry's signature Gibson 'Wino' Les Paul Custom features a Fishman Powerbridge piezo pickup to capture the acoustic sounds he likes to explore. He credits his guitar tech, Brian Herb, for his help with the guitar's development

"I did the whole writing session for [my last album] on a Les Paul with a cracked neck… We both needed a little recovery – the guitar and me"

But you were soon back on your feet playing with Camp Freddy.
"Camp Freddy was cool. Matt Sorum, Dave Navarro, Billy Duffy, Billy Morrison... I love all those guys. It was good being able to hang out and jam in early sobriety in a safe environment with guys that I partied my ass off with, who were like, 'You can do this, dude. We're just as nuts as you are and it's totally possible.' So it was a cool no-pressure kind of environment."

How did you feel facing the world again in early recovery? Were you excited by the possibilities that life had to offer?
"I've been lucky enough to be able to stick around. Life's full of endings and new beginnings. It's just one after the other. Hopefully you're aware and able to reset every once in a while. And it's okay for your shit to fall apart. That's life, y'know? When you're ready, get yourself back up and hit it again. Life's cyclical, and we all go through the same shit."

Is there anything you've yet to fully explore in your career?
"I don't know what the future brings, but it's open. I would like to get more into film. I love the marriage of music and film. I've done songs and I've done some jamming on stuff, but I've never scored a movie. That would be interesting if it was the right film and the right fit." G

Jerry Cantrell's new solo album, *Brighten*, is out now via independent release
https://jerrycantrell.com

PETER ROCKLIN FINE ART

" STARS & GUITARS " OIL PAINTING ON PANEL 120cm x 120cm

GUITAR PORTRAITS
PAINTINGS IN OIL & ACRYLICS

WWW.PETERROCKLIN.COM

Studio / Gallery 07812 570752

INSTAGRAM. @PETERROCKLINFINE ART

GEAR OF THE YEAR

However you play, there's going to be a way to sound great that seems tailor-made for you (and your pocket). Such is the breadth , utility and quality of the guitar gear scene in 2021, the real problem may be finding exactly what works best for you among the sprawling ranges of the giant US and Japanese gear makers – but also among the many small makers turning out brilliant guitars, amps and effects all over the world.

In the following pages, you might just find your answer. They contain 40 hand-picked favourites from what has been, despite the long shadow of Covid, a really interesting and, at times, revelatory year in gear reviews here at *Guitarist*. We've played electrics that were better than anything we'd yet encountered and delved deep into digital amps that fully blurred the line between analogue hardware and simulation. The best of every category of important gear – from affordable electrics to inspiring overdrives – has been set down here, in the hope that it might help you get more enjoyment from your music in the year ahead.

But first a word on how this year's Gear Of The Year winners were chosen. The candidates were initially selected from a longlist that scored either a *Guitarist* Choice or a rare and coveted Gold award in our reviews pages. We also allowed one or two wildcard entries from gear that just missed out on a Choice first time round, but proved itself in longterm testing and gigging. This already outstanding list was then hotly debated by our reviewers until, when the smoke finally cleared, we were left with 40 stone-cold modern classics to recommend to you. So, join us as we invite 2021's champion tone-makers up to the podium...

8A Inferno
PRESET
QUADCORTEX
VOLUME
TEMPO
A
B
C
D
F
G
H
SPEED
INTENSITY

18+

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

the biggest Internet portal, providing you various content: brand new books, trending movies, fresh magazines, hot games, recent software, latest music releases.

Unlimited satisfaction one low price
Cheap constant access to piping hot media
Protect your downloadings from Big brother
Safer, than torrent-trackers

18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

All languages
Brand new content
One site

AVXLIVE.ICU

AvaxHome - Your End Place

We have everything for all of your needs. Just open https://avxlive.icu

GEAR OF THE YEAR

SOLIDBODY ELECTRICS

From versatile workhorses to retro rockers, this sub-£1k collection delivers with style

Words: ***Dave Burrluck***

Gretsch G2215-P90 Streamliner Jr Jet Club

We ordered this guitar just so we could perform surgery on it for The Mod Squad, and it turned up ready to go in considerable style. It's a rare fully solid slab-bodied bolt-on from Gretsch, made from nato, with a boutique-style pickup-mismatch that pairs a Broad'Tron BT-2S humbucker at the bridge with a P90 Soap Bar single coil in the neck position. But what particularly impressed us was the rather good build with a 'Thin U' profile neck – that's much more shallow C than its spec suggests – supplied with a very tidy setup. "It's a lot of guitar, with plenty of potential," we said. "A grab-and-go axe that won't break the bank. Game on!"

Price: ***£370*** *Website:* ***www.gretschguitars.com***

Epiphone Crestwood Custom

This rather tidy repro of Epiphone's Crestwood, originally released back in 1958, was another low-cost guitar that really impressed us, particularly in its details. It's powered by a pair of Epiphone Pro mini-humbuckers and loads on a Tremotone vibrato, which proved a lot easier to restring than a Bigsby. "The Crestwood Custom is the big surprise," said reviewer Neville Marten. "The Pro mini-humbuckers are spectacularly good. Clean, they retain an open clarity that's bright but never piercing. Add a nice drive pedal and it's one of the most musical sounds around. Try some dirty slide with both pickups on – it's Texas blues-rock heaven!"

Price: ***£489*** *Website:* ***www.epiphone.com***

Cort G300 Pro

Along with building a staggering number of guitars for numerous brands, including PRS and Manson Guitar Works, Cort's own-brand instruments have really impressed us in recent years. There's an unfussy modernism to the G300 Pro and a spec that includes an American basswood body with a 6mm maple top, bolt-on roasted maple neck, stainless-steel frets and a classic pair of Seymour Duncan humbuckers – a JB at the bridge and Jazz at the neck – with some neat parallel linked single-coil voices from the selector switch. "A difficult guitar to fault," we stated. "A real everyman instrument that could sit in a modern metal band just as easily as a function pop/soul ensemble."

Price: ***£749*** *Website:* ***www.cortguitars.com***

MY YEAR IN GEAR

Originality Be Damned *by Jamie Dickson*

"This year's main electric purchase was an interesting mongrel that I found on sale at World Guitars in Stonehouse. Nestled among a host of sparkling new PRS and Tom Anderson instruments, I spotted what looked like an early 70s Tele Custom with a high-gloss natural finish body plus original electronics and hardware. Closer inspection revealed it had a lovely neck, with honey-coloured lacquer and even a little figuring. The body, however, was a Warmoth replacement. You could tell because it was the proper shape for a Tele – original mid-to-late 70s Teles lost their classic outline due to worn-out tooling at Fender. It turned out the guitar was a project of the late Jeff Pumfrett, who ran World Guitars for many years. It sounded great so I bought it for a very reasonable price, and the lightweight body is actually very welcome. Now, with a clear conscience, I'm getting the body refinished in aged nitro by the talented Scott Cameron at Golden Era Aged Guitars. So, who needs 100 per cent originality?"

PRS SE Custom 24-08

It was hardly surprising PRS didn't celebrate the 20th anniversary of its 'offshore' SE range in the middle of a pandemic, but we're going to put that right. What started in 2001 as a single-model introduction is now a huge part of PRS's business, and with production in Indonesia, made by Cor-Tek, the quality is impressive.

The Custom 24-08 is one of many takes on PRS's classic design, but it adds extra sounds – a total of eight – from two additional mini-toggle switches. It was actually a favourite of Paul Reed Smith's guitars from the early 80s, especially those he made for Carlos Santana. But the Custom 24-08 and the standard Custom 24 also received a slightly different "shallow violin carve" treatment to their top carve, moving them subtly closer to the contours of the much more expensive USA Core models.

PRS's classic 'halfway' 635mm (25-inch) scale length is retained here along with a 24-fret fingerboard, vibrato and dual zebra humbuckers, which are Indonesian-made 'S' versions of the coveted USA 'TCI' pickups, as used on the Core Paul's Guitar, and split beautifully via those two mini-toggle switches. With superb craft and great sounds, this is a guitar with huge potential.

Price: ***£899*** ***Website:*** ***www.prsguitars.com***

GEAR OF THE YEAR

SOLIDBODY ELECTRICS

British craft and forward-looking design won our votes among the mid-priced players

Words: ***Dave Burrluck***

Gordon Smith Gatsby

You don't need us to tell you the 'offset' – loosely based on Fender's Jazzmaster and Jaguar – has been in vogue in recent years. And there have been some excellent designs, as well as downsized iterations, such as this stylish Gatsby from the UK longest-running electric guitar maker, Gordon Smith. Based around a Fender scale, the Gatsby uses a very good offset-style vibrato with a roller-saddle tune-o-matic, and – for once with this style – tuning stability isn't a problem. There are cracking sounds from the 'Homewound' soapbar single coils in chromed covers, too. And while this Launch Edition model came in a choice of seven colours, there's now a custom option to create your own Gatsby.

Price: ***From £1,299*** *Website:* ***www.gordonsmithguitars.com***

Strandberg Boden Original NX 6

Headless guitars aren't for everyone, but you shouldn't judge until you plug in. This is a small, ergonomically designed guitar with a chambered maple-topped sassafras body and a weight of just 2.07kg (4.56lb). The scale lengths run from 635mm (25 inches) on the treble side to 648mm (25.5 inches) on the low E, and there's an unusual neck profile to its carbon-fibre reinforced bolt-on maple neck. While that neck shape will take some adjustment, it's a superb player with sounds that impressed us via the hot vintage Suhr humbuckers (SSH+ at the bridge and SSV at the neck) split via the Schaller five-way selector. Not as crazy as it looks, this is a superb modernist statement.

Price: ***£1,664*** *Website:* ***https://strandbergguitars.com***

PJD St John Standard

A relatively new British brand founded by Leigh Dovey, PJD Guitars makes its instruments in York and comes highly recommended by us – particularly the 'Standard'-level models such as this downsized offset St John. Using a chambered light ash body with proper bolt-on roasted maple neck, both finished in a very light satin nitro, the detailed, unfussy build and exceptional fretwork really challenge many more established small 'shop makers. Powering comes from Bare Knuckle or Cream T, and when we auditioned both pickups the St John sounded exceptional. It might cop some of the offset style, but with its hardtail bridge and lightweight resonant platform, it's got its own thing going on.

Price: ***£1,899*** *Website:* ***https://pjdguitars.com***

MOD SQUAD

Nostalgia, Revisited *by Rod Brakes*

"I first came across the concept of a pedalboard as a young teenager in the late 80s when a hip older guy showed me his Boss BCB-6 – a pedalboard that was released in 1983 and the same one used by pioneering electric guitar players such as by Les Paul, Gary Moore and Robert Smith.

"These days, teenagers eloquently debate the merits of various pedalboard switching systems, but back then I barely knew the difference between fuzz and overdrive. I was intrigued. 'What was a compression?' 'Why is a chorus?' 'Where is fuzz?' Et cetera. Within a few years I was confidently hauling a fully loaded BCB-6 around to gigs and rehearsals myself.

"Fast-forward a few misspent decades and here I am returning to the source of inspiration with a Boss BCB-90X. Why? Because Boss pedals just work. Even 30 years later. My other 'board is a Ferrari, a GigRig-built dream machine jammed with boutique and vintage pedals. But this simply does what it says on the tin (Fuzz, OverDrive/Distortion, Delay, Flanger, Reverb and Tremolo) very well."

Fender Player Plus Stratocaster

An extension of Fender's Mexican-made Player series, the four-guitar Player Plus series adds features such as a flatter 305mm (12-inch) fingerboard radius with quite heavily radius'd fingerboard edges, upgraded block bridge saddles and hum-cancelling Noiseless pickups. Think American Ultra spec but for a lot less money. The guitars are also offered in 'fade' finishes, but our pictured model is the classy muted metallic Opal Spark blue. Along with our featured Strat, the range includes a standard Tele, a Stratocaster HSS that adds a Wide Range-style covered full-size humbucker at the bridge, and a three-pickup Nashville Tele that squeezes in a Strat-style Noiseless pickup in the middle position.

As we've seen in recent years, Fender likes to add more sounds to its classics. The Player Plus is no different, and a pull-switch on the lower tone control adds the neck pickup to position 1 (bridge) and 2 (bridge and middle). The hum-cancelling pickups lose that noise that can plague Fender's classic single coils, of course, but deliver an unmistakable voice that we said had "bags of crisp clarity with excellent bouncy, funky mixes and a pretty standard output – certainly not 'hot'".

Price: ***£939*** ***Website:*** ***www.fender.com***

GEAR OF THE YEAR

PRESTIGE ELECTRICS

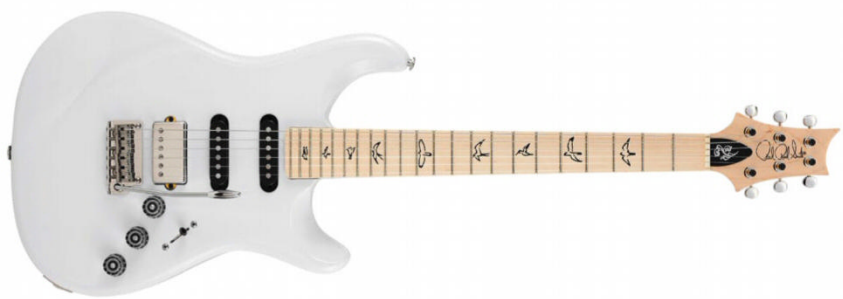
A glimpse into the ultimate in guitar craft with stunning takes on classic outlines

Words: ***Dave Burrluck***

Kithara Harland

A new name to the UK's guitar-making scene is Chris Moffitt. The Harland came from discussions with Ariel Posen – the first baritone model is with Ariel in Canada, while the standard version, above, is now Kithara's bestselling instrument. The Strat-inspired alder body gives this model a familiarity that's a good contrast to its bolt-on mahogany neck, plus Bigbsy vibrato and Gotoh Tele-style bridge with 'In Tune' brass saddles. Mojo are the pickups of choice with a Tele-style flush-pole 52 in the bridge position and a GTone based on a Guayatone 'gold foil' single coil at the neck. "It's the collusion of the seeming disparate elements that's the appeal: an inspiring instrument for the creative musician."

Price: ***from £2,299*** *Website:* ***www.kitharaguitars.com***



PRS Fiore

The second Strat-inspired signature in PRS's USA Bolt-On range after the infamous John Mayer Silver Sky, Mark Lettieri's Fiore is less about cloning an early 60s Fender and more about creating a hard-working 'SuperStrat'. One thing in its favour is that it uses a conventional PRS headstock on the all-maple neck with a conventional PRS-style fingerboard radius of 254mm (10 inches). The swamp ash body differs from the alder of the Silver Sky and we have a new two-post PRS vibrato. The Fiore pickups were specially designed for the model, too, as was the switching, which adds parallel wiring for the bridge humbucker, and the 'seven sound' mod to add the neck pickup to the bridge. A superb tool!

Price: ***£2,599*** *Website:* ***www.prsguitars.com***

Gibson Murphy Lab 1959 Les Paul Standard Reissue

Gibson's Murphy Lab – run by longtime vintage ageing expert Tom Murphy – nearly broke the internet when a large range of Gibson classics were launched in varying levels of distress. One of the most expensive guitars we've ever reviewed (if not *the* most expensive), this Ultra Heavy Aged 1959 Les Paul Reissue had our reviewer Neville Marten in quite a lather. "This one really is closer to an original than we've ever seen before. In fact, from the front we'd be hard-pressed to tell it from a genuine '59." While that price tag is a little steep for most of us, the same guitar ultra light aged costs £6,099, and the Les Paul Junior starts at £3,799.

Price: ***£9,199*** *Website:* ***www.gibson.com***

I LEARNED FROM THAT

Back To Basics *by Dave Burrluck*

"I can't speak for anyone else, but the lockdown months have changed my approach to the guitar: I've come out the other end with a definite less-is-more approach. The first casualty of this new mindset was my pedalboard. Instead, I strapped on my Les Paul, plugged straight into my amp and clipped on a headstock tuner.

"Of course, working like this puts extra focus on your volume and tone controls (not to mention your amp!). I've always used them, but with no solo boost I now need to make the guitar do everything. I'm winding the volume way down for my cleaner rhythm tones, so I can edge it up a little for more crunch – then full up for maximum bluster. The tone control needs to earn its living, too.

"When you think about it, those four potentiometers that'll cost you under 30 quid are pretty important. And that might mean a bit of experimentation in values and tapers. Check out next issue's Mod Squad for more thoughts on those! Liberating times."

Patrick James Eggle Macon Single Cut

Gold-award 10/10 ratings are rare in our reviews section, but here's a guitar we'd have given 11 if we could. Patrick James Eggle and his small team make just 20 guitars a month from their workshop in Oswestry. And, like many contemporary makers, Eggle has obviously referenced the classic Gibson Les Paul with the Macon, but this is never going to be confused with the real thing. The craft level is exceptional and there's a definite style, too. The hardware is lightly aged but not relic'd, and the neck finish is worn away leaving a lightly oiled and waxed bare-wood finish. The mahogany backs are lightly chambered in a honeycomb pattern to reduce weight with less effect on the sound than many weight-relieved or chambered guitars.

You can expect high-grade parts such as the ABM two-piece bridge and tailpiece, and our review guitar featured a set of Cream T Whiskerbuckers featuring a very vintage-style circuit, with the exception of the 'blower' switch, which sends the output of the bridge pickup directly to the output jack.

"Patrick has taken the inspiration and made it very much his own," we said, "with an altered appearance, but a sound and feel that many of us can only dream of."

Price: ***£4,500*** ***Website:*** ***www.eggle.co.uk***

GEAR OF THE YEAR

SEMI-SOLID ELECTRICS

Our top-rated semis ooze class while refining the semi-hollow template for today's player

Words: ***Dave Burrluck***

Gretsch G2622T-P90 Streamliner Center Block Double-Cut P90 w/Bigsby

It's no surprise that this is the second Gretsch Streamliner to grace our Gear Of The Year selection. The Streamliners might be the intro point to the Gretsch empire, but they represent extremely good value for money. This model has a lightweight, mainly hollow centre block, plus a new pickup design that's exclusive to the Streamliner range, the FideliSonic 90, loosely based on the P-90 'staple' neck pickup of the original Gibson Les Paul Custom. The range also boasts the downsized G2655T-P90 Streamliner Center Block Jr Double-Cut P90 w/ Bigsby, and both are available with the V Stoptail tailpiece at £539. Cool pieces at great prices.

Price: ***£609*** *Website:* ***www.gretschguitars.com***

Vox Bobcat S66

Loosely based on the Italian-made Vox Bobcat that first surfaced in 1966, this new version was remodelled by veteran designer Rich Lasner and his G-Rok team. The Korean-made S66 sports a trio of Strat-style single coils – but also comes with dual Vox V90 soapbar single coils as the V66 – and includes an interesting circuit that blends the middle pickup in with any selection from the three-way toggle pickup selector switch. It's crisply made, and the price includes a hard case. "The S66 is quite inspired," we said. "Plonk a set of Strat single coils on a full-size thinline semi and throw in a wiring loom from a modded Les Paul Custom. Neat." Bigsby versions are now available, too.

Price: ***£1,279*** *Website:* ***www.voxamps.com***

Yamaha SA2200

Here's a design that goes right back to the beginnings of Yamaha electric guitars in 1966 with the Gibson ES-335-inspired SA-5. By 1977, the SA range had expanded and included the SA2000. This featured the sort of outline we see on today's SA2200, which has been in production since around 1991. Over that period it's not only been a beacon for Yamaha's top-level Japanese lutherie but has become quite the jazz/fusion standard. "Probably one of the best kept secrets out there," we said this year. "Its tuxedo style might not appeal to everyone, but its sounds and feel are simply superb: a very pro-level workhorse guitar that really should be on the radar of any serious player."

Price: ***£1,699*** *Website:* ***http://uk.yamaha.com***

MY YEAR IN GEAR

Bought, Sold & Traded *by Neville Marten*

"As 2021 dawned, I was sure my current set of instruments was what I'd still have at the end. How wrong was I? First, I decided I needed a home recorder to jot ideas down, so duly bought a Zoom R16 on which I quickly wrote and recorded a song then never touched it again. Next was a Fiesta Red Custom Shop Fender Precision; I actually bought this outright, but it's now gone (as you'll discover in my commentary on page 76). I then traded my Martin OM-28 Reimagined for a CS Gibson Hummingbird, purely as a stage guitar for its spectacular looks. It's brilliant, too.

"Then came the Daphne Blue Telecaster that I'd so hankered after but which, when it came, didn't match my '52-style Butterscotch one. So that went in a trade for a Matchless Lightning 15 Reverb as I didn't really own a decent pub amp. I'm now in the middle of creating a pedalboard, more of which in a later Neville's Advocate..."

Eastman Romeo LA

Despite its history in archtop and acoustic guitars, Eastman has hit the headlines over the past few years with its often-antiqued takes on some classic Gibson solidbodies. The Romeo, however, signalled a bit of a change of direction towards more original designs. It was originally conceived by Eastman's LA-based designer Otto D'Ambrosio in order to create a more ergonomic 'jazz' guitar. This LA version brings it squarely into the rock 'n' roll world, resplendent in Celestine Blue. It also adds the very neat Göldo TLT2N vibrato based on the Les Trem, plus the Göldo 3-Point-Vario 'tunamatic' bridge and rear-lock tuners. Here's a 'jazz' guitar with a very in-tune and stable vibrato system!

Whereas the original features a solid carved spruce top, the LA reverts to a laminated spruce top with mahogany laminate back and sides, and a glued-in maple neck with ebony 'board. The pickups differ, too: the original guitar features Lollar Custom Wound Imperial humbuckers; here we get custom Seymour Duncan Phat Cat P-90 single coils with 'radiator' covers. Altogether, the Romeo LA might have been inspired by the jazz age but is every bit the modern thinline, and we understand there are plenty more original designs to come...

Price: ***£1,499*** ***Website:*** ***www.eastmanguitars.com***

GEAR OF THE YEAR

ACOUSTIC GUITARS

Which fine examples of the luthier's art were first to pass this year's chequered flag?

Words: ***David Mead***

Yamaha NTX5

Just because an acoustic has nylon strings doesn't necessarily mean it's headed for the classical guitar market. Far from it. The Yamaha NTX5 gives the player an excellent plugged-in sound, which means this guitar will more likely find itself active in the crossover fields of jazz, pop, Latin, soft rock or anything along similar lines. With solid woods throughout, including a European spruce top and walnut back and sides, and Yamaha's Atmosfeel under-saddle pickup, contact sensor and internal mic trio, the NTX5 charmed us with its good looks and playability. Its 48.3mm nut width makes it finger-friendly for steel-string players, too. Our review summed up that the NTX5 "ticks all the boxes".

Price: ***£1,786*** *Website:* ***http://uk.yamaha.com***

Taylor GT 811e

We keep saying that smaller acoustics seem to be very much in vogue with both bespoke luthier builds and production-line models, and Taylor's GT 811e is a case in point. Part of Taylor's 800 Range, the 811e clocks in with a Sitka spruce top and Indian rosewood back and sides, but the extra zest comes from master guitar designer Andy Powers' C-Class bracing. This new design is a crucial part of the 811e's tonal powerhouse: "The C-Class idea was a way to deliberately over-exaggerate the low-end response from a small box so that it ends up well-balanced despite its size," Andy told us, and he was dead right. Punchy, fun and toneful, the 811e won a few hearts during its stay with us.

Price: ***£3,335*** *Website:* ***www.taylorguitars.com***

Lowden S-23 12-Fret

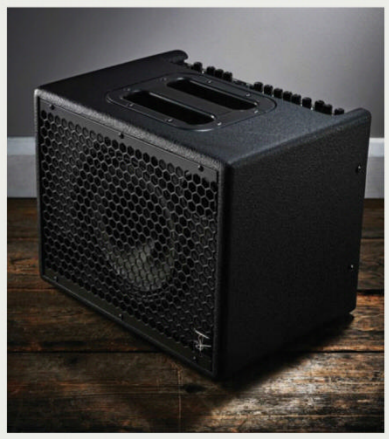
The Lowden S-23 came to us as part of a pair of 12-fretters, its accomplice on the day being the smaller-bodied WL-25, one of the company's 'Wee Lowden' range. Part of the charm of an acoustic where the neck joins the body at the 12th (as opposed to the 14th) fret is that the bridge is placed at the widest part of the guitar's soundboard. This means, in theory at least, a more efficient transfer between strings and top, and we often find that a 12-fretter is actually louder and prouder than even a dreadnought with a 14-fret join. We praised the S-23's singing, airy voice and its surprising dollop of refined tone that would please even the most demanding connoisseur.

Price: ***£3,475*** *Website:* ***www.lowdenguitars.com***

I LEARNED FROM THAT

Stage Ready *by David Mead*

"A lesson I relearned this year was that an acoustic guitar becomes a totally different beast once you plug it into an amp. I've been saying it for years in reviews of electro-acoustics, but it still surprised me when I had occasion to spend some serious practice time with an amp recently. Having been booked for a gig in the early part of 2022, I thought it was a good chance to take a look at the gear I traditionally use when playing live. Before now, I've used a Yamaha AG Stomp – a remarkable preamp/multi-effects unit and microphone modeller that has served me well in the past. This time around, though, I thought I'd use an amp, the Da Capo 75 coming along at just the right time. The first time I plugged in (which was also my first time through an amp or PA in many months) was a revelation. Response, tone, feel – all different but in a good way. It really brought it home to me that banging away on an acoustic practising tunes is one thing, but you need to be aware how the guitar is going to react in concert."



Gibson Generation G-45

Gibson's Generation acoustic range comprises four models: the G-00, G-45, G-Writer EC and G-200 EC. Body sizes are based on the L-00, J-45, Songwriter and J-200 respectively, and the Writer and 200 models come with LR Baggs Element Bronze pickups. The thing that sets the Generation Series apart is the presence of a 'player port', which is mounted on the side of each guitar's upper bout. This acts as a monitor so the player can get a better idea of the guitar's sound, and is based on a concept devised by former company president Ted McCarty, which was blueprinted back in the early 1960s (but didn't find its way into production at the time).

Other than that, construction-wise each model in the Generation range has a Sitka spruce top with walnut back and sides, a utile neck and ebony fingerboard. Each of the four models also received a prestigious nine out of 10 from us, the G-200 picking up a special mention for its rich but refined voice. But it was the G-45 that just nosed by the winning post for its excellent all-round playability, clarity and mud-free bass response. A very reasonably priced acoustic guitar, manufactured at Gibson's Bozeman facility in Montana alongside the brand's top-of-the-range instruments.

Price: ***£1,099*** *Website:* ***www.gibson.com***

A YEAR IN GUITAR

STAR BUYS

2021 saw a return to the live stage for many artists and so we were curious to find out what gear they had been buying to power their performances

Words: ***David Mead***

Andy Timmons

"I'm really enjoying the Mesa California Tweed amp: exquisite clean tones and it takes pedals well. Also I'm extremely happy to have the new Keeley Halo on my 'board now. It's my signature dual echo pedal that's been in the works for a couple of years, being released early 2022."

Paul Gilbert

"I bought a drum set! Wait... you probably want guitar gear. I got a Marshall SV20C amp and put it right next to me so I can feel the air move. And I'm also getting my slide-magnet installation down to a science. First, I get a neodymium (N52) bar magnet and wrap that in a few layers of gaffer tape so the magnet won't shatter and the slide won't get scratched up. Then I cut a two-inch strip of 3M heavy duty mounting tape and attach that to the bottom of the magnet. Then it's ready to stick onto the lower horn of the guitar. The tape is strong enough to hold the magnet onto the guitar, but it can be removed without hurting the finish."

Dominic Miller

"I've just acquired a gorgeous S-type made by Bruce Nelson. A beautifully made guitar that ticks all the boxes. The main feature for me is a device in the guitar that eliminates all unwanted buzzes and noises, which means it's a perfect guitar for a high-production setlist. It's become my main electric on Sting shows, while the '61 Strat has been demoted to spare."

Jennifer Batten

"My latest addition is the [Line 6] HX Stomp XL. It offers so much flexibility – I've entered a new world. I do the four-cable method along with my BluGuitar AMP1. I set it so every preset becomes a pedalboard I can pull effects in and out of."

PHOTO BY JOSEPH CULTICE

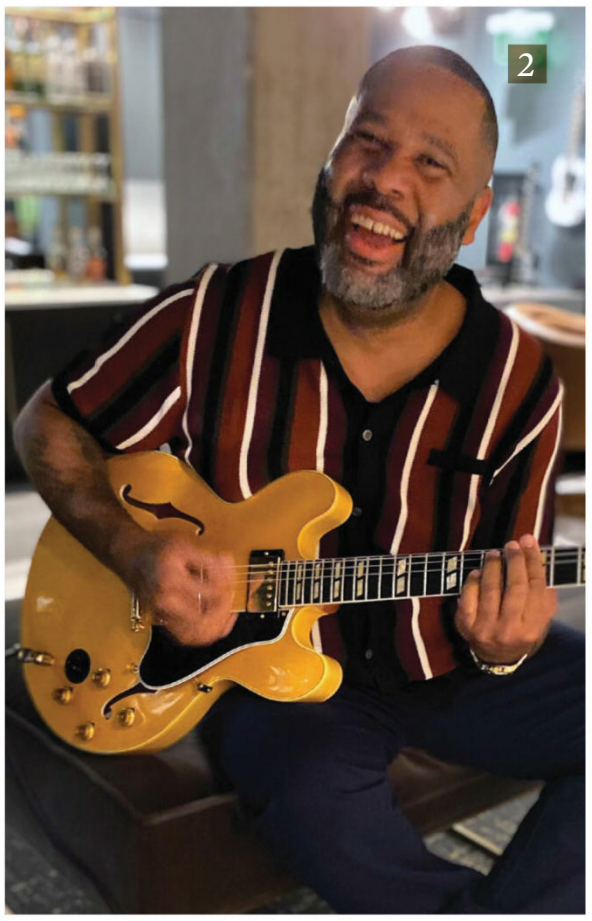


PHOTO BY MAT KOEHLER

Marty Friedman

"I've been using [IK Multimedia's] AmpliTube 5, the Fractal Axe-Fx III and the Neural DSP Dual Cortex a bunch lately, and they all have upped the game in their own unique ways. It's an exciting time for that kind of stuff."

Joe Satriani

"I picked up a fun updated effect pedal this year that helped me make a song come to life: the Electro-Harmonix Micro Q-Tron. It provides cool, funky, organic envelope filter sounds and it's simple and easy to mess around with. I used it on the title track of my new album."

Steve Morse

"I bought The [GigRig] Wetter Box, which is a sort of combining mixer for inline use of an effect. It allows me to put the TC delay pedal inline and change the volume (mix) with a remote pedal. I was trying to make the smallest/lightest rig possible for a session where I was sitting in with a band for the whole set and would only have a small area and one amp – not my usual wet/dry setup. It involves lots of cords, but it works!"

Greg Koch

"In 2021, I stumbled upon a unicorn-esque '74 Strat that weighs almost nothing and sounds glorious: sunburst in nature and still sporting the three-way toggle. Also a new Fender Custom Shop Pink Paisley '68 Tele, which is more purple than pink – and, of course, a Venetian Gold Reverend Gristle 90."

Kirk Fletcher

"My Gibson 1959 Murphy Lab ES-345, custom made for me. The guitar features an ebony fingerboard and a custom wiring setup with a push-pull pot for immediate out-of-phase sounds à la BB King *Live At The Regal*. The guitar sustains and is so resonant. I'm honoured to play it."

1. Joe Satriani picked up a Micro Q-Tron pedal for easy access to cool tones
2. Kirk Fletcher's Gibson 1959 Murphy Lab ES-345 was custom made for him. "I'm honoured to play it," he says
3. PRS Fiore aside, Mark Lettieri also bagged himself an 80s Boss DS-1 under the influence of *That Pedal Show*
4. Josh Smith's new gear includes his very own signature Ibanez FLATV1

Joe Bonamassa

"My friend John Shults [of True Vintage Guitar] from Birmingham, Alabama, called me in late January with a lead on a very nice original-owner 1958 Sunburst Les Paul. After a few weeks of negotiations a price was agreed, but the question still remained, 'How do we get it out of there?' John stepped up, got on a plane for 40 hours straight, took Covid test after Covid test, went down there and picked it up and brought it back home. 'PJ' has been on the road ever since I got it – 'Oh, and why PJ?' you ask. The original owner put a South African Airlines lost-and-found tag on its original five-latch Lifton case. His name? You guessed it: PJ."

Mike Dawes

"My favourite new acquisition has to be the Quad Cortex by Neural DSP. This modelling unit takes everything I love about their Archetype plug-ins and adds even more insane features, plus a UI that a child could understand. It's even great for acoustic and bass guitar."

Mark Lettieri

"Well, besides my new PRS Fiore guitar – upon which I'm obviously very stoked – I bought an 80s Boss DS-1 after watching a great video by Dan and Mick from *That Pedal Show*. I use it as a boost in front of my overdrives for lead tones with a smooth, almost fuzz-like quality."

Josh Smith

"My favourite new gear of 2021 is by far my new Ibanez signature guitar, the FLATV1. I worked really hard in partnership with Ibanez to make this guitar great and I couldn't be prouder of the way it turned out. I've played it exclusively since I received the final one in January and it's exceeded all my expectations." G

JoBo's recent acquisition of a 1958 Sunburst Les Paul (not pictured) made it home after a lengthy trip

PHOTO BY ELEANOR JANE

PHOTO BY MACKENZIE LENORA

GEAR OF THE YEAR

AMPS

Potent tone and feature-rich design in small boxes was this year's winning combo

Words: ***Jamie Dickson***

Ashdown AGM-484H head

Heads are back in vogue, thanks to their diminishing size and mix-and-match flexibility when paired with different cabs. Ashdown's slender and highly portable AGM-484H raises the game a little further with a versatile gain stage, great headroom from its 30-watt output and carry-on luggage portability (it measures just 80mm high). We loved its purposeful tones that could fulfil so many musical roles without ever being characterless. A quartet of quality JJ EL84s, the power valve *du jour*, provides the mumbo in the power stage, while a useful clipping switch "alters the gain structure for more versatility", said Nick Guppy. A practical, punchy pocket rocket – and it's built in the UK, too.

Price: ***£999*** *Website:* ***https://ashdownmusic.com***

Laney Lionheart L20T-112

The Lionheart range has been a bit of a sleeper for a few years now, offering seriously great tone for a reasonable outlay. With the return of the line to UK production, this 20-watt combo's kudos rose a notch higher. The good old-fashioned all-valve tone coaxes rich, girthy clean and crunch tones from a single Celestion G12H-30 driver and a quartet of EL84s in a parallel single-ended power stage. What this layout sacrifices in power it more than makes up in glorious organic Class A tones that are so usable and easy to access at the amp's output wattage. While the range has attractive head and 2x12 cab options, the focused and portable 1x12 combo is a modern classic.

Price: ***£1,049*** *Website:* ***www.laney.co.uk***

Fender '68 Custom Pro Reverb

You know you've found a good amp when everyone in the office comes up to you to say, "What *is* that thing?" So it was with the '68 Custom Pro Reverb, which, despite wearing the traditionally less desirable silver-panel livery, hides some very shrewd tonal updates and tweaks that really shine through in this engaging 40-watter, its single Celestion G12 Neo Creamback shaving around 2kg off the heft thanks to a lightweight-magnet design. The amp's also been voiced for extra touch-sensitivity, gaining custom-made Schumacher transformers with reduced negative feedback and some extra sag dialled in for richer, more nuanced dynamics. A superb modern all-rounder with a vintage soul.

Price: ***£1,349*** *Website:* ***www.fender.com***

I LEARNED FROM THAT

Fingers First *by Nick Guppy*

"Soldering is a handy skill for guitarists – as long as you remember to stay away from the hot bit. Even with years of experience, it only takes a split-second lapse of concentration to inflict injuries that can take weeks to repair. I recently did a long-overdue rewire of my pedalboard, replacing a fickle loop switch with Lehle's excellent Little Lehle III, and a gannet's nest of co-ax with homemade patch leads for the neatest result. After impetuous enthusiasm nearly burnt me big time on the first plug, I took a deep breath and repeated the mantra 'fingers first' as I slowly and carefully made 24 solder connections. A muddy initial result was traced to one imperfect joint, and after a cautious resolder I had the best-sounding pedals I've heard in a long time. Luckily, my fingers were unscathed, but I came dangerously close to missing out on my first gig in ages. Solder with care!"

633 Dragonfly RT 1x10 combo

Low-output, tone-rich valve amps just keep getting more relevant as home recording and quieter stages have put players' focus on getting maximum juice from smaller amps that can be worked hard. If you're in the market for such a thing, you won't find better than this top-notch British-built combo from 633 Engineering, whose hand-built amps are the choice of tone-conscious artists such as Kirk Fletcher.

The 10-inch Celestion VT Jr driver is mounted in an open-back birch ply cabinet, and there's a neat trick in the design of the power stage that lets you switch between a 6V6GT or an EL84 for instant access to US or British-inspired tones.

The RT version here also adds optical tremolo and a lush digital reverb to the package, giving the little Dragonfly plenty of tonal sting. It's louder than its five-watt output might suggest; small gigs are well within its capabilities, and it's perfect for on-song studio tone. Usefully, the RT also features an analogue cab sim for sending its signal directly to a DAW or PA.

The price may seem salty for a sub-10-watt amp, but it's all the tone you'll ever want in a compact combo that's designed to give its best at the real-world volumes – with a touch of boutique cachet thrown in to seal the deal.

Price: ***£1,425*** *Website:* ***www.633amp.com***

FLOOR AMPS & MODELLERS

Unrivalled tone-sculpting power in boxes small enough for your 'board

Words: ***Jamie Dickson***

Boss GT-1000Core

If you want serious creative power in a small package, you need to try this. Based on Boss's full-size floorboard GT-1000, the Core measures only 173mm wide by 135mm deep, making it no larger than a chunky preamp pedal – and yet it can do so much more. With 250 user and 250 preset patches to play with, you can configure complex chains of Boss's GT-family amp models, but it's the effects that are the main draw for us here: there's a raft of legendary sounds from Boss's huge pedal catalogue aboard, from the rare Slow Gear swell effect to rich reverbs, delays and more. It's only £220 more than Boss's DD-500 delay pedal, but the extra buys you a complete tone workstation for your 'board or studio.

Price: ***£599*** ***Website:*** ***www.boss.info***

Line 6 HX Stomp XL

Line 6 has spun its highly regarded Helix modelling multi-effects units into an impressive family of products, but this could well be the 'Goldilocks' choice. As with the smaller HX Stomp, you get full-fat Helix tones, plus five soft knobs, four buttons and eight footswitches to sculpt sound with, making the HX Stomp XL more user-friendly than its little brother and yet still £334 cheaper than the floorboard Helix LT. Unlike the LT, however, it's still small enough to fit on a moderate-sized pedalboard. Put your favourite analogue stompboxes in the Stomp XL's effects loops and you've got a pedalboard powerhouse that can also stand alone on stage or in the studio.

Price: ***£599*** ***Website:*** ***https://line6.com***

Victory V4 The Kraken

If you want to get your amp tone the old-fashioned way but need it in a pedalboard-ready package, you should try Victory's V4 The Kraken. Though it looks like an outsized stompbox or preamp, the V4 is in fact a fully functioning 180-watt amp with a valve preamp and Class D power stage that weighs less than two bags of sugar. As reviewer Nick Guppy wrote in his original review: "V4 The Kraken is all about gain, based on the original Kraken amps designed in collaboration with Rabea Massaad." Built-in cabinet simulation by Two Notes is part of this impressive package that adds up to a high-gain tone tool that is way more versatile than its monstrous moniker suggests.

Price: ***£799*** ***Website:*** ***www.victoryamps.com***

MY YEAR IN GEAR

Slide Rules *by Dave Burrluck*

"I started playing slide because I fell in love with the sound. Years later, little has changed. While many great slide players, such as Mick Taylor, play in standard tuning with a pretty regular setup, I prefer a dedicated guitar tuned to open G or E but not set too heavily in terms of string gauge or height. And while Elmore James still inspires me, spend a little time with Derek Trucks and you'll realise what a slide can do. Whatever your level, stick a bottleneck on your finger and you'll be noticed: a simple overdub on a recording is just as effective as a face-melting solo. My favourite slide guitar of the year? Fender's Acoustasonic Jazzmaster. It's easy to set up with its Micro-Tilt, and you can get a host of 'wrong' acoustic sounds into your fuzz box or a huge voice from that magnetic pickup (add gain to taste). Break the rules."

Neural DSP Quad Cortex

Every now and then a watershed product comes along that changes the way people look at a certain strand of tone-creating technology. A few years ago, Kemper did just that with its still-impressive profiling amps. But with the advent of DSP's Quad Cortex, the bar of tonal authenticity just got raised again.

Like the Kemper amps before it, the Quad Cortex can emulate the tone and performance of your favourite analogue valve amps by running a test signal through them and generating a digital profile you can play through. But its preset amps are enough to get lost in by themselves. No, it isn't a night-and-day leap in quality over other high-end profiling and modelling gear here – but there is a tangible uptick in natural responsiveness and ear-beguiling tone that is so involving.

If you've ever been left cold by modelling or profiling tech, it's worth having another try with the Quad Cortex as the combination of its easy touchscreen operation and stellar sounds might just tip the balance. It could use some more effects, but these are likely to come in future updates and in the meantime the reverbs, to use just one example, are among the best we've heard in a digital floorboard. Superb.

Price: ***£1,599*** ***Website:*** ***https://neuraldsp.com***

GEAR OF THE YEAR

DRIVE EFFECTS

When it comes to the crunch, these boxes deliver like few others

Words: ***Jamie Dickson***

Beetronics Vezzpa Octave Stinger

We've long been fans of Filipe Pampuri's powerful effects that combine arresting fuzz and drive tones with a playful aesthetic. His latest, the Vezzpa, brings together a wonderfully scuzzy fuzz with a 'stinger' mode (toggled with a double-tap of the footswitch) that delivers electrifying Jimi-style, up-octave lead tones. Though the Vezzpa mounts only two controls, Sustain and Volume, there's plenty of scope to sculpt sound. Turning down the Sustain yields a classic op-amp fuzz, while winding up Sustain yields a gated, high-gain fuzz with ripped-Velcro fuzztones that slam on and off with abruptness. The digital footswitch also permits momentary engagement of the whole effect for performance options.

Price: ***£199*** ***Website:*** ***www.beetronicsfx.com***

Flattley Revolution Dynamic Overdrive

Many new pedals are taking a classic and, rather than imitating it, are adding an extra twist. Such is the Flattley Revolution, which we'd characterise as a deft evolution of a certain green Ibanez pedal, injecting amp-like nuance and tonal variation to the original's flattering mid-hump style. The key control is a three-way micro switch to select between op-amp, silicon diode or LED clipping for varying degrees of aggression and compression in the pedal's driven voice, while its base voice is chunky, detailed and as hot as you'd ever need for classic rock and more. Cool touches, such as an illuminated ring beneath the footswitch to show the pedal is engaged, only make this neo-'Screamer more attractive.

Price: ***£259*** ***Website:*** ***https://flattleyguitarpedals.com***

Browne Amplification Protein Dual Overdrive

If there's a serious pretender to the crown worn by Analog Man's King Of Tone, this is probably it. This two-in-one overdrive was designed for guitarist/producer Adam Sniegowski specifically to deliver a drive that would work with any hired amp that touring threw at him. The design combines an overdrive inspired by a 1990s Marshall Bluesbreaker pedal (the Protein's 'Blue Side'), with a second OD circuit inspired by the amp-like Nobels ODR-1 (the pedal's 'Green Side'). You can use the drives independently or run the Green into the Blue for hot, complex 'stacked' tones. King Of Tone aside, few drives are as flexible or as involving as this.

Price: ***£319*** ***Website:*** ***https://browneamps.com***

I LEARNED FROM THAT

Less Is Better *by Jamie Dickson*

"Like fellow *Guitarist* writer Rod Brakes, I've been building a smaller pedalboard this year. I needed a light, compact 'board with clean power but only the essentials, tonally, for those times where you just want to carry a small combo and a minimum of effects to a gig. I boiled those 'essentials' down to two drive pedals (which chop and change as needed), a J Rockett Tranquilizer phaser, a delay, a Free The Tone Ambi Space digital reverb, and a Boss RC-10R looper, then mounted the lot on a small wooden board bolted to angled steel feet made for the purpose by Wolfmeister. With limited space, it's tempting to choose a pedal that 'does it all', so I fitted a Boss DD-7 delay that could do everything from reverse delay to modulated echoes. But when I chucked on a Red Witch 'Violet' analogue-voiced digital delay in its place I realised that, even though the Red Witch was basically a one-trick pony, sonically speaking, I really liked the sound of it. Chewy, warm, rich... The DD-7 gave me all the delay voices I wanted, but I realised I didn't really want or need such versatility. I just needed one sound that I loved. Sometimes 'less but better' is the key."

Blackstar Dept. 10 Dual Drive

Using valves in drive pedals ought to be a no-brainer, but some makers fail to deliver on the promise of that burning bottle inside. Blackstar had no such difficulties with its sleek Dept. 10 Dual Drive, creating an all-in-one gainstation and valve-powered DAW interface in a great-looking package – and at a very attainable price.

The key to the girthy tube tones here is an ECC83 triode valve running at 200 volts inside the Dual Drive, which Blackstar harnesses to a raft of 21st century functionality. The pedal boasts Blackstar's Cab Rig DSP speaker simulation with three different simulations on tap at any one time (alternative cabs can be loaded via Blackstar's Architect app), which permits you to record great tone direct from the pedal. There's also a TRS stereo output for practice sessions with headphones on, plus a full-on XLR output for connecting to a mixing desk, and a USB port for computer-based recording. There's even an effects loop so you can insert modulation or other pedals directly into the pedal's internal signal path.

Flexible, functional yet sharply executed, this is not the shape of things to come but the kind of progressive, empowering drive design we deserve in 2021.

Price: **£249** ***Website:*** ***https://blackstaramps.com***

DELAY & MODULATION EFFECTS

Vintage phasers, tape and echo, transformed by tech

Words: ***Jamie Dickson***

Eventide UltraTap

Reviewer Trevor Curwen called the UltraTap "one of the most impressive delay pedals you can get your hands on", and here's why. Standard delays generate regular repeats that are all the same time interval apart. Multi-tap delays, by contrast, let you add extra 'taps', yielding powerful rhythmic, atmospheric effects as echoes propagating at different rates cascade into one another. The UltraTap is based on the idea of a multi-head tape echo, except one that features up to 64 virtual heads. Sonically, this grants you "a comprehensive resource for creating a variety of rhythmic delays, atmospheric ambiences, swells and modulations". A remarkable sound-shaper that goes way beyond standard delay tones.

Price: ***£279*** ***Website:*** ***www.eventideaudio.com***

Dawner Prince Pulse

The Dawner Prince Pulse takes on some of David Gilmour's most beloved swirling rotary effects from *Dark Side Of The Moon* through to *The Division Bell*. The latter album is the most relevant reference as Gilmour used a rare vintage Gibson Maestro Rover RO-1 rotary speaker whose tones are faithfully emulated here. As with many pro-grade rotary pedals, you get two speeds to play with, plus controls that govern how quickly the spin-rate accelerates as you toggle between them. Since the pedal is designed to recreate the sound of a mic'd up rotary cabinet, it also has a knob to set the distance between the virtual mics and the revolving speaker cab, offering a very practical degree of sonic variation.

Price: ***£319*** ***Website:*** ***https://dawnerprince.com***

Universal Audio Astra Modulation Machine

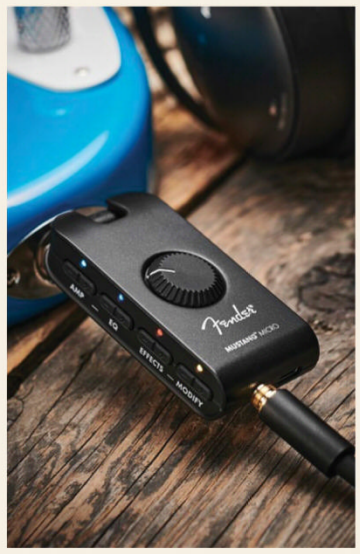
Universal Audio made its name with authentic plug-in emulations powered by DSP and housed in hardware, but this year saw its first stompboxes, including this modulation pedal featuring studio-grade emulations of revered mod effects, such as Boss's CE-1 chorus, mid-60s Fender opto-tremolo tones and MXR's Flanger/Doubler rack unit. Handily, if you register your Astra with UA, you can download two extra emulations and store a single preset to the unit. There's optional true and buffered bypass, too, a feature we'd like to see more of. A polished package with some of the world's most evocative modulation effects at a high level of sonic quality.

Price: ***£355*** ***Website:*** ***www.uaudio.com***

MY YEAR IN GEAR

Small & Mighty *by David Mead*

"I've made two significant purchases this year. The first was a new wiring loom from Axesrus.co.uk for a partscaster Strat. This particular guitar was originally put together by Martyn Booth back in 1992. Over the years I've replaced the pickups but never got around to replacing the wiring, which had worn out over time. It now has CTS 250k pots, Orange Drop caps, an Oak Grigsby five-way switch and Switchcraft jack socket and is reborn as one of my favourite instruments. The other purchase was a Fender Mustang Micro headphone amp that I bought because I live in a flat and don't often get the chance to play through an amp at volume there. It's a handy little device with a good array of modelled amps, the '60's British' being the first choice for clean tones, and I'm toggling between the '65 Deluxe + Greenbox OD' and '70s British' for crunch. The onboard effects are a handy asset, too."



J Rockett Clockwork Echo

J Rockett is the US maker behind some of the most useful and great-sounding effects we've tried in the past few years, so teaming up with Howard Davis, the effects designer behind the original Electro-Harmonix Memory Man, was always going to be interesting. The resulting pedal is the answer to the prayers of anyone who likes the grainy, woozy tones of vintage Memory Man pedals but can do without the noise, quirks (the old ones need a 24-volt power supply) and expense of decades-old originals.

For here, in the Clockwork Echo, is all of the character and none of the complaints. Built around classic bucket brigade delay chip tech, the pedal runs off nine volts but ramps that up to 24 internally to keep the tones authentic, and offers a useful maximum of 600ms delay time. Like the original, it has a nicely voiced preamp that can add a little boost to your overall signal, too. But it's the modern tweaks to creative control that really make the pedal's rich, dark delays come to life, such as tap tempo, while the self-oscillating feedback effect so beloved of analogue delay fans can be controlled via inputs for expression pedals (not included) that govern Time and Repeats – giving you fine control over a dark tsunami of echo.

Price: ***£399*** ***Website:*** ***https://rockettpedals.com***

GEAR OF THE YEAR

INNOVATION

Tone at the cutting edge of technical ingenuity in 2021

Words: ***Dave Burrluck*** *&* ***Jamie Dickson***

Fender Mustang Micro

The credit-card sized Mustang Micro was recently revealed to be Reverb.com's top-selling amp of 2021, and it's not hard to see why. Rarely has so much modelling power been packed into such a small device and so reasonably priced. You plug the Micro directly into the jack on your guitar, so there's no need for a cable, just a pair of headphones. Once powered up, it can serve as everything from a silent practice tool to a recording interface, with 12 classic amp models and an equal number of effects onboard, ranging from slapback delay to harmonic tremolo. We particularly liked the high-gain tones, inspired by Bogner, EVH and Friedman classics, and the model of a 2290 Delay is also great. A gigbag essential.

Price: ***£89*** ***Website:*** ***www.fender.com***

Udo Roesner Amps Da Capo 75

When the man who designed the acoustic amp favoured by many of the world's top pros says he's gone one better, you'd better take notice. With the Da Capo 75, amp maker Udo Roesner delivers the same ultra-reliable sonics for your acoustic, but thanks to ground-up fresh design – including a new dual-cone speaker and rejigged built-in effects section – everything seems warmer and more hi-fi to our ears, while the high-pass filter on Channel 2 offers extra control for either big-bodied acoustics or mics. Delivering 70 watts of output in a compact cabinet familiar in size to AER users that's just 7.5kg (16.5lb) in weight, the Da Capo 75 is the new benchmark for amplified acoustic guitar tone and, as such, fairly priced.

Price: ***£949*** ***Website:*** ***www.udo-amps.com***

Fender American Acoustasonic Jazzmaster

Though we've praised other Acoustasonic instruments for their tonal versatility and giggable practicality, the newest design – an acoustic reimagining of the Jazzmaster – feels like the pick of the litter in terms of creative possibilities. The design is built around a three-pickup configuration of Fishman under-saddle transducer and bridge-plate body sensor Enhancer, plus a Fender Acoustasonic Shawbucker humbucker. Alongside the emulations of classic acoustic guitars, from mahogany slope-shoulder dreadnoughts to rosewood-built Auditorium acoustics, it's the extensions into alternative tones that add scope, from lo-fi piezo pickup sounds to fat, driven electric tones from the new humbucking pickup.

Price: ***£1,879*** ***Website:*** ***www.fender.com***

MOD SQUAD

Treasured Bass *by Neville Marten*

"Not a mod in its strictest sense, but this did involve modifying how a certain instrument played and looked. My great friend and bandmate of 35 years, Roger Newell, died recently. I wanted a musical keepsake so his widow, Gilly, sold me his stage Fender Precision; he'd used it with us on literally thousands of gigs. It's actually an early JV Squier and I've played it many times when Rog and I swapped instruments to do the instrumental *Diamonds*. Rog liked his basses to fight back, so the action was scary and it had mighty hawsers for strings. It also hadn't been cleaned or set up for decades, so that was last weekend's task: new D'Addario 0.045 to 0.0105 nickel bass strings, a thorough clean of the rosewood 'board, a fret-dress and polish, and a general setup, which brought the action down so I could play it. It's very important to me that I own it and can now actually play it. Thanks, Rog."

Cream T Aurora Standard 2PS

As detailed in our review over on page 92, Cream T Guitars is a new venture, and the Aurora guitar has been co-designed by Billy F Gibbons and pickup maker Thomas Nilsen. Its obvious innovation comes with the ability to swap out the pickups in seconds and, while not new (this system is licensed from Relish, and let's not forget Dan Armstrong's See Through Ampeg from 1969!), the Aurora provides a 'chassis' that's a lot more classic than Relish's own more futuristic designs.

The Aurora uses Cream T pickups, which are, for the most part, scanned from historic instruments such as Les Pauls, and include Billy Gibbons' Whiskerbuckers, Bernie Marsden's Bernie Buckers, and the '57 GT cloned from Geoff Whitehorn's 1957 Goldtop. It's a different take on pickup design.

The guitar is made by PJD in the UK and there's plenty of the company's style in the build: lightweight and chambered with a detailed, precise build. It also reflects the current interest in UK-made guitars at a time when delivery for many big names has been hampered by international shipping issues and long back orders caused by pandemic demand and factory shutdowns. The times they are a-changing...

Price: ***£2,499*** *Website:* ***www.creamtguitars.com***

A YEAR IN GUITAR

MOD SQUAD HEROES

What impressed us in the backroom workshop at *Guitarist* this year? The Mod Squad boss looks back over the past 12 months, which held a few surprises...

Words: ***Dave Burrluck***

Judging by our inbox, the interest in modding continues unabated and I'd like to apologise right now for the products, parts and projects I've not had time to squeeze into The Mod Squad this past year. Aside from detailing my own modding adventures, quite a few of our staff have requested a little help... Our editor-in-chief asked me to revoice his Telecaster; our art editor's mate needed an overhaul on his lowly Squier Showmaster (which I still haven't finished!); and one of our commercial team wanted a pickup to be installed on his Shergold. I think I might have to put my rates up...

But many, many now very famous guitar makers all started by repairing guitars, citing that it's where they learned about instruments – the good and bad bits – and how to fix and improve them. I might have been doing this lark for more years than I care to remember, but I'm certainly still learning. What's that expression? "The more I learn, the more I realise how much I don't know."

Indeed, doing these mods, especially when it's for other folk, I'm often using kit that I haven't personally experienced before. Jamie's Telecaster was a great example. He had a set of **Lollar Tele Vintage (www.guitargearpro.co.uk)** single coils and I was a little shocked just how good they sounded on his pinstriped Fender American Vintage guitar. I have Lollars on a couple of guitars that I gig regularly, but I'd never tried these.

Elsewhere, I fitted a smart set of **Bare Knuckle Silo humbuckers (www.bareknucklepickups.co.uk)**, designed with and for Rabea 'Bea' Massaad. It took me a little out of my comfort zone with what appears to be a 'progressive' intention, but these are quite simply juicy rock 'buckers that split really well, giving the Shergold SP-02 Provocateur – to quote myself – "a real hot-rod makeover with surprising subtlety and musicality".

Lollar and Bare Knuckle are very well established pickup makers, of course, but neither are a cheap date. Cream T pickups are certainly making quite a noise at the moment, not least for their scans of actual vintage humbuckers on historic guitars. Again, they're not cheap, but they don't sound it, either,

"Many famous guitar makers started by repairing guitars, citing that's where they learned about instruments – the good and the bad bits"

and unlike many designs they don't aim to improve or update. Basically, a set of **Cream T Bernie Buckers (www.creamtpickupsdirect.com)** on a decent single-cut guitar will get you close to Bernie's famous 'Beast' or, perhaps more obviously, let you experience what one flavour of PAF really sounds like.

But pickups are only one part of your guitar's electric circuit, and thankfully more and more people are shining a light on the quality, value and taper of the pots we use and the way you wire things up. If you have a guitar that's in the right ballpark, sound-wise, but not quite there, I suggest you consider the circuit before you spend what can be a significant amount of money on new pickups. And with respect to the legion of pickup makers out there, that circuit can be as important as the pickups themselves.

Jeremy Tosh at **Charles Guitars (www.charlesguitars.co.uk)** has helped us out on numerous occasions choosing pot values and types, not to mention navigating the thorny subject of tone capacitors – and it's a topic we'll be returning to in future issues. Bare Knuckle is also upping its accessories with higher value premium-quality CTS pots (now offered in three different tapers) and its own-brand capacitors. There are thousands of guitars out there from many, many brands that simply don't consider matching pickups and circuits. You should. And learning to solder is a key skill to nail.

As our Gear Of The Year feature illustrates, we've had some fantastic instruments through our hands this year, yet looking back at the blur of activity on The Mod Squad's bench (aka the kitchen table), it's the cheap, often unloved guitars that have given me the most reward. When our deputy editor, David Mead, asked if The Mod Squad could use a Strat copy that his lady wife had purchased for £30, I thought, 'Well, it might be useful for parts.' My younger self would probably have gutted the guitar and loaded in whatever 'posh' pickups and bits I could. However, aside from a new set of **Gotoh tuners (www.wdmusic.co.uk)**, I just did the basic fret polish and setup and added a new-to-me 'half blend' circuit. This

Left: Editor-in-chief Jamie had his Fender American Vintage '52 Tele transformed with pinstripes, new strings and a set of Lollar pickups

Above: Cream T unleashes the 'Beast' with its Bernie Buckers, cloned from Bernie Marsden's '59 Les Paul Standard, which look and sound the part

blends the neck pickup to just positions 1 and 2 (creating bridge *and* neck, and all three on together), meaning that positions 3, 4 and 5 remain standard. And despite the cheap pickups, I ended up with a guitar that I did use for parts: quite a few *guitar* parts on a recording project. It was more like a restoration than a modding project and cost little more than £120 including the guitar.

Finding the germ of an idea can often lead to a good song, and it's no different with a guitar and a successful (to you) mod or restoration. There has to be something going on – something that appeals to you, something that you think you can polish, enhance.

That Gretsch G2215-P90 Streamliner Junior Jet Club certainly had something going on – a guitar anyone can buy for under its £370 full retail price. I stripped it back, cut back the gloss sheen, added

The Shergold SP02 Provocateur in Battleship Grey with Bare Knuckle's Silo humbuckers

"Finding the germ of an idea can often lead to a good song, and it's no different with a guitar and a successful (to you) mod or restoration"

some Gotoh tuners and a lightweight Les Paul Junior-style bridge (which I aged). I then wired in just a bridge humbucker made by **Aaron Armstrong (www.armstrongpickups.co.uk)** that reader Alan Kirby had ordered but proved surplus to his requirements and had donated to the cause. I'm now using that Gretsch alongside a Gibson Les Paul Classic, a guitar that costs considerably more. It also features the **Anomaly (www.anomalyguitar.com)** control knobs, designed by Luke White whose pickup rings we've discussed in The Mod Squad and are now being using by many makers, not least Cream T's new guitar venture (see page 92 for the review).

Good luck with all your modding adventures and keep those emails coming. If we can help, we will! G

WHEN THE LEVEE BREAKS

When Rivers Meet are one of the most soulful, galvanic roots-rock duos you'll hear anywhere. We flagged down their road-worn tour van for an hour to talk cigar-box electrics, playing blues on mandolin, and learn why ditching Americana for gloves-off rock 'n' roll set them free

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Phil Barker

In a world where military-grade hype seems to power most of the music industry, it's refreshing to witness a record spring almost out of nowhere because it's such a strong, feral slice of rock 'n' roll that you're compelled to pay attention. Such was *We Fly Free*, the debut album by East Anglian husband-and-wife duo Aaron and Grace Bond. Despite being launched in the Covid-blighted year of 2020, the record lit up the lockdown airwaves like a stray firework and saw the pair take four British Blues Awards in the same year, the first album to do so in the annals of the event.

Like a vintage motorbike, the band's viscerally emotive sound doesn't have a whole lot of moving parts: Aaron's riffs are the engine that sends them roaring down the road, while Grace's vocals are the volatile spirit that fuels the excitement. With a new album, entitled *Saving Grace*, just launched, When Rivers Meet have been on the road promoting their new record, but they pulled over to join us for coffee at *Guitarist*'s studio and explain why making the shift from acoustic Americana to gutsy rock 'n' roll ended 10 years of soul-searching and transformed their musical fortunes almost overnight. They also opened a few flight cases to show us the tools of their trade, from Keef-inspired custom single-cuts to raw and rootsy cigar-box electrics. Just don't trash-talk Elvis in front of them, y'hear...

How did you get started making music together?
Aaron Bond: "We first met 17 years ago, in the pub..."
Grace Bond: "Yes, because of our mates..."
Aaron: "And we got chatting straight away."
Grace: "Our first conversation was actually about Elvis."
Aaron: "Yes, because it was on the jukebox at the time."
Grace: "Somebody was dissing Elvis and we were like, 'Hang on a minute, no.' So we united on that [laughs]."
Aaron: "Then we just got chatting about music and gradually sort of got together. We were in different projects ourselves: I was in a couple of rock bands and Grace was in all sorts of different bands."
Grace: "Everything, yes, Meatloaf tribute bands..."
Aaron: "Country bands and all sorts. Then it took quite a long time before we decided to do anything together."
Grace: "It didn't feel that obvious and, also, when we did start playing together, Aaron was playing acoustic guitar and I was playing [unplugged] mandolin, so it was much more like Americana. It took us a while to get into a groove, especially with writing together. We could always see the potential there, but it took nearly 10 years for us to find it. We were playing the Americana stuff and I remember saying, 'Do you know what? I'm not actually loving doing this any more, something's not quite right.' We'd done other projects, we were doing session work and covers stuff, and we were actually getting our thrill out of doing that and not our own stuff."

What sparked the change to the roots-rock music you perform now?
Grace: "I actually remember the moment we decided to take a different direction. We were at a Guns N' Roses concert. At the time, we were going to rock concerts and then going home and playing something completely different. So, anyway, we were at this concert and I'd had a couple of beers and then I stood up and was going, 'This is what we need to do: we should be playing rock music and blues.' So, the next day, Aaron went and got his Les Paul..."
Aaron: "We loved The Civil Wars. They were amazing, and because of the vocal harmonies and things like that... oh, wow, they were something else. So we thought at the time, because I was playing acoustic and Grace

“It took us a while to get into a groove, especially with writing together. We could always see the potential, but it took nearly 10 years for us to find it”

GRACE BOND

1. For Aaron Bond the feel and vibe of a guitar are almost as important as its sound. The band places a lot of store in having a strong emotional connection not only to their material but to instruments themselves

2. Despite having a great sound on the two When Rivers Meet records, Aaron's not an obsessive gear-junkie: if a pedal works for him, he'll stick with it – the only criteria you really need to sound great. His Boss BD-2 Blues Driver is a lynchpin of his 'board, however

3. The two pillars of Aaron's electric tone are a custom-built T-style electric that (despite the off-piste decal) was made by Gulfcaster Guitars over in Florida, plus a Gibson Les Paul Faded used extensively on the band's first long-player

had an acoustic violin and mandolin, 'Well, this must be the route we need to go down because we can't possibly do blues-rock just as a duo.' People kept saying that to us: 'You need a band, you can't do it as a duo.' We believed it to a certain extent, didn't we? Then, like I say, when we went to see Guns N' Roses, it all changed and we said, 'No, we will do this.'"

How did you know you'd made the right decision?

Grace: "We were at the Dereham Blues Festival in Norfolk. We'd been doing what we felt was some good-quality stuff [from the band's earlier Americana phase], but we never got any real reaction. So we did some new stuff we'd been writing, thinking, 'Let's go see how this goes,' and it was like, 'Oh my God...'"

Aaron: "When we first started playing there was nobody there. And within two songs the whole place was absolutely packed. We thought, 'Wow,' you know. It was crazy."

Grace: "Ever since, we've said whenever we write a song, we've got to love it because people *know*. If you don't [love it yourself], the audience knows..."

Aaron: "We're quite ruthless when we write. When we're writing a song, if we just think, 'Well, it's okay...' then we just scrap it and move on to something else because we've got to love it from the get-go."

Grace: "We've got to be like, 'This is the only song I want to play now – this is the one.'"

What guitars and other gear have you been using to sculpt your current sound?

Aaron: "Well, most of the new album is 'Scotchy', my Telecaster[-inspired solidbody] and also a 335 guitar, plus my Gibson Les Paul. Obviously, there's my cigar-box guitar, as well. That's basically what I use, but we kind of went through an old 70s Vox amp on most of the songs, plus a couple with the Marshall. Beyond that it was just really old reverb, a few delay pedals and things like that."

Grace: "We used proper spring-reverb boxes. Our producer Adam [Bowers] gets very much into the detail with the sounds..."

Aaron: "He gets very frustrated with me! He'd say, 'What? You've still got that crappy old Blues Driver?' I'm like, 'I know... I just like the sound of it.'"

Grace: "We've just bought another Marshall amp; when we're recording, I put my instruments through a valve amp as well. But it's funny, Aaron gravitates to a very trebly sound. It's always pretty toppy."

Tell us about your T-style electric, Aaron.

Aaron: "It was custom made for me by Gulfcaster Guitars in Florida. Izzy [Buholzer] went through the whole thing with me via Zoom and said, 'What do you want?' I was like, 'Well, I like *this* and I like *that*,' and he guided me through the whole build – he's very techy. He was like, 'I think you need this, this, that and the other to get your sounds,' and I was like, 'Oh, great!' I love the Keith Richards [Micawber] guitar, you see, so it's very much like his. Not quite the same but pretty close."

Tell us about your mandolins, Grace – was it easy to find a model that worked for plugged-in rock 'n' roll?

Grace: "Before I got those two, I was playing resonator mandolin, which was just a complete nightmare with feedback, just terrible. I loved it, but it was a nightmare. So I found Belmuse Mandolins and we went there and he had the 'Iceman'-style one, and that's fantastic because I play a lot of slide mandolin. So the eight-string is great for that because you just get the proper twang – I have a little bit of overdrive and a little bit of delay.

"I've also got the four-string. I never thought I would want a four-string mandolin because it feels more like a ukulele or something, you know? But as soon as I started playing it, it's so nice to be able to bend the notes and

"We're quite ruthless when we write. When we're writing a song, if we just think, 'Well, it's okay' then we will just scrap it and move on..."
AARON BOND

"Our biggest influences are Led Zeppelin, Free, Bad Company… there's a lot of space. It's the same with the old blues artists. We love that"

AARON BOND

"There aren't any guitar solos in our music because Aaron's purely rhythm, which has kind of given us a different sound, almost by accident"
GRACE BOND

4. The band's vibey cigar-box guitar was built by Dust N Bones in Cumbria and sounds "phenomenal" says Aaron Bond

5. Grace's Ibanez Iceman-inspired electric mandolin was made by Belmuse and replaced a resonator mandolin that suffered serious feedback issues

6. Grace's squared-away pedalboard has the toothy drive of a Fulltone OCD at its heart plus a Boss GE-7 Equalizer, a TC Electronic Flashback delay and a Fender ABY pedal

7. Grace Bond holding her four-string mandolin, also built by Belmuse, which allows her to solo and add bluesy bends impossible on an eight-string model. Hear it on the band's superb track *Free Man*

you can really play lead on it... just to be able to bend the strings makes all the difference. So that one was custom made for me – it's just got a humbucker on it. It works especially well with a little bit of overdrive, so it competes more with the electric guitar because otherwise it just feels too thin. When we're doing duo gigs, it's nice that we've got full-frequency coverage, in a way. So you've got the high tones of the mandolin, while Aaron plays a lot more bass-y stuff, and then there's his kick [percussion] as well. So we've got quite a full sound, even when there are just two of us, because of the mandolin."

You mentioned that Aaron provides the rhythmic pulse for the music with his feet. Do you use a piezo 'stomp box' to amplify that?
Aaron: "No. I tried some of those things and I just couldn't get on with them at all, so I literally have a kick drum behind me with a physical pedal. We like the organic look as well as the sound and whatever else. Everything we do is, like.. .real, you know?"
Grace: "We did try the blocks, though..."
Aaron: "Yes, but it gave me shin splints [laughs]."
Grace: "We kind of see our music as [being built from] a few simple elements and that's kind of it. There's not a lot of complexity because we like just two or three good elements, like a strong riff, a strong vocal line..."
Aaron: "A good beat..."
Grace: "There aren't any guitar solos because Aaron's purely rhythm, which has kind of given us a different sound, almost by accident."
Aaron: "Yes, our biggest influences are Led Zeppelin, Free, Bad Company and people like that. When you listen to their music, there's a lot of space. We love that. It's the same with the old blues artists like John Lee Hooker. I mean, for me, John Lee Hooker is my all-time favourite: just riff, riff, riff. That's what gets me..."
Grace: "Yes, just lock in and you're happy. That's why the cigar box works so well."

Who built the cigar-box electric?
Aaron: "A company called Dust N Bones in Cumbria. He made that for me and sent it down. I just started playing it – I love it. The action is so high on it, it's great. It's non-fretted and it's just beautiful for playing slide. The sound you can get out of it is just phenomenal."

What tunings do you use for slide?
Aaron: "I play loads of different tunings. I do play in standard, but also drop D and DADGAD. I play in [open] G, E, C. Hence, I have a lot of guitars because it's just quicker to change them – I pick up another guitar, rather than try to retune them..."
Grace: "This is what he says, but it's just because he wants more guitars!"
Aaron: "No... but I do like a lot of guitars [laughs]." G

When Rivers Meet's new album, *Saving Grace*, is available now on One Road Records . To buy the album and for more info, visit ***https://shop.whenriversmeet.co.uk***

IGF INTERNATIONAL GUITAR FOUNDATION & FESTIVALS

Join us at the IGF Bath summer school 2022

We present an amazingly rich and varied programme packed with all the guitar things you always wanted to know and be able to play! Blues, rock, jazz, acoustic and much more!

Tutors include **Neville Marten**, **Jason Sidwell**, **Jon Bishop**, **Gianluca Corona**, **Chris Quinn**, **John Wheatcroft** and **Tolis Zavaliaris**

16-21 august

TOP 40 AND FUNK with Jason Sidwell

This course is for guitarists that desire strong abilities to suit being in a band. This will include picking approaches and band relevant chord voicings to modes for soloing and exciting repertoire analysis with a bias towards funk and RnB legends like Chic, James Brown and Michael Jackson.

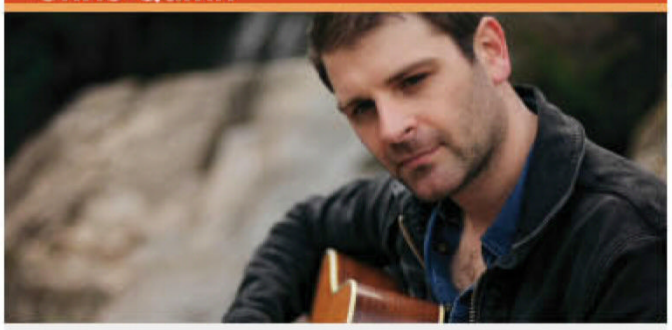
JUMP BLUES with Chris Corcoran

Referencing the big sound of '40s & '50s R&B and Jump Blues guitar, this course will give a fresh perspective on how to add drive, style and invention. Licks, riffs and phrases will be covered as well as the styles of guitarists like T-Bone Walker, Lonnie Johnson, Tiny Grimes and Barney Kessel.

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

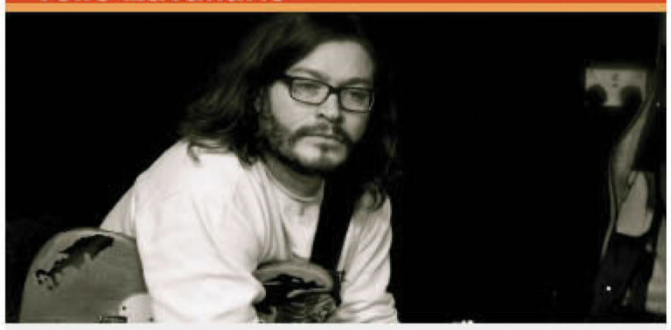


This course focuses on roots based music, ranging from folk to blues songs. You will study guitar techniques used by some of the greats of popular songwriting and also touch on useful fingerstyle methods and open tunings.

CLASSIC ROCK & INDIE ROCK with Jon Bishop

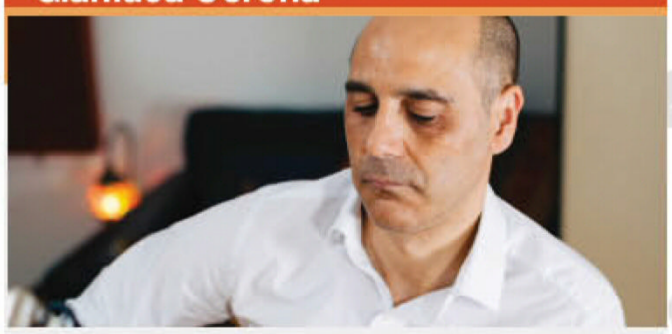
This course will cover many of the main components that guitarists use, ranging from scales and chord riffing through to string bending and use of harmonics. Lots of classic rock and indie riffs will be looked at with iconic songs.

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.

Early bird discount available
until 7 March 2022

£120 deposit secures your place

book now

GuitarTechniques Guitarist musicradar Total Guitar

full info and booking: **igf.org.uk**

Sharp Dressed Man

Give a rockstar a pencil and what do you get? A Cream T guitar! Co-designed by the legend that is Billy F Gibbons and made in the UK, the Aurora is here. But can it light up the sky? Let's find out...

Words Dave Burrluck
Photography Phil Barker

CREAM T AURORA STANDARD 2PS **£2,499**

CONTACT **Cream T Guitars** PHONE **01695 570023** WEB **www.creamtguitars.com**

What You Need To Know

1 What's the deal here and who the heck is Cream T?
Regular readers will know of Cream T pickups and its designer Thomas Nilsen, not least for the way that he creates his pickups by making scans of original vintage pickups via his 'bonkers' Oracle box. A classic case of snake oil and smoke and mirrors, we thought... until we started using them. Like a certain Mr Gibbons, we were impressed.

2 So Billy Gibbons has actually designed this guitar?
Yes – along with Thomas, of course, Billy has put on his guitar designer's hat to create a brand-new model.

3 And what's special about the pickup here, then?
The guitar features a seemingly simple pickup-swapping concept from Swiss-based guitar maker Relish; the company has licensed the technology to Cream T. And the good news for the mod-averse among you is that you don't need a soldering iron: you just pull out the pickup and slot another one in, so it takes seconds to revoice the guitar. If that's too futuristic for you, each Cream T guitar is available with conventional fixed pickups for less money.

Earlier in the year we reported on the birth of this new guitar company, Cream T Guitars. If you missed that Blueprint feature in issue 477, here's a recap. In brief, Norwegian pickup-maker-to-the-stars Thomas Nilsen joined forces with Tim Lobley, the owner of Sound Affects in Ormskirk, to restart his pickup-making business in the UK. As regular readers will know, Thomas has a unique take on pickup design, scanning pickups from old 'Bursts and the like via his Oracle Pickup Scanner and replicating them. The Cream T Whiskerbuckers, for example, are scanned from Billy F Gibbons' fabled 'Pearly Gates'; the Bernie Buckers are from Bernie Marsden's almost-as-famous 'Beast'. Tim Lobley had been impressed by futuristic Swiss-based guitar maker Relish and decided to see if its pickup-swapping technology could be applied to more conventional guitars – obviously featuring Cream T pickups. Increasingly visible York-based guitar maker PJD was given the job of producing the guitars designed by Billy and Thomas and brought to market by Tim.

In that Blueprint article we featured Prototype #2, and the team has been very busy refining that into a mini-range

Billy F Gibbons drew out this classic Martin-style square-topped headstock, which gives the guitar quite a retro vibe. The Cream T logo has also been enlarged since the earlier prototype we looked at

Since the pickups are surrounded by the purely cosmetic Anomaly pickup rings, no-one would know you can swap them out in seconds. This Cream T Whiskerbucker is the default choice for the Aurora guitars, scanned from Billy F Gibbons' fabled 'Pearly Gates'

of seven models – three of which are effectively Billy's signature guitars, while four are more regular models (see What's On The Menu on page 99). Our Standard model here is the blue-collar workingman's guitar – but with pickup swapping.

Feel & Sounds

If you've been able to get your hands on a PJD guitar, there are obviously a lot of similarities here, particularly the clean, unfussy build, which is faultless. Along with a very good weight for the style of 3.69kg (8.12lb), the guitar feels a little more muscular than that previous prototype with an alive acoustic resonance.

Described as a "59 LP Style" profile, the glued-in neck is certainly meatier than that earlier prototype. Dimensionally, it's around half a millimetre slimmer in depth than Gibson's '50s Les Paul Standard, measuring 21.4mm at the 1st fret and 24.6mm by the 12th before the neck increases in depth to flow into a pretty classic style D-shaped heel. It's a full-width tenon, too, although the neck doesn't extend into the neck pickup cavity because that is an open hole to accept the pickups, which simply push in from the back. It all feels pretty traditional, though; there is a slightly undulating feel to the neck back due to the very thin satin nitro finish, but the profile is a really good-feeling C.

The Standard is unbound on both the fingerboard and top body edges, a little more Les Paul Special if you like, and it's the only model with dot inlays. It may appear a little austere for some, bearing in mind the £2,499 price of our pickup-swapping model, especially as it only comes with a gigbag. But a logo'd Hiscox case – cream in colour, of course – can be ordered for an additional £75.

This is a very good player with sensible Jescar frets (spec'd at 2.27mm wide with a measured height of approximately 1.32mm) that are immaculately fettled on the dark rosewood 'board with lightly rolled edges. The setup is really good,

This Aurora Standard is a simple design, beautifully executed, and a perfect vehicle for Nilsen's pickups

THE RIVALS

As to the pickup swapping, the Trinity by Relish guitar (€699) is available in three colours; extra sets of Relish and other brand pickups start at €249. Relish's Swiss-made guitars start with the Mary (from €3,499).

The Modern strand of Gibson's current catalogue includes its solderless Quick Connect system for the pickups. It's not an instant way to swap out pickups, but if you can use a screwdriver it doesn't take very long at all. Guitars such as the Les Paul Classic (with a street price of £1,799) and the Studio (£1,399) come recommended from us. Still with Gibson, the USA production Les Paul Special, with dual P-90s and single-piece bridge, streets at £1,349, while the lightly aged Murphy Lab version from the Custom Shop is more costly at £3,799.

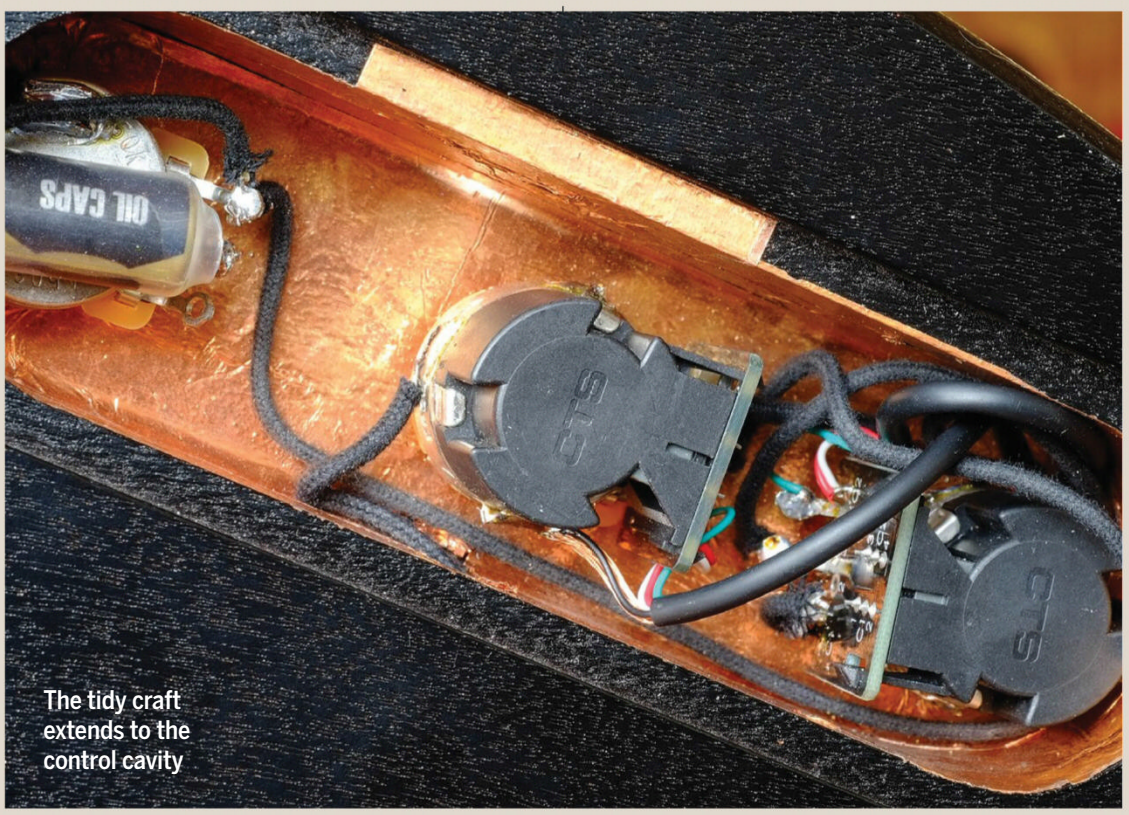
In the UK, Gordon Smith has the all-mahogany GS2 60, which, if ordered to a similar spec as our Cream T model (with two-piece bridge, covered GSG humbuckers and CTS/Switchcraft wiring loom), would cost £1,249 including a gigbag.

UNDER THE HOOD

What's inside this finely made innovative guitar?

When you remove the control cavity's backplate, you can't help but be impressed. All the pots are CTS 500kohms and the volumes are those posh CTS pull-push types with their small circuit board connections. The hook-up wire is the old-school cloth-covered type and it's very neatly wired in vintage style. There's a single .022 microfarads tone cap (a Cream T paper-in-oil type) and the entire cavity and coverplate are shielded with copper foil. No tricks here; it's nicely done.

The cavities for the pickup swapping are covered with a neatly recessed black plastic plate that attaches magnetically to the guitar. You simply pull that off, pull out one or both pickups, and push in the new ones – like the back cover, they're firmly held in place by small magnets. There's a mounting assembly that attaches to the back of each pickup with a central Allen-keyed bolt that allows you to dial in the correct height for that specific pickup. In production, however, PJD's Leigh Dovey tells us these pickup-swapping mounting frames, to which the pickups attach, have caused some problems on the prototype guitars, but he has the solution that will be fully sorted on the guitars we'll get to buy.



The tidy craft extends to the control cavity

It's a known fact that Thomas Nilsen doesn't disclose much of what's inside his pickups. He certainly doesn't chase the exact vintage-correct materials like some makers, and he uses a 'special sauce' to pot the pickups. However, as we comment in our sound evaluation, they actually sound unpotted, not least when you tap the covers. All three humbuckers have a similar DCR centred around 8.3kohms. The Duchess neck single coil measures 8.27k, and there's nothing stopping you putting any pickup in any position – you just need to readjust the height and push it in.

The open-backed Gotoh tuners with their cream plastic buttons add to the old-school aesthetic. The volute was added by PJD's Leigh Dovey to reinforce the narrowest part of the neck under the access hole for the double-action truss rod

too, and this Aurora comes across as very familiar in feel, seated or strapped on. So, with its shoulder-placed toggle switch and those dual humbucking-sized pickups, now surrounded by the ultra-stylish Anomaly pickup rings, we don't get four controls as you might expect but three: a volume for each pickup (with a pull-switch to engage a coil-split on any humbucker) and a master tone.

If the feel and playability haven't got you by now, the sounds we hear are superb. We start our test with the Whiskerbuckers installed and a hour or so later we haven't even considered swapping them. It would be silly to suggest they're the 'best' PAF clones we've ever heard, but we'd definitely say they capture that magic. The lean bite of the bridge with its almost single-coil character really cuts through, contrasted by the softer attack of the neck pickup with an equally vocal character. As we've said before, they don't sound potted, but they are, and at higher volume levels you get plenty of handling noise – things sound very lively, in a good way. Any classic rock fan needs to hear (at least) this bridge pickup through a cranked Marshall-style amp: it's woody, edgy... total rock 'n' roll.

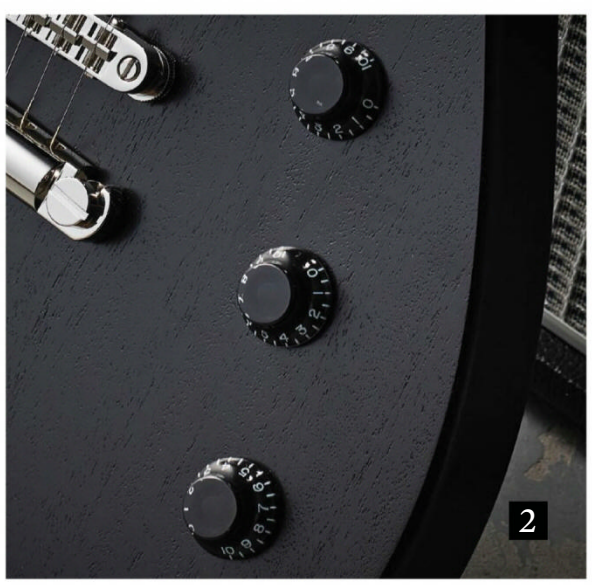
1

1. Aside from the Whiskerbucker, the Standard comes with a humbucking-sized Duchess P90 single coil (neck) and Banger & Mash (bridge). The beauty of the pickup-swapping concept is you can put the bridge in neck position, or vice versa

2. The three-control layout here gives a volume for each pickup (with a push-switch coil-split) and a master tone. Billy just rides the volumes and doesn't use a toggle switch. For us mere mortals, we get a pickup selector, too!

On this all-mahogany platform, there's not quite the crisp edge we hear from our maple-topped Les Paul Classic with Burstbuckers. The Aurora sounds a little sweeter, rounded in the high-end, and pulling back the volume slightly, the tone further, the vintage-style wiring thins the voice without losing its clarity. You could quite possibly have a career on either pickup and across hugely broad musical styles.

Its simplicity is exactly the appeal. It's not apeing a classic-era design yet it feels very vintage informed


2

The coil-split switches voice the inner slug coils of each humbucker, and while they come across as being a little thin sounding initially, with a little tone roll-off they add some musical 'Fender' to the voice, and both provide frankly superb early electric blues sounds with a more narrow focus than the bigger humbucker voices. But let's not pigeonhole this guitar or its pickups: the sounds we describe work just as intuitively with some heavy modulation and delay. They're simply very musical.

But what about the other pickups? This is where the fun starts as we pull out the neck Whiskerbucker and pop in the humbucking-sized Duchess single coil. There's a little more edge to the neck position now, less smooth than the Whiskerbucker and slightly more dynamic – it's a great way to A/B pickups. Pickup aside, everything about the guitar is the same. Of course, it's a single coil so pulling up the split switch on neck volume control doesn't have any effect, and you can't help thinking that a tapped version of this pickup would suit. Maybe we'll see that down the line.

Finally, we pop in the unique Banger & Mash – the only pickup here that's not a clone – and it's very impressive again, especially when paired with the Duchess at the neck. There's seemingly a little less girth compared with the Whiskerbucker and you hear a little more 'Fender', and winding up our test amp it's a great rootsy Americana rhythm sound, whereas our Tele bridge reference sounds thinner and more spiky. Mix it with either that Whiskerbucker or Duchess at the neck and, well, it's pretty Keef. Split, again voicing the slug coil, things get a lot thinner, but when mixed with either neck pickup and our pedalboard it does a pretty good Pretenders or clean-edged early Police-era Andy Summers. To be fair, we're scratching the surface of the potential here.

This Prototype #2 reflects the style of the Aurora BFGT2PS

The case candy includes extra pickups in a hand-tooled leather holster plus a certificate of authenticity in a leather pouch

WHAT'S ON THE MENU?

An overview of the new Cream T Guitar range

The Aurora range starts with the all-mahogany Standard 2 (£1,999); the Standard 2PS (£2,499, as reviewed) is the same guitar but includes pickup swapping and an extra set of pickups. The Custom adds a thin maple top and a little more decoration; the MP2 (£2,499) features fixed pickups, while the MP2PS (£2,999) has pickup swapping.

Moving on up and the BFGT2 (£3,499) shifts the specification more towards the needs of Billy F Gibbons, so we get the same three controls (but with no pickup-selecting toggle switch) and a Music City wraparound single-piece bridge. The BFGT2PS (£3,999) adds pickup swapping. A final limited-edition model, personally signed by Billy, the BFGT1PS (also £3,999) comes in aged Aztec Gold only and with a single pickup (with just volume and tone controls) plus the pickup-swapping feature.

All the guitars in the range include a leather holster for the spare pickups, a leather pouch for the certificate of authenticity, and a logo'd Hiscox case – aside from the Standard models, which come with a gigbag and the option to upgrade to a hard case for just £75 at the point of ordering.

All seven guitars share the same Les Paul-meets-Telecaster outline. They're all slab-bodied, too, with a depth of 44mm, and are chambered. The Standard and Custom models have 'standard' chambering (primarily on the bass-side lower bout), while the BFGT models have the unique 'signature' chambering, which was suggested by the project's instigator, Tim Lobley. All of the guitars have a 628mm (24.75-inch) scale length with 22 narrow/tall frets and the same 254mm (10-inch) fingerboard radius. The non-signature guitars use a Gotoh tune-o-matic and stud tailpiece combo as opposed to that wraparound bridge of the signature models. All models feature individual open-backed Gotoh SXB510 tuners on the three-a-side old-Martin-style raked-back headstock.

> With the ability to revoice the guitar in seconds, it's like having a mini vintage guitar collection

Each guitar (fixed and with pickup-swapping) comes with Cream T Whiskbuckers. On the Standard and Custom pickup-swapping models you get an extra pair of pickups: a humbucking-sized P90 at the neck, the Duchess, and Thomas's unique Banger & Mash originally made for Keith Richards.

The limited single-pickup BFGT1 comes with a Whiskerbucker at the bridge plus Eliminator bridge, Original Banger bridge and Banger & Mash bridge. The two-pickup, non-limited BFGT2 model comes with either a fixed set of Whiskerbuckers or, in its 'PS' version, with a set of Whiskerbuckers plus an Eliminator Set, an Original Banger bridge and Banger & Mash bridge. On the pickup-swapping models, however, you're not limited to those particular additional pickups: you can actually order the guitar with *any* of the Cream T range. If you decide later down the line that you want to try another single or set of Cream T pickups with the Relish pickup mount added, these will cost £15 on top of the price of each pickup.

VIDEO DEMO ▶ http://bit.ly/guitaristextra

The back cover is held in place with magnets. Pull it off and you see the holes in the guitar to accept the pickups. Incidentally, Cream T plans to offer any brand of pickup with the Relish mounting bracket installed

CREAM T AURORA STANDARD 2PS

PRICE: £2,499 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Single-cutaway, chambered body hardtail electric
BODY: 2-piece mahogany
NECK: Quarter-sawn mahogany, 59 LP Style profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 628mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43.2mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, cream acrylic dot inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium (Jescar FW55090)
HARDWARE: Gotoh tune-o-matic-style bridge and lightweight stud tailpiece, Gotoh SXB510 open-backed tuners – nickel-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Cream T Whiskerbucker humbuckers (with included Duchess P90 single coil and Banger & Mash), 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, neck and bridge volume controls (with pull-switch coil-spits) and master tone controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.69/8.12
OPTIONS: The fixed pickup Standard 2 costs £1,999. Cream T Hiscox hard case adds £75 (if purchased at order). Additional Cream T pickups with Relish mounting add £15 to standard-mount pickups. Other brands will be available and you'll be able to send in your own pickups to have the mountings fitted – see website for prices
RANGE OPTIONS: See 'What's On The Menu?' on page 99
LEFT-HANDERS: Not currently
FINISHES: Noche (Black, as reviewed) Fantasma (White), Picante (Red), Desnudo (Natural) and Laguna Lite (Light Blue) – thin satin nitrocellulose to both body and neck

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Excellent design and build; quality hardware; Cream T pickups, pickup swapping and superb sounds

CONS Not everyone will get the relatively austere appearance balanced against the price

Verdict

Despite the colourful backstory, the artist association and the pickup-swapping concept – which, let's not forget, isn't unique to Cream T – this Aurora Standard comes across as a simple design that is beautifully executed and a perfect vehicle to show off Thomas Nilsen's pickup range. The ability to revoice the guitar instantly is quite something, as we've reported before. Yes, beyond the spare set you get with the guitar, the costs can mount up if you're buying additional pickups, but it's obviously a cheaper way of having more than one guitar in terms of sound.

On the flip-side, the Aurora's simplicity may have some people questioning its price, which appears expensive on paper, not least in this finish style and with complete absence of decoration. But it does, of course, include four Cream T pickups with a retail value of £750.

For us, though, that simplicity is exactly the appeal. It's not apeing a classic-era design yet it feels and sounds very vintage

> The Standard model is the sort of instrument you could turn up to any gig with and not be shown the door

informed, timeless even. The Custom version and the non-limited BFGT models come with a figured maple top with its obvious 'Burst association, but our Standard model looks less specific – the sort of instrument you could turn up to any gig with and not be shown the door. It's a working tool, not a fashion statement. Plugged in and with the ability to revoice the guitar in seconds, it's like having a mini vintage guitar collection – it really doesn't sound like a new guitar at all. For anyone who enjoys the subtleties of vintage-voiced instruments, you'll have a field day here. And instead of buying different guitars, you might well find that your 'new' guitar lies just a pair of pickups away, even if you have no idea what a soldering iron is. G

JOE BONAMASSA

LIVE IN CONCERT

UK TOUR 2022

APRIL

20 **GLASGOW** SECC
22 **CARDIFF** Motorpoint Arena
23 **BRIGHTON** Centre

MAY

5 **LONDON** Royal Albert Hall
6 **LONDON** Royal Albert Hall

GET TICKETS AT
JBONAMASSA.COM

The Perfect Christmas Gift

for just £25

plus

FREE BLACKSTAR FLY 3 MINI AMP

(CHOOSE BETWEEN BLACK OR VINTAGE)

WORTH £65

The FLY 3 is an innovative, cutting-edge three-watt mini amp

Combines two channels, tape delay and the Blackstar patented Infinite Shape Feature (ISF) to create the perfect compact and portable guitar amplifier

It packs a punch with big TONE, even at the lowest volumes

Terms and conditions: Offer closes 31st January 2022. Offer open to new UK subscribers only. All gift subscriptions will start post-Christmas with the next available issue. Please allow up to 6 weeks for delivery. Your gift will be delivered separately within 60 days after your first payment has cleared. Gifts only available to subscribers on the UK mainland. In the unlikely event that we run out of this gift, we promise to offer you an alternative gift of the same value. Payment is non-refundable after the 14-day cancellation period, unless exceptional circumstances apply. For full terms and conditions, visit www.magazinesdirect.com/terms. For enquiries call 0330 333 1113. Lines are open Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm UK time, or email help@magazinesdirect.com. Calls to 0330 numbers will be charged at no more than a national landline call, and may be included in your phone provider's call bundle.

Your special Christmas offer

- **FREE Blackstar FLY 3 mini amp worth £65**
- **Enjoy 6 months of *Guitarist* for just £25 – that's just £3.85 an issue!**
- **Receive every issue delivered direct to your door**
- **A thoughtful gift that keeps delivering throughout the year**

Upgrade to include digital for only £5

- **Instant access any time, anywhere**
- **Never miss an issue of *Guitarist***
- **Available on iOS or Android**

Order the gift that keeps on delivering

www.magazinesdirect.com/XMASGUI

or call **0330 333 1113** and quote **XM21b (Black) or XM21v (Vintage)**

MANUFACTURER
ACLAM GUITARS

MODEL
THE WINDMILLER PREAMP

PRICE
£289

CONTACT
ACLAM GUITARS WWW.ACLAMGUITARS.COM

ACLAM GUITARS

The Windmiller Preamp

Pete Townshend's secret 60s sound-shaper revisited

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Olly Curtis

Way back in the 1960s and early 70s, long before pedals became the huge thing they are these days, guitarists had to look at other ways to inject a little more life into their amps and squeeze more excitement, drive and distortion out of them. Now, while purpose-built units of the Rangemaster ilk were designed to do just that – and definitely did the business for Rory Gallagher, Tony Iommi and others – certain players relied on more conventional equipment, using it in a role perhaps beyond that for which it was intended.

It's well documented that Jimmy Page was a fan of the extra gain and tonal shift to be had from the preamp in his Echoplex tape echo unit, while Ritchie Blackmore favoured feeding his amp from the preamp of a modified reel-to-reel tape recorder. In the case of Pete Townshend back around the 1966/'67 period, the weapon of choice was the preamp in a spring reverb unit – the Grampian Type 636 – which can clearly be seen atop his Marshall amps in many period photographs and videos.

Barcelona-based Aclam Guitars has a nose for seeking out obscure, perhaps forgotten, but crucial gear and resurrecting its tonal mojo – witness its Dr Robert pedal emulating the Vox UL 730 amps used in the studio by The Beatles for a short period – and now the company has done a similar job for the Grampian, taking a vintage unit and indulging in a spot of reverse engineering. The team has recreated the preamp's essential sonic qualities while taking time to eliminate the hiss that the original was known for. They've also added some features to increase versatility, including Hi- and Lo-Cut filters to roll off treble and bass respectively.

SOUNDS

To use it in the same way Mr Townshend did back in the 60s, The Windmiller needs to have a guitar plugged directly into it because it has a low-impedance input that interacts with the pickups to colour the tone in a particular way when it receives the high-impedance output from a guitar. With the pedal's Gain knob at minimum there's a small level boost and an instant tonal shift when you kick it in – a definite enhancement that, to our ears, smoothed out a little harshness while giving the guitar more body and an airy top-end.

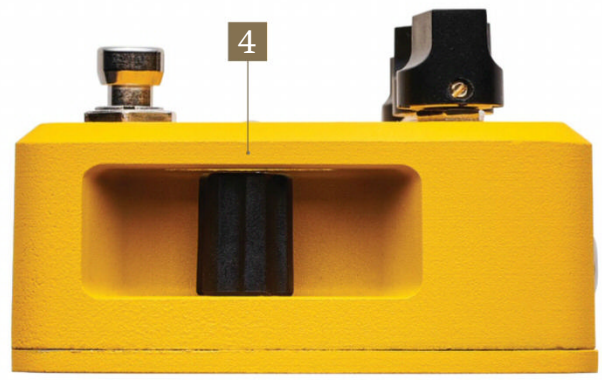
01. FOOTSWITCH
Maybe you'd use this as an always on pedal, but if you do want to switch it in and out then this noiseless soft-touch switch activates the relay switching

02. GAIN KNOB
The crucial control – just turn it up to boost the signal

03. TONE KNOBS
These two will tailor the sound to suit your particular combination of guitar and amp. They are inactive at fully counterclockwise so just turn them clockwise to start removing bottom- or top-end

04. ACLAM MOUNTING SYSTEM
The enclosure has a proprietary locking system designed to fit Aclam's Smart Track pedalboards, but the holes may be useful for fixing to other 'boards

05. OVERLOAD INDICATOR LAMP
A throwback to the original unit, this will glow brighter with higher gain and harder playing



Tech Spec

ORIGIN: Spain
TYPE: Preamp pedal
FEATURES: True bypass, pedalboard fixing system
CONTROLS: Gain, Lo-Cut, Hi-Cut, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied), 100mA
DIMENSIONS: 136 (w) x 87 (d) x 55mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE

8/10

Turning up the gain starts to get things cooking as the pedal puts more into your amp, resulting in a lively and dynamic drive that cleans up naturally with guitar volume. A Strat and The Windmiller into a vintage Marshall JMP50 gave us that classic Townshend sound: edgy raunch with an open clarity that'll entice you to play chord-driven Who songs of the period such as *Substitute* or *I Can't Explain*. However, The Windmiller could have universal appeal beyond apeing the 60s Who style as the classy sounds we also obtained with other guitar and amp combinations proved.

The two tone knobs are really useful in setting The Windmiller up for use with different rigs or pickups, offering fine-tuning rather than anything radical but really helping shape overall tone. You may wish to roll off some low-end for a leaner sound that's helpful at higher gain settings, or make things a bit mellower with some hi-cut for spiky pickups. The original Pete Townshend tone came from the interaction of single coils with the Grampian 636, but if you're using humbuckers some judicious lo-cut control will help you get more into that tonal zone.

Besides being first in the signal chain, The Windmiller can also thrive in other scenarios. Putting a buffered pedal in front of the Aclam so that it is fed with a low-impedance signal means that the colouration from the impedance mismatch is absent so the pedal can be used more as a transparent preamp. As such, it can be used as a boost for solos or as an always on tonal component with the two filters contributing to the overall tone. There's plenty of gain of tap and we particularly like the way it can push a drive pedal to another level.

VERDICT
While The Windmiller would be particularly of interest to Who obsessives looking to emulate the raucous 60s sound Pete Townshend was known to describe as "a kind of clear fuzz dirge", it could also command a place in many disparate rigs as a characterful boost and tone conditioner to enhance the signal chain. G

PROS *Rare vintage sound revived; practical tone controls; quality footswitching*
CONS *It's a little larger than we'd have liked*

MANUFACTURER
BLACKSTAR

MODEL
DEPT. 10 DUAL DRIVE & DUAL DISTORTION

PRICE
£249 EACH

CONTACT
BLACKSTAR WWW.BLACKSTARAMPS.COM

ROUND-UP

Blackstar Dept. 10 pedals

The amp maker's new effects range combines valves with versatility

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Olly Curtis

Described by Blackstar as "the most advanced valve pedals in the world", the new Dept. 10 series units all feature an ECC83 triode valve that runs at more than 200 volts internally to facilitate valve-amp-style organic tone, dynamics and break-up. There's a smaller Boost pedal in the range, but here we're taking a look at the two twin-footswitch pedals, the Dual Drive and Dual Distortion, both of which feature two independent channels you can toggle between.

Besides being used for drive/distortion in a standard pedal array, both units have extra outputs with the signal passing through Blackstar's Cab Rig DSP speaker simulation: there's a TRS stereo output that can take headphones for silent practice, an XLR output ideal for connecting to a mixing desk, and also a USB port for computer-based recording. Three different speaker simulations are instantly available from a front-panel Cab Rig switch and you can use Blackstar's Architect software to configure these with a choice of cabinets plus various microphone and power amp options. A send/return loop allows you to connect external equipment – such as modulation, delay and reverb pedals – directly into the signal path.

BLACKSTAR

Dept. 10 Dual Drive £249

Each channel of Blackstar's new Dept. 10 Dual Drive has two voicings that are available via a toggle switch: Channel 1 can be set up for Clean or Crunch, while Channel 2 offers Crunch (a little fatter than Channel 1's offering) or Overdrive where you'll find the gainiest sounds. Each channel has its own Gain and Level knobs, but both share the same tonal adjustment via an array of four knobs. The Bass, Middle and Treble work just like an amp's tone knobs, while the ISF knob determines the type of amp as it morphs from USA to UK – in part altering the midrange character from open to dense. The clean channel voicing has a useful degree of compression going on, so it's great for recording and can get into light break-up as you up the gain. The other voicings deliver from a clean boost through all shades of crunch to saturated lead tones, all done with great feel, responding naturally to guitar dynamics and volume. G

VERDICT *An extremely versatile drive pedal – a most natural way to add two extra dirt channels to a clean amp*

BLACKSTAR

Dept. 10 Dual Distortion £249

While its control surface works exactly the same as the Dual Drive, the Dual Distortion has more gain overall and a beefier voicing; it's more high-gain modern than classic vintage. With Channel 1's Clean and Crunch voicings and Channel 2's OD 1 and OD 2, you're covered from solidly fat clean chording right through to harmonic-laden high-gain leads. As with the Dual Drive, the speaker simulation here is nicely authentic, offering up a complete sound that both records well and will give you a great front-of-house feed as an alternative or a complement to your amp. USB recording is a doddle to set up – you just set the Dept. 10 pedal as the audio input in your DAW.

As with its sibling, there's plenty of flexibility available in changing from one channel to the next, which can be radical or something more subtle, such as setting up two crunch sounds with slightly different gain settings. G

VERDICT *An excellent range of functionality in a pedal that will suit those who gravitate towards heavier guitar tones*

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: China
TYPE: (Dual Distortion) Valve overdrive pedal and preamp
FEATURES: Buffered bypass, ECC83 valve, 2x channels, Cab Rig speaker simulation, USB recording, FX loop
CONTROLS: Gain 1, Level 1, CL/CR switch, Gain 2, Level 2, OD 1/OD 2 switch, Bass, Middle, Treble, ISF (Infinite Shape Feature), Cab Rig switch, Channel 1 footswitch, Channel 2 footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, standard cab rig output, XLR line output, standard send, standard return, USB Audio
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (included) 500mA
DIMENSIONS: 154 (w) x 116 (d) x 72mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: China
TYPE: (Dual Drive) Valve overdrive pedal and preamp
FEATURES: Buffered bypass, ECC83 valve, 2x channels, Cab Rig speaker simulation, USB recording, FX loop
CONTROLS: Gain 1, Level 1, CL/CR switch, Gain 2, Level 2, CR/OD switch, Bass, Middle, Treble, ISF (Infinite Shape Feature), Cab Rig switch, Channel 1 footswitch, Channel 2 footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, standard cab rig output, XLR line output, standard send, standard return, USB Audio
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (included) 500mA
DIMENSIONS: 154 (w) x 116 (d) x 72mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

MANUFACTURER
FREDRIC EFFECTS

PRICE
£140

MODEL
THE ACCOMPLISHED BADGER MKII

CONTACT
FREDRIC EFFECTS WWW.FREDRIC.CO.UK

FREDRIC EFFECTS

The Accomplished Badger MKII

A compact pedal for boost, drive and distortion of many stripes

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Olly Curtis

The Accomplished Badger from London-based Fredric Effects is a preamp/booster pedal that will provide a degree of colouration to enhance your signal in a specific way. It features two gain stages with an op-amp buffer/boost driving a germanium transistor gain stage that features individually selected vintage new-old-stock components, tested for optimal gain and low leakage.

While the pedal has been around for a few years, what we have here is a new iteration: the MkII version, which now incorporates an internal charge pump so it can run at 18 volts from its nine-volt input, and features an audio-grade Triad output transformer that is said to deliver a more musical saturation and break-up. You also get three DIP switches inside the pedal for more options.

A Volume knob controls the overall output and then individual knobs set the gain of the op-amp and germanium stages. Without any DIP switches engaged, the pedal offers a clean sparkly boost with a tightened up bottom-end at lower levels of the two gain knobs. Turning the pair up pushes things into a nice gritty break-up and well beyond, all sensitive to guitar volume and picking dynamics. Juxtaposition of the two gain knobs offers variations on that theme as their different characters interact and you can find a sweet spot that works for you.

To take things further, engaging the first DIP switch actually doubles the gain from the op-amp stage, although things can get quite quirky at the upper levels of the gain knobs even without that, easing into glitchy and broken territory. At the extreme, with both gains up full, the signal can cut out momentarily if you hit the strings hard, offering some interesting spluttery effects that can be exploited with touch and dynamics.

The other DIP switches can greatly expand the tonal options, making it almost like having three pedals in one. One switch brings in a soft clipping circuit with two germanium diodes, offering some very usable drive tones. The other brings in an asymmetrical hard clipping circuit with three silicon diodes that puts a fuzzy distorted edge on things.

VERDICT

Sized nicely for any pedalboard, the MkII provides DIP switch options that, combined with the main controls, make this a versatile boost choice to hit your amp exactly where you need it. G

PROS *Compact size; versatile range of sounds for one small pedal; cute graphics*
CONS *Having to take off that baseplate to get to the DIP switches*

ALSO TRY...

PHOTO BY ANDERTONS MUSIC / WWW.ANDERTONS.CO.UK

BENSON

Germanium Boost £219

Featuring a single rotary knob, this USA-made boost pedal has an error correction circuit to correctly bias the germanium transistor so it is impervious to component drift, leakage and sensitivity to temperature.

PHOTO BY EXPRESSO FX / HTTPS://EXPRESSOFX.COM

EXPRESSO FX

Germanium Boost £189

This boost with NOS Mullard Germanium transistors features seven different voicings accessed through a stepped rotary switch – achieved using seven separate, high-quality NOS capacitors and not by simply adding a tone stack.

PHOTO BY ANDERTONS MUSIC / WWW.ANDERTONS.CO.UK

XOTIC

RC Booster V2 £179

This latest version includes the same 20dB of clean boost as the original RC Booster (discontinued in 2017) but has a second independently footswitchable gain channel for fatter tones. Two-band EQ offers up to 15dB of boost or cut.

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Germanium preamp/boost pedal
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Ge Gain, Op-Amp Gain, Volume, 3x internal DIP switches, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 20mA
DIMENSIONS: 67 (w) x 109 (d) x 48mm (h)

8/10

PT2399 & FV-1 Chips

Stefan Fast of YouTube channel ThePedalZone cracks open his pedal collection to discuss the influence of the chips behind our tone

The majority of us probably rarely think about what's inside our guitar pedals. We like the thought of them being mystic devices created by sonic magicians, with access to unobtanium unicorn dust. However, I honestly think that the narrative becomes even more magical when you understand the story behind some of the crucial components in there. So let's take a quick look at the PT2399 and FV-1 chips and how they helped shape the pedal scene as we know it today.

PT2399 CMOS ECHO/ DELAY CHIP

This pivotal integrated delay circuit was developed in the late 90s by Princeton Technology. With a delay time ranging from 30ms to 340ms, it was originally designed for adding slapback delays and reverberating sounds to karaoke machines and entertainment systems. But it quickly became an integral part of the burgeoning pedal scene and for four good reasons: 1) It simply sounded great. Even though it's digital, it really nails those iconic analogue and tape-style echoes of the past. Hence, you'll often see PT2399 delays marketed as analogue-voiced or vintage-inspired digital delays. 2) Where other delay chips and bucket-brigade devices would need an external clock, filtering or memory in order to create an effect, everything necessary to create a delayed sound was contained within the PT2399 itself [pic 1], making it super easy to use. 3) It was also affordable and readily available, which made it viable for small pedal brands to invest in this technology. 4) Compared with other delay chips, it was super compact, which made it easier to make unique analogue frameworks around it. You'll often see PT2399 designs outfitted with wild modulation circuits, dirty preamps or chaotic oscillation features, making for much more creative and unique takes on delay effects.

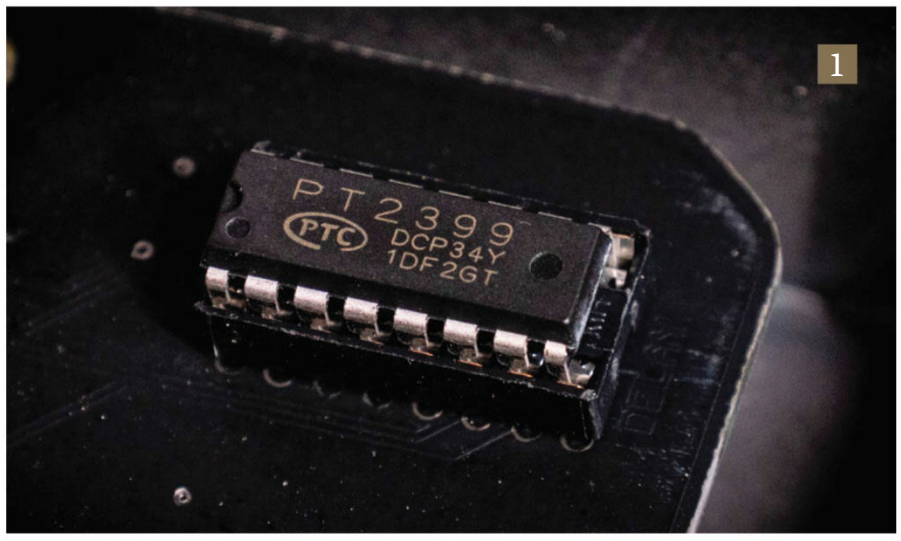
> "The pedal narrative becomes more magical when you understand the story behind some of the crucial components"

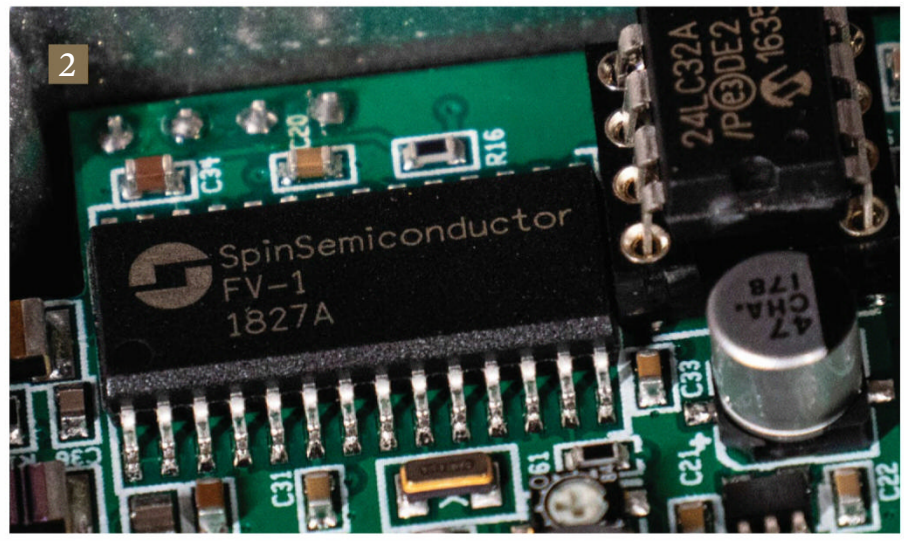
PT2399 PEDALS

Death By Audio's Echo Dream 2 is the perfect showcase of how far you can push a PT2399. The chip has been massively overclocked, giving you up to one second of lo-fi delay time. The pedal was then outfitted with a multi-LFO modulation section and a crushing fuzz circuit, all allowing for walls of obliterating ambience.

Showing how great the PT2399 can be elsewhere, the Keeley Mag Echo recreates classic modulated analogue/ tape-style delays. It has up to 600ms of delay time with close to no noise artifacts, which shows that some clever filtering can push this chip far beyond its normal 340ms limit, still providing stellar results.

Then we have EarthQuaker Devices' Sea Machine. This pedal really highlights how great the PT2399 is for making chorus pedals, too, due to the chip's ability to do delays as short as 30ms. It also features a multi-mode LFO and the ability to adjust the pre-delay and feedback of the delay line, opening up for slapback echoes and cascading reverbs, pushing this pedal far beyond conventional chorus.





SPIN SEMICONDUCTOR FV-1

The FV-1 [pic 2] was developed in 2006 by none other than MXR co-founder and Alesis founder, Keith Barr, and Frank Thomson of Alesis. By walking the halls of NAMM year after year, they discovered that there was a need for an affordable and intuitive DSP (Digital Signal Processor) solution aimed at delay and reverb, so they decided to deliver the sonic goods.

Much like the PT2399, the key reasons for the FV-1's massive success were its affordability, simplicity and abundance of great sounds. Other DSP chips existed, but they were expensive, complex to program and complex to integrate. The FV-1 had stereo converters, RAM and eight sample effects stored in it, making it ready to go instantly. Also, by allowing the use of open-source third-party drag-and-drop programming software, it enabled people without any formal coding skills to make their very own effects from scratch. The chip also allowed creators to store up to eight custom effects via an external EEPROM chip. This is why you often see FV-1-based pedals offering several variations of an effect. The importance of this chip can't be stressed enough because it has allowed small companies to create hi-fi digital reverb, pitch-shifting, delay and modulation effects all on their own. Sounds and technology that used to be solely reserved for the big players in the industry.

FV-1 PEDALS

EarthQuaker Devices' Afterneath [pic 3, with other FV-1 pedals] simply came about from Jamie Stillman messing around with how many short delays he could stack in the FV-1 software, resulting in this now iconic ambient reverb pedal. It's a great example of how this DSP accommodates creative experimentation and exploration from anyone, not just trained DSP engineers.

As so many companies use the FV-1, it's a perfect platform for collaboration. You can technically take the EEPROM from any FV-1 device and install it in your own to start using those sounds. Chase Bliss Audio has gone all in with its Dark World Reverb; it uses two FV-1s where one side is developed by Keeley and the other is made by Cooper FX, letting you mix and match standard and experimental reverbs.

Elsewhere, Keeley's Loomer is a reverb and fuzz in one. The FV-1 handles the three reverb modes, while the fuzz is an all-analogue circuitry of its own. A great showcase of how the FV-1 can easily be integrated with other effects due to its compact size.

Finally, KMA Machines' Cirrus is a unique reverb/delay pedal using two FV-1 chips in order to give you both a multi-mode delay and multi-mode reverb, which can be stacked any way you want and dynamically modulated through your playing. G

HEAR IT HERE

I hope this gives you some insight into how these small chips revolutionised and democratised our industry by making it easier to create advanced time-based effects. Hear some of the pedals in action on ThePedalZone YouTube channel at **https://bit.ly/480TTchips**

« BLUEPRINT »

MORNING GLORY

Jim James of My Morning Jacket has a new signature model ES-335 that harks back to an under-celebrated era in the model's history. We join him to discover why this semi is truly a guitar for all seasons

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Olly Curtis

Jim James is the founding member of My Morning Jacket, now 23 years into a psychedelic road trip through the varied sonic terrain of America's alt-rock scene. Everything from late-era Beach Boys to Bob Dylan and Marc Bolan is referenced in the band's eclectic sound, which has journeyed a long way over two decades. A common thread that runs throughout is James's plaintive vocal and warm, anthemic guitar lines that shimmer behind a mirage of spring reverb. Now, James has been honoured with a signature model ES-335 that caught our interest with its pragmatic, everyman spec and an early 70s vibe that should appeal to a far wider number of players than James's fanbase alone.

"We joked about that a lot," Jim says with disarming frankness. "I wanted to just create a guitar where people could be like, 'Who the fuck is Jim James? I don't really care, I just love this guitar.' Kind of like the Barney Kessel guitar or the Johnny A. one, I just wanted to make a guitar that hopefully felt super classic, where somebody would just be so stoked when they saw it that it didn't even matter if they knew who I was or not."

The practical but classic spec he chose stands every chance of achieving that aim. His signature 335 has a flavour of late-60s 335s with its walnut finish and witch hat control knobs. Simple dot inlays continue the low-key vibe, with a calibrated pair of Gibson's T-Type pickups, a modern take on the T-Top humbuckers used by Gibson from the mid-60s to the 1980s providing the power. Indeed, the only unique styling cues that mark the guitar out as a signature model, not a pawn-shop workhorse, are an owl motif on the back of the headstock that's echoed on the accompanying hardcase. We caught up with Jim to talk about the 335's central place in his music making and learn why no guitar really passes muster in his music until it proves itself on stage.

Jim James owns a few ES-335s and says Gibson's best-known semi is the ultimate all-rounder electric

> "I wanted to make a guitar that felt super classic, and it didn't matter if somebody knew who I was or not"

When did you first pick up an ES-335?
"Gosh, probably about 20 years ago or so. I think I got my first one in maybe 2002 or something like that. So, yeah, probably around 20 years."

Was that a brand-new stock model off the production line?
"Yeah, it was a new one – I got a new one from Gibson. I bought it at a local music store here. I still play it: it's a Tobacco Burst 335 that I got before we started making our *It Still Moves* [2003] record. Because I think before that, I only had the Flying V and I wanted something different that had a different resonance and I got that one."

PHOTO COURTESY OF GIBSON

Jim James's new signature ES-335 provides all the versatility he needs, with the reassurance it will behave perfectly on stage

1. A glimpse through the unbound f-hole reveals the customary quality assurance stamp

2. Outside of James's personal sigil on the truss rod cover, there's little signature ornamentation – though owls do feature on the case and the reverse of the headstock

3. T-type humbuckers provide the tone-power, proving bright and clear enough for Jim James's broad range of sonic needs, including heavy use of effects

Were there any musical touchstones or influences that drew you towards the 335?
"You know, it's funny. I don't really know exactly... I had seen people play them, obviously, but there was just something in the back of my mind that told me there was something [about the design I would connect with]. I just wanted to open up my sound some more, you know? And I'd had a Gretsch hollowbody before that – a Gretsch Broadkaster. And I like that guitar, but it wasn't quite doing what I wanted it to do, and the Flying V was, like, too much rock 'n' roll! I was wanting something that was somewhere in the middle, so I just went for it. And ever since it's been the main type of guitar that I go to first for everything."

What qualities, in your mind, differentiate an average 335 from a really good one?
"Well, that's funny because when I got my first one I had never played another one before, so it was kind of a gamble. I just ordered it and got it and luckily fell in love with it. But since then, I know what you mean. I've played a lot of them, whether it's just out of store or at a studio or a friend's guitar or whatever – and it's interesting how each guitar resonates uniquely. You know, there's something so unique about every single guitar. Obviously, there's so much to it: there's the wood, there's the neck, there's the pickups and so on. For me, it's the vibrational element. When I hold it, does it have good vibrations coming from it? And then, once you start playing it, how much does it cut through the mix or how dull is it? Because it's wild how some guitars are way too trebly or some don't give you much power at all.

> "My first 335 sliced through and gave a real nice jangle, but it still could really, really rock out"

"The thing I loved about the first one I had was that everything I was looking for in the studio, it could do: it sliced through and gave me a real nice, jangly kind of clean thing, but it still could really, really rock out. And it wasn't like the Gretsch I had – that was also a hollowbody, but when I would try to really rock with it, it would just go crazy with feedback and take off and stuff. You had to be super conscious of it. So there was just something about it where I felt like any time I wanted something to happen, it could happen with that guitar."

What did you ask Gibson for when it came to spec'ing out a signature model for yourself? Was it a 'greatest hits' of your favourite features from your previous 335s?
"I talked to Dustin Wainscott [program director for Gibson Made 2 Measure], who designed the guitar with me, and I told him what I was looking for. I have pretty bad carpal tunnel syndrome so I need a thin neck that plays very easily. And that's the other thing: some 335s, if you pick one up at Guitar Center, or whatever, have kind of a normal neck on them that's too thick for me. I also noticed that Gibson didn't really have any beautiful walnut-finish guitars any

PROMENADE MUSIC

01524 410 202
www.promenademusic.co.uk

Acoustic Guitars

22679 - Adam Black O-3 - Left Hand
22680 - Adam Black S-2 - Natural Left Hand
20599 - Art & Lutherie Roadhouse Parlour, D. Blue
18281 - Atkin Essential OOO Handmade in England
19361 - Bedell OH-12-G Parlour Guitar Secondhand
22873 - Blueridge Dreadnought (GR52201)
21716 - Blueridge 000 Acoustic Guitar (GR52202)
14197 - Breedlove Discovery Concert Lefthanded
18269 - Breedlovel Guitarl Acoustid Strings
21922 - Brunswick BFL200 Left Handed Natural
13906 - Cort AD810-OP AD Series Acoustic Guitar
22106 - The Cort AF510M Mahogany
22843 - Eko Ranger VI VR Honey Burst
12332 - Faith FKM Mercury
19662 - Faith FKNCD - Naked Neptune
18898 - Faith FKR Naked Mars FKR, Natural
16877 - Fender FA125 Acoustic Guitar
5601 - K Yairi G1F, Parlour, Vintage Sunburst
18950 - Yairi YBR2 Baritone Acoustic Guitar
22459 - Klos Full Carbon Acoustic Travel Guitar
22020 - LAG Tramontane 88 T88A Acoustic Guitar
22857 - Martin 00015M Mahogany Acoustic electro
6009 - Martin 00018 standard Series Acoustic
13824 - Martin 00028EC Eric Clapton, Natural
13064 - Martin D18 Dreadnought
16760 - Martin D28
22749 - Martin D28L Lefthanded Acoustic Guitar
6008 - Martin D35 Dreadnought, Natural
22945 - Martin D35 Dreadnought, Nat, Secondhand
21788 - Martin D45
5835 - Martin Backpacker Acoustic Travel Guitar
7115 - Martin LX1 Little Martin
6007 - Martin OM21 Orchesta, Natural
19126 - Martin OM28 Reimagined
19804 - Martin SC-13E Guitar
22358 - Ozark High-Strung Guitar 33726 Nashville
10230 - Seagull S6 Original
18418 - Seagull S6 Original QIT
15480 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR O
17054 - Tanglewood DBT SFCE BW Discovery Exotic
13291 - Tanglewood TPEFLS
22894 - Tanglewood TW OT 2 Super Folk Acoustic
18361 - Tanglewood TW2T Travel Size Guitar
15784 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR D Acosutic
13290 - Tanglewood TWJDS Dreadnought Acoustic
19462 - Tanglewood TWJPS Parlour Acoustic Guitar
22774 - Traveler Guitar Pro Series
13271 - Vintage VTG100 Travel Guitar in Natural
13128 - Vintage VTR800PB Viator Travel Guitar

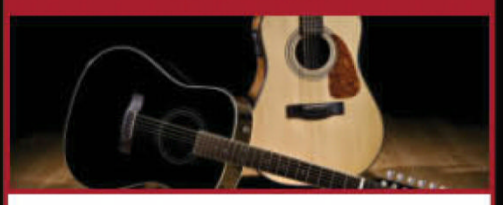
Electro Acoustic Guitars

19259 - Fender Newporter Player, Ice Blue Satin
22082 - Fender PM3CE Triple O Standard Guitar
22955 - Fender Redondo Player, Sunburst
19095 - Godin A6 Ultra A6 Cognac Burst
18939 - Godin A6 Ultra A6 Natural SG
22914 - Godin Multiac Nylon Encore Natural SG
22761 - Guild OM-140 LCE Natural Left Handed
19801 - Yairi BM65CE Electro Acoustic Guitar
19070 - Klos T_A Acoustic Travel
19069 - Klos F_DAE Deluxe Electro Acoustic
19065 - Klos T_AE Electro Acoustic Travel
19064 - Klos F_AE Electro Acoustic
21966 - LAG Hyvibe 30 THV30DCE Cutaway
22026 - LAG T118ACE Tramontane Cutaway, Black
22021 - LAG T170 ACE Tramontane 170 Auditorium
21965 - LAG T270ASCE
22589 - Lag HyVibe THV20DCE Electro Acoustic
22969 - Larrivee 03 Mahogany Recording Series
19691 - Larrivee D03 Dreadnought ElectroAcoustic
22937 - Larrivee OMV-40R Legacy Series
0000 - Maestro -15 Models In Stock Now
21585 - Martin 000-13E Guitar
22751 - Martin 00012EL Koa Electro Acoustic Lefty
22747 - Martin 00017E Whiskey Sunset Electro
22752 - Martin 000CJR10EL Lefthanded
19403 - Martin 00X1AE Guitar
21553 - Martin D-13E Electro Acoustic Guitar
22743 - Martin D10E Electro Acoustic, Sapele
22577 - Martin D12E Koa Dreadnought Electro
22745 - Martin D16E Mahogany Electro Acoustic
22746 - Martin D16E Ovangkol Electro Acoustic
22748 - Martin D18E Electro Acoustic w/ Fishman
19489 - Martin DJr-10E Jnr Electro-Acoustic
22742 - Martin D-X1E Mahogany Guitar
19050 - Martin GPC11E Electro Acoustic
7320 - Martin LX1E, Electro Travel Guitar
19458 - Martin LX1RE Electro Acoustic Guitar
18517 - Martin OMC15ME Electro-Acoustic Guitar
21974 - Northwood M70 14 Fret 000 Electro Acoustic
18167 - Northwood M80 OMV Cutaway Acoustic
17418 - Northwood Auditorium Electro Acoustic Guitar
19339 - Ovation 1771VI-1GC Glen Campbell Legend
19341 - Ovation 2771STR-MB Main Street
11087 - Ovation Standard Elite 6778LX Black
19347 - Ovation C2078AXP-KOA Exoticwood Elite
22868 - Ovation CE44 Electro Acoustic Guitar
22952 - Ovation CE4412 12-String Mid-Depth Black
19346 - Ovation CS24 Celebrity Standard, Nat
22856 - Ovation CS24L Celeb. Trad Mid-Depth Nat
22855 - Ovation CS28P Celebrity Trad Plus Koa
22869 - Ovation CelebElite Exotic CE48 SupShallow
19338 - Ovation 1771STG-ES
22360 - Ozark Hawaiian Guitar
14914 - PJ Eggle Linville Electro Acoustic
0000 - RainSong - 16 Models In Stock Now
22934 - Seagull Coastline Spruce QIT, Used
19950 - S & P Woodland Cedar Dreadnought, Lefty
00007 - Tanglewood - 22 Models In Stock Now
22774 - Traveler Guitar Pro Series
22785 - Traveler Guitars Ultra Light Nylon
18789 - Vintage LVEC501N Dreadnought, Satin Nat
18790 - Vintage VGE800N Gemini P. Brett Baritone
21937 - Yairi Rag 65VE Small Parlour Guitar
21936 - Yairi YFL55 CE BVS
19602 - Yamaha LLTA TransAcoustic Vintage Tint
19165 - Yamaha SLG200NW Silent Guitar, Nylon
15619 - Yamaha SLG200S Steel Silent Guitar Nat

Classical Guitars

4985 - Asturias Standard Model Classical Guitar
19128 - Asturias by Kodaira 3340 Classical, Used
21769 - Breedlove Solo Concert Nylon CE
22771 - Cordoba Protégé C1M 1/2 Size Size Classical
22770 - Cordoba C1M 1/4 Size Classical Guitar
22769 - Cordoba C1M Full Size Classical Guitar
21880 - Fender ESC80 Classical Guitar
17847 - Hiscox LA-GCL-L-B/S Artist Large Classical
17846 - Hiscox LA-GCL-M-B/S Medium Hard Case
7365 - Jose Ferrer 3/4 Size Classical
18946 - Yairi CE1 Electro Classical Guitar
18947 - Yairi YC6 NS Classical Guitar
18949 - Yairi YCT8 Classical Guitar
22019 - LAG TN70A Tramontaine Nylon Guitar
21034 - Martin 000C12-16E Nylon Guitar
0000 - Mendieta - 23 Models In Stock Now
22854 - Ovation CS24C-4-G Celebrity Classic Nylon
22738 - Raimundo 146 Classical Guitar
22754 - Raimundo 660E Electro Acoutsic Classical
0000 - Ramirez - 9 Models In Stock Now
16060 - Stagg C410 1/2 Size Classical Guitar
15291 - Stagg C430 3/4 Classical Guitar Blue
15289 - Stagg C430 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
17108 - Stagg C440M Classical Guitar
17106 - Stagg C440M Classical Guitar
17109 - Stagg C440M Classical Guitar
19470 - Stagg SCL50 3/4N Pack, Natural
22785 - Traveler Guitars Ultra Light Nylon
14755 - Yamaha SLG200N Silent Guitar, Nylon, Nat

12 Strings



18730 - Cort Natural Glossy MR710F, 12-String
22844 - Eko Ranger XII VR EQ Honey Burst 12
22845 - Eko Ranger XII VR EQ Natural 12
22846 - Eko Ranger XII VR Honey Burst12-String
22847 - Eko Ranger XII VR Natural 12-String
18916 - Faith FKV12 Naked Venus 12-String
16029 - Patrick James Eggle Saluda 12 String
21559 - RainSong BI-WS3000 12-String
21560 - RainSong CO-WS3000 12-String
21564 - RainSong V-DR3000X 12-String, Natural

Acoustic Amplification

5712 - AER Alpha - 40W, 1x8"
5193 - AER Alpha Plus - 50W, 1x8"
18514 - AER Compact 60 Mk 4
5710 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Hardwood - 60W, 1x8
15913 - AER Tommy Emmanuel Sig. Compact 60
5707 - AER Compact Classic Pro - 60W, 1x8"
5708 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Mobile - 60W, 1x8
22776 - AER Compact Slope 60 4
4945 - AER Compact XL - 200W, 2x8"
9028 - AER Domino 3 200w Watt Acoustic Amp
22788 - Acus ONE FORSTRINGS 5T
22871 - Acus ONE FORSTRINGS 8
15917 - Boss Acoustic Singer Live Acoustic Amp
15918 - Boss Acoustic Singer Pro Acoustic Amp
22851 - Boss Acoustic Singer Live LT Acoustic Amp
21579 - Fender Acoustic Junior GO, Dark Brown
13956 - Marshall AS50D - 50W, 2x8"
19481 - Orange Crush Acoustic 30
4976 - Roland AC33 30W - 1x5"
9358 - Roland AC33, Rosewood
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)
13831 - Udo Roesner Da Capo 75
10937 - Yamaha THR5A Acoustic Amp

Ukuleles

19899 - Aloha Concert Ukulele With Engraved
19901 - Aloha Shiny Model Concert Ukulele In Mahog.
20532 - Ashbury AU-15B Baritone Uke(GR35048B)
20533 - Ashbury AUR-10 Concert Resonator
19887 - Austin Naupaka All Mahogany Soprano Uke
19872 - Austin Naupaka Soprano Ukulele With Bag
19675 - B & M UBJ2 Banjo Uke Open Back
19698 - B&M Uke Bass Mahogany BMUKB1
16227 - Baton Rouge UR4S Soprano Ukulele
18052 - Baton Rouge UR51S Soprano Ukulele
22887 - Baton Rouge VX1/B8 Eight String Baritone
18975 - Breedlove Lu'au Concert Nat Shadow E Uke
19915 - Elvis Hanauma Mahogany Soprano Uke
19913 - Elvis Hawaii Student Soprano Uke
19873 - Factory Prototype Concert Ukulele
19881 - Factory Prototype Concert Ukulele g
19894 - Factory Prototype Concert Ukulele
19917 - Factory Prototype Funky Top Concert Uke
19918 - Factory Prototype Mahogany Concert Uke
19916 - Factory Prototype Mahogany Concert Uke
19897 - Factory Prototype Rev. (Headstock Damage)
21529 - Fender Fullerton Stratocaster Uke, Black
21530 - Fender Fullerton Strat Uke Sunburst
20278 - Fender Fullerton Tele® Uke Black
20438 - Fishman AG0-UKE Passive Ukulele (Narrow)
19888 - Flight NUS310 Soprano Ukulele With Bag
19883 - Flight Nus350dc Dreamcatcher Soprano Uke
19877 - Flight Prototype Concert Ukulele,Sapele Top
19876 - Flight Prototype Concert Ukulele,Spruce Top
19869 - Giannini Custom Concert Ukulele Spruce Top
19880 - Giannini Custom Concert Ukulele
20218 - Gold Tone Little Gem Ukulele Banjo,Amethyst
18289 - Gold Tone Little Gem Ukulele Banjo Clear
20810 - Goodrich Pedal Bracket (GA-01)
16458 - Iberica SC Classic Sop Uke, Solid Acacia
0000 - & Huge Stock of Ohana, Risa & Tanglewood

Mandolin Family

22801 - Ashbury A Style Mandolin Cedar
20014 - Ashbury A Style Mandolin Sunburst
20051 - Ashbury A Style Electro Mandolin S.burst
19937 - Ashbury A Style Mandolin Sunburst Lefty
17918 - Ashbury Irish Bouzouki, Flat Top 33015
22794 - Ashbury Carved Irish Bouzouk GR33121
19299 - Ashbury Gazouki, Guitar Body, GR33024
17920 - Ashbury Irish Bouzouki &Case GR33016
17928 - Ashbury Octave Guitar Mandola 32021
15442 - Ashbury Rathlin Irish Bouzouki
22793 - Ashbury Style E Celtic Cittern, 10 string
15437 - Ashbury Celtic Octave Mandola
13527 - Blue Moon BB15 Bouzouki GR33001
18799 - Blue Moon BB15E Electro Bouzouki
18225 - Breedlove Crossover FF NT Mando, Nat
22797 - Kentucky Deluxe A Model Mando, Amber
22796 - Kentucky Std F Model Mando GR31044
22834 - ResoVille MS12 Reso Mandolin Copper
22337 - ResoVille MS12 Reso Mandolin Nickel
22502 - ResoVille Weeki Wachee Dark Nickel
22340 - ResoVille Weeki Wachee Reso Nickel
22832 - ResoVille Weeki Wachee Reso Maple
22831 - ResoVille Weeki Reso Uke Engraved
17926 - Sakis Model 2 Greek Bouzouki GX33011
18419 - Seagull S8 Mandolin Sunburst EQ
19670 - Seagull S8 Mandolin, Natural

Electro Acoustic Guitars

19446 - Art & Lutherie Roadhouse Indigo Burst HG
19299 - Ashbury Gazouki, Guitar Body, GR33024
21766 - Breedlove Artista Concert Nat Shadow CE
21765 - Breedlove Organic Series Sign Concertina
21850 - Breedlove Organic Series Wildwood Concert
21763 - Breedlove Pursuit Companion CE Travel
22519 - Breedlove Pursuit Concert CE
15886 - Breedlove Stage Black Magic Concert Used
13911 - Cort AF510EOP Electro Acoustic Guitar
19448 - Eastman AC508CE Electro Acoustic, Used
22850 - Eko Ranger VI VR Acoustic 6-String, Nat
22848 - Eko Ranger VI VR Eq Electro Acoustic 6-String
22849 - Eko Ranger VI VR Eq Electro Acoustic 6-String
22733 - Faith FECVL Eclipse Venus Electro Lefty
12358 - Faith FKV Venus Concert Cutaway/Electro
19542 - Faith FNBCEHG HiGloss Baritone Neptune
22507 - Faith FNCEBMB Blood Moon Neptune
19136 - Faith FPNECG Nexus Neptune Electro Cognac
22728 - Faith FPVCG Nexus Venus Cut/E Cognac
22727 - Faith FPVCK Nexus Venus Copper Black
22726 - Faith FPVCKL Nexus Venus Cop Black Lefty
21881 - Faith FVBLM Blue Moon Venus Cutaway
16783 - Faith FVBMB Blood Moon Venus Cutaway
18798 - Faith FVBMB Blood Moon Venus LEFTHAND
15344 - Faith Nomad Mini Neptune
21838 - Faith PJE Legacy Earth Cut/Electro FG1HCE
19573 - Fender Am. Acoustasonic Strat, Sunburst
18565 - Fender American Acoustasonic Tele, Nat
18567 - Fender American Acoustasonic Tele, SGray
21625 - Fender Malibu Player, Natural
21577 - Fender Newporter Classic, Cognac Burst
19364 - Fender Newporter Player, Candy Apple Red

Travel Guitars

21763 - Breedlove Pursuit Companion CE Travel
22105 - Cort AD Mini 3/4 Size Guitar
15344 - Faith Nomad Mini Neptune
19070 - Klos T_A Acoustic Travel
19066 - Klos T_DAE Deluxe Electro Acoustic
19065 - Klos T_AE Electro Acoustic Travel
22459 - Klos Full Carbon Acoustic Travel Guitar
22025 - LAG Travel KAE Travel Guitar
19489 - Martin DJr-10E Jnr Electro-Acoustic
5835 - Martin Backpacker Acoustic Travel Guitar
7115 - Martin LX1 Little Martin
7320 - Martin LX1E, Electro Travel Guitar
19458 - Martin LX1RE Electro Acoustic Guitar
18366 - Tanglewood TW E Mini Koa
22774 - Traveler Guitar Pro Series
13271 - Vintage VTG100 Travel Guitar in Natural
13128 - Vintage VTR800PB Viator Travel Guitar
22948 - Washburn Rover Travel Acoustic Blue Used
19165 - Yamaha SLG200NW Silent Guitar, Nylon

Tenor & Baritone Guitars

20534 - Ashbury AT-14 Tenor Guitar, Spruce Top
8851 - Ashbury AT24 Tenor Guitar
15434 - Ashbury Tenor Guitar, Flamed Oak
22792 - Blueridge Acoustic Tenor Guitar
19542 - Faith FNBCEHG HiGloss Baritone Neptune
18950 - Yairi YBR2 Baritone Acoustic Guitar
18790 - Vintage VGE800N Gemini P. Brett Baritone

For full guitar details, pricing and photos, enter the number next to each guitar model into our SKU search facility on the website.

Witch hat control knobs and a walnut finish evoke the late 60s and early 70s

Waffleback tuners and an owl-in-flight motif give the guitar a bit of a leftfield twist

more. They have lots of cool sunburst things or natural things, but I've always loved and wished I had a walnut-finish 335. I have a beautiful Tobacco Sunburst 335 and I also had a black 335 and I love both those guitars, too. But I always wished I had a walnut one: there are tons of vintage ones out there.

"So I was talking with Dustin and I wanted to create something that felt like it had been around forever – a really natural-feeling guitar that was as light as it could be and had a nice slim neck on it. So we went back and forth several times and we tried out different pickups, one with P-90s on it and another with a crazy tailpiece on it, and I realised, through all that stuff, that the most important thing to me was I really wanted to make one that I could live and die by on stage. So, for me, that means a 335 with the stopbar tailpiece and the right pickups. That's what I love and that's what really delivers for me on stage – because playing at home or in the studio is a different thing. You don't have to be worried about certain things like feedback or loud amplifiers.

> "I really wanted to make a 335 that I could live and die by on stage"

"So yeah, we went back and forth several times and also talked about whether or not to make it a 345 or 355. For my part, I also wanted to make it as cost-effective as possible because, even if a 335 is still a pretty expensive guitar for most people, I wanted to make it as beautiful as possible but also as cost-effective as we could."

What do you want from a set of humbuckers in a 335? Do you like low-wound PAF-style pickups or do you prefer something a bit hotter and fiercer?

"I like them to be somewhere in the middle. I really like the T-type pickups that we settled on. I knew I wouldn't love this guitar until I was literally on stage with it at a show because there are so many things you can try out at home or in the studio – but I really don't know [if something will work for me] until I'm on stage with my setup. And when I compared the prototypes of this guitar to the black 335 and the Tobacco 335 I already had, I just realised I didn't want the pickups to be too aggressive.

"As I mentioned earlier, for a minute we thought it would be fun to try out P-90s, but there's just something about those that didn't work, either – because I want to be able to get some real nice, clean jangly tones but also be able to get some incredible lead tones, too. So I wanted the pickups to be right in the middle so I could do everything I needed to do."

Do you like to control gain and tone mostly with pedals or do you prefer using the 335's quartet of volume and tone controls creatively instead?

"When I'm singing and playing in my shows, I do most of that off the pedals. But when we get into improv stuff, I like to use the volume controls on the 335. And

Thorpy FX

WE DISTIL OVER 100 PLEXI AMPS INTO EVERY PEDAL*

WWW.THORPYFX.COM

*NO AMPLIFIERS WERE HARMED TO CREATE THE AWESOME SOUNDS OF THE BUNKER

The workmanlike spec, realistic price and solid tone mean the Jim James 335 has broad appeal

I also love to flip it to the neck pickup and take all the tone out and go for some dark, jazzy tones. So yeah, when we get into the improv stuff, I love working with the pickup selector and the volume knobs and all that stuff. I go between both approaches."

Fenders and Fender-derived guitars seem to be in fashion with people who use a lot of effects, maybe because of the clarity and dynamic range you get out of single coils. Do you feel that, being humbucker based, the 335 is at a disadvantage to single-coil instruments in effects-heavy scenarios?
"Not at all. I mean, I feel like the 335 really cuts through. There are some things... if I want to go even more rock 'n' roll, I'll go for my Flying V that I've had for 20 years or an SG or something like that. And I love Strats and I love Teles, too. But for whatever reason, on my musical journey, those are more flavours in the spice rack, as opposed to the main broth of the soup or the main ingredients in the soup. Because with single coils, at least for me, I've always had problems with radio interference or hum or

> "You can get crazy monster sounds but then flip back to a normal sparkling, clean thing"

noise. And sometimes it's the perfect thing, but most of the time there's just something about the humbuckers, especially on a 335, because I think it really slices through but then does a lot more, too, that you really can't get with a single-coil guitar."

Are there any hidden or underrated tones you can get out of a 335 that you think more people should be aware of?
"Well, one of my favourite things that I do – I don't know if people know about them or not – is that I just love turning the volume all the way down on the neck pickup and using the pickup selector as a killswitch. I love playing with that and, also, maybe more traditional jazz players know about that trick of using the neck pickup with all the tone rolled off. That can be incredible when you're using a ton of fuzz or something and sucking all the treble out of it and making some kind of crazy vacuum cleaner sounds [laughs]. That's the thing about the 335: there's so much I can do when we're playing and still not have to worry about feedback. You can get crazy monster sounds but then flip back to a normal sparkling, clean thing... I have never found a guitar that does it better than a 335.

"I have a Barney Kessel guitar I love, from 1962 or something – and that's just incredible for a few things. But as an 'everything' guitar, it's impossible because if you try to get super rock 'n' roll with it, you can't even barely play it [laughs]; it's just feeding back. And it's so huge, the body's so deep... As I say, for some things it's really, really amazing. But with my 335 I wanted to help create a guitar that can do everything. That's what the 335 is to me. If I could only have one guitar, that's what I would have, without question." G

www.gibson.com

"Out of this world gift ideas!"

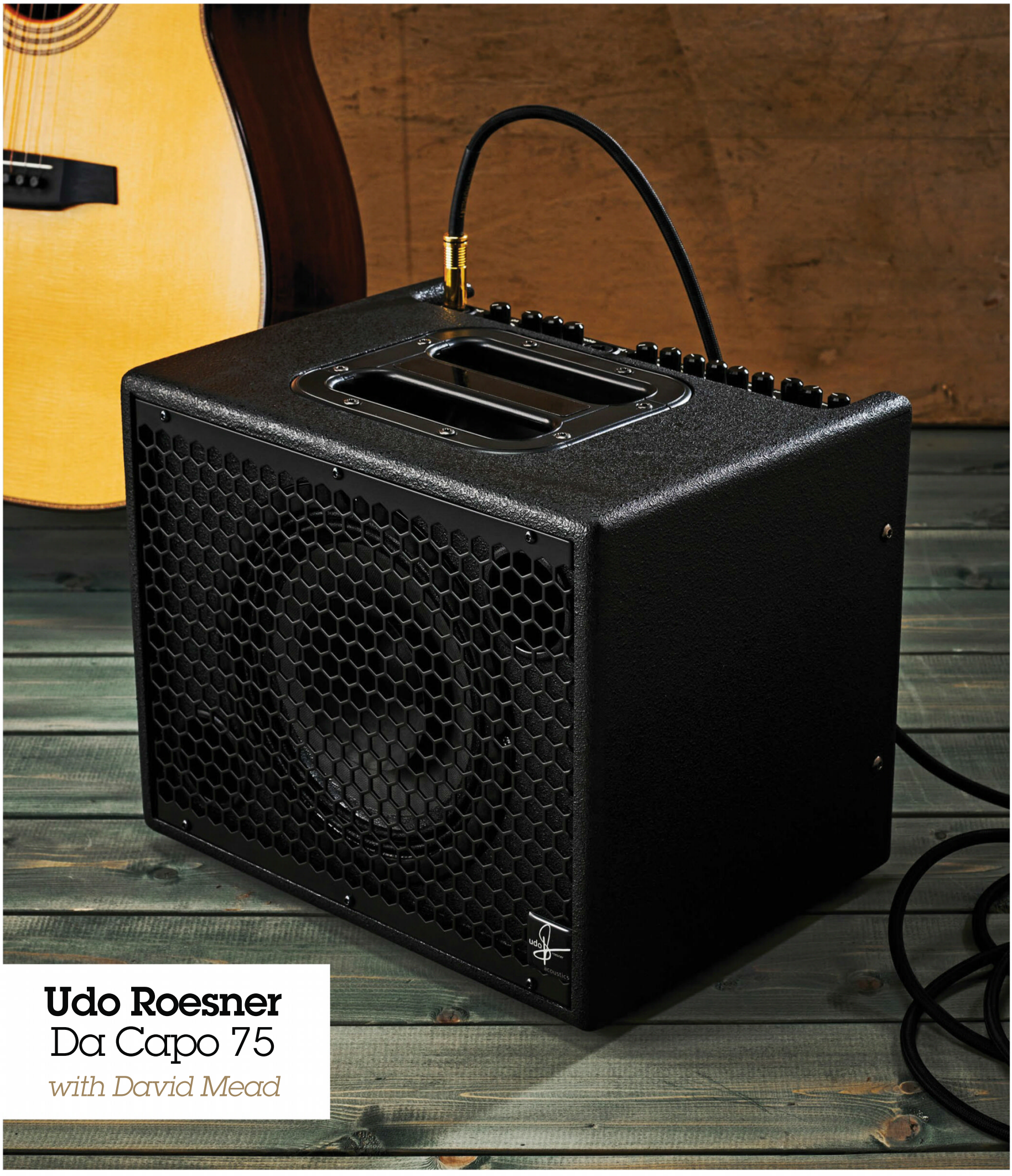
ERNIE BALL®

THE PLAYER GIFT GUIDE!

2021 Edition

Longtermers

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



Udo Roesner
Da Capo 75

with David Mead

Writer

DAVID MEAD
Guitarist, Deputy Editor

David Mead takes the new Da Capo 75 acoustic amp home to try with a few different guitars and formulates a plan to optimise his acoustic sound using a space-age microphone...

The DPA 4099G mic clips on unobtrusively and includes an adaptor to plug in directly to the amp

For anyone who missed the review in last month's issue, the Da Capo 75 is a brand-new acoustic amp from designer Udo Roesner, the man responsible for the AER Compact 60. Visually it's very similar, but Udo has rethought his AER creation and carefully enriched the Da Capo with new features, while enhancing practically everything that made the Compact 60 such a milestone for live acoustic performance in the first place.

Basically, the Da Capo is a two-channel 75-watt amp with built-in effects that has a comprehensive EQ section, a custom designed twin-cone speaker, an effects loop and just about every output a soundman could possibly ask for. In short, we liked it very much and instantly decided that further probing was called for, hence its presence here as a Longtermer.

What's the first thing you do when you bring a new amp home? Well, you try every guitar you own through it, of course. I'd already used my Fylde Goodfellow to test drive the Da Capo for the review in issue 479, but I was fascinated to find out how it would handle my two other gig buddies: my Fylde Falstaff Custom and my nylon-string Admira Elena-E. My other plan was to try an experiment I've

> *"If an amp renders you oblivious to the passage of time, you know you're going to become good friends"*

wanted to do for ages and that is to get hold of a DPA 4099G microphone and test the amp's mic input facility. After all, the combination of under-saddle pickup and external high-quality microphone sounds like a recipe for great live sound – and the Da Capo, with 48-volt phantom power on both of its inputs enabling the use of studio-level mics, gives me the opportunity to put it to the test. How high quality are DPA mics? Let's just say that when NASA wanted to put a microphone on its Perseverance Mars rover, it was DPA's doorbell they rang first. I doubt that my own sonic adventuring will be quite as out of this world, but if it's good enough for NASA...

First things first, though. I want to hear what sort of sound I get out of the aforementioned guitars without a mic attached. I'd already tested the Goodfellow through the amp when I was writing the review and so it's now the turn of the Falstaff Custom and its Headway FEQ pickup. This is a guitar with a wrecking-ball bass that has confounded many a sound engineer in the past. I always pre-warn them and usually get that "yeah, yeah... we've done this before, mate" response, but when I hit the first chord, with the low-frequency feedback that inevitably occurs, I watch them scramble to start pulling faders down on the mixing desk. So this guitar is an obvious candidate for Channel 2 on the Da Capo where I can tame the bass a bit with the high-pass filter. It worked, too. The richness and clarity remained and, with a dose of the built-in Long Reverb, I spent a very pleasant few hours caught up in the guitar's sound. That's a good sign; if an amp renders you oblivious to the passage of time because you're enjoying the sound you're making, you know you're going to become good friends.

It was pretty much the same story when I tried the Admira through the amp, too. It's fitted with a Fishman Prefix Pro Blend pickup and internal mic combo, and I've used it for both live work and recording in the past. It's usually a balancing act getting the under-saddle pickup playing nicely with the internal mic before you even set the EQ on an amp, but here I had a comparatively easy ride.

I mentioned in the review that the preamp controls on the Da Capo seem more sensitive and more interactive than the AER Compact 60 I'm used to, but I managed to prove to myself once again that a little concentrated tweaking in this region yields results. A little bit of fiddling – no more than you'd do at the average soundcheck – and I had a perfectly useful sound. Once again, the warmth of the amp's built-in Long Reverb proved to be an asset that left me wondering whether I actually need any outboard effects in this region at all. Certainly something to think about, moving forward.

The folk at DPA (Sound Network) were kind enough to lend me a DPA 4099G mic so that I can try the experiment I mentioned earlier. This mic is about 45mm (1.8 inches) long and comes with a gooseneck attachment and special mount that clips onto the guitar. The lead from the mic is thin and unobtrusive but very strong, and DPA includes an XLR adaptor so that it plugs directly into either channel on the Da Capo amp.

Once mounted on the instrument, DPA advises pointing the mic at the place where the guitar's neck meets the body – in the Fylde's case that will be the 14th fret – and adjusting accordingly. For more bass, angle the mic more towards the soundhole; for less, angle it towards the neck. Initial tests were impressive indeed with both nylon- and steel-string guitars. Needless to say, this is something I want to spend more time with, and so I shall be experimenting more with the EQ options on the Da Capo to see if I can find the perfect balance between the under-saddle pickup and mic. Watch this space!

Reviewed *479* ***Price*** *£949 (inc gigbag)* ***On Test Since*** *October 2021* ***Studio Sessions*** *No* ***Gigged*** *No* ***Mods*** *No* *www.bandm.co.uk*

BOUGHT & SOLD

STEVE GUNN

The Brooklyn-based singer-songwriter spins the tale of a voyage into the world of classical guitars and how he let a Silvertone slip through his fingers

What was the first serious guitar that you bought with your own money?

"My parents gifted me the first guitar that I ever played, which was an Alvarez acoustic. It was one of those deals where if you walk into a big guitar store, they're on display and you can snag them for Christmas or something like that. That was my first acoustic. And then when I was a young teenager I worked at a little ice cream store and saved up money. The first guitar I bought was on a super impulse, based on what it looked like and based on the price. I bought a Silvertone – the one that has the amp built into the case.

"In retrospect, I wish I had bought something like a vintage Fender Jazzmaster, because at the time the prices weren't as high as they were even 10 years ago. I wasn't satisfied with the Silvertone, it wasn't staying in tune, and so I traded that in and I bought a 60s Fender Mustang – it was one of those moments where I walked into the guitar store and it was up on the wall and that was the one I wanted. I didn't know anything about the pickups or anything, I just knew it looked cool!"

What was the last guitar that you bought and why?

"The last guitar I bought – and I'm really glad I did this – was a classical guitar because I've been playing steel-string-style guitar for years and years, and then I played a Gibson [F-25] Folksinger guitar. They have a wider neck, it's almost as if it's a transition from a classical neck to an acoustic. A friend of mine had one of those and I was like, 'Oh my gosh, this wider neck makes so much more sense to me, considering the way I play fingerstyle,' and so I wanted to get a classical guitar just to have around my house. This was right before lockdown.

> "I've played Fenders from the 50s, pre-CBS, and there's an energy in the wood. There's a lot of magic in older guitars"

"I'm friendly with the guys who run the Chicago Music Exchange and I wrote to them and said, 'Can you recommend a classical guitar? I don't want to break the bank...' and they said, 'You should definitely get a Cordoba,' and so I bought one from them and they mailed it to me and I played it every day."

What's the most incredible find or bargain you've ever had when buying guitars?

"I never had any of those miracle gear moments, but I have had some luck with Craigslist. I bought a Martin

STEVE'S GO-TO GEAR

"I'm playing acoustic guitar, mostly, so I have my two Martin models: the 000-18 and the D-28. I use a [Radial Engineering] Tone Bone, which is a preamp and a DI, and so I can run a line into my effects and then run a line direct into a PA.

"In my effects, I have an Xotic EP clean boost and a compressor, the 2026 from Bondi Effects in Australia. I use their Art Van Delay, too, which is modelled on the Boss DM-2. For reverb and echo I have [Strymon's] El Capistan. Since I finally muscled up the money to get it, it's been such a great pedal for me, very versatile – it gives me that tape echo I like.

I also have this really great overdrive pedal called the [Sarno Music Solutions] Earth Drive; I think it's based on the old vintage Tube Screamer, it's just perfect for me. I use a the Real McCoy RMC wah pedal, too, my favourite over the years – and I have tried many!

"Electric guitar-wise, I have a T-style that my friend Rick Kelly made. I ordered it, it took two years to make and now I have this beautiful guitar. I've also got a Jazzmaster – not a vintage one but a special edition from the Chicago Music Exchange – and it's really beautiful from head to toe."

000-18 from a guy on Craigslist. I'd been looking for a triple-0 for a while and suddenly one popped up and I emailed the guy immediately and he got back and said, 'You're the first person to get back to me and so I'll honour your offer,' and I'd offered him a very fair price. It turns out he was a gentleman who was working for a church and he had two of the same guitar that he'd got from a dealer somewhere and they were special editions. So the guy said, 'Okay, let's meet up. Meet me in the Guitar Center, I'll be wearing a black leather jacket.'

"So I went to the bank and got the cash and I was in this enormous Guitar Center and I see this guy with a case, opened it up, perfect condition, gave him the money and I brought it home. It just felt so perfect for what I needed it for and I took it on the road for seven or eight years until it got smashed by an airline. After a lot of haggling, the airline gave me some money and I put that towards buying a really beautiful vintage D-28. So purchasing that original guitar helped me buy this beautiful Martin."

Have you ever sold a guitar that you now intensely regret letting go?

"I have too many guitars and I'm always afraid to sell them. But, just for sentimental value, I wish I still had that Silvertone I sold for probably next to nothing because it was the first guitar I earned with my own money."

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"This happens to me with guitars I can't afford. You pick up a guitar and you just kind of *know*. Obviously, that can happen with very expensive instruments, but when you know, you know. It doesn't happen to me a lot and when it does I always try to figure out a way to get the instrument."

When did you last stop to stare in a guitar shop window, or browse online, and what were you looking at?

"I look at Reverb all the time and I've recently been looking at some effects. My primary search right now is for vintage tape echo. I really would love to have a sturdy Echoplex – I relied a lot on that with this last album, *Other You* – [producer] Rob Schnapf has a beautiful one in his studio. I've tried replicating it by buying modern equipment, but I feel that the real thing is so much of a better, palatable tone."

If forced to make a choice, would you rather have a cheap guitar and an expensive amp or a top-notch guitar and a cheap amp?

"I think I'd rather have the guitar. I've played Fenders from the 50s, pre-CBS, and there's an energy in the wood. There's a lot of magic in older guitars and I think I would definitely play through a cheap amp if I could get a priceless Fender." **[JD/DM]**

Steve Gunn's latest album, *Other You*, is available now via Matador Records

www.steve-gunn.com

From his first guitar – an Alvarez acoustic – to his latest classical purchase, Steve confesses, "I have too many guitars and I'm always afraid to sell them"

The MOD SQUAD

RESTORATION CHOICE

In the second part of our restoration of a Sid Poole-designed UK-made Westone guitar, Dave Burrluck moves further on in polishing a forgotten gem

If you missed last issue's The Mod Squad, I've been restoring a guitar designed by the late luthier Sid Poole, who passed away just over 20 years ago. This model was played by a good mate of mine for many years, Jim Matthews, who we tragically lost at the end of 2020. It's beginning to sound like an episode of *The Repair Shop*... The guitar on the bench is a prototype Westone Corsair Classic, designed – as I explained in our previous issue – by Sid and myself back in 1996 and '97 and made to a very high standard by Rob Green at Status Graphite.

We left our restoration after a simple clean up of the originally oil-and-waxed body and neck so now it's time to give the neck, fingerboard and frets the once over. Actually, the frets are in good condition, but the guitar hasn't been used for some years, so the first thing I do is check the neck, which has a noticeable forward bow, even by eye. I hear the sound of alarm bells in the distance, but tensioning the truss rod – thankfully, a dual-action type – has the neck straight and the frets level in minutes.

A quick check over the 'board, however, reveals a high 13th fret. After some investigation – and a tap or two with a smooth-faced hammer to double-check it hasn't popped out of its slot – I decide to just spot-level it with StewMac's Fret Kisser [pic 1]. Because that's widened the fret crown, a few passes with StewMac's Z-File crowning file [pic 2, see the Tools For The Job on page 126] followed by a vigorous rub with 600-grit paper, ensuring the fingerboard is protected with a Nomad fretboard guard [pic 3], has me on a level playing field. I quickly buff up the frets with 800- then 1200-grit paper on a cork

1 Using the StewMac Fret Kisser to spot-level the high 13th fret

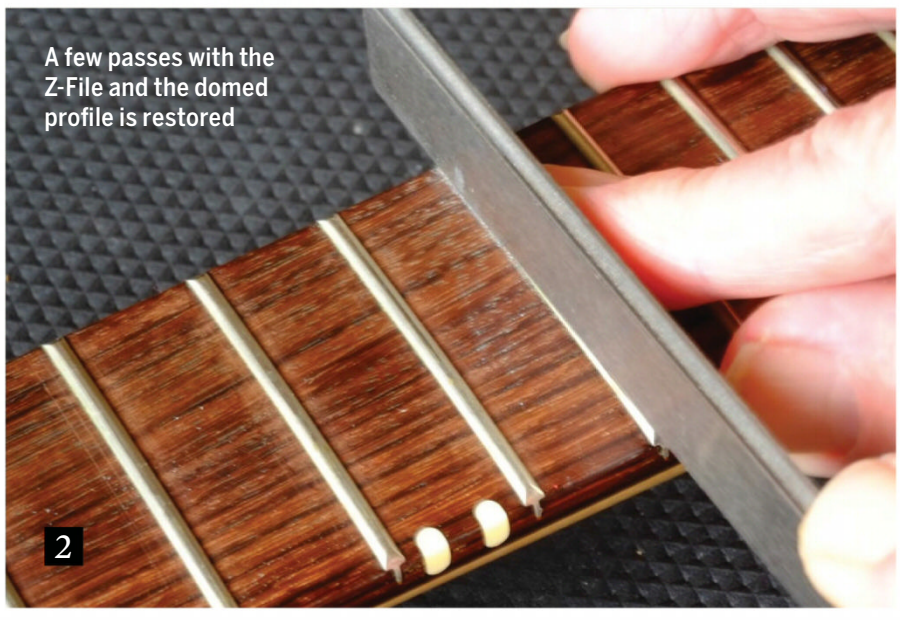
"Restoration or not, things have moved on in 20 years so I go for Bare Knuckle's Boot Camp pickups"

block [pic 4] in the direction of the fret and, as there are no bits on the guitar, a final rub with 0000-grade wire wool [pic 5]. I then do this again using one of those fretboard guides and with some metal polish I buff up each fret to a mirror-like shine [pic 6]. Finally, I use some white spirit on a kitchen towel to remove any residue from the polishing then add a couple of dabs of fingerboard oil, and the dark stripy rosewood looks – and feels – rather good.

As I explained last issue, Sid had modded this prototype to accept a PRS vibrato, so I wanted to restore that. From a previous mod I had a PRS S2/SE vibrato that has a little tarnish and wear to the nickel plate. Refitting is straightforward, and rather too easily I string up and find things are all pretty dialled in and need only minor adjustment to the string height. Even the intonation is pretty good. It's certainly good enough to play the guitar unplugged for the first time in some years. I'm liking what I feel and hear.

Powering Up

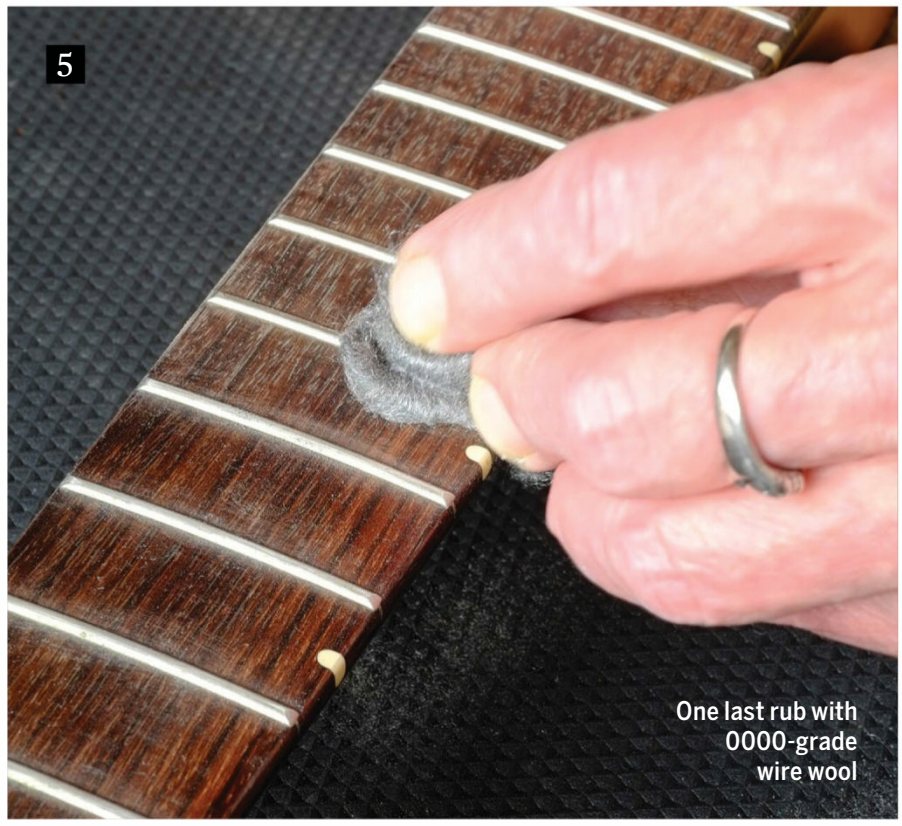
Back in 1997 we didn't have the number of UK pickup makers we do today. Far from it. If we did, I'm sure we'd have used one – if we could have got the price right. While the production versions of these


2 A few passes with the Z-File and the domed profile is restored

3 After a quick rub with 600-grit paper, the high fret is back in order

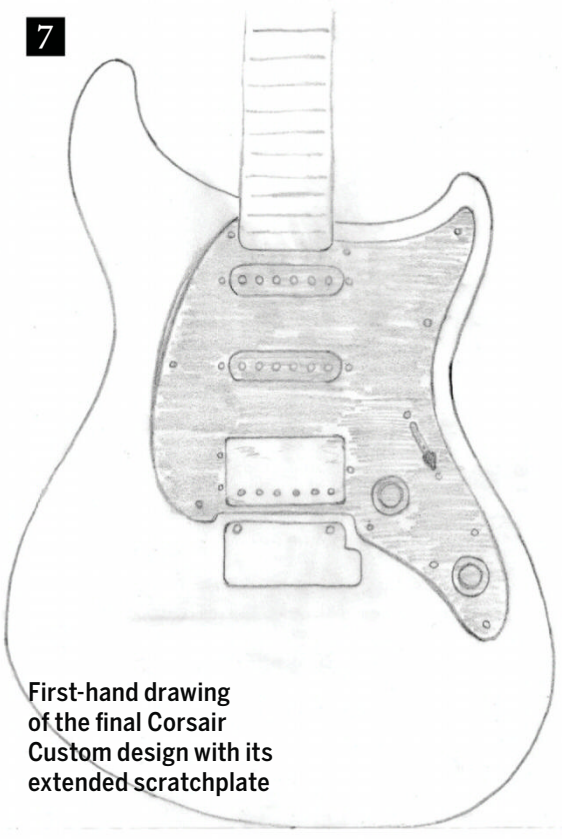
Finally powered up, the Westone is on its way to being ready to play

Repolishing the frets with 600- and 1200-grit on a cork block



One last rub with 0000-grade wire wool

Finally, each fret can be polished to a mirror sheen



First-hand drawing of the final Corsair Custom design with its extended scratchplate

guitars used Gotoh pickups, I'd fitted a pair of DiMarzio stacked single-coil-sized humbuckers, DP401 Virtual Vintage 2.1 in the middle position and a DP402 Virtual Vintage Blues at the neck, which are still on the scratchplate. The missing humbucker was definitely a DiMarzio, too, but exactly what I have no idea. Jim liked his classic rock, so I suspect it was a lower-output humbucker, perhaps a Virtual Vintage PAF. I remember, as per my early drawing [pic 7] that it was always intended to be covered. My dilemma, then, is should I keep those original DiMarzios and try to find something similar for the bridge pickup?

Restoration or not, I decide that things have moved on in 20 years. The feel and sound of the Westone certainly suggests it's worth seeing how good I can make it right now, and I can't help thinking if me and Sid were designing a guitar today of similar 'affordable boutique' style we'd be looking at something like Bare Knuckle's Boot Camp pickup range. I already have an Old Guard humbucker, so a quick call to Bare Knuckle's Ben French has a couple of single coils ordered up. Typical of the company's service I get a wiring diagram that takes the guesswork out of making sure the in-between positions on the five-way lever pickup selector will be hum-cancelling and that the humbucker is split so that it voices the slug, not screw coil – exactly as we'd designed the guitar to function back in 1997.

While I'm waiting for the units to arrive I decide to simply load in and wire up just the bridge humbucker. I'd decided to add a rather unusual tone circuit here. It splits the bridge pickup to single coil with the control full on: pull it back a little and you get the full humbucker and then the usual roll-off via a .022 microfarads capacitor. It's a little odd because you don't have a tone control for the split sound, but Jim loved this simple circuit.

A good number of years after it was last fired up, the work-in-progress Westone remains an impressive instrument. There's certainly something going on with the vibrant, pushy acoustic voice being lapped up by that Old Guard humbucker, fulfilling that 'hot-rod Fender' intention. Although not yet fully loaded, it weighs 3.19kg (7lbs) and feels super comfortable strapped on or seated. Even in this basic raw stage it's kinda laughable that it would have cost £599 back in 1997. Next issue I'll be loading in those single coils and looking at the various options we have with an HSS guitar. Choices? Oh, yes! G

@rotosound_uk

OUR GENERATION

Kinga Głyk plays **Swing Bass 66** nickel wound strings:
the choice of era-defining musicians since 1966

TOOLS FOR THE JOB

Are you a hobbyist modder or a wannabe guitar maker and repairer? Either way, you might need to invest in some job-specific tools

Part of The Mod Squad ethos is doing a lot with a little, whether that's your workshop space (aka the kitchen table) or the tools you might need. As we outlined in issue 478, a few well-chosen tools, very few that are guitar-specific, will stand you in good stead to keep your guitars in top condition, not to mention allowing you to carry out some pretty involved mods.

When you start dipping your fingers into the sort of work a pro would normally do, things can become very different. And expensive. We discussed in that previous issue that a set of nut files can be very costly and are really only viable if you plan to take your modding seriously. While there are plenty of outlets for 'luthiers tools' in the UK, none have the sheer mind-boggling array of US-based StewMac. I defy anyone who's interested in this lark to go onto its website and not think, "Oh, that would be handy..." The trouble is, before you know it, your cart is bursting and the dollars are mounting. Then you've got shipping, customs and import taxes to consider.

You'll find plenty of guitar-specific tools on sites such as eBay and Amazon. I needed some small crocodile clips to do some experimenting with different value caps and resistors and had ordered a cheap pack of 30 for a few pounds before I noticed they were shipping directly from China. I can't believe I clogged up the world's shipping channels for so little money, especially since I can admit that I've used just two of those clips.

> "When you start dipping into pro-type work, things can become expensive"

Earlier this year, StewMac donated a few bits to The Mod Squad's toolbox after I'd been discussing with Jay Hostetler that my long-used pillar file – the sort of thing we used back in the day to recrown frets and also round their edges – was now next to useless as the abrasive face had literally worn away in the most used parts of the file. "I'll send you a Z-File," he offered. I thanked him, pretending I had some idea of what he was talking about. If you've ever levelled the frets on a fingerboard, you'll know that when you're done you should have 20-something flat-topped frets when ideally you need ones that are domed in profile. Crowning files aren't a new concept, there are plenty out there, but ones I've tried, and indeed own, are rarely used. Why? Because it's very difficult to see what you're doing until you've done it, and it's all too easy to not only redome the fret but shave a bit of the top. That's why I always went back to my aged pillar file (with its edges ground off) because I could always see the centre of the fret top, which I'd typically marked with a Sharpie. Yes, there's a little skill involved, but after a few recrowns on fingerboards with 20-plus frets, you get the hang of it pretty quickly.

StewMac's Fret Kisser and Z-File: the right tools for the job

But back to the Z-File. Instead of it having a single domed cutting edge, it has two but they're angled and have a 300-grit diamond abrasive. One edge of the file cuts mainly the left side of the fret, turn it over and you do the right side (it never touches the actual top of the fret), and by lightly rolling the file you get it domed within minutes. It's harder to describe than it is to do! Your reference is still that Sharpie-marked flat top, but you'll just see it getting narrower as the Z-File does its magic. While this diamond-coated file isn't cheap, it's exceptionally good, and I notice StewMac now offers a compact version (without a traditional handle) that's not only cheaper but looks even better.

Another tool I bought a couple of years back is StewMac's Fret Rocker (I don't know if they invented it; many other brands offer similar). It has four perfectly machined, very straight edges of different lengths, allowing you to lay it across *three* frets anywhere on the fingerboard. If it rocks, the centre fret is slightly high; if it sits flat, you're good. Nine times out of 10, slight fretbuzz on an otherwise perfectly level 'board can be chased down with the Fret Rocker. It's indispensable.

So, let's say, as I found with my Westone restoration, the frets all seem perfectly level except the 13th fret, more on the treble side than the bass. It was still well seated and a light tap with a hammer didn't sound 'hollow' and certainly didn't lower the fret. You don't want to stone the entire 'board as all the frets will have to be recrowned and repolished. And you could address that specific area, but it'd add more work.

Enter the Fret Kisser! It looks like the Fret Rocker, but in the centre of each of those four sides is a 300-grit diamond abrasive strip. Select the correct edge to span those three frets and lightly move it back and forth to level just the high fret. When it's level, the Fret Kisser will skim over the fret taking no more fret away. You can then recrown and clean up just that one fret. StewMac also tells us how you can do that with your strings on, but we'll leave that for another time (or the eager among you can learn more on the StewMac website).

As we've said, StewMac is not only the premier guitar-related tool supplier in the world, its website is a mine of information – headed up, of course, by Dan Erlewine. We can't recommend it enough.

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.

Ashdown Engineering

Ashdown Guitar Magnifiers

ALL VALVE TONE

MADE IN ENGLAND

Designed, engineered and lovingly hand built in the UK custom shop the AGM-5C is designed for genuine tonal purists wanting luscious British valve driven guitar tones but at home/studio friendly volume levels combined with a host of modern player friendly features.

FOR MORE INFO:

WWW.ASHDOWNMUSIC.COM

MUSICNOMAD™
EQUIPMENT CARE

CLOSING DATE:
4 February 2022

MAKE SURE YOU ENTER AT
https://bit.ly/git480musicnomad
BEFORE THE CLOSING DATE
GOOD LUCK!

WIN!

A Guitar Setup Toolkit

Worth £279

A comprehensive kit of MusicNomad setup tools could be yours

Fancy tackling maintenance and modding work yourself, learning rewarding skills along the way? Well, you're in luck – the good folk at MusicNomad, a premier maker of specialist tools for guitarists, is giving away a Starter Kit bundle of top-quality guitar setup tools worth £279 for one lucky reader to win.

The Starter Kit bundle on offer includes a 26-piece screwdriver and wrench set, an 11-piece truss-rod wrench set, a six-piece diamond-coated nut file set of your choice, plus gauges that work for all electric, acoustic, classical and bass guitars. MusicNomad will even throw in a 24-page instruction booklet to help you set your guitar up like a pro, every time. With those tools and insights at your fingertips, you'll be able to maintain your guitars in top condition, with playability dialled in to your exact preferences every time.

As MusicNomad puts it, "By developing innovative, precision gauges and tools combined with step-by-step general guidelines anybody can follow and set up their guitar to play and sound great."

To be in with a chance of winning this superb prize, all you have to do is answer the following question correctly:

You adjust neck relief on a guitar with:

A) the truss brace
B) the brace rod
C) the truss rod

UK entrants only. To enter and for full T&Cs, head to *https://bit.ly/git480musicnomad*. Good luck!

Behind Every Musician

Equipment insurance

+

Legal advice and representation

+

Fee recovery

+

Contract advice

+

Career development

Join the MU for £1
Get six months free*

£1

Musicians' Union

mu

*For terms and conditions visit **theMU.org**

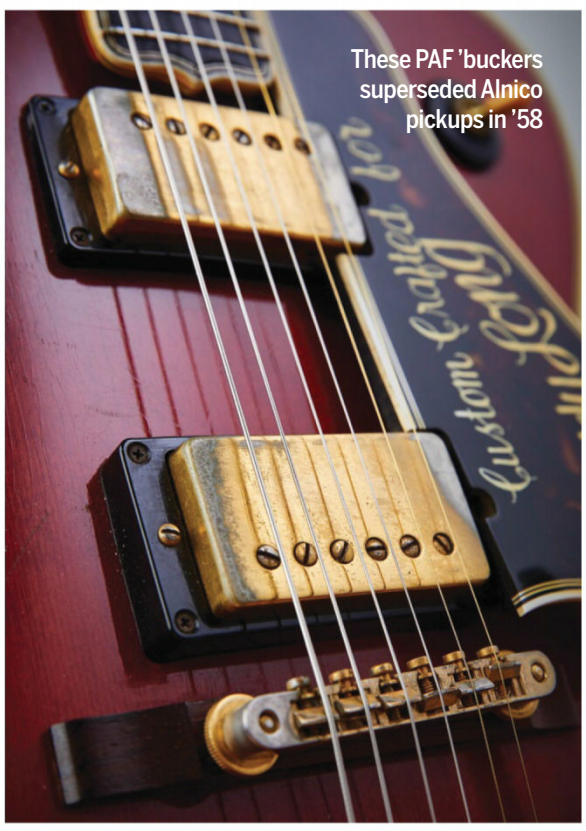
ClassicGear

This short-scale carved-top electric hollowbody was Gibson's premier thinline

Gibson Byrdland

The year 1954 was a watershed one for Gibson. For the first time in the company's history, electric guitars outsold acoustics. In the post-war era, musical tastes were changing fast and Gibson rose to the occasion in order to meet demand at every opportunity. After Ted McCarty came onboard in 1948 as CEO (soon to be president) of Gibson, the company hit one home run after another: the perennially popular ES-175 in 1949; the flagship L-5CES and Super 400CES electric archtops in 1951; and its first solidbody, the Les Paul Model, in 1952. By '55, the Les Paul range had expanded to include four other models – the Custom, Special, Junior and TV – and total sales figures show a steady increase year-on-year as the solidbody electric guitar continued to gain in popularity into the mid-50s.

As the decade progressed, this new style of electric guitar began to dominate the market and Gibson's focus shifted away from the deep-bodied archtops of yore. Keen to develop further ideas and expand the product line, McCarty and his sales team increasingly reached out to pro players for feedback. And it appears they found the market to be somewhat divided. On one side were Gibson's traditional jazz boxes with their rich full-bodied tone, and on the other were the slimmer, feedback-resistant Les Paul solidbodies. Surely a compromise could be reached somewhere between the two? The suggestion was made by two of the best-known players at the time – Hank Garland and Billy Byrd – and Gibson listened.



These PAF 'buckers superseded Alnico pickups in '58

Gibson explored Garland and Byrd's idea of producing a version of the 17-inch-wide L-5CES with a thinner body depth, and four prototype instruments were built and registered in April 1955 as 'L5-CES spec. thin model'. Sensing they were on to something, Gibson quickly went on to develop not one but three new models, namely the Byrdland (a portmanteau of the names Byrd and Garland), the ES-350T and the ES-225T. Comprising Gibson's seminal electric thinline range, this would prove to be one of the most important developments in the company's history, leading directly to the now iconic semi-hollowbody double-cutaway ES-335T a few years later.

> The Byrdland helped lead directly to the now iconic semi-hollowbody double-cutaway ES-335T

Gibson's new thinline electric guitar range made its debut at Chicago's July 1955 NAMM convention and was marketed at three distinct price points. With its solid/carved spruce top and fancy appointments, the Byrdland was the more upmarket model costing $550 in Sunburst and $565 in Natural. The mid-priced laminated maple-body ES-350T/N was $155 less, while the $179.50 ES-225T was aimed at the "popular price field". The ES-225T made it first out of the gate with over 450 instruments shipped in '55, while Gibson began shipping Byrdlands and ES-350Ts in earnest the following year.

"The new Gibson Byrdland designed for progressive guitarists," reads the original advert. "Its thin body... Its narrow, short scale length... gives it unusually fast and brilliant tonal response, combining the characteristics of the solid body and conventional guitars." As per Gibson's top-of-the-line solidbody Les Paul Custom and deep-bodied L-5CES and Super 400CES guitars, the thinline hollowbody Byrdland also featured Alnico aka 'staple' pickups, albeit with smaller bespoke dimensions in order to take into account the guitar's unusually narrow neck profile. **[RB]**

The Evolution of the Gibson Byrdland

April 1955
4 prototypes registered as 'L-5CES spec. thin model'

July 1955
Byrdland introduced at NAMM in Chicago alongside ES-350T and ES-225T thinlines

1956
First shipped from Kalamazoo

1958
Alnico pickups replaced by PAF humbuckers

1959
Stereo Vari-tone optional

1960
Florentine/pointed cutaway

1962
Neck changes from 2- to 3-piece laminated maple

1963
Some with 1-piece laminated maple backs

1969
Original Venetian/round cutaway returns

1959 Gibson Byrdland

1. SERIAL NUMBER
'A'-prefixed five-digit serial number

2. HEADSTOCK
Multiple-bound; flowerpot motif and Gibson logo pearl inlays; black nitrocellulose finish

3. HARDWARE
Gold-plated: Bigsby vibrato; Kluson metal keystone tuners; Tune-o-matic bridge with rosewood base; pickguard bracket

4. NECK
Two-piece maple (with mahogany centre strip); 23 ½-inch scale length; 1 5/8-inch nut width; multiple-bound 22-fret ebony fingerboard with pointed end; pearl block inlays; 14th-fret body join; custom cherry nitrocellulose finish

5. BODY
Carved spruce top; solid maple back and sides; 17 by 21 by 2 ¼ inches (w/l/d); single Venetian cutaway; seven-ply top binding; three-ply back binding; bound f-holes; custom cherry nitrocellulose finish

6. PLASTICS
Personalised cellulose nitrate pickguard reads 'Custom Crafted for Buddy Long'; two-ply (b/w) 'bell' truss rod cover; two black pickup surrounds; four black bonnet knobs; white switch tip; rubber switch grommet

7. PICKUPS & ELECTRONICS
Two PAF humbucker pickups; Vari-tone switch; four 500kohms pots (individual pickup volume and tone); two tone capacitors; three-way Switchcraft pickup selector switch; side-mounted Switchcraft jack

David Davidson's Vintage Icons

Between Telecaster-style P-Basses and rosewood 'boards was this 'Holy Grail' design

1958 Fender Precision Bass

The triumvirate of a blonde/ash body, maple neck and gold anodised pickguard helped this P-Bass make its mark

"This is a 1958 Fender Precision Bass. It has a white transparent blonde finish over an ash body with a solid maple neck. It comes with its original tweed case and a matching 1958 Fender Bassman amplifier – both in impeccable condition. This bass has a gold anodised pickguard, which Leo Fender started using in 1954 on special orders. They thought a metallic pickguard had good shielding properties, but the 60-cycle hum continued to be a problem. In '59, the [gold anodised] pickguard was replaced by the more familiar tortoiseshell [cellulose nitrate] 'guard and rosewood 'boards became standard. In the late 50s, a variety of custom colours were available, but the regular Precision Bass finish was sunburst, moving from a two- to three-tone sunburst in February 1958.

"This beautiful guitar has had two owners before me, both of whom are still alive. The instrument was originally purchased in Vermont. And it has virtually no wear at all. The case and the amp, too – they have barely a scuff. The headstock and neck are completely straight, and it's never needed any fret-dressing or filing. A lot of the time on these instruments the headstock will lean [forwards] because of the tension on the neck over the years. But this P-Bass has been stored properly. It even has the original Fender flat-wound strings that it was shipped with. Suffice to say it's in virtually 'as new' condition.

"The original receipt shows it was bought along with the [narrow panel 50-watt/4x10 tweed] '58 Bassman from the same store. It was a 'swimming supply and music store'. Back in the day, travelling salesmen would walk into stores and ask, 'Would you be interested in selling Fender instruments?' That's kind of how things happened back then. I'm not really old enough to remember stores like that, but I've seen many receipts over the years that had a mixture of different types of businesses under one roof, like furniture stores that also sold Gibson instruments, for example.

"The blonde/ash body, maple neck and gold anodised 'guard spec P-Basses are kind of the Holy Grail pieces for some people. As are the Stratocasters. In fact, I recently sold a blonde '56 with a black anodised pickguard. The [1957] prototype Jazzmaster was a Desert Sand finish with a black anodised pickguard. And I personally own an early '59 Stratocaster with an anodised 'guard and Fullerton Red finish – the predecessor to Fiesta Red. It's very Pee Wee Crayton-looking. His was also Fullerton Red, although people often call it Fiesta Red. '59 was the year Fender transitioned to Fiesta Red.

> "The receipt shows this bass was bought from a 'swimming supply and music store'"

"This P-Bass is one of the scarce coloured ones you'll see from the era. Blonde Fender guitars have an ash body, even after they switched to using alder in '56, because the grain just looks so much better. And with the gold 'guard it's a super, super look, although I love them with tortoiseshell 'guards, too. Blonde is such a great colour. There's something specific about '57 and early '58 blonde finishes; it's a very white blonde and very translucent looking. If you look at, say, an earlier Blackguard, it'll probably have much more of a honeyed colour, and if you look at a '59, they have much more white in the colour and are less translucent. On this guitar, you can see the ash grain as if you're looking through a slightly foggy window...

"It made sense for Fender to move the P-Bass design away from the original slab-body 'Telecaster' bass to the Stratocaster-style contoured body [in 1954]. The Stratocaster was very popular in the late 50s – way more popular than the Tele. When the P-Bass changed again in '57 [to also include a Strat-style headstock] it was because of the Stratocaster.

"Similarly, the Jazz Bass [released in 1960] exists because the Jazzmaster's offset body design was such a huge hit after it came out in '58. By 1960, that was their number one-selling guitar, so they figured their next bass should mimic the look of the Jazzmaster. Fender basses kind of followed that logic. Then, of course, the offset VI came out in '61, followed by the Jaguar in '62.

"I think the P-Bass is the quintessential rock 'n' roll bass. The split-pickup design was a really interesting thing to do at the time [from 1957]: the location of the pickup on the body and the way it accentuates the bass in the lower two strings, while the coil for the higher two strings that sits further back towards the bridge gives it its unique voicing. They even carried that split-pickup design on to the Electric XII model [released in 1965].

"The Jazz Bass pickups maybe do more tricks, but the P-Bass is often the instrument of choice for the person who wants that real thump and bottom-end. That's what makes the Precision Bass special for so many." **[RB]**

Vintage guitar veteran David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York
info@wellstrungguitars.com / 001 (516) 221-0563 / **www.wellstrungguitars.com**

PHOTOS BY PAIGE DAVIDSON

Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks

CAGED Blues

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Knaggs Choptank & Vox AC15 C1
Difficulty ★★★☆☆ | 10 mins per example

IN CASE THE TITLE had you wondering, CAGED is an acronym comprising five essential chord shapes. Though these are easiest (by far) to play in the open position, the shapes give us patterns to work with all over the fretboard. Barre chords using the E and A shapes are the most common and easily used examples, but the point here is not to play whole chords, just to be aware of where the shapes occur on the fretboard.

A good example – and one I've used frequently in my solo this month – is the open C chord shape in a few different positions. Doing this with a barre is not the most practical or attractive proposal, neither is it necessary. By viewing the notes in the chord as a pattern such as the pentatonic, or breaking it down into two- or three-note shapes, you can save your tendons and incorporate arpeggio-style lines, doublestops and triads. While we're looking at the C shape, try playing through shape 3 of the major pentatonic (identical to shape 4 of the minor pentatonic) and you may notice that the C shape is actually part and parcel of it; we're just viewing the notes from a slightly different angle. *Little Wing* and *Electric Ladyland* both feature numerous examples of the CAGED chords and pentatonic shapes being combined, albeit leaning towards a more chordal approach.

In this solo, I've used partial chords and doublestops in addition to the regular pentatonic shapes they are nested within. It can take a little adjustment to view patterns like these as part of a shape that you aren't actually playing in full! It might be helpful in some cases to place your fingers on all the notes of the chord at once – with the understanding that this is a device to help programme the brain and fingers, rather than make unrealistic demands of them... Hope you enjoy and see you next time. G

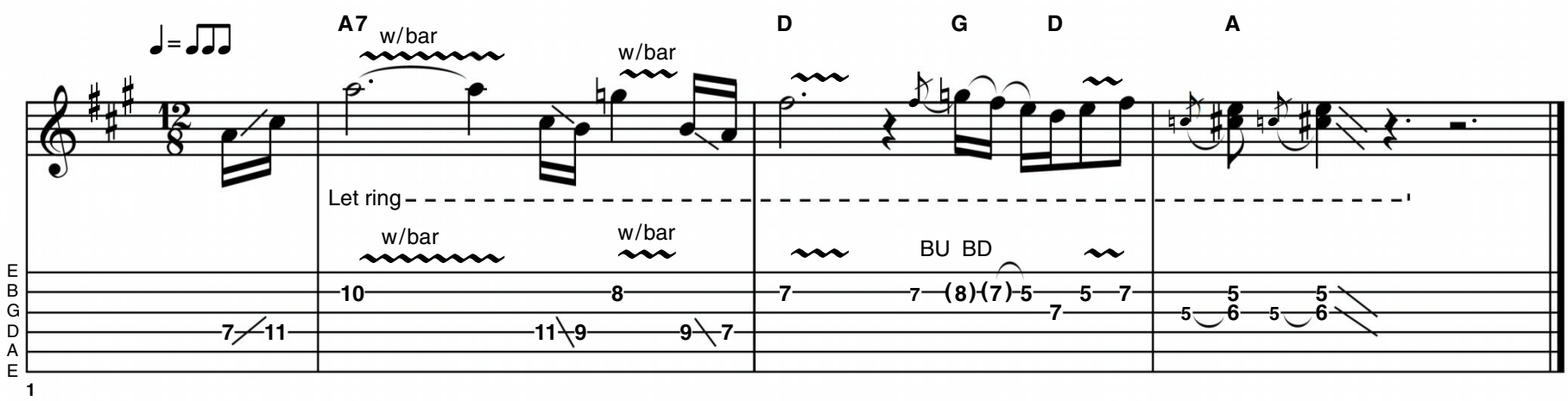
Richard Barrett's new album, *Colours*, (complete with backing tracks), is available now from ***www.richardbarrettguitar.com***

Matt Schofield mixes CAGED/chordal and pentatonic approaches

PHOTO BY SAM HARE

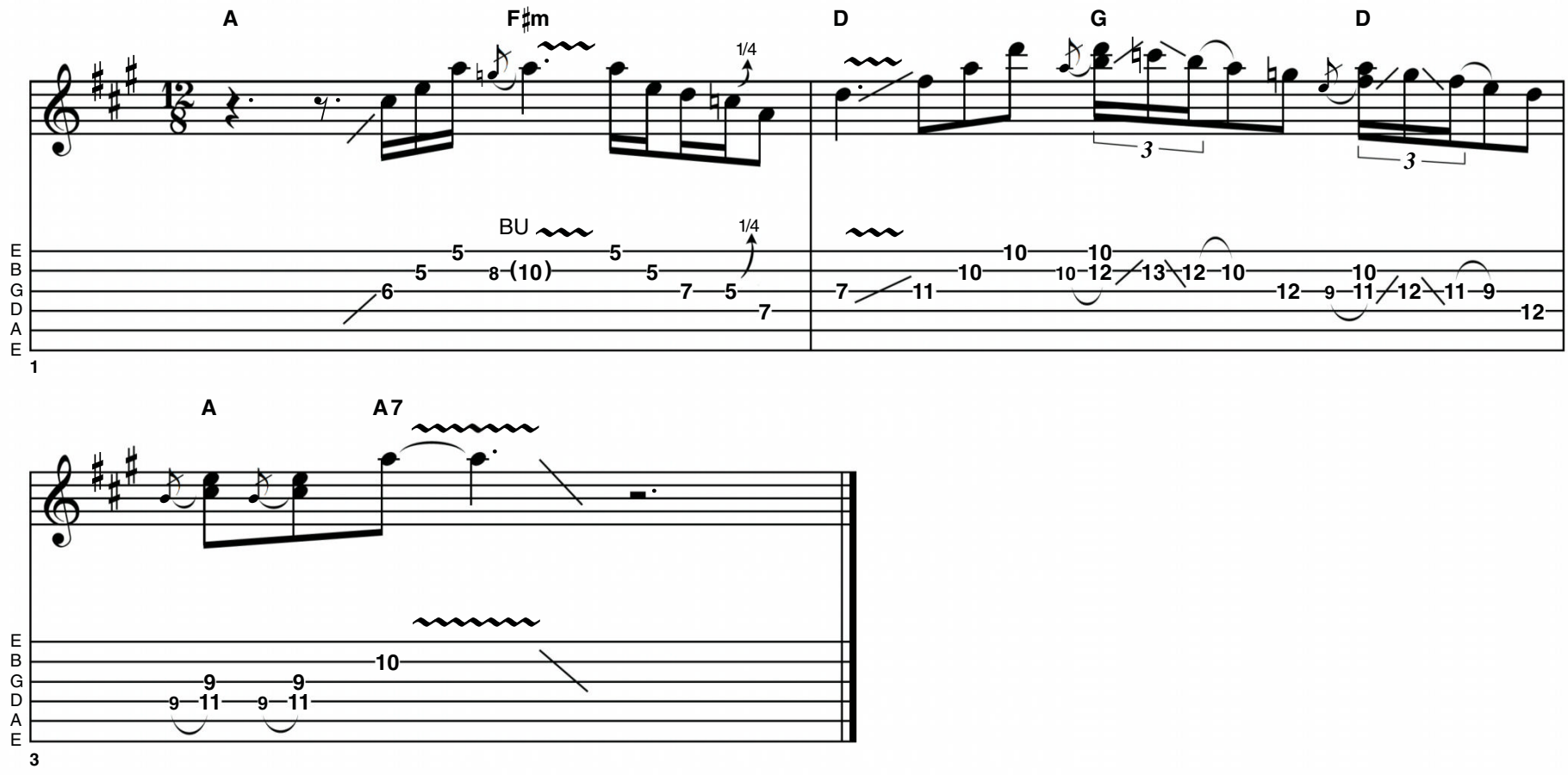
Example 1

IT'S FAIRLY EASY TO KEEP UP with what's going on here. The first doublestop can be viewed as part of a C chord shape, which would have its root note at the 12th fret of the A string. By the same token, you could say I'm combining two notes from shape 3 of the A major pentatonic! I then slide down two frets to transpose the idea to G, leading to a third doublestop based around shape 4 of the D major pentatonic. The single-note line at the end implies a Dsus4, before landing on part of an A major chord.



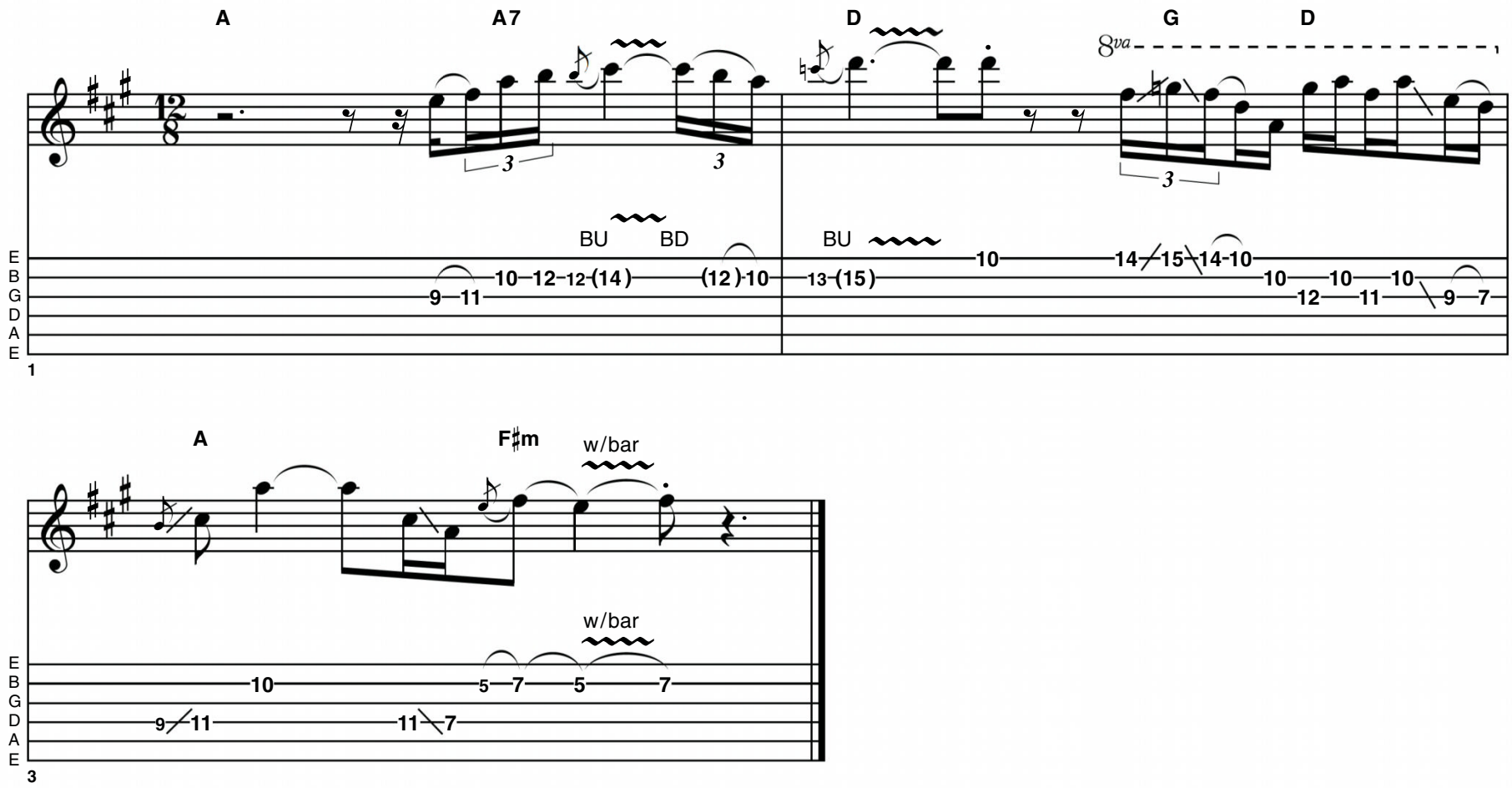
Example 2

I'M TAKING A BIT OF A LIBERTY HERE by using the A minor pentatonic over A major then F# minor. I get away with this by pushing any C naturals slightly sharp – a BB King-style move that stops everything sounding too 'major'. The slides are inspired by Matt Schofield. The rest of this phrase uses parts of an 'A' shape barre chord at the 10th to 12th fret giving us a G chord then part of an 'E' shape (albeit well disguised) in that same position. That last triad is derived from the same 'C' shape that began Example 1, just using three notes rather than two.



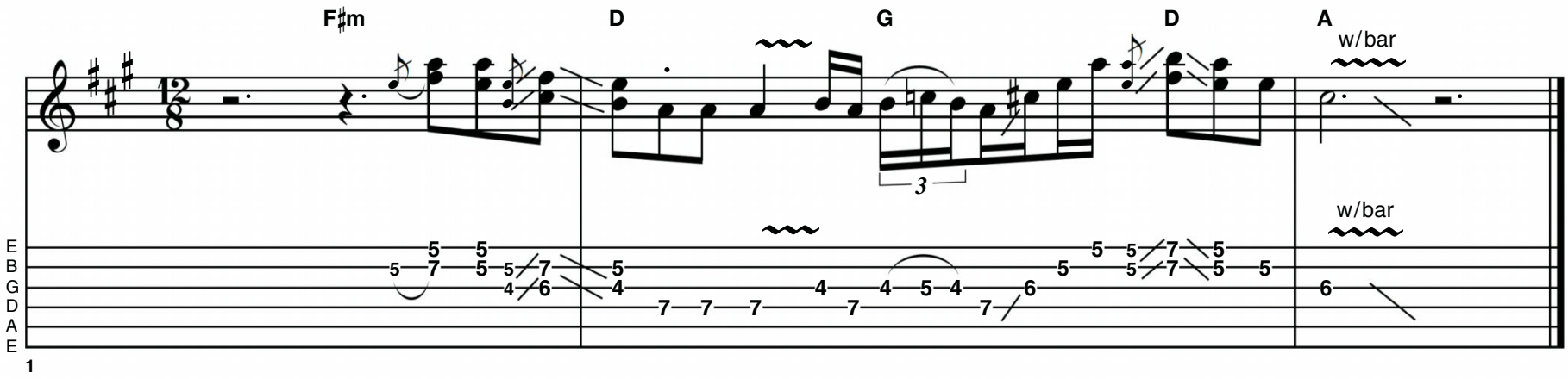
Example 3

THIS EXAMPLE JUMPS AROUND A BIT: part inspiration (aka bluff!) and partly through mixing the CAGED chord approach already described and adding in some more 'straight' pentatonic licks. These ideas are not meant to replace those, after all. Later, some wider-spaced slides combine pentatonic shapes and imply Dsus4 again, referring to the chord in the backing. The change of position for the last phrase hints at where we'll be heading in the final example.



Example 4

SOME DOUBLESTOPS BASED AROUND SHAPE 1 of the A major pentatonic kick things off, but as the phrase progresses you'll see it's also based around the 'E' shape A major chord that lives in the same space. The key is to have the confidence to move in and out of the shapes without losing track of where you are. Keeping the nearby pentatonic shapes in mind will help with this – so will playing, taking risks and making mental notes!



Hear It Here

MATT SCHOFIELD
FAR AS I CAN SEE

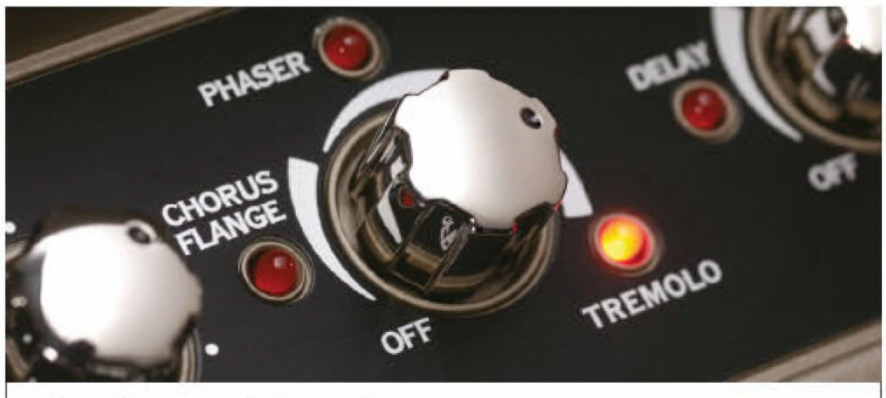
The combination of chordal and pentatonic ideas is integral not just to Matt's solos but his chord figures and embellishments. Check out *Clean Break* to hear this in action. *The Day You Left* also clearly displays how comfortable he is mixing CAGED/chordal and pentatonic approaches. You'll also hear this happening fast on the uptempo swing of *Everything*; the harmony and chordal structure is there, but you'll hardly, if ever, hear a whole chord explicitly played.

KIRK FLETCHER
SHADES OF BLUE

Kirk really is a master of combining chordal and pentatonic ideas seamlessly in a variety of musical scenarios. Check out his aggressive Chuck Berry-tinged playing on *Blues For Boo Boo*. *Country Girl* showcases how he can keep the rhythm part harmonically detailed and driving in a more 'standard' blues context, also finding the time to add fills between vocal lines. Finally, have a listen to his funky doublestops and melodic pentatonic lines on *The River's Invitation*.

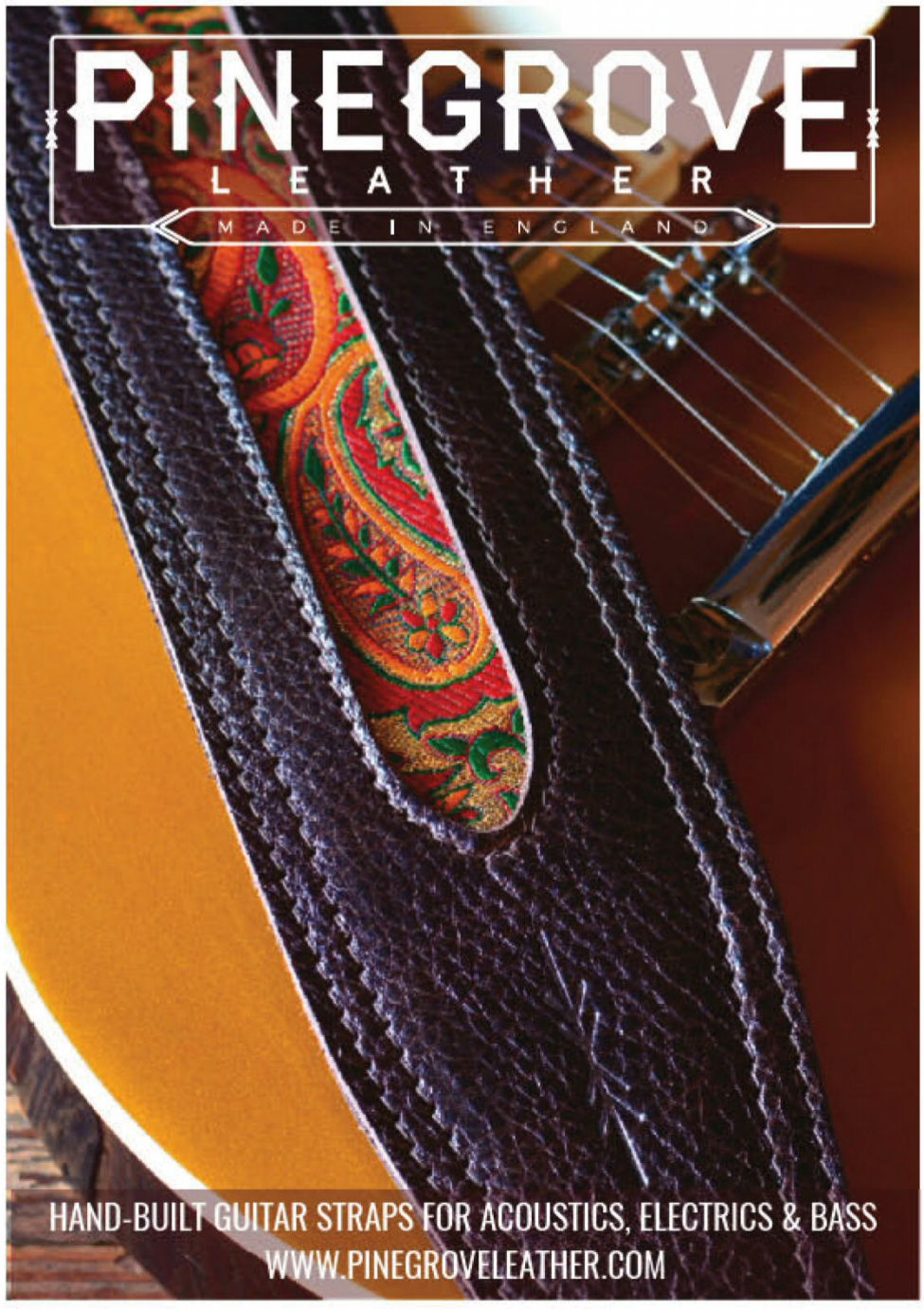
JOHN MAYER TRIO
TRY!

There is (quite correctly) much talk at the moment of John's latest release, *Sob Rock*. However, hearing him on this live album in a less produced context is also impressive. Check out *Who Did You Think I Was*, *Wait Until Tomorrow* and *Daughters* to hear him integrate chordal harmony, pentatonics and funky chord patterns without missing a beat. There is no place to hide in a trio format, but there's also the opportunity to step up and shine.



Advertise here

Call now on **01225 442244**.
Guitarist



SJM Concerts by arrangement with United Talent Agency presents

PORCUPINE TREE
CLOSURE /
CONTINUATION.
FRI—NOV.
11TH 2022
THE SSE ARENA,
WEMBLEY
LONDON

GIGSANDTOURS.COM
PORCUPINETREE.COM
TICKETMASTER.COM

Guitarist

Nextmonth

PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES / STRINGER/GETTY IMAGES

50 GUITARS THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

Some instruments are born great; others have greatness thrust upon them…

BERNARD BUTLER

The ex-Suede guitarist on Bert Jansch, old guitars and revisiting his debut album

DAVE BROCK

Hawkwind's psychedelic overlord reviews his epic space-rock journey

Next issue on sale
7 January 2022

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR DIGITAL EDITION AND SAVE!

Want instant access to *Guitarist*?
Go digital from just £2.20 an issue!
www.magazinesdirect.com/GUI

GUITARIST PRODUCER TONE HUNTER

POLYMATH

ADAM 'NOLLY' GETGOOD SIGNATURE HUMBUCKER SET

"The Polymaths can truly do it all - rich clean and crunch tones, outrageously chunky high gain rhythms and beautifully vocal leads."

Bare Knuckle

bareknucklepickups.co.uk

PHOTO: Courtesy of Guns N' Roses

GRETSCH

OUTLAW ORIGINAL

GUNS N' ROSES
RICHARD FORTUS
SIGNATURE FALCON™

GRETSCHGUITARS.COM

©2021 Fender Musical Instruments Corporation. All Rights Reserved. Gretsch® and Falcon™ are trademarks of Fred W. Gretsch Enterprises, Ltd. and used herein under license. Bigsby® is a registered trademark of Fender Musical Instruments Corporation.

9001

9000