

Guitarist

Issue 492

DECEMBER 2022

YEARS OF THE

Les Paul

**PETER
FRAMPTON**

ON HOW GUITARS
& BOWIE SAVED
HIS SOUL

PAGE 80

Reviews

MAGNETO
ERIC GALES RD3

MXR DUKE
OF TONE

TAKAMINE
LTD2022

& More

Featuring

THE HISTORY OF AN
ELECTRIC ICON

20 BEST UPGRADES
FOR LES PAULS

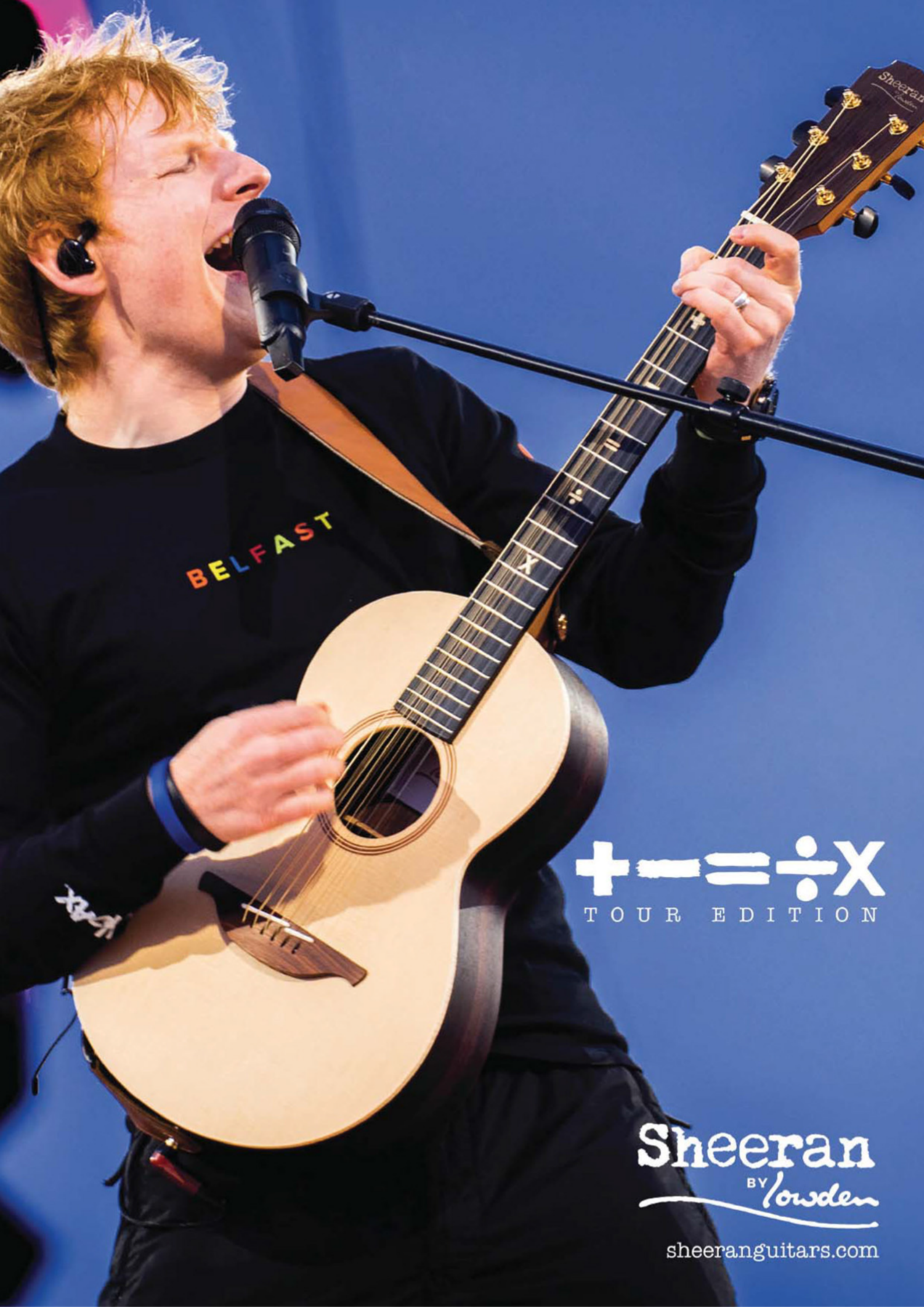
GIBSON FADED
SERIES REVIEW

& More

1959 Gibson Les Paul



PLUS
FENDER 'KINGFISH' TELECASTER DELUXE
GORDON GILTRAP
TAYLOR 514CE



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Form & Function



This month's cover feature celebrating seven decades of the Les Paul got me thinking about guitars that feel naturally comfortable to each of us – and those that take a bit more adjustment. I've always been most at home with Strats and Teles, likely because the first few electrics I owned were either based on them or were actual Fenders. And that probably set the mould. When I pick up a Les Paul, I enjoy playing it, but it's a little like stepping into a hire car for the first time – everything's in a slightly different place to usual, but get motoring and you soon start feeling at home.

Curiously, two of Gibson's other landmark electrics lie at opposite ends of the comfort scale for me. Firebirds, although long-feeling guitars, always seem like the most Fender-like of Gibsons to me. Maybe it's just the visual influence of that six-in-a-line headstock, but, to me, they share a certain linear, angular feel that Fenders also possess. By contrast, the SG – a guitar I've always wanted to love because of Robby Krieger – feels a little alien to me, even to this day. The neck feels way off to the left, almost in a different postcode to, say, a Les Paul or even a Tele, and I miss the extra heft to the tone that the Les Paul's slab of mahogany and maple cap seems to bring. Not that SGs have even sounded anything less than great in the hands of players such as Angus Young. It's just a case of what each one of us happens to click with – or not.

Unlike bicycles, made in different frame sizes, the ergonomics of electric guitars are kind of fixed, outside of custom variants. But the only guitar I ever had to sell because of ergonomics (with regret as it sounded great) was a US-built Chandler 555: the neck was just too wide and flat for me. But I bet, for someone else, it was just right. Whatever your perfect fit is, enjoy the issue and see you next time.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights



Gordon Giltrap

He's one of the greatest fingerstyle acoustic players, but anyone can learn from this modern master's approach to guitar on **p48**



Prince Charming

Analog Man's King Of Tone is one of the world's most sought-after overdrives. Now MXR has given it a regal, if small, sibling **p24**



Purple Reign

Christone 'Kingfish' Ingram is one of the most exciting blues talents out there – we catch up with him to hear about his new Tele on **p114**

Guitarist

Future Publishing Limited, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA
Telephone 01225 442244 Email guitarist@futurenet.com Online www.guitarist.co.uk

EDITORIAL

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Jamie Dickson

jamie.dickson@futurenet.com

DEPUTY EDITOR

David Mead

david.mead@futurenet.com

CONTENT DIRECTOR, MUSIC

Scott Rowley

scott.rowley@futurenet.com

REVIEWS EDITOR

Dave Burrluck

dave@daveburrluck.com

ART EDITOR

Darren Phillips

darren.phillips@futurenet.com

MANAGING EDITOR

Lucy Rice

lucy.rice@futurenet.com

SENIOR MUSIC EDITOR

Jason Sidwell

jason.sidwell@futurenet.com

CONTRIBUTORS

RICHARD BARRETT, ALEX BISHOP, ROD BRAKES, TREVOR CURWEN, PAUL GOUGH, NICK GUPPY, MARTIN HOLMES, RICHARD HOOD, GLENN KIMPTON, CATHERINE KIRKPATRICK, NEVILLE MARTEN, ANDY MCGREGOR, HUW PRICE, DAVINA RUNGASAMY, GARY STUCKEY, ALVIN WEETMAN, STUART WILLIAMS

IN-HOUSE PHOTOGRAPHY

PHIL BARKER, OLLY CURTIS, ADAM GASSON, 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 Guy Meredith guy.meredith@futurenet.com

MARKETING

DIRECTOR OF ACQUISITIONS Sharon Todd sharon.todd@futurenet.com

HEAD OF ACQUISITIONS Helen Harding helen.harding@futurenet.com

SENIOR CAMPAIGN MANAGER Faith Wardle faith.wardle@futurenet.com

CAMPAIGN MANAGER Rachel Wallace rachel.wallace@futurenet.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS MARKETING EXECUTIVE Oliver Hope oliver.hope@futurenet.com

PRINT & PRODUCTION

HEAD OF PRODUCTION UK & US Mark Constance mark.constance@futurenet.com

PRODUCTION MANAGER Frances Twentyman frances.twentyman@futurenet.com

SENIOR AD PRODUCTION MANAGER Jo Crosby jo.crosby@futurenet.com

DIGITAL EDITIONS MANAGER Jason Hudson jason.hudson@futurenet.com

DIGITAL EDITIONS PRODUCER Nick Lee nick.lee@futurenet.com

INTERNATIONAL LICENSING & SYNDICATION

GUITARIST IS AVAILABLE FOR LICENSING AND SYNDICATION. TO FIND OUR MORE CONTACT US AT [LICENSING@FUTURENET.COM](mailto:licensing@futurenet.com)

OR VIEW OUR AVAILABLE CONTENT AT WWW.FUTURECONTENTHUB.COM

HEAD OF PRINT LICENSING Rachel Shaw licensing@futurenet.com

CIRCULATION

HEAD OF FUTURE INTERNATIONAL & BOOKAZINES Tim Mathers

MANAGEMENT

SVP GLOBAL MAGAZINES & MARKETFORCE Adrian Hughes adrian.hughes@futurenet.com

BRAND DIRECTOR Stuart Williams stuart.williams1@futurenet.com

COMMERCIAL FINANCE DIRECTOR Dan Jotcham dan.jotcham@futurenet.com

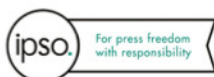
HEAD OF ART & DESIGN Rodney Dive rodney.dive@futurenet.com

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

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Neil Godwin

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FIRST PLAY



TAYLOR 514CE
£3,659

WHAT IS IT? Brand-new Taylor with sustainably sourced urban ironbark back and sides, new design 'board inlays and light 'edge burst' finish to the top

Iron Maiden

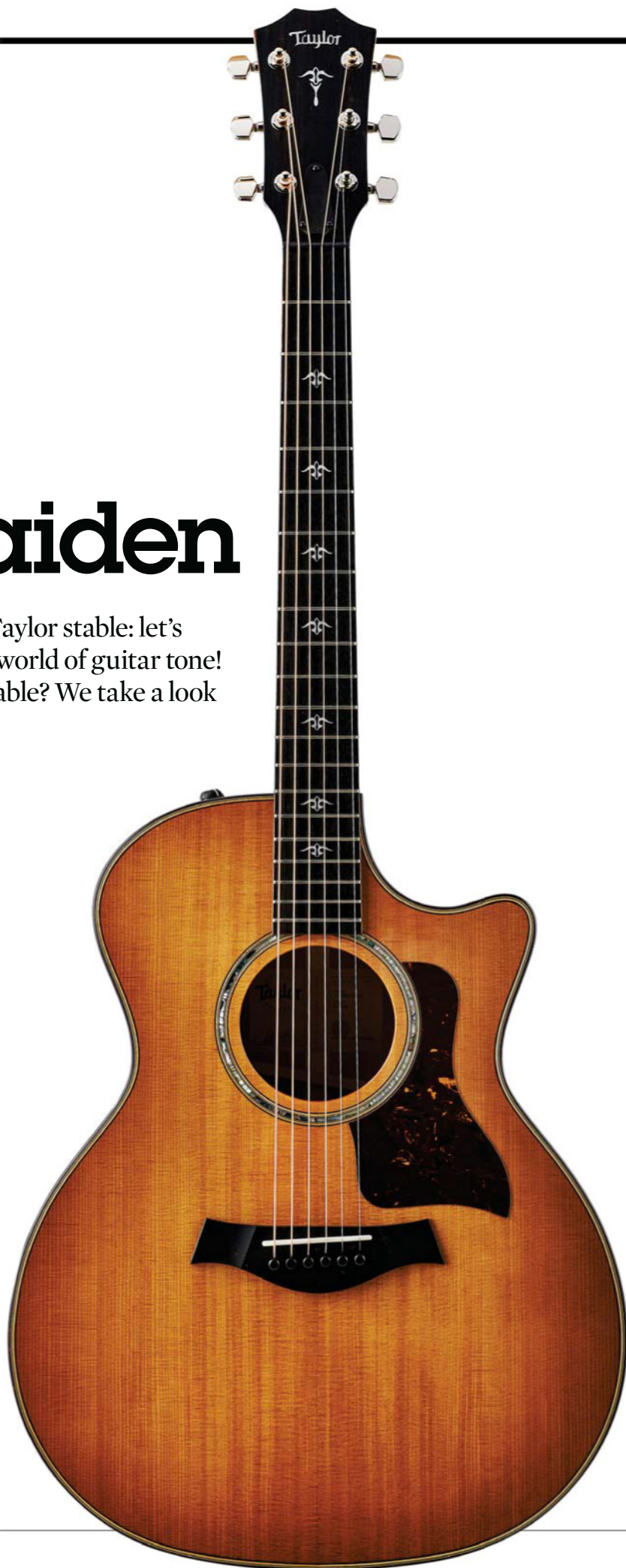
Another new wood joins the Taylor stable: let's introduce red ironbark to the world of guitar tone! But what does it bring to the table? We take a look

Words Neville Marten **Photography** Olly Curtis

There surely isn't another large guitar manufacturer that does more to look after the environment than Taylor, in either discovering new timber species for guitar building, or conserving stocks of rare ones. Witness its careful management of koa in Hawaii, the conservation of Crelicam ebony in Cameroon, and the discovery of 'urban' woods from within the cities of California, such as urban ash, and this new one on us, urban ironbark.

Many Californian cities feature wide tree-lined boulevards, and when it's time to replace them due to age, safety or other issues, Taylor rescues this otherwise waste timber and puts it to the best possible use – building beautiful acoustic guitars.

Since Andy Powers has taken up the helm at Taylor, we've been highly impressed by the instruments that have been coming out of the San Diego facility. The Taylor tone has also come of age lately, with different models delivering a variety of interesting sounds somewhat removed from the pleasing but fairly bland tone often previously exhibited. This is largely down to Powers, who has redesigned







1. The 514ce's top is Sitka spruce, a staple guitar wood. But here it's aged or 'torrefied' to provide a vintage, played-in sound

2. Notice the ES2 pickup's adjustment screws located between the micarta bridge saddle and ebony bridge pins

the guitars' innards utilising innovative bracing patterns. He's also worked hard on sourcing new and viable woods, such as the urban ironbark (red ironbark) you see on this rather attractive 514ce.

Ironbark's grain looks not a million miles away from mahogany but is not a related species (originally Australian, it's actually from the eucalyptus family). Said to sound somewhat akin to East Indian rosewood

"but more so", and exhibiting the hardness of ebony (it sinks like ebony does, too), it's a great guitar-building find for Taylor.

Here, the straight-grained Sitka spruce top has been torrefied in order to open it up for a more played-in tone, while both fingerboard and bridge are Crelicam ebony, from Taylor's forestry partnership with Madinter in Cameroon, West Africa. This facility fells and processes the lumber on site, thus providing valuable employment for the local population, as well as harvesting this rare and valuable timber as sustainably as possible.

The neck is hewn from what Taylor calls neo-tropical mahogany, which we gather is grown in South America and, again, environmentally sourced. A scarfed-on headstock not only saves material but also creates a stronger build since the grain follows the headstock's pitched back angle, and doesn't run straight through the neck's weakest part, right behind the nut. Tuners are classy Schallers with Taylor branding, and the pickup is the company's excellent Expression 2 system.

As we'd have expected, having reviewed many Taylors over the years, build quality, both internally and externally, is utterly flawless. Kerfing and bracing (the guitar





features Andy Powers' V-Class bracing) are clean as a whistle, while the thin-skin finish is gloss on the body and matt on the neck. And while not quite sure at first, we've really grown to like the top's subtle tobacco stain 'edge burst', too.

Feel & Sounds

Great playability has always been at the core of Taylor's proposition. Right from the earliest days the guitars were said to be acoustics that played like electrics. With our 514ce's Elixir Nanoweb 12-gauge phosphor bronzes that's clearly still what Taylor is aiming for. Featuring the company's standard carve, which manifests as a C shape with a slight V along the centre, the neck is incredibly comfortable to play. With a 44.45mm black Tusq nut and a 648mm (25.5-inch) scale length, it's a joy to fingerpick open chords and licks, while

While not quite sure at first, we've really grown to like the top's subtle tobacco stain 'edge burst' finish

single-note lines drip off the fingers higher up the ebony expanse. Access to the upper frets – there are 20 in total – is afforded courtesy the delicate Venetian cutaway, and if Taylor's idea is to make the guitar's playability the last thing on your mind, then they've succeeded here in spades.

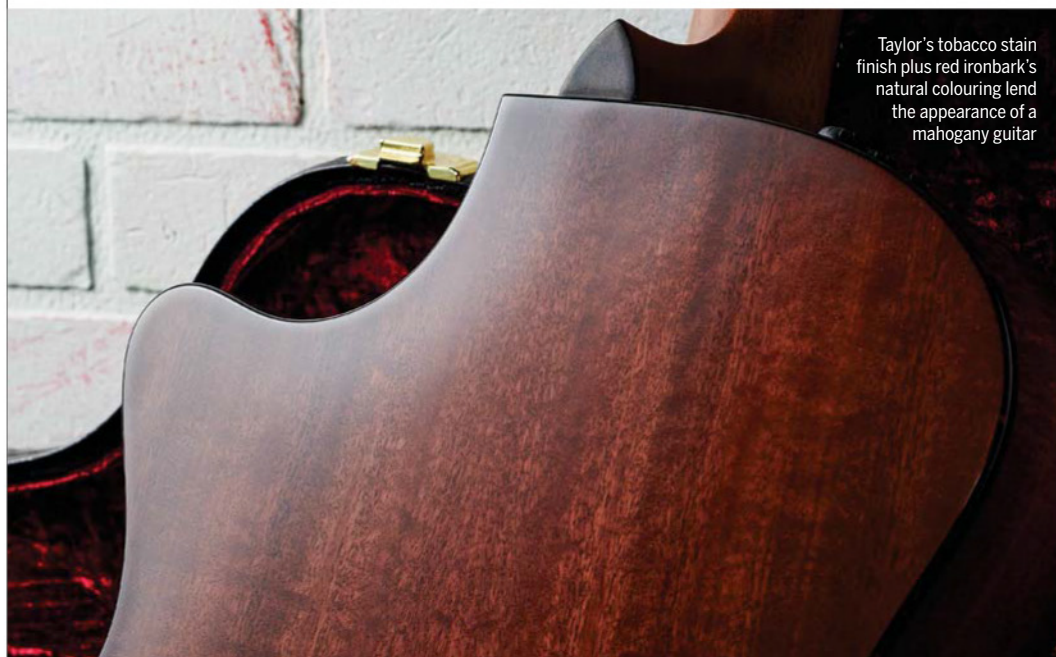
Taylor says that sonically the guitar "delivers a sweet, muscular sound that combines rosewood's high-fidelity voice with mahogany's warm and punchy midrange and spectrum-wide sonic balance". And one has to say, that's pretty much bang on. With a rosewood-bodied Martin D-28 and a mahogany Gibson Hummingbird as comparators, the Taylor holds its own proudly. Where the big Martin has an overall thicker and more punchy tone than the sweeter-sounding Gibson, the 514ce includes both of these traits in its DNA. Taylor says it's equally at home plucking delicate pieces as it is bashing out songs all night. Indeed it is, whereas our Martin is a fantastic picker and the Gibson definitely more of a strummer.

What's particularly pleasing is the Taylor's superb string-to-string balance, and equally defined upper, mid and bass registers. Being the company's big-selling Grand Auditorium size, which is

3. The ES2 system has simple volume, treble and bass controls, shown against the tobacco stain 'edge burst' and Italian acrylic 'Aerial' inlays

4. The Taylor headstock, once a modern design, is now a classic. Here, we have Schaller tuners, a pearl inlay, a black Tusq nut and plastic truss rod cover





Taylor's tobacco stain finish plus red ironbark's natural colouring lend the appearance of a mahogany guitar



TAYLOR 514CE

PRICE: £3,659 (inc hard case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Cutaway Grand Auditorium electro-acoustic

TOP: Torrefied Sitka spruce

BACK/SIDES: Solid urban ironbark (red ironbark)

MAX RIM DEPTH: 111.125mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 381mm

NECK: Neo-tropical, South American mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

TUNERS: Taylor branded Schaller
NUT/WIDTH: Black Tusq/
44.45mm

FINGERBOARD: Crelicam ebony with Italian pearloid inlays and ebony binding

FRETS: 20, medium-fine

BRIDGE/SPACING: Crelicam ebony with white micarta saddle
55.5mm

ELECTRICS: Taylor Expression System 2 (ES2)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.12/4.6

OPTIONS: N/A

RANGE OPTIONS: Taylor 512ce Grand Concert (£3,049)

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes

FINISH: Gloss tobacco stain edge burst top, natural satin neck – thin skin gloss back and sides

Taylor Guitars

00800 23750011

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9/10

PROS Taylor's flawless build, superb playability, and a range of totally convincing sounds

CONS Though compatible with its competitors, it's a tad expensive

pitched somewhere between the larger dreadnought and smaller 000 or Grand Concert models, the 514ce doesn't quite have the cannon-like roar of the D-28, but it definitely kicks out a decent punch acoustically. It would certainly hold its own in any acoustic ensemble.

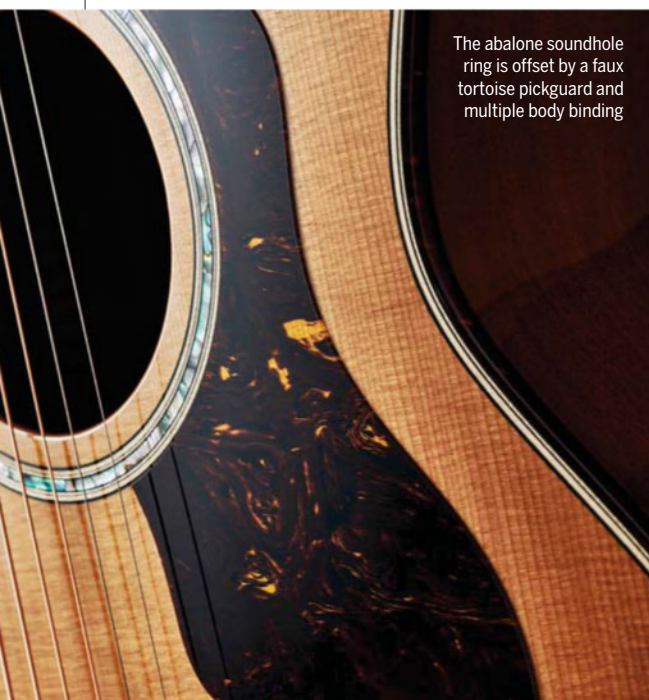
Plugged in, the Expression System 2 delivers a pretty faithful representation of the guitar's voice. It's neutral sounding, with no obvious piezo 'quack' due to the pickup's mounting behind the bridge and not directly under the saddle. It's a well tried-and-tested system.

Beautifully built, Taylor's new 514ce plays like butter and sounds strong, balanced and poised

Verdict

Price-wise, the 514ce is on a par with Martin's Reimagined series, and while we feel both are a little expensive, it's what you pay for quality these days. But Taylor is definitely striking while the iron is hot, with tons of new models, all of which bring something new to the table, whether that's innovative bracing, an alternative timber, or even a whole new range as with the American Dream series (the company's lowest price, US-made, all-solid timber range, as reviewed back in 2020).

There are so many great acoustics around at the moment that every manufacturer has to be on its toes. Taylor most certainly is, as this excellent guitar goes to show. Beautifully built, it plays like butter and sounds strong, balanced and poised. The torrefied spruce top gives it a 'lived-in' sound so there's no feeling that it requires breaking in. And the little things, like an easy access battery compartment by the endpin, and the second strap button fitted to the heel, make it stage-ready from the off. That it works so well as a sofa companion, a strummer in the band, or picking out sensitive ballads at the open mic night, is the result of great design and commitment. And if a guitar can be 'ethically' built then this one does its best. A very fine instrument! **G**



The abalone soundhole ring is offset by a faux tortoise pickguard and multiple body binding

Laurence Jones

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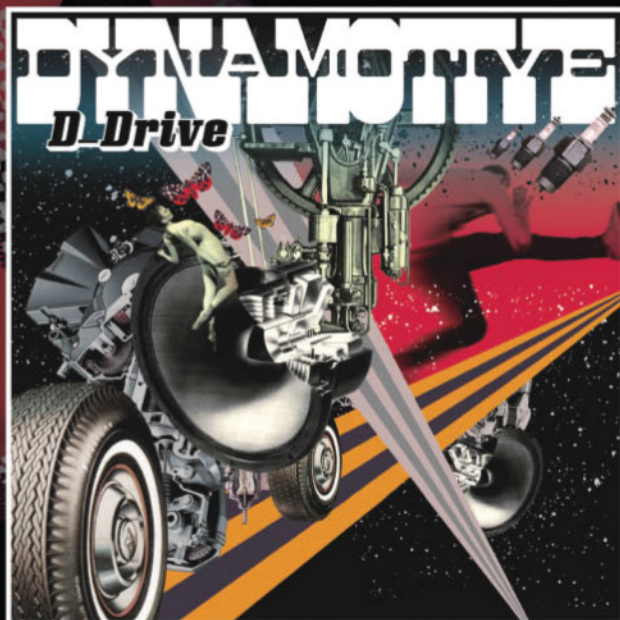


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FIRST PLAY



**MAGNETO U-ONE
ERIC GALES RD3**
£849

WHAT IS IT? Eric Gales has been playing Magneto guitars for over a decade – here's his pretty affordable new signature model

Crown Tools

After releasing his career-defining album, *Crown*, earlier this year, the bar is set high for Eric's new signature guitar

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis

Magneto guitars first appeared back in late 2008, the brainchild of Christian Hatstatt, a guitar designer and maker who has worked with various European brands, most notably Gary Levinson's Blade Guitars. Christian's initial designs centred on two models: the Sonnet and T-Wave inspired by Fender's Strat and Tele. Later in 2012, the Velvet was added, a more Les Paul-inspired style. Yet unlike many modern makers who might simply change a headstock outline, Magneto subtly reevaluates those originals. Initially, they were only made in Japan via a collaboration with Kei Yatsuzuka, but more recently the Chinese-made U-One range, introduced into Europe in 2019, provides Magneto style at a much lower price point.

Eric Gales joined the party in 2011. "We were introduced to Eric by a friend from NYC who put us in touch with his manager at the time," reports Christian. "We got him one of our guitars to try out and he has been playing them ever since. After a discussion with Eric in early 2020, we came up with the idea to build a guitar that would be more affordable but would feature what Eric likes the most:





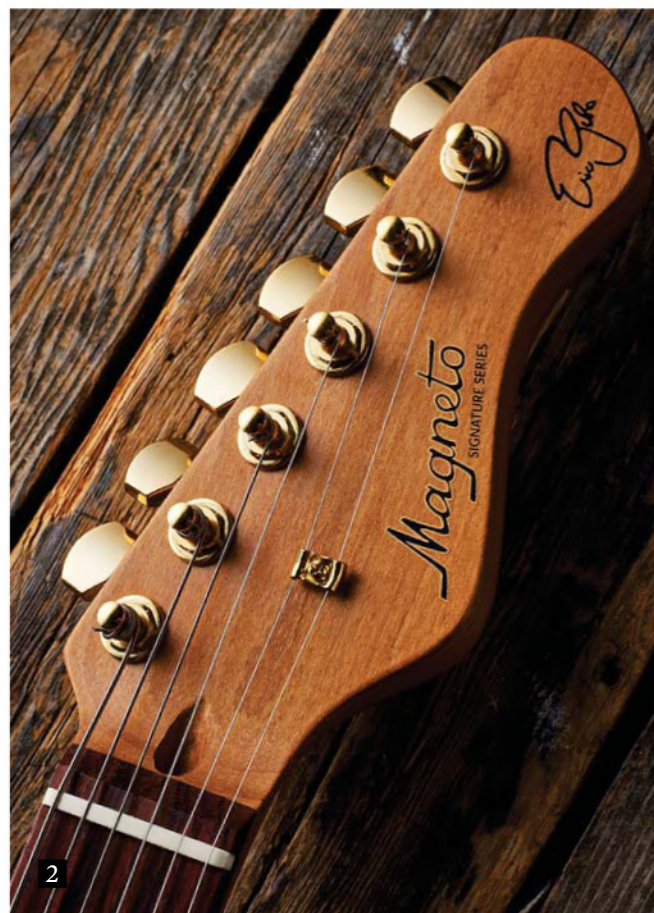


1. There are numerous design motifs such as these milled lines in the scratchplate that make the RD3 quite unique and stylish

2. Magneto's take on the six-in-a-line headstock is far from radical. The tuners are non-locking, but the nut is oiled bone and very well cut

size, weight, pickups, hardware and some cool design features." And the RD3 you see here – based on Eric's Japanese-made Raw Dawg II Custom – was born.

Although the inspiration is obvious, there are plenty of aspects here that change both the look and the function. The upper horn sits slightly lower into the body and the treble horn appears more out-flowing, not to mention the three cut-outs in the gold-backed plastic mirror scratchplate (the same material is used for the vibrato's spring coverplate). Meanwhile, the body



strap button on the tip of the body heel. Eric, of course, plays his guitar upside down left-handed style, simply because that's how his elder brothers played (and not because he's left-handed).

While the Lollar Sixty-Four single coils Eric uses on his custom guitar were impossible to use on a guitar at this price point, "the Metro-Poles EG1 set was modelled after our 62 single coils", says Christian, "and we found out that Eric liked my idea of using flat poles. It always bugged me to have less volume on some

4. A key part of the pickup design is the flush pole magnets for even string-to-string response, not least with the 305mm (12-inch) fingerboard radius

You'll be missing a lot if you just keep these controls full up – they really are the key to what is an expansive and expressive guitar

3. As well as the extra strap button to facilitate Eric's upside-down playing style, notice how the heel area is dished and there's that 'Raw Dawg' nickname on the neckplate

heel area, for example, has a dished relief, while the heel itself is thinner and slightly tapered. Then there are the classy control knobs from smooth grained ivoroid with black rubber ribbed grips. Being an artist model, the guitar has Eric's signature on the headstock and a larger version that surrounds the 12th fret. Eric's 'Raw Dawg' nickname is displayed on the gold-plated neckplate, too, plus we get an additional



UNDER THE HOOD

What's inside Eric Gales' new squeeze? Let's take a look

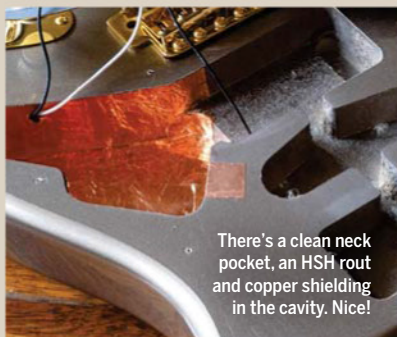
Removing the neck, which is a good tight fit and there's no finish (or shim) in the neck pocket, we see the body is routed for HSH and the area where the controls and switch sit is lined with copper foil, which connects to the foil ground on the scratchplate. The pots are the mini 'Made in Korea' type made by Alpha, and measuring the tone pot we have 500kohms, not the usual 250k. This may be one reason why we have plenty of highs here, which, as we describe in our sounds test, can easily be pulled back from both the volume and tone controls. Speaking of which, there's

a quite large matt orange/red tone cap, but it doesn't have any markings (although Magneto confirmed it's .047 microfarads).

The flush-pole pickups look of a high quality with waxed cloth-covered hook-up wire and 'Magneto Eric Gales EG1' engraved on the fibreboard bases along with Neck, Mid and Bridge IDs as each is graduated for output: the bridge measures 6.48kohms, the middle 6.26k and the neck 5.96k. "We manufacture the EG1 pickups in China, not far from the China factory [that makes the guitars]," says Christian Hatsatt. "For this set, we are using

Elektrisola AWG 42 wire and Alnico V magnets with some degaussing, scatterwound. It really is a beautiful pickup." Compared with the Lollar Sixty-Four single coils on his Custom models, "these pickups have slightly higher-midrange and great presence to cut through in the mix", he says.

The only thing to watch is that the scratchplate (and spring coverplate) screws are very small and the basswood is relatively soft. We'd doubt you could remove the 'plates more than a few times before you'd need to plug and redrill those holes.



There's a clean neck pocket, an HSH rout and copper shielding in the cavity. Nice!



The pots here are 500k and the unmarked tone cap is actually .047 microfarads



The pickups appear very well made and are clearly marked for neck, middle and bridge position

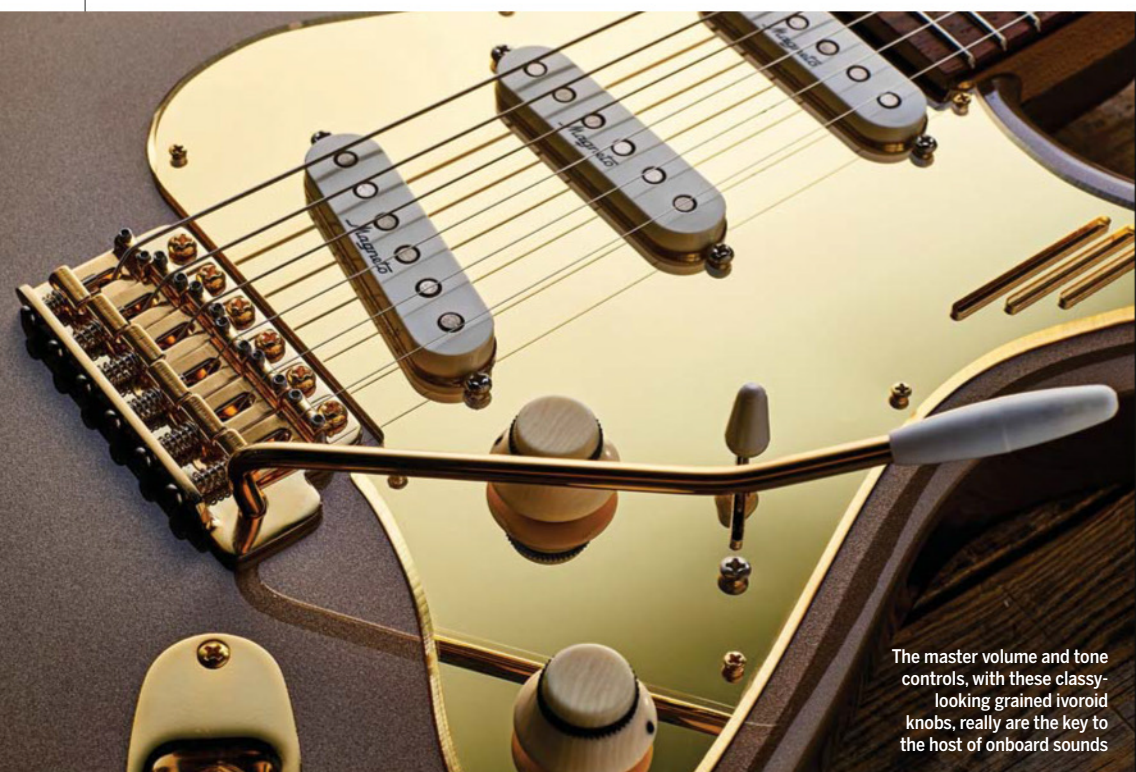
strings when the guitar is played clean! An important part of the plan was to develop pickups that would have the dynamics and great midrange response, which play an important role in Eric's guitar tone."

Feel & Sounds

Under the very classy, lightly metallic finish we have a two-piece basswood body that results in a nice weight of 3.49kg (7.7lb). Of course, it feels very Strat-like strapped on, but while that slightly wider cutaway and tapered heel do give a little more 'air' for higher playing positions, that extra strap button might be a signature feature too far.

The satin-finished neck feels very good, too, and it's pretty mainstream in size – 42.2mm wide at the nut, just over 21mm deep at the 1st fret and 23.5mm by the 12th with a pretty classic full-ish C-meets-D profile (that's actually very close to Gibson's SlimTaper, albeit slightly narrower in width) and has slightly incurving and comfortable sides to the fingerboard; the top edges are lightly rolled. The fret size suits the style at 2.38mm wide by 1.25mm high, very slightly wider and taller than those used on PRS's similarly priced SE Silver Sky, which is an obvious reference, although here they sit on a flatter Gibson-like 305mm (12-inch) radiused fingerboard.





The master volume and tone controls, with these classy-looking grained ivoroid knobs, really are the key to the host of onboard sounds

Fretwork and setup certainly match the price point, and the oiled bone nut is very nicely cut. It's good craft.

As set, the vibrato is decked, but the six-screw unit should be easy to set to floating if you'd prefer, and with the saddle screws sitting somewhat above the saddles themselves, well, the first job we'd undertake is to add a neck shim. That aside, we appear to have steel saddles and a top plate with a full-size steel block. Not least with that excellent nut work, tuning stability is really good.

Obviously, what we hear is very Strat-like and with both volume and tone full up there's no shortage of high-end sizzle, which produces a quite modern voicing on the (hum-cancelling) mixes, but might be a bit too much for some on the solo pickup

selections. However, just pull back the volume, which barely reduces the output, and those highs round really nicely. The tone control is pretty wide-ranging, too, with smooth graduation to further tame the high-end. Turned lower, it almost hints at a humbucking voice, particularly with a level boost or overdrive; full off it's a very usable 'woman' tone. You'll be missing a lot if you just keep these controls full up – they really are the key to what is an expansive and expressive guitar.

A very cool-looking rerun of a classic with just enough original style to elevate it above the lookalikes

Verdict

Anything that shines a light on Eric Gales is very welcome in our book and there's little to disappoint here, aside from some minor, simple-to-fix setup issues. This is a very cool-looking rerun of a classic that has just enough original style – not least its custom colour and gold mirror scratchplate – to add a little bling and elevate it above a tidal wave of 'really can't be bothered' lookalikes. Conversely, it is a signature guitar with no colour options and many players might prefer a more classic appearance. But above all, it's the sounds and slick playability that are rather impressive here. Time to add Magneto to your 'to-try' list, we'd say. **G**



Along with the larger inlaid signature that surrounds the 12th fret, we get Eric's signature on the headstock tip, too



MAGNETO U-ONE ERIC GALES RD3

PRICE: £849 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Double-cutaway, solidbody electric

BODY: 2-piece basswood

NECK: Slab-sawn roasted maple, 'medium C' profile, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Oiled bone/42.2mm

FINGERBOARD: East Indian rosewood, pearloid dot w/ inlaid signature at 12th fret, 305mm (12") radius

FRETS: 22, narrow jumbo

HARDWARE: Gotoh Custom vintage-style vibrato w/ steel plate saddles and steel block, Gotoh SG-360-07 enclosed tuners – gold-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm

ELECTRICS: Magneto Metro-Poles Custom EG1 single coil set, 5-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume and master tone

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.49/7.7

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: In the U-One series the Sonnet, on which the RD3 is based, is available in various styles from £349

LEFT-HANDERS: Sonnet Classic US-1300 (£399)

FINISHES: Sunset Gold (as reviewed) – high gloss polyurethane to body; vintage tinted satin to neck

Rosetti

01376 550033

www.magnetoguitars.com



PROS Stylish re-evaluation of a classic; great weight; sharp detailed build; excellent pickups and quality hardware

CONS Our sample might need a neck shim; only one finish

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

Fiore



PLAY IN FULL BLOOM

MARK LETTIERI SIGNATURE MODEL

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

- Mark Lettieri

FIRST PLAY



**ORIGIN EFFECTS HALCYON
GREEN OVERDRIVE**
£239

WHAT IS IT? A responsive and more tweakable evolution of the fabled Tube Screamer



Green Machine

That famous green overdrive is the starting point for an ultra-responsive evolution from Origin Effects

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis



ORIGIN EFFECTS HALCYON GREEN OVERDRIVE

PRICE: £239

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Overdrive pedal

FEATURES: Buffered bypass

CONTROLS: Level, Drive, Dry, Tone Adapt switch, Voice switch, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 80mA

DIMENSIONS: 64 (w) x 120 (d) x 58mm (h)

Origin Effects

www.origineffects.com

1. The Adapt switch can be off (position 0) or give you two different strengths of the Adaptive behaviour (I and II)

2. You can access two different types of mid push from the Voice switch – a standard TS-style mid hump or a more focused presence peak

3. The Dry knob adjusts the level of dry signal as an integral component of the tone. At 12 o'clock it's the same as a standard Tube Screamer, so you can take it up or down

It's undoubtedly one of the most popular overdrives ever, but do we really need another pedal that's based on the Ibanez Tube Screamer? The answer to that one is a very big yes from Origin Effects, who says that although its new Halcyon might be based on the ubiquitous green box, it goes way beyond what the average overdrive has to offer.

The basic idea here is to combine the magic of a vintage TS808 with the responsiveness of a good valve amplifier. Origin's contention is that while the typical green pedal's mid-pushed drive can be great for a thick solo tone, it can also become a touch thin and anaemic with reduced guitar volume or soft playing. The company's solution is its proprietary Adaptive circuitry, which aims to adapt its voicing in response to pick attack and volume changes.

The pedal's Level, Drive and Tone knobs will be familiar to anyone who's ever used a Tube Screamer, but here there's also a Dry knob. While a Tube Screamer has a fixed amount of dry sound mixed in, this lets you tweak that upwards to improve performance when using the pedal for drive into a clean amp. You also get a Voice switch that offers the standard TS808 mid-forward voicing, which works great for a thicker tone with single coils, or the Mod setting that offers a sharper and brighter presence than the regular mid hump, a touch more aggressive and well suited to humbuckers.

But it's the three-way Adapt switch that brings in the tonal responses to your dynamic changes, with the mid-forward voicing fading away as the pedal cleans up. Position 0 responds like an original 808, but positions I and II offer increasing degrees of Adaptive behaviour. The amount of bass and treble roll-off that gives you that mid-hump is in direct proportion to the amount of clipping, so by using softer playing dynamics or rolling back the volume knob you're not only getting a cleaner sound but also restoring bass and treble in a natural-sounding transition between drive and clean.

Verdict

A player's pedal, the Halcyon does everything a standard TS does but can go beyond that with some well-thought-out additional features that really extend versatility, not least a more nuanced dynamic response than your standard green clone that's just waiting to be exploited. **A**

THE RIVALS

If you're looking for Tube Screamer tone in all of its varieties, the JHS Bonsai (£219) actually offers nine different options (OD-1, TS-808, TS-9, MSL, TS-10, EXAR OD-1, TS-7, Keeley Mod Plus and JHS Strong Mod) via a rotary switch. EarthQuaker Devices also offers Tube Screamer-style evolutions in the form of the Plumes (£115), or the Palisades V2 (£239) if you desire a double-channel pedal.

We couldn't have a Rivals section without some mention of the original green pedal, which can currently be found in the form of the Ibanez Overdrive Pro TS808 (£155) and the Maxon OD808 (£109).

EarthQuaker Devices' Plumes features three clipping modes



9/10

PROS Origin's usual high standard of build quality; dynamic TS sound with no tonal compromises; adjustable dry sound; two voices

CONS Nothing... but paying in excess of £200 for any TS won't be agreeable to all players

FIRST PLAY



TC ELECTRONIC PLETHORA X3 TONEPRINT PEDALBOARD £299

WHAT IS IT? A more compact
version of TC Electronic's X5
multi-effects pedal



Triple Treat

TC Electronic's Plethora X3 presents the company's TonePrint pedals flexibly arranged in one compact unit

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

1. The Effect knob selects and assigns pedals to the pedalboard. Rotate to scroll through them, then press to assign to a pedal slot
2. Three Parameter knobs give you instant access to specific parameters for the selected pedal in Edit mode. They can also be assigned as Hot Knobs in Play mode for quick live tweaks
3. The TonePrint encoder scrolls through the TonePrints that you can assign to an effect, but a long press on it (quite possible by foot) will bring up the onboard tuner

The TC Electronic Plethora X3 (reviewed in issue 465) is a flexible multi-effects unit that can store 127 presets, known as 'pedalboards', each with five individually footswitchable effects taken from TC's TonePrint pedal range. The unit offers a great opportunity to add a range of effects to your rig, but may be on the large side for incorporation into smaller pedalboards. Now, though, there's this compact version that, at 176.5mm (7 inches) in width, will be a more practical proposition for many players. The X3 has all the effects of the X5, but you can only use three of them at a time rather than five. The other main differences are that it loses the send and return loop and has no provision for plugging in an expression pedal.

The X3 has 16 effects pedals available to assign to each of the three footswitches in any of the 127 onboard pedalboards. You can assign any pedal to each, so you could have multiple instances, such as three delay pedals, if desired. Each pedal can be loaded with a TonePrint (basically an edited set of parameters) from those stored onboard – there are 75 slots per pedal housing TonePrints and you can load those slots with your own TonePrints created with the software editor as well as the Artist or TC factory options. Beyond a loaded TonePrint, there are instant front-panel editing options available.

The lack of an expression pedal input may be seen as a drawback, but there are plenty of performance options via the pressure-sensitive MASH footswitches. Each footswitch can be held down to change a parameter for its assigned effect, such as maybe turning up the feedback of a delay. You can also set a footswitch up for tap tempo instead of a MASH effect.

Verdict

While the X3 loses some of the X5's flexibility, the advantage gained is that it is a much smaller pedal that can sit nicely on your pedalboard. As such, it's a great way to expand a 'board with a whole range of decent-sounding effects – a single unit with one power input, and effects in any order having the advantage over buying numerous single pedals. This could be all your modulation pedals in one place, all your delays/reverbs or whatever combinations work for you. Alternatively, just add a drive pedal to the X3 and you'll have an utterly practical minimalist rig that you can take anywhere. **G**



TC ELECTRONIC PLETHORA X3 TONEPRINT PEDALBOARD

PRICE: £299

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Multi-effects pedal

FEATURES: True Bypass, 127 onboard 'pedalboards', chromatic tuner, optional cab sim at the end of the chain, MASH performance options, looper

EFFECTS: Helix Phaser, Viscous Vibe, Tape Deck Looper, Hall of Fame 2 Reverb, Flashback 2 Delay, Sub'n'Up Octaver, Brainwaves Pitch Shifter, Corona Chorus, Hypergravity Compressor, Mimiq Doubler, Vortex Flanger, Pipeline Tap Tremolo, Quintessence Harmony, Sentry NoiseGate, Shaker Vibrato, Alter Ego Vintage Echo

CONTROLS: Effect, TonePrint, 3x Parameter, Play/Edit switch, Board switch, 3x Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard inputs (Mono & Stereo), standard outputs (Mono & Stereo), MIDI In, MIDI Thru, USB

POWER: Supplied 9V DC adaptor 600mA

DIMENSIONS: 172 (w) x 118 (d) x 54mm (h)

Musictribe

www.tcelectronic.com

THE RIVALS

There are plenty of other options for getting a number of effects in a reasonably compact self-contained setting. One of the most practical pedalboard additions would be the Boss MS-3 Multi Effects Switcher (£419), which combines a multi-effects engine and multi-pedal switcher in one unit. The Zoom G3n (£160) offers instant access to three effects, has a comprehensive feature set and is more affordable. Of course, there's always Line 6, and while the HX Effects (£449) is probably the closest in nature to the Plethora as it has no amp sims, it's a larger eight-footswitch unit; the smaller HX Stomp (£445) is the more compact option.



9/10

PROS Compact all-in-one unit; ease of setup and use; variety of effects; MASH performance features; TonePrint facility; stereo and mono operation

CONS A send and return loop would have added flexibility

FIRST PLAY



**MXR CUSTOM SHOP
CSP039 DUKE OF TONE**
£179

.....
WHAT IS IT? Analog Man's respected and in-demand drive pedal revamped for the mass market



Minor Royalty

Forgo the five-year waiting list for Analog Man's elusive purple pedal and give this MXR collaboration a go instead

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

1. This three-way switch offers Boost, Overdrive and Distortion modes – you'll have to readjust the Volume knob when switching between them
2. The Duke Of Tone follows the standard micro pedal 'board-friendly' format with diminutive footprint, offset jacks and the power input at the top end
3. The Tone knob will give you an instant tweak of your top-end presence, but there's an internal trimmer should you need to set a different overall treble content

Ever since its introduction, the Analog Man King Of Tone has been one of the most sought-after drive pedals on the market, so much so that if you want a new one you have to get on a waiting list – which, by some current estimates, is about five years long! The King Of Tone is a double-channel pedal based on heavily modded circuitry from the Marshall Bluesbreaker pedal, each channel having internal DIP switches for a choice of Overdrive, Clean and Distortion modes. It also spawned a single-channel version, the Prince Of Tone, which has a top-panel switch for the modes. That pedal's control surface is echoed in this new Duke Of Tone unit, which is an Analog Man collaboration with MXR, designed to give guitarists some of that King and Prince Of Tone mojo without having to get in line and queue.

The Boost mode is the equivalent of the King Of Tone's Clean mode and uses op-amp clipping rather than diodes. Here, unity gain with the Drive knob at minimum is around two o'clock, leaving some Volume knob travel for dialling in a clean boost. This mode is great for taking a clean amp just that little bit further because the Drive knob adds grit around the edges, all with great touch sensitivity and an open transparency that lets your core guitar/amp tone breathe. It's also really potent for stacking with other dirt pedals. There's plenty of nuance to be dialled in with the knobs, but if you want some extra headroom then the Duke can be run at 18 volts.

OD mode utilises diode clipping and brings in a natural, airy low-level drive sound, while Distortion mode, with its harder clipping, takes things that little bit further with more compression going on.

The big question for many will be whether it sounds identical to a single King Of Tone channel, and from A/B tests with our own pedal we can say that, although it took slightly different knob positioning, we were able to match the two pedals up to a point where any perceived disparities were so subtle as to make no difference when playing. In short, it can do the job.

Verdict

What's not to like about this pedal? Anyone wanting to buy into the whole King Of Tone thing can now do so instantly. If you want a versatile and transparent boost or drive pedal that you can neatly slot into any setup, it's no sweat with this particular Duke. **G**



MXR CUSTOM SHOP CSP039 DUKE OF TONE

PRICE: £179

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Drive pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Volume, Drive, Tone, OD/Boost/Dist switch, internal treble trimmer, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 6mA but can be run safely at 18V

DIMENSIONS: 40 (w) x 91 (d) x 55mm (h)

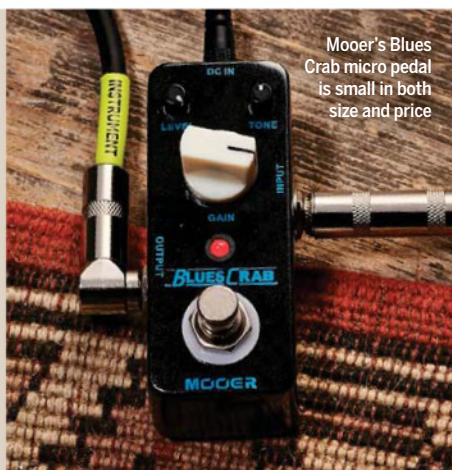
Westside Distribution

0141 248 4812

www.jimdunlop.com

THE RIVALS

The almost identical Prince Of Tone (\$148) is intermittently available from the Analog Man website, but there are lots of pedals around that are evolutions of the Bluesbreaker, such as the JHS Morning Glory (£195) with Volume, Drive and Tone knobs plus a Hi-Cut switch and a Gain Boost toggle switch (with optional remote footswitch control). Elsewhere, the Wampler Pantheon (£199) has Volume, Gain, Bass, Treble and Presence knobs, plus three-way switches for Gain Level and Overdrive Voice. If the small size of the Duke appeals but not the price tag, you may wish to audition a Mooer Blues Crab (£39).



9/10

PROS King and Prince Of Tone sounds without the purchasing obstacles; very compact size; three instantly accessible modes; decent build quality

CONS Nothing... except the usual fat fingers/small knobs interactions of a pedal this size



the Wishlist

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

Kauer Korona Supreme £3,499

CONTACT **Andertons Music Co** WEB www.kauerguitars.com WORDS **Neville Marten** PHOTOGRAPHY **Phil Barker**

Doug Kauer and his dedicated team of craftspeople work from a small facility in Sacramento, California. Producing a range of some vintage-inspired and several radical modern designs, the company boasts custom-shop build and uses the finest available electronics and hardware.

Continuing the ever-popular offset theme, Kauer's Korona model comes in two guises: the solidbody Korona itself, and the instrument we have here, the bound-bodied thinline semi Korona Supreme. With its finely grained swamp ash body and dark roasted four-bolt maple neck with natty two-tone headstock, the Supreme cuts a real dash. This smart appearance is highlighted by a pearl pickguard with a crisp black coachline around its perimeter. The 'guard hides a 'universal rout', which means virtually any pickup combination can be chosen – Kauer offers Lollar, TV Jones or Wolfetone, and includes humbuckers, P-90s, Filter'Tron, Gold Foil and more. Hardware quality is top notch, and here we see a cut-down 'half-Tele' bridge, plus Hipshot open-geared locking tuners.

While a host of switching options is available, here we see a more conventional layout with two Lollar Imperial

humbucking pickups, single volume and tone controls, and a three-way selector switch. No push-pull pots, coil-splits or other distractions; just a no-nonsense guitar that wants to get down to business.

Kauer says he wasn't sure about doing a thinline version of the Korona, but having done so was amazed at how great it sounds and how versatile it is. We love Lollar Imperial pickups and these work superbly in this semi-hollow ash configuration. Through an Orange Rockerverb 50 the guitar sounds immense: fat and punchy but with a vintage-style clarity that works brilliantly with the amp set clean-ish, and translates to huge but articulate tones with the gain piled high.

It plays great, too. 22 medium Jescar frets sit on a 304mm (12-inch) radius fingerboard of beautiful wenge with offset dot markers, while the roasted maple C-shape neck sits snugly in the palm, and that dramatic slanted cutaway means top-end access is excellent.

We think it's an extremely cool-looking instrument that's built to superb standards, plays really well and has a wholesome range of sounds. Its looks are radical and modern but with vintage overtones, and we applaud the Korona Thinline unreservedly. **G**

1. The Korona Supreme's six-a-side headstock is an attractive two-tone affair, with pearl Kauer inlay and tuner buttons on the open-geared, locking Hipshot tuners. Truss rod adjustment is at this end, and the wood's grain looks particularly appealing, too

2. Swamp ash has a very marked grain and in this semi-hollow configuration also feels incredibly light in weight. Roasting the maple darkens its colour and, many makers believe, provides improved stability

3. Lollar Imperial pickups are a classy choice since they offer crisp vintage-style tones that beef up well with extra gain. Notice, too, the cut-down 'half-Tele' bridge with its three compensated brass saddles



4. African wenge is used for the Korona's 648mm (25.5-inch) scale fingerboard with its 22 medium Jescar frets. Note the offset pearl dot position markers and the white binding that matches that of the body. In addition, every Kauer guitar receives a Plek setup before it's shipped

5. It's unusual to see a black coachline around a pickguard but it's a nice design touch, we feel. Beneath it is a universal pickup rout that allows virtually limitless choice to the player. These Lollar pickups work particularly well in the Korona's semi-hollow body, too, sounding fat but hugely articulate

6. While Kauer offers various switching upgrades from the company website, here it's a much simpler affair with master volume and tone controls, plus a classic three-way pickup selector switch. The stylised 'cat's eye' soundhole is cool



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NAME DROP

Babicz bridges

You might have heard of the brand Babicz because of its pioneering work on Steinberger guitars. Its Full Contact bridges are centred around the patented eCAM saddles, which maximise contact between the saddle and bridge, giving greater transfer of vibrations to the guitar's body

I remember these!

You probably remember the name, yes. Fender launched the Aerodyne series in 2004 as a modern take on its classic designs. We've seen the series since then, but now Fender has rethought the designs to bring us a refreshed version. The company's blurb talks about "aerodynamic lines, custom-voiced pickups, state-of-the-art hardware, dazzling finishes and unmistakable silhouettes".

Modern designs? What's wrong with old ones?

Not everyone wants to play a period-correct version of a Strat or Tele, and here Fender has taken its two most iconic electrics, alongside the Precision and Jazz Bass, and given them a contemporary overhaul. There are three six-string electrics on offer – two Strats and a Tele – and they're all Japanese-made.

So, what's different about them?

Starting with the two Strats – the Aerodyne Special Stratocaster and Aerodyne Special Stratocaster HSS (shown below left and middle) – you'll find a few fairly radical breaks from tradition. Yes, it's a Strat body shape, but it's made of basswood. These models feature a carved top to add to that sleek look, and the body is bound, too.

There's no scratchplate...

Nope! As such, everything is body-mounted, unlike a regular Strat where the electronics are mounted to the scratchplate. For this Aerodyne series, Fender has spec'd Aerodyne Special pickups including the chrome-covered humbucker in the HSS Strat. These are controlled by a five-way switch, plus master volume and two tones, all of which are covered with knurled chrome control knobs.

CARVED TOPS

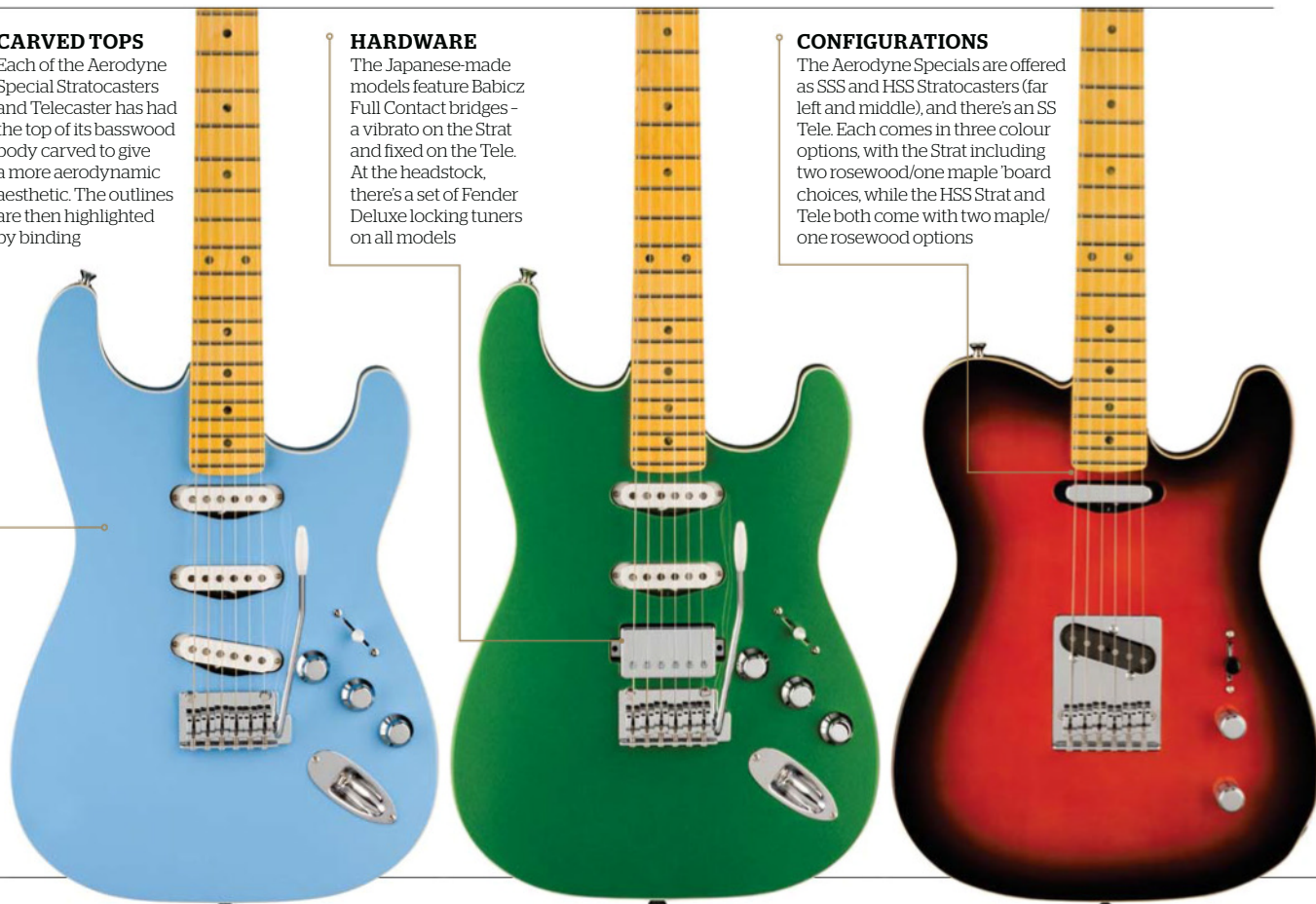
Each of the Aerodyne Special Stratocasters and Telecaster has had the top of its basswood body carved to give a more aerodynamic aesthetic. The outlines are then highlighted by binding

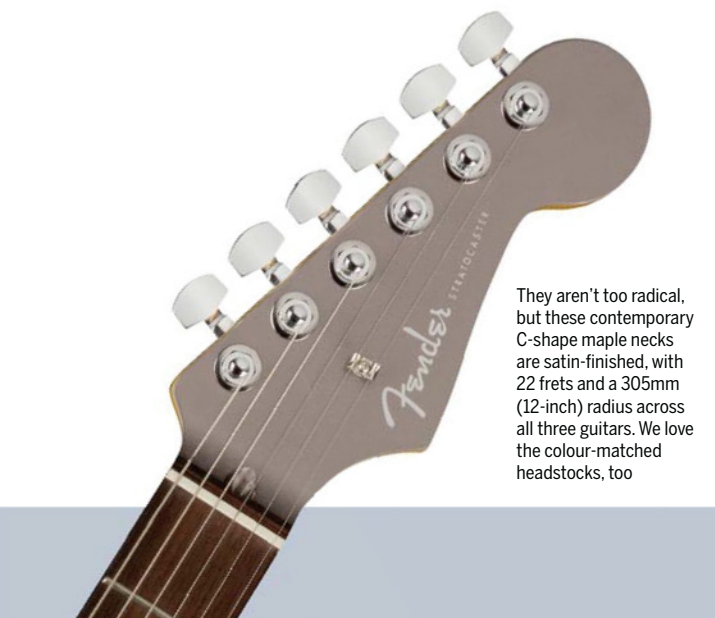
HARDWARE

The Japanese-made models feature Babicz Full Contact bridges – a vibrato on the Strat and fixed on the Tele. At the headstock, there's a set of Fender Deluxe locking tuners on all models

CONFIGURATIONS

The Aerodyne Specials are offered as SSS and HSS Stratocasters (far left and middle), and there's an SS Tele. Each comes in three colour options, with the Strat including two rosewood/one maple 'board choices, while the HSS Strat and Tele both come with two maple/one rosewood options





They aren't too radical, but these contemporary C-shape maple necks are satin-finished, with 22 frets and a 305mm (12-inch) radius across all three guitars. We love the colour-matched headstocks, too

What about the neck?

It's not as much of a departure as you might expect from Fender's talk of futuristic designs. The neck is maple and finished with a satin polyester on the back. The fingerboards vary depending on which main finish you go for – with a choice of maple or rosewood – but, in both cases, it's the standard Fender 648mm (25.5-inch) scale length but with a flatter 305mm (12-inch) radius. All Aerodyne Special six-strings are fitted with 22 frets, and Fender has added an additional touch with the matching headstock faces.

Tell us about the bridge.

One of the jewels in the Aerodyne Special's crown comes from the Babicz Full Contact two-point vibrato, the idea being that maximising string-to-body transfer aids in the sustain and tone departments. At the other end, the Aerodyne Specials are fitted with Fender Deluxe locking tuners for quick string changes and stable tuning.

What about the Telecaster?

Many of the construction features are shared across the two designs: the basswood body, carved top, binding, neck/fingerboard designs are all the same as the Strat. The single coils in the Tele are based around the classic Tele-style pickups, and while it also includes a Babicz bridge, this being a Telecaster, it's fixed.

You mentioned dazzling finishes - what are the options?

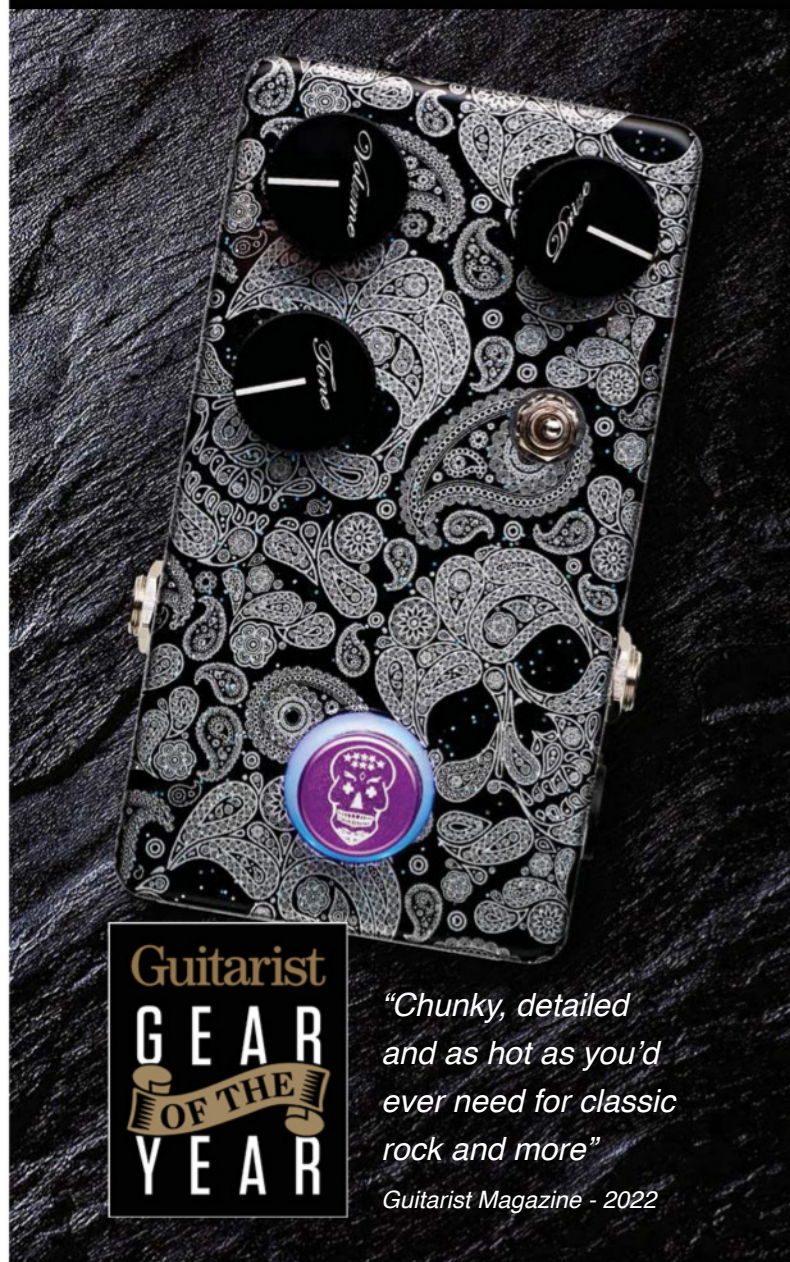
As you'd probably expect, the colour options for each guitar are slightly different. The Aerodyne Special Stratocaster comes in Bright White, Chocolate Burst (both rosewood fingerboards) and California Blue (maple 'board), the HSS Stratocaster is offered in Dolphin Gray (with a rosewood 'board), Hot Rod Burst and Speed Metallic Green (maple 'board), and the Aerodyne Special Telecaster also offers two maple-'board options, Dolphin Gray and Hot Rod Burst, while California Blue is this time paired with a rosewood fingerboard.

Dare we ask how much?

The Aerodyne Special Stratocaster and Telecaster are both £1,299, while the Aerodyne Special Strat HSS adds another £50 to the price tag at £1,349. All three models ship with a Fender Deluxe gigbag and they should be hitting the shelves by the time you read this. [SW]



Flattley
Boutique Effects Pedals



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Guitarist Magazine - 2022

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Fretbuzz

A monthly look at must-hear artists from all corners of the guitar world, from the roots of their sound to the tracks that matter most

Artist: Marisa Anderson

Album: *Still, Here* (Thrill Jockey)



The eight tracks on 2022's *Still, Here* tell their stories through instrumental compositions
marisaandersonmusic.com

Portland, Oregon-based instrumental guitarist Marisa Anderson has already had a colourful career involving work with Sharon Van Etten, William Tyler, and Jim White of Australian instrumentalists Dirty Three. Her solo output includes seven albums, with this year's *Still, Here* following 2018's *Cloud Corner*. "This album was probably a four-year process," Marisa begins. "After *Cloud Corner*, I wasn't sure I would do another solo record because I didn't know if I had anything new to say. I needed a little time and distance, so I decided to work with William and Jim to change up my process."

Shake It Out

The decision to shake things up has resulted in a rich album that could only have been created by Marisa; the long drawn out notes and meditative phrases are immediately recognisable, and there is confidence and freshness to be found in the playing. "I do think it worked," she nods. "It shook some other things loose and now I feel inspired again – and I'm writing new stuff all the time, which is fun. I also just got off a run [of shows] with Jim White, which is all improv stuff. My work with William is very much composed, whereas what I do with Jim, it's a lot freer, and I felt I needed to do both to unblock my solo music and give it more arteries to go down."

Marisa's recording output is a mix of solo and collaborative efforts. Her Reverb-purchased T-style (right) ticked all the boxes, with a rosewood neck, Bigsby and P-90 pickups

Studio To Stage

Still, Here takes a central stance when it comes to improvisation versus composition, bringing in disciplines from both of her recent duo albums. "There was quite a lot of improvised stuff on there, actually," she says. "But the relationship changes once I start preparing it for performance. So the recordings can be improvised, but I need to figure out patterns and sequences so I can take them on stage. Songs like *Night Air* were built out of bits over a very long period of time – but it wasn't composed, it just took a long time to come in."

Electric Feel

Although Marisa owns a broad range of instruments, her signature sound utilises the capabilities of the electric guitar. "I like sustain," she says, simply. "But aside from that, I don't want to hurt my arms and hands. Steel-string acoustic is its own thing and it's become a stand-in; when you think of the guitar, you think of steel-string acoustic and I think it's a bit of a homogenisation of this instrument that has so many different voices. The Dobro is technically a steel-string acoustic and I like that voice in a very specific way, but it's definitely not the main part of my palette and I don't dream in that voice. When I'm at home, I use either the nylon-string or the electric. It's almost never the steel-string."

Custom Classic

After showing us several instruments, including her 1930s Dobro, a terz guitar (a small-scale classical guitar), a requinto and a lovely ornate nylon-string parlour guitar, Marisa picks up her current main beast. "This is a Warmoth Telecaster with Lollar P-90s on it," she explains. "I got it during Covid. I was hunting for a combination of solid rosewood neck, P-90s and a Bigsby and I found one on Reverb with all three. The rosewood neck is quite unusual, and the resonance on this thing is insane, it goes on for days." She runs off for a moment, before returning with another peach. "I also used this one on the album," she says. "It's an early 40s [Gibson] ES-125. It's the one I've had the longest and I love it so much." **[GK]**

Standout track: *Night Air*

For fans of: William Tyler, Sarah Louise, Steve Gunn, Chris Forsyth



PHOTO BY PATRICIA VÁZQUEZ GÓMEZ

SPEAKING OUT

Marisa uses music to voice her feelings on contemporary events

While *Still, Here* may come across as a calm album, Marisa uses her music as an outlet for commentary on current affairs. Just as *Cloud Corner's Lament* reacted to the stark image of the body of two-year-old Syrian refugee Alan Kurdi lying on a Turkish beach, *The Fire This Time* is directly addressing the murder of George Floyd. "It was written the same day and was my response to that news at that actual time. You can hear sirens on the recording and that was happening on my block because of the protests starting in Portland. So that was certainly not a calm day: that song was my visceral, horrified response to those events."

Albums

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



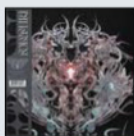
Polyphia with guest pop vocalist Sophia Black

Polyphia

Remember That You Will Die

Rise Records (available now)

10/10



The guitar band with a difference releases a stunner

While there are many fresh guitar heroes online these days, the anticipatory appetite for the latest Polyphia album has been quite something. As an instrumental-based four-piece, they've been together since 2010 with guitarists Tim Henson

and Scott LePage amalgamating a broad span of styles. Be it Guthrie Govan-style shred, chords/rhythms as favoured by neo-soul players such as Isaiah Sharkey, K-Pop extended chord progressions or mathematical rhythmic cleverness à la Animals As Leaders, it makes for a heady brew. Their appearances on social media playing seemingly impossible, intricate riffs have raised their profile considerably, and Tim Henson has also received a coveted Ibanez signature model, the TOD10N, just recently and so the guitar world's gaze is now fully upon his fiery fretwork.

With the cheerily titled *Remember That You Will Die*, the 12-track album is a rich sonic assault of super-tight rhythmic interplay with often crazy guitar arrangements bouncing around the stereo spectrum. There are plenty of collaborations, too – Brasstracks join on opener *Genesis*, which is reminiscent of US soul-rock bands such as Mint Condition, and vocalist Sophia Black excels on the vibrantly punchy *ABC*. Of interest to us is closer, *Ego Death*, which features the one and only Steve Vai. He enters halfway through with his whammy bar lyricism and soaring bends – it's quite something. If you want brave guitar for a new world, you have to add Polyphia to your list. They're too big a guitar phenomenon to ignore. **[JS]**

Standout track: *Genesis*

For fans of: Steve Vai, Dream Theater

Andy Fairweather Low

Flang Dang

The Last Music Company

(release date: February 2023)

8/10



Sparkling solo album from esteemed sideman

It's been a long wait since Andy Fairweather Low's last solo album, *Sweet Soulful Music*, was released in

2006, but *Flang Dang* is a notable return to form. More often spotted either as a sideman to artists such as Eric Clapton and Roger Waters or in the driving seat of his own band, The Low Riders, Andy's new album finds him playing all the instruments except for the drums, which were handled by Low Rider Paul Beavis. Andy's love for rock 'n' roll is to the forefront from the very first track, the upbeat *Waiting On The Up*, and the mood continues in one form or another throughout. *Dark Of The Midnight* sounds like it could have been written for Clapton's *Journeyman* era, whereas *Ska 67* is crackling with a characteristic reggae vibe. The whole album is a joyful party – jump right in! **[DM]**

Standout track: *Dark Of The Midnight*

For fans of: Bill Wyman's Rhythm Kings, Willie And The Poor Boys

Red Hot Chili Peppers

Return Of The Dream Canteen

Warner Records (available now)

9/10



Triumphant new release is a real feast

Some bands have an immediately identifiable soundprint and we found that you only have to be 23 seconds into the new Chilis album – recorded at the same sessions as this year's earlier release, *Unlimited Love* – before you conclude it couldn't be anyone else. Is it Flea's funk-driven bass or Frusciante's furious guitarscapes? Nope, it's more like the sum of a rather glorious set of parts. "Return Of The Dream Canteen is everything we are and ever dreamed of being," the band declares in the album's press release. "It's packed. Made with the blood of our hearts..." And there's little doubt that this could be their best album to date. It's full of catchy melodies – check out *My Cigarette* or album opener, *Tippa Ma Tongue* – recalling the band's 90s masterpiece, *Blood Sugar Sex Magik*. There's even a tribute to Van Halen with the song, *Eddie*. It's a winner. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Tippa Ma Tongue*

For fans of: Foo Fighters, Pearl Jam

Steve Howe with his late son, Virgil



PHOTO BY GLENN GOTTLIEB

Virgil & Steve Howe

Lunar Mist

InsideOut Music (available now)

8/10



Posthumous musical reunion of father and son shines brightly

Yes's famous six-stringer's new release has been created from unreleased material from his late son, Virgil Howe.

It's the second album combining Virgil and Steve's work and it's an intriguing blend of styles from the title track's electronica to the piano and electric-guitar-based *Free Spirit*. Working from Virgil's pieces, Steve has added guitars and bass to augment what was already there or expanded them with extra ideas and/or improvisation. As for the guitars, Steve's electric and acoustic performances form the centre point be they melodies, chord riffs or cleverly stacked arrangements. *Mariah's Theme* is a classical/world music/electronic composition with intriguing melodic and harmonic turns. There's appealing nylon-string guitar on *Lothian's Way*, giving a dash of madrigal magic. *Pinnacle* is percussion-free, with a classical piano and guitar arrangement, while closer, *Martian Mood*, nods to early 70s prog with synth filter sweeps and exclamatory guitars. [JS]

Standout track: *More Than You Know*

For fans of: Yes, Brian Eno

Marillion

Holidays In Eden (Deluxe Edition)

Parlophone (available now)

9/10



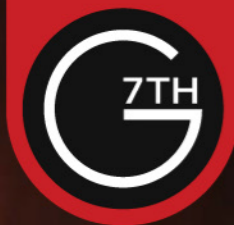
Bumper revisit to prog band's early work

Artists reviewing their early material in lavishly appointed boxsets is becoming almost an everyday event these days.

But why not? After all, recording tech has leapt forward over the years and the urge to apply it to older catalogue must be overwhelming. This is the case here, as Marillion re-release their first album with vocalist Steve Hogarth – after Fish left the band – 1991's *Holidays In Eden*. Among the three CDs and Blu-ray in this deluxe set we find a full remix of the original album, plus a double-CD helping of live work taken from a show in Hammersmith in September '91. And, as if that wasn't enough, the Blu-ray features a documentary on the making of the album, a German TV concert, sundry B-sides and other audio memorabilia. Treasure, indeed. [DM]

Standout track: *Dry Land*

For fans of: Genesis, It Bites, Asia



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Tones Behind The Tracks

Formed in 2020 after a decade of history together, **Cardinal Black** are finally ready to release their debut album to the world

Artist: Cardinal Black

Album: *January Came Close* (Jump In Records)



January Came Close, Cardinal Black's debut album, follows a sold-out tour with Myles Kennedy and features a track from a live session at Abbey Road

Debut albums can sometimes be a shot in the dark. But in Cardinal Black's case, a comprehensive campaign on social media, including a Kickstarter fundraiser to finance the recording, means that *January Came Close* has become one of this season's most highly anticipated releases. We check in with guitarist Chris Buck to hear how the album came together.

Which studios did you use for the recording?

"The last track on the album is taken from a live session at Abbey Road so it was recorded entirely live in one take. And at the other end of the scale is a place

"The album version of 'Terra Firma' is very delay-drenched. We're shooting for Pink Floyd 'Dark Side Of The Moon' meets Ray LaMontagne"

Chris Buck's star is already risen in the guitar world with accolades abounding from contemporaries and industry alike

that was a carpet warehouse until very recently, a studio called Snake Mountain in South Wales, which a couple of mates opened up very quickly into an amazing little place. There was another track called *I'm Ready*, which was recorded live at Rockfield. As good as Snake Mountain Studio is, they don't have the capacity to record the entirety of the band. It's kind

of your drums and bass together and then layer it up from there. *I'm Ready* is very much a live vibe so we thought that, of all the tracks, it would be great just to go in and do it entirely live. We did a Kickstarter campaign to fund the recording of the album for the most part. And we had a lot of Kickstarters come down to the studio and actually watch that process live, which I think aided the recording."

How were the sessions, in general?

"It was pretty intensive in terms of long days. We're not one of these bands that likes to roll in the studio for midday and work through to the early hours or whatever. We've all got families and wives and children, which kind of preclude us from doing that for the most part. So we were there early in the morning and would work through usually till about 11 o'clock or until one of us physically couldn't do any more. So it was done over the space of about a month."

What gear did you take into the studio?

"My main guitar on the album was my custom Yamaha Revstar. There were a couple of other little bits and bobs used here and there: the Gibson 355, which inadvertently ended up featuring the Varitone on a track for no other reason other than we got halfway through recording before I noticed I had turned it on at some point. But that weirdly kind of defined the sound of that track, which is quite a cool little fortuitous moment in time, I guess."

"We'd just come off tour, playing most of the songs live, so it was a case of, 'I know the kind of sounds I'm aiming for and I know what gear I'm using to try and achieve those sounds.' It's a guitar-heavy album in the sense that we are a guitar band, so it was just picking the guitars that felt like they best serve the song and, for me, that was the guitars that either those tracks were written on or the guitars that those tracks had been honed on over the past however long touring"

What about amps?

"The amps were, for the most part, my touring rig: the Fender Pro Reverb and the Victory Copper Deluxe. There were a couple of tracks on the album that were a 1958 Fender Deluxe, which belongs to a friend of mine Ed Oleszko. I was shooting for a certain type of sound and I sent over a couple of reference points to



PHOTO BY ROSS MADDEN



PHOTO BY TONY TEAGUE

Ed and he was kind enough to listen and try to figure out what that might have been. This amp seemed like the closest to be able to achieve it and so we took that in the studio. Again, it was a case of not necessarily shooting to use the best gear so much as just shooting to use the gear that I'm more familiar with."

How did you end up with a two-amp rig?

"I think the two-amp thing is something I've come to relatively recently. The Fender is pretty mid-scooped and there's quite a lot of low-end in it. And there's quite a lot of crystalline sparkly top-end, but not a lot of midrange. Conversely, the Victory Copper is all aggressive, shouty Vox-y midrange. I'd struggle to do a gig with just one of them because I've become so used to the sound of how the two of them fit together like a little jigsaw puzzle. You find yourself EQ-ing each amp to complement the other. You know, there's not as much low-end or top-end in the Victory because that's covered by the Fender. But conversely, you don't find yourself trying to compensate for the lack of mids in the Fender because that's taken care of really nicely by the Victory."

You've accumulated quite an extensive pedalboard, too.

"It is fairly extensive. And I guess, for the most part, it's stuff that has grown and evolved over the course of a few years, and the course of a few different rigs and figuring out what works with each amp, what doesn't work with each guitar, and honing it in. I mean, the actual literal process of putting that 'board together was fairly quick because it was all migrated over from a previous pedalboard and just trying to condense it down into a smaller 'board. The [Line 6] HX Stomp takes care of a lot of the more outlandish effects. The reverbs and delays and stuff are very specific to

specific tracks. And then it's just different flavours of overdrive to taste. We're trying to cover a lot of ground. With Cardinal Black in particular, there's a lot of more ambient stuff, which is happening in the verse or in between tracks – even as kind of interludes in the songs. So it's not just the typical kind of 'overdrive, delay and away you go' kind of thing. There's a bit more to it than that, at least hopefully so."

Can you itemise one track on the album, which is particularly effects-heavy?

"This track called *Terra Firma*, which is the Jazzmaster track live. The album version of that is very delay-drenched, and would sound hopelessly bare without it, I think. We're shooting for a kind of Pink Floyd *Dark Side Of The Moon* meets Ray LaMontagne, which is very spacey, I guess. There are certain tracks that are very stripped. *Tell Me How It Feels* is a fuzz and an overdrive at most, and then just one or two overdrives throughout the rest of the track."

What lies immediately in the future for Cardinal Black?

"We've just finished a headline tour and then we're straight back out on tour [in November] with Peter Dinklage. Doing the Royal Albert Hall is obviously a landmark gig of that tour. We've got a couple of things in Europe, then plan to do a live vinyl recording at a studio in Switzerland, at which tickets are sold and a crowd comes in and watches live as it is cut entirely live to vinyl. And then we're going to be touring pretty heavily throughout the early part of next year." [DM]



Cardinal Black's album, *January Came Close*, is available now via Jump In Records

www.thecardinalblack.com

Cardinal Black (L-R):
Chris Buck, bassist Sam
Williams, vocalist Tom
Hollister and drummer
Adam Roberts



Chris Buck gives us a full
rundown of his rig in our
exclusive video at
<http://bit.ly/guitaristextra>



Bad To The Bone

We guitarists talk a lot about tone in the electric realm. What, then, can we do to lift the acoustic to new realms of sonority, asks **Neville Marten**

Quite a few years back I traded three guitars – one Martin and two very nice Höfners – for another Martin, a used D-28 1937 Authentic. Guitar Village in Farnham had two from this illustrious range: a D-18 and the D-28 that I finally settled upon. The idea of the Authentic series is that the guitars are recreations of actual instruments that Martin has in its possession. Because they can't use Brazilian rosewood, my D-28 is beautifully figured Madagascan, the nearest thing available at the time – they've now switched to Guatemalan, as Madagascan has become rather more scarce.

"After adding new bridge pins the difference was staggering. More clarity, more volume and dramatically improved tone across the spectrum"

I've known Guitar Village's owner, Derek (Del-Boy!) Eyre-Walker, for many years and it's always great to catch up. I asked if I could try both guitars and Derek set me up in a quiet room with a cup of tea and left me to my own devices. I played both guitars for over an hour, swapping them around and trying to decide

which one I preferred. Even though they were both secondhand, I was trading in a lot of money's worth and so wanted to get it right. Both sounded fantastic in different ways and I just couldn't make up my mind. Derek came back and asked how I was getting on. Seeing my utter befuddlement, he said, "Why don't you go and have a walk, get the sound out of your head and then come back? You'll probably decide in five minutes flat."

I did what Del said and had a stroll around the shop drooling at everything, then went outside for a bit of fresh air before returning. He was dead right. Within five minutes I'd chosen the more strident D-28. We did the deal and off I went.

String Theory

Several years of living with central heating later and the edge binding had decided to pull away in the guitar's waist, both front and back. So I took it to my old mate and ex-Gibson co-conspirator Robbie Gladwell. I said I was in no particular rush and, being so busy and taking me at my word, Robbie had the guitar for some months.

On getting it back, having had a brilliant, invisible job done, I decided to restring the D-28 with 13-gauge wires, which Martin recommends. You see, a 1937 guitar would have had no truss rod, so the heavier gauge is needed to pull the neck forward for the correct action. In taking out the white plastic bridge pins, a job I'd done a trillion times, I managed to snap the heads off two – something I'd never done before. After cursing my clumsiness I went straight online to order a new set. I decided I'd upgrade to bone, as cheapo plastic seems out of place on an £8,000 instrument – mine was considerably less as it was used, plus Derek took my three guitars as a direct swap. Anyway, bone seemed far more appropriate.

I went for Thomann's own brand, Harley Benton, at the mighty cost of £13.90. Until they arrived I stuck in a couple of mismatched plastic pins and waited. A few days later my package arrived, I restringed the Martin with Elixir 13s – and you know what? The difference was staggering. More clarity, more volume and dramatically improved tone across the spectrum. I've hardly put the darned thing down since. It was always a great dreadnought, but it's a veritable battlecruiser now.

So, if you feel your favourite flat-top could do with a little love, treat it to a set of bone bridge pins. It will thank you. Harley Benton does plain white bone, white with an ebony dot (which I bought), or with abalone. I think I can honestly say it was the most worthwhile £13.90 I've ever spent on a guitar. Why not try it, and let us know how you get on? See you next time. **G**

GAS OF THE MONTH

Natty Dread

What? Atkin D37 Aged

Where seen? Knighton Music Centre, Powys, Wales

Price? £3,099

Alister Atkin and his small team in Canterbury produce excellent pre-war-style acoustics in the vein of the two big American brands of the era. And although three grand is not cheap, it's under half the price of a D-28 Authentic and is based on the same 1937 style as mine. With torrefied Sitka spruce top, Indian rosewood back and sides, mahogany neck and ebony fingerboard with pearl diamonds and squares inlay, it's classic stuff. However, Atkin does very believable ageing on some of his guitars and that's what you find here on the dreadnought's very thin nitrocellulose finish. All Atkin guitars sound amazing, are built to super standards, and rival many of the much bigger brands in all-round quality. They always look fantastic, too, especially in this tinted, aged guise. And if you'd rather not have the usual names on the headstock, then an Atkin is as good an alternative as you'll find.





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Body Building

This month **Alex Bishop** sees his latest projects start to take shape as “overcomplicated boxes with holes in” become bona fide guitars

Regular readers of this column will know that I’ve been working on a couple of guitars recently: a cedar of Lebanon-topped Gypsy jazz guitar and a figured walnut OM, both sporting fancy side soundports and arm bevels. This month felt like a turning point as – in between a glut of repairs and guitar making lessons – the bindings and purflings were scraped back to reveal objects that were no longer overcomplicated boxes with holes in but curvaceous wooden sculptures of (hopefully) tantalising beauty.

“I enjoy building the neck and body so much that I actually forget I’m building a guitar, until one day the familiar outline is standing there”

My levels of excitement and anticipation at this stage never appear to wane; I seem to enjoy building the neck and body so much that I actually forget I’m building a guitar, until one day when I stand back and the familiar outline is standing there, drawn out from the roughly hewn wood it once was. I’ll try not to fantasise about the potential of how these instruments are going to sound and return to, perhaps, more practical matters.

The hard work on the arm bevels is complete, which involves fitting a banana-shaped internal block along the inside corner of the lower bout. This creates enough supporting wood to be carved away to soften the perpendicular edge that the player’s strumming arm pushes into. However, the tricky bit is in the way that the bindings and purflings have to diverge around

the bevel and then join back together seamlessly somewhere near the end block. I accomplish this by glueing in the strips, using a baffling array of scalpel blades and reinforced tape, and making the workbench look like some sort of brutal crime scene.

I’m yet to apply the ebony covering veneer, which will do the job of blending the bevel into the bindings to make this appear to be one continuous piece of wood. Success at this stage will be judged by my ability to cut a close-fitting shape (also banana-shaped) that will have to conform perfectly to the surface of the bevel, without much overlap. The veneer is ironed onto the surface and then taped into place. After this, all I can do is cross my fingers and hope for the best... Watch this space.

I’m pleased with my aesthetic choices so far on these two guitars, which by this stage are starting to show off their personalities. The theme of the OM guitar is one of cleanness and unfussy design. Between the soundboard and bindings I have opted for a single maple purfling that contrasts nicely with the darker western red cedar. Similarly, I’ve used thin maple appointments around the rosette and headstock to tie everything together. Other than some simple geometric inlays (a nod to the Kandinsky-inspired designs from my previous guitars) I’ve tried to let the timber do the talking.

Visual Impact

The Gypsy jazz guitar on the other hand takes some bold black purfling lines and a triple-striped rosette in padauk, walnut and cedar to try to complement the visually arresting fanned-fret design. I’m yet to make the fingerboard on this guitar, but I’m aware from previous fanned-fret builds that this is the piece of the instrument that really grabs the attention of casual onlookers. For maximum effect I’ll be most likely to make it from ebony, against which the nickel frets most stand out. These days, my preference is to avoid any inlay whatsoever (except for some discreet side dots to aid navigation) so as not to dilute the visual impact of those wonky lines.

So the next step is to attach the necks that have been hanging up impatiently above my workbench. Given that a lot of the guitars I build tend to have soundholes too small to put your hand into, I’ve always opted for a traditional glued-in dovetail join, rather than a bolt-on neck (which would require access to the internal neck block). While the removability of the bolt-on neck is helpful, there is something reassuringly permanent in a glued-in neck join. Whenever I question the reversibility of this method I hear my old tutor’s voice: “Well, you’re not going to glue it on wrong in the first place, are you?” I certainly hope not... **G**

This freshly assembled cedar of Lebanon-topped Gypsy jazz guitar (left) and figured walnut OM await completion in Alex’s workshop



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Telecaster Transformation

Jamie Dickson gets his refinished and aged Tele Custom back – so was it worth it? Let's find out in part two of his Tele story

Regular readers will know that a few years ago I bought a player's grade Telecaster Custom from the early 70s. The guitar had most of the right bits except for the body, which was a later Warmoth replacement with a high-gloss clear natural finish that seemed out of kilter with the guitar's honey-toned original neck and vintage hardware. The answer to fixing this mismatch came via Golden Era Aged Guitars of Castledawson, Northern Ireland. The company specialises in lovingly authentic aged guitar bodies finished in classic Duco and Lucite colours from Fender's 50s and 60s golden years, plus aged sparkle and paisley finishes and more besides.

"Scott's a demon for detail and we decided to imagine a fictional backstory for the guitar that would account for it being finished like this"

These days, Golden Era's Scott Cameron focuses on pre-finished bodies for high-quality partscaster builds, but once upon a time he used to do refinishes as well – and, intrigued by my project, offered to make an exception for my Tele Custom. So what colour did I want? Even though Scott does really authentic paisley finishes – a kind of speciality of his – neither of us felt like it would work for the Tele Custom, being too far outside the model's original look and, with that large black scratchplate, much of the ornate patterning of the paisley would have been hidden from view anyway. Likewise, I quickly ruled out an aged sparkle finish. As stunning as those can be, especially under stage lights, I wanted the Tele Custom to be the kind of workhorse guitar that you use every day, and that led me away from the glitz and towards more traditional tones.

Natural Selection

I asked former *Guitarist* Neville Marten what finish he would choose and he suggested the classic three-tone sunburst the model was originally offered in. That would

certainly be an unimpeachable choice, but in the end I decided it would be a slight anticlimax to have the guitar refinished by a superb aged paint specialist only to choose the most conventional Fender finish of all. Undecided, I cruised the internet until I found a surprising option that was right under my nose.

On an Instagram account for Telecaster fans, I saw an image of a battered natural-finish Tele Custom that looked sensational, with all the wear you might expect from a hard life on the road. Maybe the problem wasn't that my guitar had a natural finish, just that it had a painfully clean and *unnaturally* glossy natural finish. I talked the matter over with Scott, who – having already listened to 20 earlier ideas I'd mulled – really deserved a medal for patience. He agreed that, done right, an aged natural finish might look great on the Tele Custom.

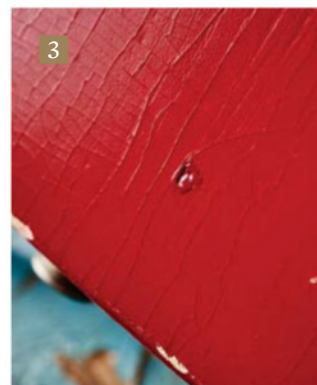
With that, the matter seemed settled. But as the day drew near that Scott had set aside for spraying my Tele with an aged natural nitro finish (yes, an anachronism for a 70s Tele, but period-correctness be damned), I started to get cold feet. Again, it seemed just too tame to re-do the guitar in a subtly cooler version of its existing look. Once that doubt had taken root in my mind, I knew I had to contact Scott. I dropped him a line sheepishly asking if it was too late to change my mind? Ever patient, Scott said it would be okay – but what did I want? Good question... By now suffering from severe 'paralysis of analysis' as someone once called it, I decided to do something unexpected and, perhaps, a bit of a throw of the dice.

"Tell you what, Scott, why don't you surprise me?" I said. Scott's got a great eye and he already knew what kinds of finishes I really liked – and what kinds I didn't – by this stage, so it was perhaps less of a gamble than it might initially seem. After a little initial hesitation, he quickly warmed to the idea and set to work. I felt a lot better for turning the matter over to him, strangely enough, and in the end I was really thrilled with the colour he chose – Mandan Red, one of a few lesser-known red hues that Fender experimented with in the 50s.

1. The original early 70s Fender neck had a slight back-bow, which was corrected, but also some lovely figuring in the maple

2. The guitar's pickups were original Tele Custom kit and sounded great together

3. Here and there, fake 'touch up' paint marks have been applied, as if dings had been patched further on down the line from the '70s' refin





4. The heavily checked finish is meant to emulate an auto shop or garage refinish with a remnant tin of Mandan Red paint

5. The front of the guitar has a slight gloss to it, consistent with being 'buffed' by playwear over decades. The reverse of the guitar has more of a knocked-back satin feel

6. A new high-spec wiring loom, including CTS pots and Sprague caps, made the guitar's internal signal path rock-solid reliable

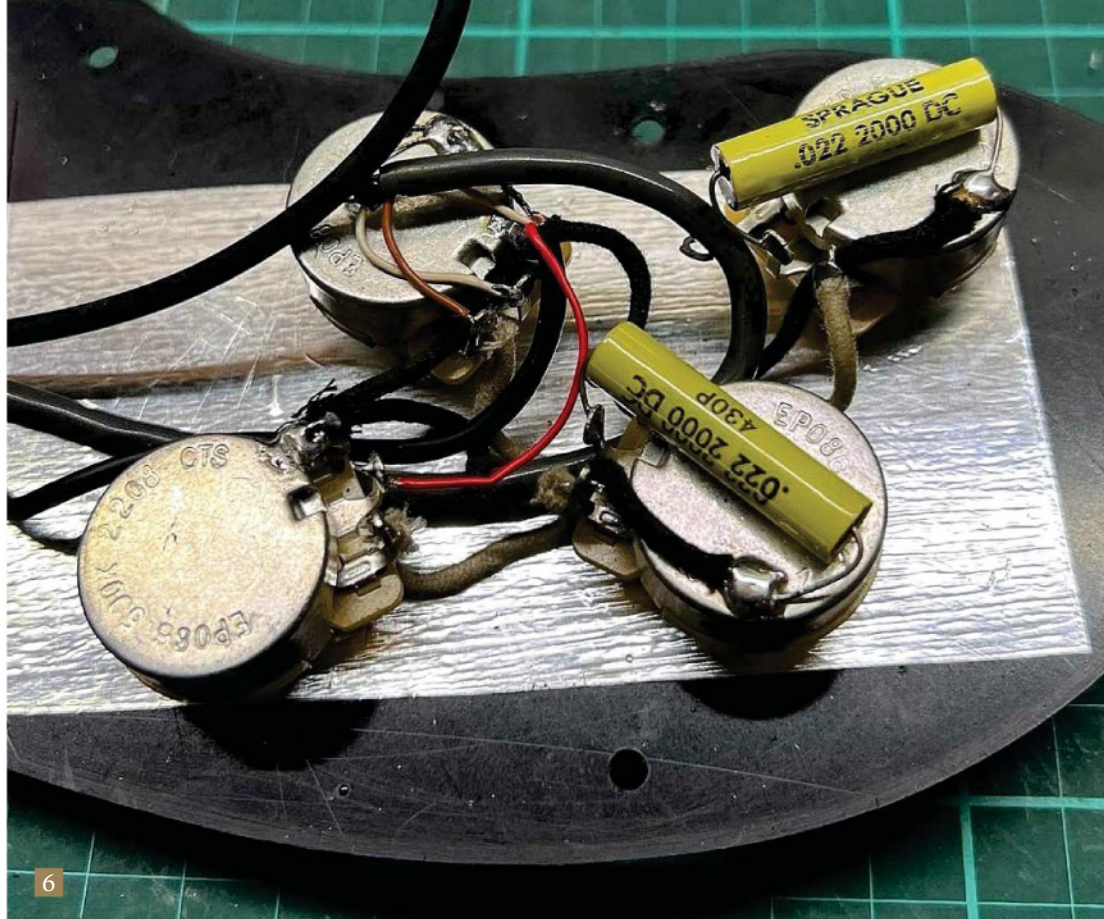
Past Imperfect

Now, obviously a 70s Tele Custom wouldn't have been finished in Mandan Red at the factory. Separated by a couple of decades of Fender history and a change of hands to CBS, that finish and my guitar, historically speaking, shouldn't have gone together. Obviously, if you're refinishing a guitar then you can paint it whatever colour you want, but Scott's a demon for detail and we decided to imagine a fictional backstory for the guitar that would account – if only in our minds – for it being finished in this Mandan Red. Now, for those who don't care for reliced finishes, the following will probably seem like an exercise in whimsy at best. If you are such a person, it may be best to look away now.

Scott said, in his mind, he imagined this guitar to have been refinished in the late 70s with a tin of old Mandan Red kicking around in an auto shop or garage shelf. That idea of a non-factory refin done relatively early in the guitar's life by someone using basic but passably professional spraying kit was what guided the whole look of my guitar, Scott explained. For the story to work, however, the result should look good but not too perfect. Scott revels in details, so this was a chance for his imagination to stretch its legs.

Instead of a high-gloss finish, the guitar would have a satin-type sheen consistent with the fictional 70s refin being done with relatively limited facilities. Parts of the top would be slightly higher gloss than the back, to replicate

6. A very tidy new wiring loom replaced the slightly chaotic mix of old and new components, including pots that appeared to have sustained heat damage, that this 'bitsa' Tele had acquired over the years



the slight buffing effect of forearm movement over the top during decades of playing. Lacquer checking would be quite heavy, again replicating an imaginary 70s garage refin. And, as the icing on this intentionally crude cake, Scott even mimicked one or two tiny spots where the finish had been touched up with the point of a brush due to dings further down the line from the '70s' refin. It's an idea that could go too far in the hands of a less skilled finisher or simply look clumsy, but Scott sent me numerous images of the work in progress that proved the effect was going to look sensational, though perhaps not for those who like guitars to look pristine and traditional.

Wired For Sound

The refinishing done, complete with its gloriously inventive 'warts' and all, it was time to send the guitar to be put back together and set up by Lowden-trained tech Ernie McMillen (www.instagram.com/ernietheguitardoctor), aka The Guitar Doctor. A couple of days later I got a call from him. A diligent and professional setup guy, Ernie told me that the Tele's neck had a slight back-bow, which he'd accounted for in the setup that included some work on the frets, and he had also tidied up the nut a little. I'd

with the guitar being put together as a quick project, and the wiring of the controls was functional but pretty untidy as found. Would I like it to be upgraded to a fully squared-away, high-end spec that befitted the guitar's new 'hot-rod vintage' vibe? After a bit of thought, I agreed. The guitar was so messed-about-with already that, although built from original vintage Fender parts in the main, there was little actual factory originality about it.

A really solid, tidy wiring loom could only improve things, under the circumstances, so I asked Ernie to proceed and he duly fitted a Switchcraft short straight three-way toggle switch for the pickup selector, four CTS 500k pots, Sprague .022µF capacitors and a Switchcraft jack socket – a fully professional spec that should prove to be rock-solid reliable.

All that remained now was for the guitar to be shipped back. I counted down the days to its arrival with eager anticipation. What would it be like in the flesh? As cool as the pictures looked or a letdown? The fateful morning arrived when the courier dropped off the familiar large rectangular card box and I sliced open the packaging with excitement and just the mildest tinge of trepidation. Pulling the guitar out of the gigbag I sent it in, I marvelled at it. The Mandan Red was a really lovely oxblood colour almost and the touches of deliberately crude detailing, done to establish its fictional backstory, were just right – not too heavy handed, characterful rather than pantomime in their rough-and-ready looks. In short, I was delighted. The project was long in coming to fruition but, true to my hopes, had transformed the guitar into something much vibier. And since this column is normally about improving tone, I'll save the best bit to last. With a thinner nitro finish the guitar felt palpably more resonant – aided by Ernie's fettling – and really loud when strummed acoustically. Plugged in, it felt slinky to play and full of great sounds, from that wiry bridge pickup to those warm-but-detailed humbucker tones from the original Wide Range. Now, all that remains is to put several years of wear-marks of my own on it... 

<https://goldenera-guitars.co.uk>

“Lacquer checking would be quite heavy, again replicating an imaginary 70s garage refin – an idea that could go too far in less skilled hands”

specified that the guitar be set up for my preferred string gauge for 25.5-inch scale Fenders, 9.5 to 44, which, to my mind, delivers the best compromise between a light, slinky feel and having a little substance to the sound, and Ernie accommodated that without fuss.

He was calling, however, because of the electronics. As mentioned in last month's column the guitar was a quasi-vintage partscaster project when I bought it. Though it worked fine, Ernie reported, there were a few things that could use an upgrade – the pickup selector switch was non-original and pretty cheap, consistent

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Moving Voices

Richard Barrett outlines a harmony using chord changes in small steps, which is great for use in a trio format

In harmony that involves shifting from one chord to another, you'll often see changes happening in small steps, rather than wide interval jumps. The five chords featured here can be played one after the other to demonstrate this in action. The way they are voiced is reminiscent of jazz players such as Herb Ellis, Tal Farlow and Martin Taylor.

Most of the examples only use the 'inside' strings, omitting the low and high Es, which is ideal for outlining the harmony without crowding the other instruments in a line-up. Voicings such as this can also be great for raking across with the pick to create arpeggio-type lines where you may want to outline the harmony as part of a solo, for example, with a trio where there is only bass and drums to support you. These chords are all movable, so can be played in any position and/or key. It's worth experimenting with them in different orders, too, like 'building blocks' that can be moved to create a variety of jazzy ideas. **G**

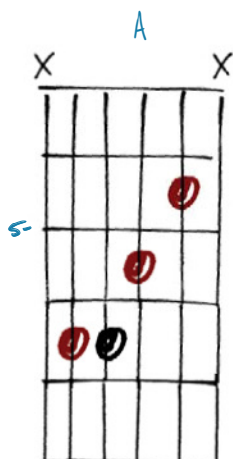
Outlining the harmony in small steps is a jazzy idea you'll hear in Martin Taylor's back catalogue



PHOTO BY JOBY SESSIONS

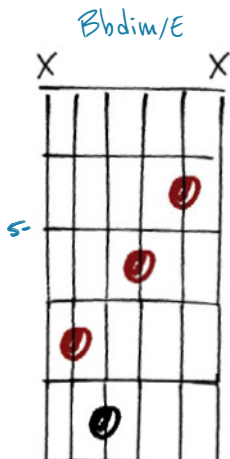
Example 1

This stripped-down A major chord omits the low and high E strings for a compact sound preferred by many jazz players. It's great when leaving room for piano, brass or vocals. The mellow sound we associate with jazz guitar is often just as much about note groupings as it is about tone and pickup selection.



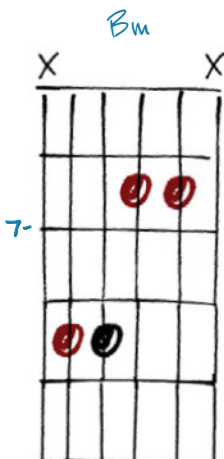
Example 2

By shifting just one note up by a semitone, we change the A chord to B $\flat$ dim/E. I've called this B $\flat$ dim/E in respect of the E on the fifth string, but the bass or other instruments could easily negate this and change it back to a B $\flat$, diminished by simply playing a B $\flat$ root.



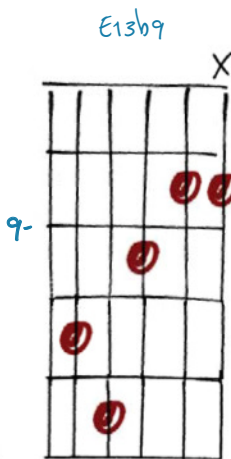
Example 3

This B minor is a cut-down version of the full barre chord, which could also inhabit this position of the fretboard. As with the last example, we could take account of the lowest note and call this Bmin/F#, but on this occasion I'm opting to imagine a B root playing under it.



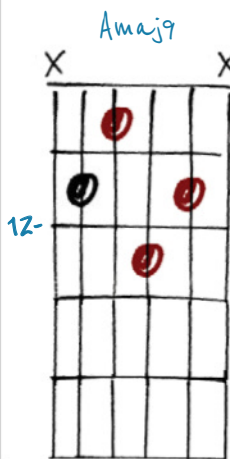
Example 4

Reaching over to the high E string, we have an E13(b9). The b9 comes in the form of the F at the 10th fret of the third string. It's tempting to use the open sixth string as a root, but then we would be sacrificing the ability to play this in any key and treading on the toes of the bass!



Example 5

Reverting back to the 'inside' strings, we have here an Amaj9. The 'maj' part of the name refers to the major 7th (G#), which is tucked in neatly below the 9th (B). This is a great example of a harmonically complex chord squeezed into a small space – ideal for jazz 'comping' and accompaniment.



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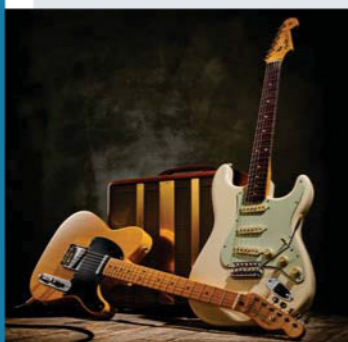
Feedback

Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor.

Drop us a line at guitarist@futurenet.com

STAR LETTER

HEAR, HEAR



Having been a person who makes noises on a guitar since 1964 – those Beatles have a lot to answer for – I have often anguished over picks, strings, guitars, amps and layers of paint (see Neville's Advocate issue 491). However, as I have grown older, I realise that those things have very little authority when it comes to ears. As you lose the youthfulness of your aural ability, you lose not just volume but also frequency and who knows what. This doesn't mean you lose

everything, but it does mean that all that other stuff is subjective.

I still love the Strat-y sound of a Strat and the humbucking sound of a humbucker or effects like echo, reverb, distortion, etc. But, I will never be able to distinguish the difference between certain amps or guitars. Nevertheless, as a longtime *Guitarist* subscriber, I do enjoy the debate between more wood versus less wood or Bare Knuckle versus original brand and so on. It's interesting to look at the science and hear expert views, so please keep it up.

Rob Hinchliffe

Thanks for your thoughts, Rob. Hearing does change over the years, partly depending on how much punishment our ears have taken either by loud amps or other factors. Treble is, if memory serves, the first part of the frequency spectrum to lose acuity, so maybe some of the nuance you report losing in your hearing could stem from that – as treble so often brings detail and definition to sounds. It's worth examining what the real importance of 'tone' is. It's not just meant to be a pleasant sound, heard in isolation – getting good tone is about inspiring yourself to play with more feeling, expression, connection. So, in that regard, if the tones you do hear do that for you, you have the essentials. Everything else is just good honest debate, as you say. One thing your ears won't fail to appreciate, though, is the set of Vox headphones winging their way to you for penning this month's Star Letter.



Each issue, the Star Letter will win a pair of Vox VGH AC30 guitar amplifier headphones!
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NEW FOR OLD...

Just seen the Feedback column in this month's magazine talking about the quantity of coverage given to new versus old-style guitars, and asking for input on this. I vote for more new. While it's always interesting to see how manufacturers adapt tried-and-tested designs, I feel that there is only so much that needs to be said here before we quickly retread well-worn ground.

So how about this instead? When a new Fender/Gibson-style guitar is released you could just run a relatively short piece along the lines of "it's like a Strat except for x, y, and z; and we give it X out of 10 for these reasons". This would presumably free up the space for coverage of some really innovative modern designs that really do have a new story to tell, and offer some genuine criticism, which I am sure a lot of smaller companies would find really useful.

Adrian North

...OR OLD FOR NEW?

Why strive for some new, futuristic innovation when there are enough sounds and moods in a standard Telecaster to keep most guitarists happy for the rest of their playing lives?

John Gow

Thanks for your points of view, Adrian and John – this is one of the eternal balancing acts of writing about guitars. Lose sight of what's new and you miss out on instruments that recharge, reinvigorate or redefine our passion for guitars. But the classics still form the basis of so many new designs and, ironically, some of the most innovative advances in lutherie in recent years, such as Martin's processes for torrefying acoustic guitar tops, are aimed at recreating the sound of old guitars without the passage of years being necessary. We especially liked, however, one recent suggestion that we do a regular feature on new guitar designs from around the world – from Finland to Australia. If you like that idea or have something else you'd like to see, either vintage or modern, let us know.

SOLID STATE

I thought you might be interested in this guitar. Some years back, I had gone into Allegro Music in Chelmsford to buy an E string for my son-in-law, who needed to clean a jet out in a carburetor. My eye was drawn to a Danelectro on sale. It seemed cheap, so I walked out of the store with it. A great guitar and takes heavy chords well. I had always wondered what

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



Tony's Dano bargain (right) is joined by his solidbody reimagining of the model

a 'proper' one would be like, as in solid. So here at last is my Dano Re-Imagined [above, left]. Hope you like it.
Tony Russell

Thanks for sending this in, Tony. We love your reimagining of the Dano look and vibe as a contemporary solidbody, which looks really slickly executed, and we particularly like the subtly reversed headstock [out of shot here] blending so well with the more traditional styling cues. Have any other readers attempted to reimagine classics in their homebuild projects? Send 'em in and we'll print the best here.

CLOSED CIRCUIT?

I've acquired a Bond Electraglide guitar from the 1980s in very good condition visually, but someone has cut through the circuit electronics ribbon cables and just wired the three pickups in parallel. The digital circuit boards are still present, but to rescue the original design I need a wiring diagram and details of the power supply. I've had no luck searching the internet and I would appreciate it if you could point me to any sources of technical information.

John Cook

Can anyone help John with schematics for his old Bond? Let us know and we'll pass the info on to John who'll hopefully be able to resurrect a little slice of Scottish guitar history.

COUNTRY MUSIC

While watching the latest episode of Channel 5's *Matt Baker: Our Farm In The Dales* I spotted his father taking this reading matter [below] into his caravan.

Ray Faulder

Fame at last! Thanks for sending that in, Ray, it really tickled us. Neil Young used to record music in his barn, after all, so guitars are quite at home in the farmyard.



Mike, father of TV's Matt Baker, clearly has good taste in magazines



THE BMG SPECIAL



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GORDON GILTRAP

What is good music? What is good guitar playing? Though the premise of such questions is simple, it can take a lifetime to arrive at meaningful answers, as acoustic master Gordon Giltrap reflects when we join him to discuss his powerful new album, *Scattered Chapters*

Words Jamie Dickson Photography Phil Barker

One of Britain's most gifted fingerstyle guitarists, Gordon Giltrap took inspiration from the heavyweights of the 60s folk scene, Bert Jansch and John Renbourn, before embarking on his own recording career in 1968. Self-taught, Giltrap's lyrical acoustic style has a joyous, universal quality that arguably even his heroes lacked and a distinctiveness that owed in part to Giltrap being a self-professed "ignoramus" when it came to standard guitar technique. After becoming a regular on the BBC's flagship serious music show *The Old Grey Whistle Test*, crossover hits such as *Heartsong* from his 1977 album, *The Perilous Journey*, followed, making Giltrap a household name – to his bemusement.

"I had no idea it would be a hit record, no idea," Gordon recalls. "But then it started selling. And next thing you know you're on *Top Of The Pops* and they ring you up and they say, 'Oh, you sold 15,000 singles today,' and you think, 'I don't know these people – how come they bought my record?' But the next day it was 25,000 copies sold in a day. It's very hard to get your head around the fact that suddenly you're selling a lot of records. Suddenly, you're known nationally, not just among the people that like guitar playing or have seen you on *The Old Grey Whistle Test*. Suddenly, you're a pop star, whether you like it or not."

But anthems such as *Heartsong* are only one facet of an ever-evolving body of work that today spans 28 albums and more than 50 years of music-making. Giltrap's road through music – and life at large – has been long and, at times, marked with tragedy. The sum of all this experience has now been distilled into his latest album, *Scattered Chapters*, co-written with keyboardist and arranger Paul Ward. As a tapestry of instrumental pieces, the thread that binds it together is a vivid strand of emotion, which is anchored in profound personal experiences and a rare humility. For Giltrap, good music-making is not about handing a loudhailer to your ego but becoming open to the flow of creativity.

"All the best stuff comes when you're not thinking about it," he reflects. "And it just flows. Basically, you start off with a one-bar idea and then build up on that. And, eventually, it's like a jigsaw puzzle: you keep putting the pieces in and then eventually you end up with a [finished] piece and then you step back from it. And you say to yourself, 'How did I do that?'"

That simple but deceptively deep question is one Giltrap has been pondering for decades. And he's happy to share his hard-won insights on what the art of guitar playing is really about in a wide-ranging and often philosophical conversation that begins with his new album and touches on life, death and the "absolute bollocks" that drives us to buy more guitars than we really need...

1. In the early days of his career, Gordon sought to emulate the styles of Bert Jansch and John Renbourn. As others have found, before and since, this attempt instead led to him finding his own unique voice on guitar

You share the limelight on the album with Paul Ward, playing a minimal role on some tracks and leading on others, yet it all hangs together beautifully.

“Well, I have an incredible relationship with Paul Ward, almost a psychic connection. All his parts were recorded in Sheffield, where he lives, but not once did we meet – everything was done by sending the tracks [via file sharing]. And then he would put on the track what he thought was right for it. Nine times out of 10 it was dead right. But, of course, he was using orchestral samples and one of the great masters of [arranging strings for contemporary music] was Del Newman, who I worked with on the *Troubadour* album. I’ve known Del since 1977, he was a genius. I said [to Paul], ‘Listen to what Del did on [1998’s] *Troubadour*, the way he mixed the strings.’ At the time, Del said he wanted to do the arrangements and produce the album because ‘I didn’t want your guitar to be buried’. So the guitar is always there and the strings are under there to complement it and I just let Paul do his thing.

“But we have this amazing relationship and the main thing that’s taken out of the equation is ego. The man doesn’t have an ego – he says, ‘Gordon, if you aren’t happy with something, tell me. I don’t have an ego, it’s not a problem. We’ve got to serve the music or serve the tune.’ And that’s how it came about.”

***Through Braden’s Door* is one of the standout pieces on the new album, both as a piece of guitar playing and in terms of emotional impact – what’s the backdrop to it?**

“*Through Braden’s Door* is a very powerful piece of music. My son died in 2018. And that was a very dark, difficult period for all of us in the family. I’d lost a son. My grandson Braden had lost his father, my daughter-in-law [Karen Giltrap-Barnes] lost her husband. Karen rang me up one day... I’d given Braden a little three-quarter sized classical guitar and shortly after his dad had died, Braden was in his bedroom. He was just strumming the open strings and singing something – some words that had come to him. He would have been six, seven years old. And his mum was walking past the door and she said, ‘I heard Braden singing and I just looked through the crack in the door, at what he was doing.’ And in my mind I visualise that scene: if I’d been there, I would have been witnessing this little boy trying to express how he felt about losing his father. And so that’s how the piece came about. Now, when I first wrote it, I gave it to Paul and for some reason, he said, ‘I’m having trouble trying to write an arrangement for this.’ I listened to it again and I said to him, ‘Do you know, Paul, it’s because the piece isn’t finished. I’m going to rewrite it.’ Again – take ego out of the equation: it’s not good enough, it’s not right. So I rewrote it.”



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“I’m a prime example of somebody who’s done everything wrong and somehow it turned out right”

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Another captivating piece from the current album is *One For Billie*. What tuning is that in?

“Thank you. That was originally on the *Ravens And Lullabies* album [2013] with Oliver Wakeman and I’d recorded it to a click track just in case Oliver needed that, but I wasn’t happy with it because it was too rigid. I always thought, ‘One day I’m going to re-record the way it should be. With lots of space, lots of *rubato*, lots of emotion,’ because it was written for my wife, Hilary. Now, her childhood nickname is Billie and even a lot of her family members still call her Billie. So I thought we’re gonna write a piece for Hilary called *One For Billie*. That came about from a tuning [C G E $\flat$ F B $\flat$ D] I’d come across years before that, which I learned from a session player called Terry Johnson who was in the pit band for *Blood Brothers*. He said, ‘You gotta hear this tuning – it’s a Joni Mitchell tuning.’ Which it is. So I tried it and thought, ‘Oh God, this is fantastic.’ So thank you, Joni Mitchell, for that tuning.”

Your playing has become a benchmark for anyone aspiring to play acoustic fingerstyle – yet some aspects are unorthodox, such as your use of a pick and little finger to pluck strings. How did you develop your style?

“I’m a prime example of somebody who’s done everything wrong and somehow it turned out right.

Seriously, from the word go. I look back on my life in absolute wonder, thinking, 'How did this happen? Who is this bloke Gordon Giltrap?' I was born with an unusual name, which I hated. But it's a gift – two 'Gs', you can remember it. How did my parents, who were working-class folk, come up with a name like Gordon? That's not a working-class name – I should have been maybe a Derek or an Albert or something, but I wasn't. So I left school at 15, with no education, and I was playing the guitar from the age of 12, but then everybody else was, too, you know?

"Most of the guitar players from my generation, who were born in 1947 or 1948 [or 1949] – myself, Mark Knopfler, Richard Thompson... we're all influenced by Hank Marvin, all of us, because he was the first great guitar hero. And we didn't realise it at the time, but the man was a bloody genius. He created that sound. It was in his fingers, but he also had the vision to use the right amplifier, the delay and the Strat. He owned it, that sound. So I was doing all I could to sound like Hank Marvin.

"And then I got turned on to the acoustic guitar and I was listening to Bert Jansch and John Renbourn. And wanted to be like [Bert] – I even wanted to look like him, which I did, funnily enough. But my hair was too smart to be like Bert.

"Most of the players from my generation were influenced by Hank Marvin. The man was a bloody genius"

"Actually, I'll tell you a funny story. When Bert was ill in hospital I went to visit him. I'd just come from a meeting with the record company and I had a load of early photographs that they wanted to use. I was showing Bert a picture of me when I was about 18. And he said, 'What's with the hair?' Because I was a Mod, you see? I wanted to be attractive to girls. But Bert was like Dylan. The way he looked was the way he was: that wasn't contrived. Bert was Bert, he was totally happy within his skin; he didn't feel the need to impress anybody. That's what he was.

"But, anyway, I left school at 15. Tried to sound like my [acoustic] heroes. I had no idea that they used their fingers [of the right hand] to play the guitar. I was such an ignoramus because I was still using the pick, thinking, 'How can I pluck two notes at once?' Then the little finger crept in and I thought, 'Well, okay, I can use that,' and it stayed like that. And here I am at the age of 74 and it's still like that."

It's all too easy for people to think of quirks in their own playing style as 'faults' to be pruned out rather than unique qualities.

"Yes – many years ago, I said to Ray Burley, who is a scholastic musician and a great classical player, 'Ray, do you think I ought to learn to read the dots?'

2. "My Dano is a stock model NOS+ with the wrapover bridge," Gordon says. "I like the simplicity of the design and have always loved the bell-like tone of those lipstick pickups, which apparently for that particular issue had pickups that had been old stock and were sort of rediscovered and were said to have a warmer sound. Either way, I love the guitar a lot and used it on the track *Turning Earth* on *Scattered Chapters*"



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“I got turned on to the acoustic guitar and I wanted to be like Bert Jansch – I even wanted to look like him, but my hair was too smart”

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He said, ‘Don’t do it – because what you do theoretically shouldn’t work. But it does.’ He said, ‘You’ve broken all the rules, but you do it your way and it works. And if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.’ And I think that’s relevant to a lot of people. They think, ‘Well, I’m a blues guitar player. I love Stevie Ray Vaughan – I want to spend my life getting the sound he does. And how did he get that sound? Well, I’ll use 13-gauge first strings and whatever else he did to get that sound.’ But you want to say, ‘No, that’s him. You’re never gonna sound like him. You’ve got to be yourself.’”

Another insecurity that guitarists can fall prey to is that they don’t believe they are ‘proper’ guitarists unless they can play with blistering dexterity, even though good feel, timing and melody usually matter more to listeners. “Yeah, that’s a lesson of youth versus experience in a way, isn’t it? Because when we have a piece that has some

3. Gordon at ease with his signature model Fylde to hand, which features a figured maple back and cedar top. While this is his instrument of choice for larger shows, he also gigs with his signature model Vintage electro-acoustics, which he designed with veteran luthier Rob Armstrong



complexity, some go-faster stripes, part of you wants to show off how neatly you can do it at speed. But some pieces, which could be played in a complex, fast way, actually breathe a bit more and sound better when you let a bit of air and space into them. So I suppose it's a matter of taste and experience judging where to pitch it. It's maturity, really, but it takes a long time to get to that point. It can take a lifetime, actually.

"Let's take as a shining example the brilliant Tommy Emmanuel. Any guitar player worth their salt would love to be able to play as well as Tommy does night after night, with that speed, with that precision. I'm never going to be able to play like that. But, for me, it's the slower pieces that he plays that mean more... So I'm a shining example, if you like, of somebody who can play something slower – hopefully something that's got a bit more melodic, emotional and soulful content to it, that means something. For example, every track on this album means something, there's a story behind it.

"But let's take any great guitar player, no matter who they are, throughout history, they've not become great because they played fast. If you analyse it, why is Peter Green still revered as this great guitar player? Was Peter Green a fast guitar player? So why are these people great? Because you are touching the soul.

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*"I'm still looking for a guitar
that I can use to help me create
better music. But, in actual fact,
I don't need to"*

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You're making a direct contact between you and their soul, which is a deeper level. And it's so deep at times you can't even put it into words. Let's take Jeff Beck: Jeff Beck can play three notes and it makes the hair on the back of your neck stand up. His sound, his tone... I mean, when the penny really dropped with me about Jeff Beck was years and years ago. My drummer at the time, Ian Mosley, gave me an album called *There And Back*. There's a track on it called *The Final Peace* – just Tony Hymas on keyboards and Jeff on guitar. And that first note when he came in... it feels like you're listening to God. And that's what he was trying to create. Just that tone, that sound and his fingers on that fingerboard was just incredible. That's genius. Peter Green could play just three notes like that. Because he was playing from the heart. It's just beautiful.

The other insecurity guitarists can fall prey to is feeling that their gear isn't good enough.

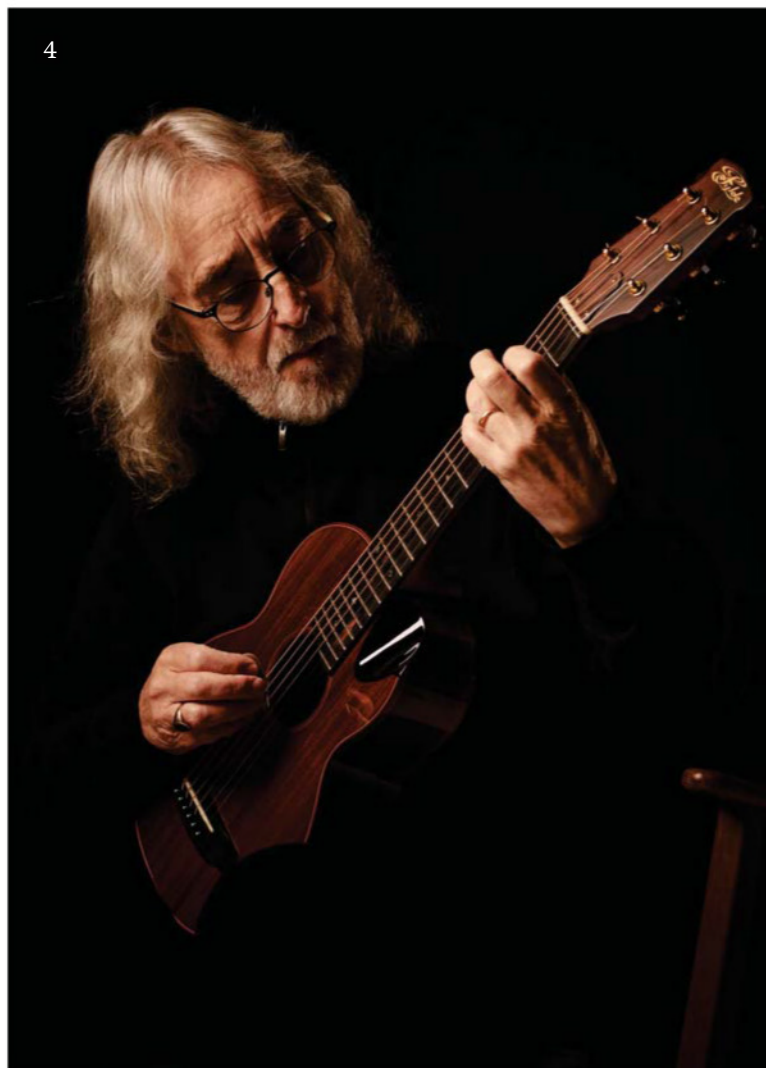
"Yes, I remember the early days of *Guitarist* magazine where they would interview me and I would think, 'I saw that interview with David Gilmour and he's surrounded by all these guitars. Now, if I'm surrounded by a lot of guitars people will think, 'Oh, he's successful – he's got all those guitars. I wish I was him.' And it's all bollocks. It's all absolute bollocks.

But we're still looking for that guitar, aren't we? We think, 'If I buy that guitar, I'll be a better guitar player,' or 'If I buy that guitar I can write better tunes.' Now, there's still that within me – I mean, I'm still looking for a guitar that I can use to help me create better music. But, in actual fact, I don't need to."

You had a period of serious illness a few years ago – how did that affect your relationship with the guitar?

"You know, I'm very blessed. I mean, in 2015, I could have died, you know, I was diagnosed with cancer. It wasn't till 2016 that I could have surgery, but anything can happen. I could have died under the knife, but I didn't. I came through that. I subsequently had to have more surgery. For all I know, I may need to have more surgery, but you just think, 'Well, okay, I'll just take that as it comes' – though that's easier said than done because fear is a big obstacle to get over. But I had a little wonderful moment the other day when I was doing my meditation and, suddenly, I thought, 'I'm not scared of anything. Whatever comes my way, I'll deal with it.' Because there's nothing you can do about it. They say, 'Everything you resist, persists.' You can't go against the flow of life, you can't go against what's going to be happening to you. You can't avoid it, so you try to deal with it the best way you can.

4. Gordon with the scaled-down custom acoustic he calls his 'Baby Fylde', adding: "I have always loved short-scale guitars because one is able to tune higher than concert pitch to achieve those lovely bell-like ringing tones. The woods used are Brazilian rosewood that Roger Bucknall bought from the family of the late classical guitar maker Harald Petersen many years back and kept in storage. Bridge and fingerboard are ebony"





“Every track on the new album was written from the heart... and that’s all that matters”

"But when I became ill, I lost all interest in music and I would go into my music room and I would sit there surrounded by all these guitar cases. I'd know that I'd got the finest guitars in the world in that room. I had a beautiful J-200 that Pete [Townshend] gave me when word got back to him I was poorly. And I'd always hankered after a J-200, so there I was and I thought I got a guitar that was given to me by Pete... In fact, within a month, I was given two guitars, one from Pete Townsend, one from Brian May – Brian gave me a beautiful little 12-string, which I've recorded with and I used it on one of the tracks. But I was sitting there thinking, 'I've no desire to pick up anything. I've got no desire to play, I've lost all interest in music. Because the fabric of my life has just been ripped away. Somebody's just told me that I've got something serious that can be life-threatening.' So you start questioning your mortality and you get things into perspective.

"But as time goes on, you start to take interest again and start playing again and thinking, 'Will I ever get back to playing on the stage again? Will I be well enough?' But Johnny Etheridge said to me, when I told him I was ill, 'After you've had your surgeries your job is to get better. That's your job, nothing else. Your job is to get better.' That stuck with me because he'd had major surgery a couple of years prior to that.

"Whatever guitars we buy or sell or keep, we're only custodians of them. We're only borrowing them – it's like the house we live in"

"We all fall into that trap of [endlessly acquiring] guitars, you know, but they are only *things*... And at the end of the day, whatever guitars we buy or sell or keep, we're only custodians of them. We're only borrowing them – it's like the house we live in. We only borrow it."

How do you hope the songs on *Scattered Chapters* will be received, when viewed against the big picture of your life in music?

"When you know the backstory to a piece and somebody says, 'I'm not really keen on that piece,' I'll say, 'That's fine, as a matter of opinion – but I know where it's come from. I know what it means to me, and I know what it means to Paul.' And that's why this body of work is so powerful. I could never, ever come up with anything that can improve on this album; it's not possible. Just like with *Troubadour*, it's not possible to make a better album than that because you can't replicate the energy and the atmosphere and the vibe of what was happening at that point in time, when you've got the great Del Newman conducting some of the finest musicians in the country, many of whom have passed on now...

"So when I'd done that album, I thought, 'This is my finest album, I can't do better.' But then if you start going back in time to *Visionary*, *The Perilous Journey*, *Fear Of*

The Dark... you remember the vibe in the studio at that time, where you had the finest drummer in the world playing on your tracks, Simon Phillips. So you go, 'That was then, this is now – let's move on.'

"There's no way that Paul and I can make a better album than *Scattered Chapters*. Paul said, 'I think the best is yet to come.' But no, that's not true. All we can do is the best we can do, in the future, if it's right for that to happen and if the circumstances of life allow us to do that. Because tomorrow doesn't exist. The future doesn't exist. You can talk about it. You can plan it and you can put it in the diary. But it only happens when you get there. *If you get there*. But I have to tell you, every track on the new album was written from the heart. And I apply that to anybody who writes something. I say, 'If you've written something from the heart, if you put it out there in the public domain, people are going to make a comment.' But if you've written it from the heart, that's all that matters. At the end of the day, *you* know where it's come from. You don't need to change a note of it. Because you've got to live with that." **G**



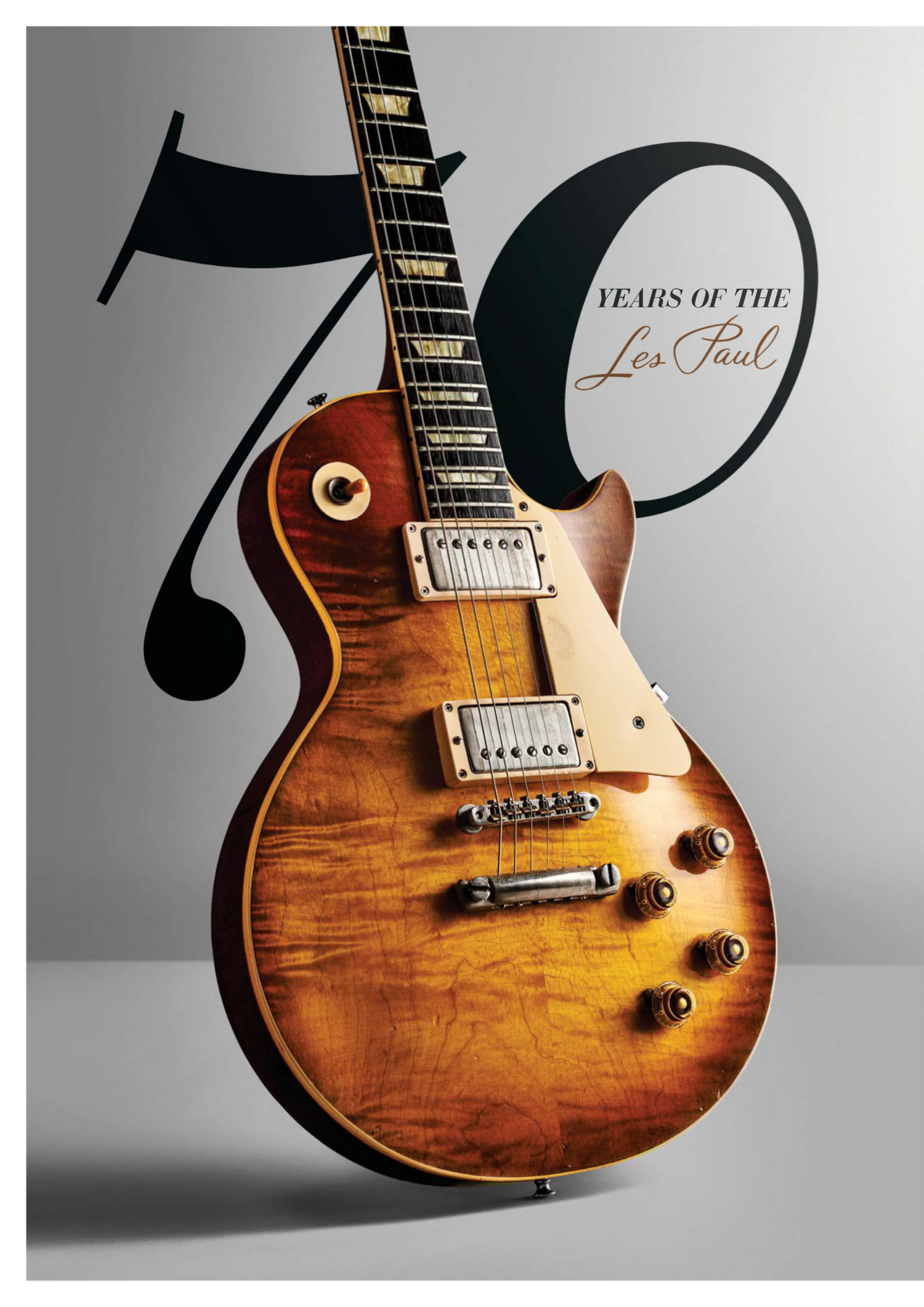
Scattered Chapters by Gordon Giltrap and Paul Ward is out now on Psychotron Records. For more information, including live dates, visit www.giltrap.co.uk

5. After decades of recording and performing, Gordon says it's the guitarist's emotional and even spiritual connection to the music that matters most

6. A reluctant venturer into the realms of electric guitar, Gordon nonetheless wove its sound into his music from the 70s onwards and still does so today, though acoustic remains his main focus



PHOTO BY ESTATE OF KEITH MORRIS/RED FERNS/GETTY IMAGES



YEARS OF THE
Les Paul



Built for jazz, the Les Paul found its true métier in the hands of blues-rock artists years after its debut. Likewise, the sunburst Les Pauls of 1958 to '60 saw weak sales initially but are today the world's most desired guitars. Here, we examine the rise, fall and rise of the mercurial, ageless Gibson Les Paul, seven decades on from its birthday...

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Neil Godwin

Guitarist would like to thank Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars for the kind loan of the incredible 1959 Gibson Les Paul Standard that appears on the cover of this issue. For more info and a tour of their incredible stock, see www.vintageandrareguitars.com

GOLD RUSH

Gibson's Mat Koehler is a tireless archive-miner who's spent countless hours tracing the history of the company's iconic electrics. We join him to get a handle on the epochal first 10 years of the model's history in which it transformed from elegant jazz guitar to the weapon of choice of the nascent rock 'n' roll revolution

Words Jamie Dickson

As senior director of product development at Gibson, Mat Koehler is behind the company's drive for maximum vintage authenticity in its reissues, from Epiphone Coronets to Custom Colour Firebirds. But he says the Les Paul – and the man who put his moniker on one of the most iconic electrics of all time – was the guitar that sparked his interest in working for the Nashville company and it remains one of his ruling passions.

"I'm from Waukesha, Wisconsin, Les Paul's hometown," Mat says, "so the name Les Paul has always been legendary to me. Even as a kid and growing up, my uncle had a music store there called White House Of Music and you'd always hear whispers that 'Les Paul's in

1. Les Paul's 'Number One' or first approved prototype of the Les Paul Model. Ever the tinkerer, Les added many subsequent mods of his own

2. A time of transition: here, a vintage 1952 Goldtop (left) sits next to a 1954 Les Paul, with its wraparound tailpiece. Note, this '52 was modified at some stage to allow strings to pass over, not under, the bridge

town'... It was ever-present. I was always around guitars, but the Les Paul always had the mystique to me and that led to me really wanting to find an opportunity to work for Gibson. So yeah, in a way, it means everything to me."

With this thought to conjure with, we sit down with Mat to get his forensic view on the large and small transitions the model made in its earliest years, including the anomalies and one-offs thrown up by the breakneck speed of change as the rock 'n' roll era took off...

"Everything was constantly evolving at Gibson in the 1950s and 60s. They wanted to stay ahead of the curve" **MAT KOEHLER**

the opposite of how Les Paul had wanted. So because Les Paul wanted to palm mute, and they did not execute it that way, it took them a full year and a half to fix it. The good news is, in that time, Ted McCarty had created an amazing solution – the McCarty bridge, the stopbar bridge, which is still one of my favourites. It's not the best for intonation, which is why it evolved further, but it has a really specific sound and grit to it. And then you got the ABR-1 that first debuts on the Les Paul Custom in 1954 – in late '53, actually – and then it applies to the regular Les Paul, the Goldtop model in 1955. And then pretty much the Les Paul, as we know it today, was born. That's the evolution, outside of humbuckers being introduced in 1957; those are the three steps to the current ABR and stopbar setup that we see today."

With so many changes in the space of a decade, you do hear of a fair few examples of one-off guitars surviving that have features you wouldn't normally associate with a given year.

"Yeah, I had a vintage guitar business before I joined Gibson, so I would see a lot of those anomalies, but I wasn't able to put them into context. Working at Gibson and working for a long time with the Custom Shop and Gibson Memphis, just being present in the factory setting, you completely understand some of these mysteries, like I completely understand how a Goldtop could have been shipped in '59 and it probably was held back – possibly in the repair department – and shipped later. Or they found it,

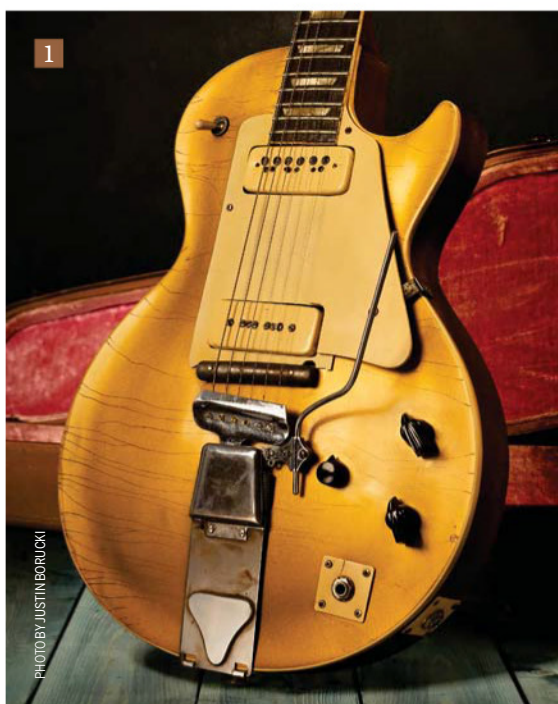


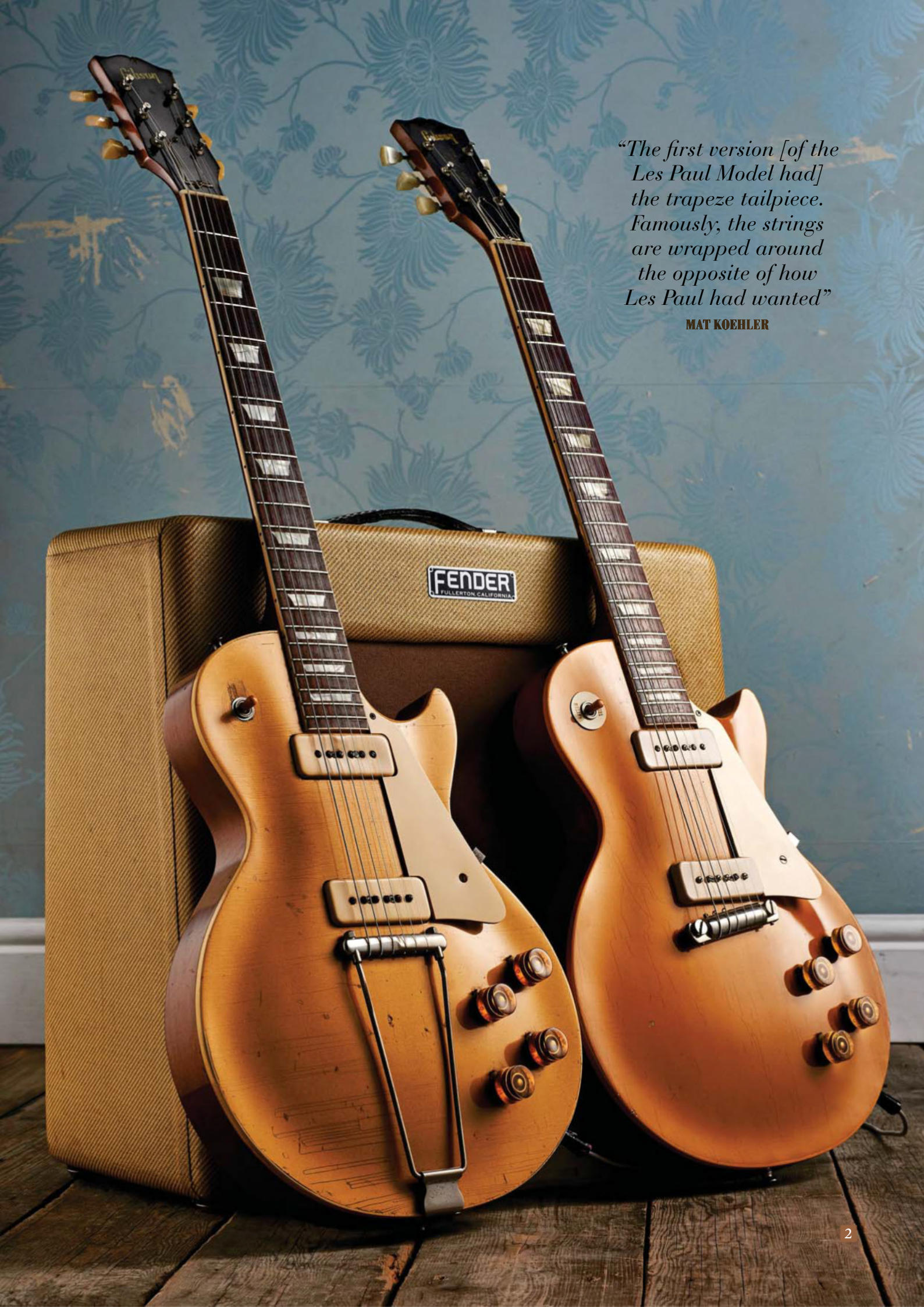
PHOTO BY JUSTIN BORUCKI

What's your take on the early years of the Les Paul Model? It saw quite a few revisions in short order.

"Yeah, first, I should say that it wasn't just Les Pauls that were constantly evolving in the 1950s and 60s – it was everything. So Gibson really had this model-year mentality where they wanted to add features and benefits and make changes. And if something was selling well and working well, normally it would stay in the line for a little bit longer, but even then they were trying to stay ahead of the curve. They had a lot of competition at the time because this was the guitar boom era. That was another reason why I think they were conscious of their imitators, too, and they wanted to stay above the curve.

"So in the 50s, the first version is the trapeze tailpiece. Famously, the strings are wrapped around

PHOTO BY NEL GODWIN

A photograph of two vintage Fender Les Paul guitars with trapeze tailpieces, leaning against a brown Fender case. The guitars have a light-colored body and a dark fretboard. The case has a "FENDER FULLERTON, CALIFORNIA" logo. The background is a blue floral patterned wall.

“The first version [of the Les Paul Model had] the trapeze tailpiece. Famously, the strings are wrapped around the opposite of how Les Paul had wanted”

MAT KOEHLER

they serialised it and just shipped it out. You know, rule number one of businesses is [there must be] stuff going out the door, so Gibson always wanted to have things going out the door, even if they were older, repaired or repurposed. So yeah, that Goldtop '59 is a good example.

"Wrap-tail models, I've seen as late as early '57. So there are some odd ones. Then there are the other anomalies, such as unique colours, which I'm really interested in. I have a mini custom-colour collection. No Les Pauls, unfortunately! The whole gist of it is that the factory setting is unpredictable. And that's why you see anomalies."

One of the big changes to the Les Paul was the introduction of the sunburst finish models in 1958.

Why did the Goldtop get the push?

"Honestly, it's about factory context. I think they wanted to get out of the gold paint business because metallic paint is tough to work with. There's a lot of trash in the air from the metallic finish and they were like, 'Can we get away from metallic here, please?' I think that was the request [laughs]. It took them a while to settle on the Cherry Sunburst as we know it today – they did try a [completely] Cherry Red guitar very early on before there was a Cherry Sunburst, and there were maybe two of those, if I remember

3. The earliest Les Paul Customs of the mid-50s featured a so-called Alnico V 'staple' pickup at the neck. Seen here on a Gibson Custom reissue, its design proved too tricky to mass manufacture and it was later dropped in favour of a trio of PAFs

4. Producer John Shanks' 1960 Les Paul Standard, with what appear to be 1959-spec appointments, making it a holdover example – things didn't change overnight when specs were updated

"At the time they debuted, [the Custom] was the one that Les Paul bonded with. It was really tuned into his tastes... he was definitely drawn to those tuxedo appointments"

MAT KOEHLER



LATTER-DAY LESTERS

The development of the Les Paul after the 1970s may have been less radical, but it, too, has its landmarks. Here are three notable ones...

LES PAUL HERITAGE 80 SERIES



One of the earliest attempts by Gibson to faithfully replicate the by-then celebrated 1959 Les Paul Standard was the Heritage 80 Standard. Introduced as the name suggests in 1980, it was made in three variants, with increasingly fancy appointments: the Standard 80, the Standard 80 Elite, and the rare (around 50 were made) Standard 80 Award, which featured gold hardware and a richly figured Cherryburst maple top. Though designed to be accurate reissues, the outline and geometry of the cutaway and body differed slightly from originals. The series was discontinued in 1983.

LES PAUL STUDIO



Spotting a gap in the market for a US-made Les Paul at a more affordable price, Gibson debuted its Les Paul Studio in 1983. Featuring a one-piece mahogany body with single-ply binding, maple neck and three-piece maple top, the Studio Standard was low on frills but, perhaps incongruously, featured an ebony fretboard. A Custom version was released at the same time and featured a mahogany neck and body and multi-ply binding on the top edge of the body only, with single-ply elsewhere. The Studio has since proven one of the most popular and adaptable guitars in Gibson's line-up, undergoing many changes and variants, including multi-pickup Studio Lite M-III versions.

LES PAUL AXCESS



When the modern rock era arrived, Gibson struggled to find the right way to address a shred-oriented trend in guitar design that tended to favour Strat-derived solidbodies not archtop single-cuts. New designs such as the SuperStrat-style U2 and idiosyncratic M-III failed to get a serious foothold on the ultra-playable contemporary electric market, so in 2008 Gibson turned its attention to adapting its flagship Les Paul, introducing a heel that blended seamlessly with the body, a belly carve for comfort and an extensively chambered body for weight relief. The addition of a Floyd Rose completed the model's migration into modern shred territory and likely influenced the direction of later contemporary LP models, including the more recent High Performance series, discontinued in 2020.

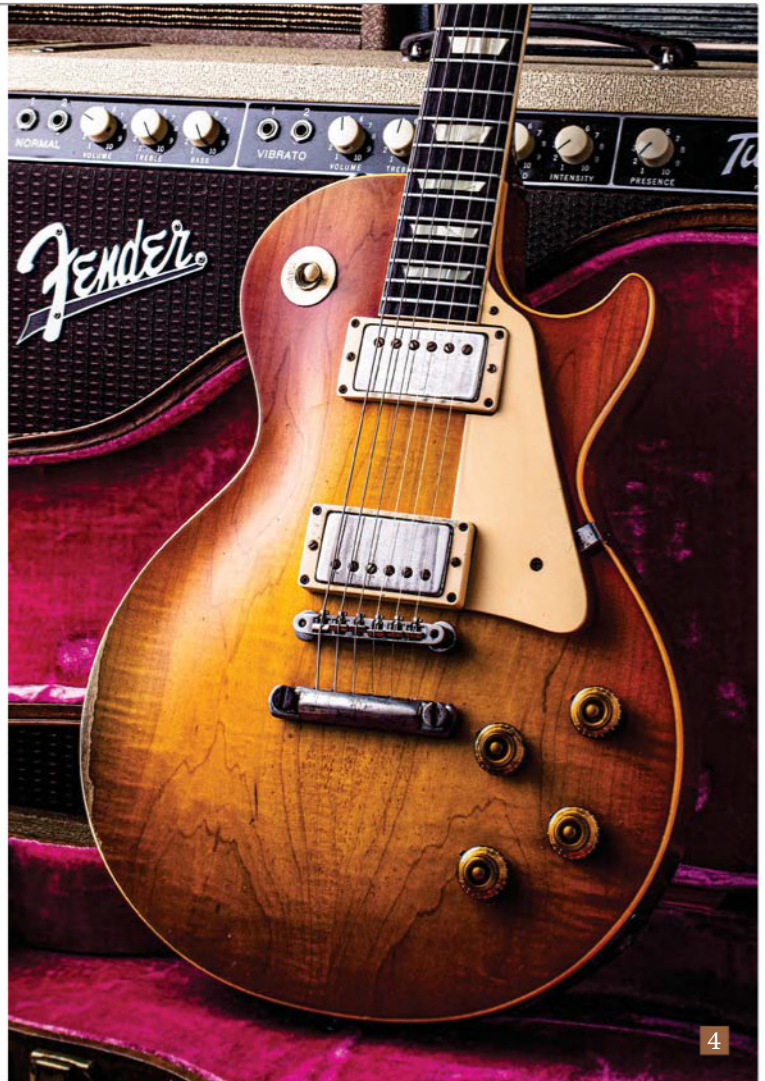


PHOTO BY ELEANOR JANE

“They wanted to get out of the gold paint business... but the irony is they didn’t sell as many Sunbursts as Goldtops” **MAT KOEHLER**

rightly. Then there was a really unique guitar that I’ve seen personally, that is in the ledger book, it almost looks like a hand-stained sunburst, though it’s more of an amber sunburst: it’s front and back sunburst with a tortoiseshell pickguard – really unusual, but it’s real and it’s legit. I’m just not allowed to share where it’s at [laughs]. That tells me they were experimenting with a few different finishes before they landed on Cherry Sunburst, but then when it debuts in the *Gibson Gazette*, they lead with ‘a beautiful cherry sunburst is the news for the Les Paul...’ so they clearly were trying to hone in on something that they thought would hit.

“The irony, of course, is that it didn’t really hit it. They didn’t sell as many Sunbursts as they did Goldtops. Then in that evolution of ’58 through 1960, it was really

just minute changes to the guitars that now are celebrated as great differences. We’re talking about bigger frets; occasionally, you’ll see flamier tops in ’59. And then in 1960, they wanted to get rid of the fading aniline-dye finish on the top. So by mid-1960 they had introduced a new kind of tangerine-orange sunburst [aka ‘tomato soup’ finish]. That’s really the gist of it, though thinner neck profiles and some of the hardware changes were instituted across the board, such as the reflector knobs in 1960, the double-ring tuners. Not a whole lot of differences under the hood, though. Same construction, same pickups.”

Earlier you mentioned the ledger books in which Gibson kept track of production of various models, but the record is incomplete, isn’t it? How do you go about

authenticating 'Bursts for which official records no longer exist?

"There are only a few Les Pauls in our 1958 [ledger] book. And, unfortunately, the time at which the Sunburst was debuted, was also the same time period when the Explorer first shipped. That's exactly where that ledger book ends; it's unusual because the ledger book ends halfway through. May 31 is the last day in the ledger book and then it's just blank, so that tells me either they moved to a different accounting system or ledger system, or they

"In that evolution of '58 through 1960, it was really just minute changes that now are celebrated as great differences" **MAT KOEHLER**

5. Producer John Shanks' 1959 'Burst is typical of many built at the time in having a relatively plain top. This example is not quite fully original – note the Grovers

had already started another book and they were just tagging on. So that's interesting.

"But it's still a great mystery what happened to those records. They definitely existed, but there's this gap between mid-'58 through 1960, a then it starts again in 1961. Clearly, there must have been some intention to keep records for that time period. I don't know if it was malicious... we're actually still recovering parts of our archive today. And oftentimes, they're just in some little old lady's garage, so it's very possible that they're out there and that they will be recovered, I feel.

"But as far as verifying Les Pauls goes, the ledger book itself is not a huge help with any of that. With some Les Pauls from '58 through 1960, you really, really have to know the 'tells' [unmistakable signs of genuine authenticity]."

Just for illustrative purposes, what might one or two of those 'tells' be?

"I'm not sure I'm willing to give that up... But I can say, generally speaking, you want to hone in on completely benign elements of the guitar that most people would not think to look at. A lot of people are looking at the top carve and the neck profile, but those are things that changed day to day in the factory. You want to look for something that would be consistent on those originals that is fairly [mundane] and then hone in on that, compare, compare, compare, see how it evolved.

"The more access to Les Pauls you have, the better. Fortunately, when I had my previous business, one of my best customers was Joe Bonamassa, who was very, very friendly in sharing his guitars with me. That was great."

Moving on to the Les Paul Custom, it seems almost a shame that, though an icon in its own right, it's been in the shade of the 'Bursts...

"Yeah, clearly at the time they debuted it was the one that Les

Paul bonded with. The irony is he had specifically requested a maple cap on the Les Paul, and then by the time they made the Les Paul Customs in the 50s, they were solid mahogany. I'm not actually sure if Les Paul knew that or not. But the ebony fingerboard makes up for that a bit, gives some of that brightness.

"So yeah, the Custom was the first model to debut the ABR, which is kind of cool, in 1953. And their evolution with the staple pickups was a whole different vibe with the tiny, tiny frets. Everything was designed around fast play. There was a lower-action spec, too, on that model, which a lot of people don't know – out of the factory they were supposed to have an extremely low action as well as the small frets.

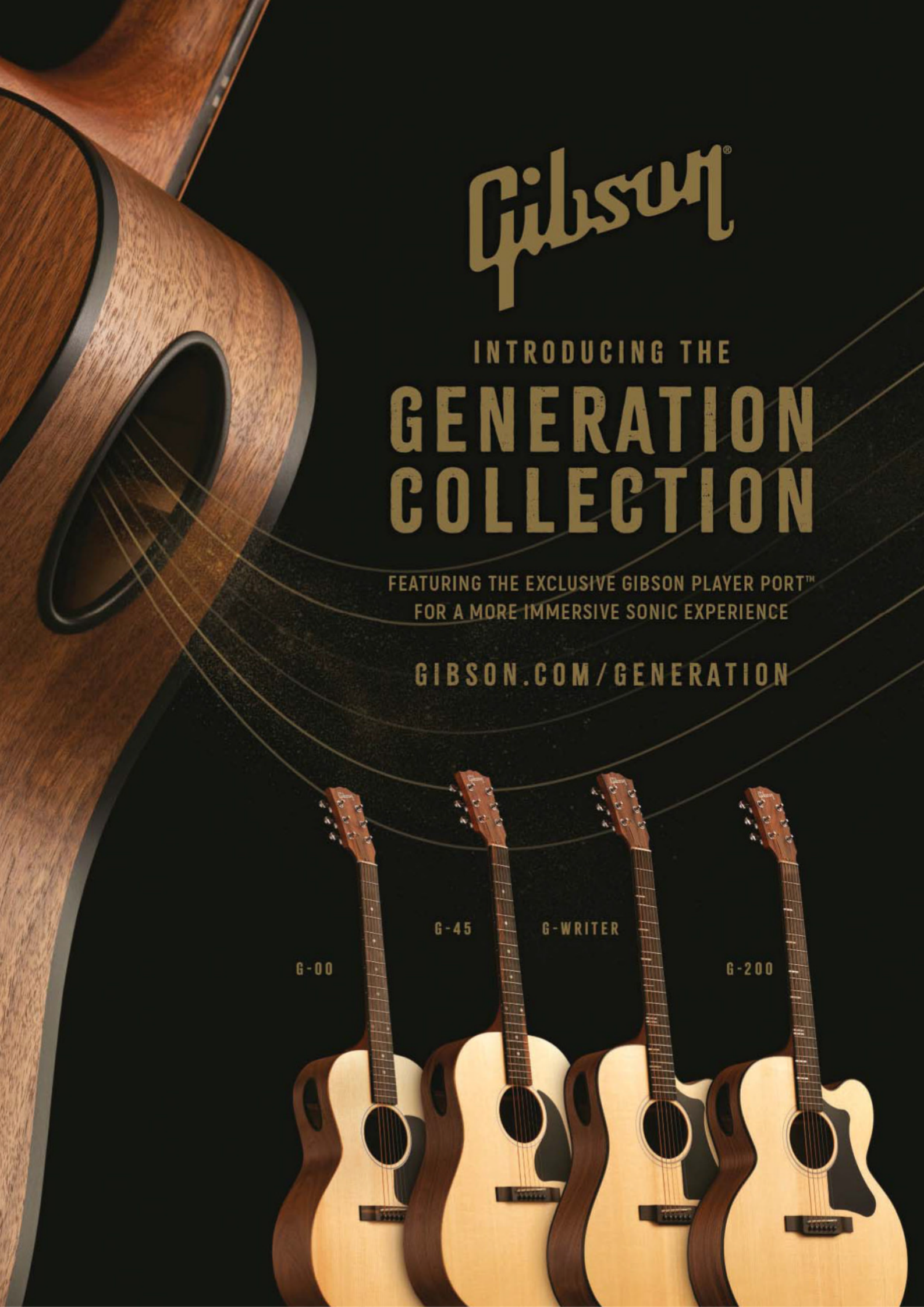
"So the Customs were really, really tuned into Les Paul's tastes, even more than the Les Paul 'regular', which is what I call anything that has gold paint. Even when the Les Paul transitioned into the SG shape, you see Mary Ford and Les Paul playing the SG Custom with the Les Paul name on it, so he definitely was drawn to those tuxedo appointments – and he was a sharp dresser, so it's no wonder."

The Alnico V 'staple' pickup used on the neck position of the earliest Les Paul Customs is having a bit of resurgence at the moment, appearing on a fair few boutique electrics by independent makers. Why did it only ever appear, briefly, on the Custom?

"Again, factory context – I now understand that they're very difficult to build. It's part of the reason why we're redeveloping the staple pickup as we speak, to be more factory-friendly. The design itself was a little crude – we have Seth Lover's original drawings and you can tell that this wasn't his instinctual way to create a pickup. This was Les Paul in his ear saying, 'This is what you should do.' I think that had a lot to do with it. But it does serve a purpose and it has a fantastic jazz tone, which is why you see it on archtop models. I think, really, the reason that it wasn't more prevalent is just because of the difficulty to construct it." 



PHOTO BY ELEANOR JANE



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LP EVOLUTION

Below we chart the key changes the Les Paul and its variants went through in its seminal early years from 1952 to 1978

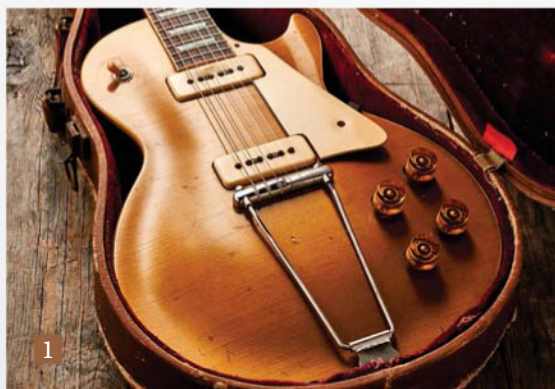
Words Jamie Dickson

1952

LES PAUL MODEL launched. Multi-section maple top, mahogany body and neck. Gold-finished top (a few had gold back and sides also), twin soapbar P-90s, trapeze tailpiece. Shallow-angle neck-set means strings have to wrap *under* bridge, preventing palm muting, to make setup geometry work – turning a good bridge design into a flawed one. Shallow neck-set also made later conversion to stopbar tailpiece or Tune-o-matic problematic. Single-ply cream binding – though very earliest models omit neck binding. Single-ring Kluson tuners with no brand name. Tall 'barrel' control knobs. Silk-screen 'Les Paul Model logo on headstock'.

1953

GOLDTOP LES PAUL upgraded with single-piece wrapover bridge and new raked-back neck-set geometry, with trapeze tailpiece discontinued – though some guitars produced in early '53 still made to 1952 spec. Neck-set angle increases slightly up to 1954. Serial number on reverse of headstock. Gold 'barrel' control knobs reduced in height.



1954

LES PAUL CUSTOM launched with mahogany carved top, neck and body. Alnico V pickup at neck and P-90 at bridge, black covers. First appearance of ABR-1 bridge. Low 'fretless wonder' frets, bound ebony fretboard. Black finish and multi-ply binding, gold-plated hardware, split diamond inlay on headstock.

LES PAUL JUNIOR launched. Single-cut, slab mahogany body, 24.75-inch scale and one P-90. Two-colour sunburst finish.

LES PAUL TV model launched: essentially yellow-finish Junior but very early models had maple body and ¾-size scale length.

1. The shallow neck-set of the earliest Les Pauls led to usability problems with the trapeze tailpiece

2. 1953 saw the disarmingly simple wrapover bridge introduced. Not easy to intonate, it was superseded by the ABR-1 in 1955

3. Few guitars look as rock-focused as a three-pickup Les Paul Custom, but at the time of its launch in 1957 it was still marketed as a modern jazz guitar, essentially

1956

SPRAGUE 'BUMBLE BEE' CAPACITORS replaced earlier Sprague 'Grey Tiger' caps in wiring looms of goldtop Les Paul Model.

LES PAUL JUNIOR pickup moved forward slightly to stand clear of bridge posts.

1957

HUMBUCKING PATENT APPLIED FOR (PAF) pickups replaced soapbar P-90s on Les Paul Model with DC resistance typically within a 7 to 9kohms range. Some examples built with dark back and sides finish (and yellow serial for legibility), but the majority have natural mahogany finish back and sides. Earliest PAFs fitted to Goldtops feature stainless-steel covers before moving to nickel-plated ones. Early humbucking Les Pauls feature black plastic parts, including M-69 pickup rings, pickguard and so on (typically with matching black back and sides on the guitar), though cream plastics replaced these relatively quickly.

LES PAUL CUSTOM switched to three humbucking pickups.



1955

ADJUSTABLE ABR-1 bridge replaced wrapover bridge on goldtop Les Paul Model in autumn. Gibson logo moved up headstock. Control knobs changed to familiar 'top hat' shape with curved sides.

LES PAUL TV model increased to 24.75-inch scale. Mahogany body from late '55.

LES PAUL SPECIAL launched featuring a mahogany body and neck, two soapbar P-90s, rosewood 'board and wrapover bridge. Available in TV Yellow.





1958

SUNBURST-FINISH LES PAUL STANDARD introduced (note the name change from 'Les Paul Model'). Two-piece, centre-seam maple top, cherry-tint back and sides, and the Cherry Sunburst finish features a more vibrant red tint than 1959 examples. Relatively few were made with notably figured tops (circa 15 per cent) and around the same proportion were factory fitted with Bigsby B-7 vibrato.

LES PAUL JUNIOR body changed to rounded, double-cutaway design (as does TV Model). Pickguard now tortoiseshell instead of black. Cherry finish.

1959

FRET SIZE INCREASED on Les Paul Standard, neck profile slightly less chubby than 1958 examples, red of sunburst subtler – some examples in Tobacco Sunburst made. Pickup bobbins white or 'zebra', though if the latter the bobbin with adjustable poles always black. Square-cornered jack plate fitted, along with small changes to plastics including ring around pickup selector, which becomes thinner, with different font.

LES PAUL CUSTOM fitted with Grover Rotomatic tuners.



1960

SUNBURST FINISH changed due to introduction of new red dyes less sensitive to light damage, assuming a now-famous 'tomato soup' hue. Control knobs changed to 'reflector' type with metal cap, replacing the earlier top-hat knobs with clear plastic tops. Neck profile became slimmer. White bobbins on pickups phased out. Note, the earliest 1960 Les Pauls were built to same spec as 1959 examples.

1961

MODEL CHANGED completely to 'Les Paul/SG' type double-cut design featuring thin mahogany body and bevelled edges plus 'sideways' Vibrola. Les Paul's name still appeared on truss-rod cover, however.

LES PAUL CUSTOM line also changed to SG-style body with white finish.

1963

LES PAUL STANDARD MODEL officially discontinued, but, in reality, the then-current SG-style Les Paul Standard simply became the 'SG Standard'.

4. 1958 Les Paul Standards, such as this beautiful example belonging to the Seven Decades collection, rarely had figured tops

5. The Les Paul Deluxe was a marriage of convenience between the classic single-cut body and surplus stock of Epiphone pickups – but its sound helped define 1970s rock music

1968

SINGLE-CUT LES PAUL STANDARD model reintroduced as a reissue of the 1956-spec P-90 Goldtop, though with numerous alterations. Metal parts now chrome instead of nickel-plated, fingerboard Indian rosewood not Brazilian, serial number stamped not inked on headstock reverse. Sprague 'Black Beauty' or brown-disc capacitors.

LES PAUL CUSTOM also reintroduced with two humbucking pickups 'amplifier'-style control knobs, shallower headstock back angle (14 degrees instead of 17 degrees), maple top on mahogany body and long-tenon neck joint.

1969

LES PAUL DELUXE introduced. Features four-piece 'pancake' body construction comprising a maple top, a thick upper section of mahogany, a thin layer of maple then a thick lower section of mahogany, arranged pancake-wise. Two mini-humbuckers instead of P-90s, goldtop finish. Three-piece mahogany neck with volute.

LES PAUL CUSTOM also received 'pancake' body construction and three-piece maple neck with volute.

LES PAUL STANDARD reissued in 1954 spec, with wraparound tailpiece and two P-90s with 'Gibson' on the covers. No volute.

1971

LES PAUL DELUXE offered in Cherry Sunburst and Cherry Red finishes.

1976

LES PAUL STANDARD built with four-piece pancake construction (maple/mahogany/maple/mahogany), three-piece maple top, two humbuckers, Tune-o-matic bridge. Offered in Wine Red, Natural, Tobacco Sunburst and Cherry Sunburst finishes.

1978

TWO-PIECE BODY with maple top. Goldtop finish now also available. 

MAKING A SCENE

It's arguable that the Les Paul might have become a footnote in guitar history if Clapton hadn't sent its reputation rocketing in '66 with that Bluesbreakers album. Here, Whitesnake legend Bernie Marsden recalls how the Lester entered the mainstream of British rock guitar in the early 70s

Words Jamie Dickson

How did you first become aware of Les Pauls as a guitar to aspire to playing?

"Same as everybody – the Bluesbreakers. That picture on the back, you know, and then very soon after that, because Eric mentioned Freddie King, I started seeing pictures of Freddie King with a Goldtop. So it was in my head, but even then – and we're talking probably 1971 or '72 – [Les Paul Standards] were like £250. It was way out of your comfort zone, really. So when I got my first SG and it turned out to be a Les Paul [see timeline on the previous page] I was over the moon. So I bought my first Les Paul in 1970. And that was the SG that Gary [Moore] had, and which I still have today."

What was the first single-cut Les Paul you owned?

"I had a '53 conversion with UFO, more or less as soon as I joined them. I got the gig with a Firebird. I think they liked the look of the Firebird so when I turned up for the gig they said, 'Oh, where's your guitar?' And I said, 'I got another one.' But that one had binding on the headstock, which was very unusual. There is a picture of it in my book [Bernie's autobiography, *Where's My Guitar?*] and you can just see the binding on the headstock, but it had two PAFs fitted and a stop tailpiece, and that one was with me for three or four years, up until I got the Beast [Bernie's well-known '59 'Burst]."

1. By the late 70s, Bernie Marsden (pictured here in 1978 on set with Whitesnake at Shepperton Studios) had himself a bona fide Les Paul that was dubbed 'the Beast'

When did you first try out an original 'Burst?

"The first real one I ever saw was in Bradford. I was playing a gig with UFO – it might even have been my first gig – and I had that '53 conversion. The opening act was a guy called Phillip Goodhand-Tait, singer-songwriter/piano player, and he had a guitar player with him; his name was Arthur."

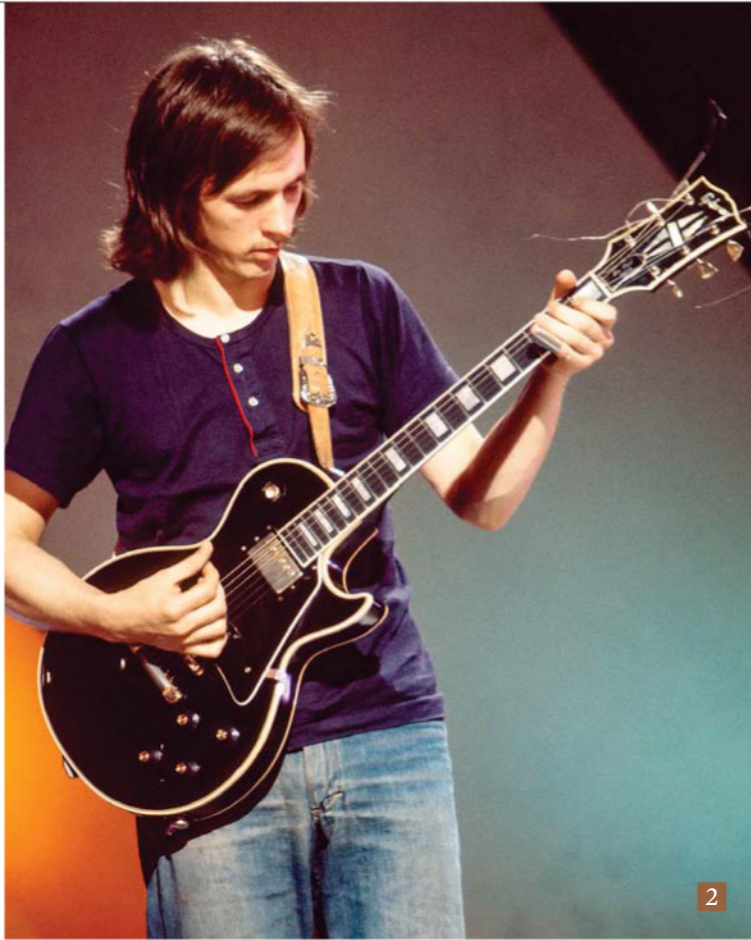
"I was wandering about and I couldn't find the UFO dressing room, so I walked in another room

"The Les Paul was in my head, but in 1971 or '72 [Les Paul Standards] were like £250. It was way out of your comfort zone" **BERNIE MARSDEN**



and there was a brown case. I thought, 'Oh, whose is this, then?' Because Phillip Goodhand-Tait was a piano player, right? So I looked at this case and opened it and there's a '58 Les Paul inside. I took it out of the case, which is completely wrong – you don't touch anybody else's guitar without asking – but I couldn't help myself. I sat down because I thought it'd be [the guitar of] one of the lads. But then in comes Arthur, a real hippy type – blonde hair right down to his waist. I went, 'Oh, sorry. Is this yours?' I was all embarrassed. And he said, 'Yeah, man...' and I said, 'This is a lovely guitar.' He said, 'Do you want to buy it? It's for sale.' I said, 'Oh, I don't know. What's a guitar like this worth? I have a [conversion] Les Paul.' So he said, 'This is an original Les Paul from 1958. I'm looking for £150.' I think I had about 15 quid in the bank at

PHOTO BY MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES



2

BÊTE NOIRE

Amen Corner frontman and longtime Clapton sideman Andy Fairweather Low on the Les Paul Custom he loved and lost early in his career

"I had the most fabulous black Les Paul, which I played when I was in [post-Amen Corner 70s outfit] Fair Weather," Andy recalls. "It was the guitar that I used on both albums with Fair Weather. About 20 or 30 years later, someone came to see me at a gig and we were talking about guitars and searching for a [perfect] guitar sound, and the guy went, 'But you had it,' and I said 'When?' And he said, 'Go back to those albums with Fair Weather and listen to that guitar sound...' So I had it then, with the Les Paul – and I wish I had that sound now. The songs weren't good and my playing wasn't good. But that *sound*..."

"It was a humbucker one – mahogany neck and all that. Beautiful but heavy. And I was still learning my craft as a player, so the weight was interrupting the flow. In the end, I sold it. Things went really bad, I had no money. I went back home and I had to sell my Strat, the Les Paul, a Fender Rhodes I had... all the gubbins that had served me well in the 70s, I had to sell 'em all just to get cash. But yeah, whoever's got it now has got themselves a bloody fabulous guitar!"

the time, so I remember saying, 'No, I've got one. I'm okay, thanks.'

"Can you imagine how many times I've thought about that conversation? It was immaculate – brand-new. I never did chase him up. I don't know what happened because the next time I saw Phillip Goodhand-Tait, he didn't have Arthur with him. For all we know, that could have been the Bluesbreaker guitar. He said it was a '58, but it could have been a '60 [for all I knew at the time], know what I mean? But that's just one of those Les Paul stories for you."

Was it common for pros in the early 70s to devote time to seeking out original 50s Les Pauls?

"Not really, there were a few of us around at the time – me and people like Mick Ralphs and Geoff Whitehorn – and we were all fairly aware. The guy that was the big innovator was a guy called Robert Johnson; not the Robert Johnson you might be thinking of. This was a guy from Memphis, he played with John Entwistle and he carried around with him what became known as the 'Brockburst'. We'd bump into him in Top Gear or Guitar Village and he was one of the lads. Because he was

2. In the early 70s, Andy Fairweather Low was in possession of a toneful mahogany-necked Les Paul Custom. But he didn't realise what he had till it was gone...

American, he wanted to get to know as many of us reprobates as he could. He would say, 'You want to get one of these guys...' and then he would bring this gorgeous guitar out and plug it in and we'd go, 'Wow,' and he'd say, 'This is the one [model, not specific instrument] that Clapton used on the Bluesbreakers,' and we'd all go, 'Oh, yeah...' and then a light came on, you know? He'd say, 'One of these will cost you at least £300...'

"I was talking to someone at a gig about searching for a [perfect] guitar sound, and the guy went, 'But you had it'" **ANDY FAIRWEATHER LOW**

and we'd go, 'Oh, well, I won't be getting one of those then...'

"But then people did start to get them. Geoff [Whitehorn] beat me to a Goldtop in Guitar Village by an hour. We've talked about that for the last 50 years nearly! He's still got that Goldtop. I think it was 240 quid: he got down there at 11 o'clock and I showed up with the money at about 12.30. So between that and Mick Ralphs and the famous Flying V story, that's twice I got stuffed!

"Mick got one first, actually. I think Mick got one in America and brought it back after a Mott The Hoople tour. Then the Beast turned up in the Marquee one night when I was with Wild Turkey. Mick was at the gig and afterwards, he said, 'When you played that guitar, it was like you're plugged into two amps. You gotta have it, Bern – you gotta have it...' I said, 'Mick, I haven't got any money and this guy wants £500 for it. It's out of the question.' He said, 'Well, you've got other guitars. Trade 'em in...' And that's more or less what I did. I still owed [the seller] money at the end of it, but he was very good, he waited about three months for his payment."

"This guy, Martin Henderson, he would source Les Pauls for people he thought should have them. A Les Paul guru. That's when the story came up, after I bought it. He said to me, 'How's the guitar?' I said, 'Fantastic.' That's when the famous line came, 'Yes, isn't it strange that Clapton let it go?' I said, 'What do you mean?' And he said, 'That came from Andy Fraser [of Free]. Andy got it from Paul [Kossoff] and Paul had traded it [for another guitar] with Eric. So that's the chronology of it.'" **✎**

OLD GLORY

Tom Murphy has been the driving force behind Gibson's ever-more accurate reissues of vintage Les Pauls, culminating in the creation of the 'Murphy Lab', which crafts the company's hand-aged guitars. We join him to discuss what the Les Paul was designed to be, what it became – and what it takes to make a great one today

Words Jamie Dickson Photography Adam Gasson

When did you first start working on Les Pauls?

"It goes way back to around 1970, with just an interest in the guitars. I had already started having a knowledge and appreciation for older guitars, like so many other people. I moved to Houston, Texas, in 1969, and there happened to be a culture of old-guitar guys there. My first Les Paul was a 1968 Goldtop, and I guess I'd say my first experience there was I stripped all the gold off of it. I've told people [since then] I am definitely paying for several sins I committed back in the day!

"I actually never planned to be a guitar technician, luthier or repairman, but it finally caught up with me that that's what I was

1. Details as small as the exact font shape of the Gibson logo inlay are revised and improved as new info comes to light on how the originals were crafted in the 50s

supposed to do – helping other people with their guitars and just letting my passion guide me."

The flamed maple top has become an emblem of the Les Paul, but less than a third of 1958 to 1960 Les Paul Standards are estimated to have had any figuring in at all. Have we misunderstood the model's past?

"We all have a love of the organic nature of a really beautiful figured top. I have a silly saying that when

you'll see really off-centre seams. But they hadn't yet engineered the centre seam or said, 'Let's make it look all bookmatched' like it is on the back of the jazz guitars. I mean, if you think about it, when it came into being, the top of Les Paul looks like the *back* of a jazz guitar – maple had never been on the front before. So then here comes the Les Paul and then they said, 'Oh, let's showcase the top.'

"But you don't see many '58s with fabulous tops [namely, at the start of the 'Burst's original production run]. I will say that it is *possible* that marketing or engineering then decided, 'Hey, we want to put the seam in the middle and we want really sophisticated-looking wood on the top.' All the same, a totally plain 1959 sunburst Les Paul and a really flamed one were the same price. Exactly the same price. But they are not now."

"My first experience of a '68 Les Paul was stripping the gold off of it. I'm paying for sins I committed back in the day!" **TOM MURPHY**



we see a great top and the guys are marvelling at it, I say, 'This stuff doesn't grow on trees, you know?' And why it's beautiful is it doesn't exist until it's found on a processed tree and so no two are alike, though some are similar. The difference today, and it has been since the 90s, is that we can calculate [production] and produce beautiful, awesome instruments every day through our source of wood, so it's really not a rarity today to find a beautiful top. But think back to the time before that was engineered into the guitars...

"We now have seen what was reported to be the first sunburst Les Paul – it surfaced and actually turned out to have a three-piece top. It looked like they might have tried to make it somewhat symmetrical, where the seams [in the three-piece maple top] were placed on each side of the bridge as opposed to on a Goldtop where

Did the top-carve change much over time?

"You tend to see it a little bit more pronounced on the '52s and '53s, which was very, very early. I'll tell you this, in the first year that we made the Historics, Matthew Klein – who's one of our engineers – and I did quite a bit of the engineering on the guitars. We wanted to capture a more accurate carving. We did have a couple of originals we were able to look at and take some measurements from, but we didn't have the digital scanning [technology] that we have now.

"Matthew hand-carved a big butcher-block piece of maple to the shape that he gathered from making accurate measurements. We had a measuring gauge on the top centre seam and we progressed

it up through the centre of the guitar, and that gave him some numbers to make a grid from and he then copied that [mapped profile] and hand-carved [a new carving template or 'pattern']. So we had this old carver where the wheel would travel over that pattern and it would reproduce it over on the top of a Les Paul. And that gave us an updated version of the carving. I was satisfied with it, but it didn't take me long before noticing it started to be sort of compromised because guitars had to go through a really heavy-duty belt sander to get the carving ripples out of the top. And so you lost some of that fine detail.

"I'm gonna jump ahead and say the carving today, that you see on our vintage-style Les Pauls, either gold or sunburst, is the most accurate that I've ever seen because it's taken off of a real guitar and transferred to digital machines. I love it. It showcases the look of a Les Paul, with the figured maple."

What's the secret to imparting that subtly 'just right' look to a reissue guitar's top?

"I won't get too technical, but I figured it out because I was around so many guitars. The top of the Les Paul has a plateau in the belly, as we call it, and it's not flat, exactly, but it's not all rounded, either. Through the 80s you'll see really arched tops, focusing on the centre. Well, that's almost flat on a vintage Les Paul to accommodate the pickup rings, the bridge. I discovered that there was a sort of flatness to the whole look of an old Les Paul: the screws are flat-headed, the pickup rings and the covers are for most part level with each other, the bridge is pretty close to the top of the guitar, and then the tailpiece..."

"They're all sat on this cool plateaued belly, which, when it gets out toward the edge, drops off pretty quick. [The downward contour radiating outwards from the belly] doesn't go below the binding – though people think it

2. The exact contours of a Les Paul's top are key to its visual appeal, says Tom Murphy, as evidenced in this Murphy Lab 'Burst reissue. He adds that the peak of the arched top is flatter than many would think

does. But as it fans out sideways, the drop from the top of the carving to the bottom is radical and pretty fast, and so it catches light. So when we saw Jimmy Page on stage, there was a crescent-shaped light where we're seeing the carving in the top, and without that definition, you don't see that.

"Today, the carving is a showcase of the top of a Les Paul and I love seeing it. It was really good [in the 50s and 60s] and then it drifted – and in the 70s, they almost lost the carving. There are some guitars from that period where it's totally flat from the bridge to the binding. And a lot of us knew that. So the [accuracy-restoring] things that we're able to do today are like that – the shape of the carving is very, very important."

Tell us something surprising about the Les Paul...

"You know, the first one I ever encountered belonged to a friend. He had bought it and it was like \$4,000, which was a lot of money at that period in time. I can't even say what year it was. But he gave me that guitar because I was playing music professionally. Well, that guitar did not weigh 8lb – and that guitar did not sound good. So I never planned to be a technician, like I said, but now I am. But I will

tell you that if you can't handle 9lb, you don't need to be playing a Les Paul! I don't know what it is, but there is probably a formula [to define] the ideal weight and density of the body and the neck and the top all together.

"We have a lot of engineers here and ways to measure stuff. I had two tops – just the tops – in my hands one time when I was picking tops. And that's just a slab, the two pieces glued together. It's like an inch thick [before carving]. So I had one in one hand and one in the other and I realised these are not even close to the same weight – yet no-one talks about the weight of the top. We measure, we weigh the backs – starting in '93 – and if it didn't weigh 9.5lb or less, we would not use it for the back of a Historic. But that's all we can control. Because once we got it started, we can't adjust it. You're not gonna throw a guitar away if it happens to weigh 10.5lb. But we figured it would control the overall weight if we caught it at the beginning of the back.

"Anyway, I went and weighed these tops: one weighed 3lb and one weighed 6lb. Wow! That's gonna be two entirely different guitars. And they're probably not gonna sound the same because the top that weighs 6lb is the

3. Subtle ageing – or heavy, as desired – is now the preserve of guitars made in the so-called Murphy Lab, as displayed on the rear of this headstock

4. Everything from pickup covers to plastics and hardware is designed to be as accurate as possible – and today's aged reissues have come quite a long way from the replica 'Bursts of the 80s and 90s

exact same size as the 3lb top, but obviously it's much denser. Well, your bridge is screwed into the top, not the back. So what's gonna sound better: the 3lb top or the 6lb top? So ideally, if you put a really dense, tight, heavier top on a light back, it'll balance out."

How has the process of making accurate reissues of vintage Les Pauls evolved?

"When you look at a vintage Les Paul, it's completely beautiful to me – always was. I would just stare at them and think, 'How did they come up with this cool design?' Les Paul himself was an innovator, he broke a lot of [pre-existing] rules with that design and, like I said, the music eventually caught up with the guitar.

"When I saw my first '68 reissued Goldtop in about 1970 I was disappointed to see the wider binding in the cutaway, which I knew didn't exist in the 50s. That's a technical thing because the routing for the binding follows the top, and it's a quarter of an inch

"The carving you see today on our vintage-style Les Pauls is taken off of a real guitar and transferred to digital machines" **TOM MURPHY**



tall at the binding. If you rout it from the back, it's much easier, but when you get to the cutaway, since the top arches up, you'd have to cover all of that with binding. So those guitars are wonderful and very valuable today, but it looked like a compromise. They're really good guitars, but it showed that they weren't trying to replicate 50s guitars; they just had some similar features. The body shape looked like a Les Paul, but if you get right down to it, there were lots of differences. So over the years, aficionados really wanted Gibson to figure it out and nail it.

"So you had various attempts by outside consumers – most of them were guitar dealers – to try to get Gibson to [highly accurately] replicate a 50s Les Paul. Because the project was done from the inside to the outside, when we took on Historic that meant Gibson's gonna figure out how to make the guitar right. We don't need

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“Les Paul was an innovator, he broke a lot of rules with the design and the music eventually caught up with the guitar” **TOM MURPHY**

5. Artist models are also produced in the Murphy Lab, such as this Sergio Vallin 1955 Les Paul Goldtop with Bigsby B7 vibrato and Custombucker at the bridge – a blend of reissue and modded hot-rod Lester

anybody else’s advice. We’ll take real guitars and try to copy them. And that’s what is done in this building today, all day – replicas of 50s guitars.

“I will tell you that if you look at a current Historic Les Paul and you look at the Gibson logo and peghead face, if you look at the top of the capital ‘G’ in the logo, it’s now rounded, exactly like the 50s. Whereas if you look up to 2019, that had a flat sort of look. I wasn’t concerned about it, but I was told we were gonna change it. And it has been changed – and now I can’t unsee it. That’s how committed the company is to detail on all the guitars. It’s like a dream come true for me. When I was involved in ’92 and ’93 with the Historic coming on, I had no idea we’d be making the guitars so accurate today. It’s really great.” 

www.gibson.com

VIEW FROM THE TOP

Gibson CEO JC Curleigh joins us to talk about the past and future of the Les Paul at the Nashville-based company – including its Epiphone Lesters



70 years on, what significance does the Les Paul have for you and the Gibson company today?

“You know, it’s interesting, when you look at iconic brands over time, they always trace back to an iconic product. And if you think about Levi’s, for example, Levi’s wasn’t a brand until the 501 was invented. So the Les Paul was created by an artist – by an innovator, an inventor and an artist – and it has stood the test of time since then as an iconic guitar, not only because of Gibson creating it but because of the journey that artists took it on. And it’s found itself relevant in almost every generation and genre since the start of the Les Paul in the 50s.”

How do you plan to ensure that the Les Paul stays relevant in the next 10 or 20 years of changing musical styles?

“I think there are [a few] ways: one is in how you set up what I would call the Les Paul architecture – and that’s very simple for us. So number one is we declared that we wanted to do the Original Les Paul Collection [but also] have a Modern Collection. So when you think about Original, we’re true to what we did in the 50s and 60s, the Standards; all of the detailing that we put into the Originals that we make today has basically given us the credibility to say we completely understand the importance of the Les Paul and its origins. And we’ve worked hard to bring that back. But we’ve also got the Modern collection, which is basically the Les Paul shape, but it’s putting sort of modern dimensions, features and benefits in – whether that’s weight relief, or whether that’s a neck profile, or some other elements of sound creation in the iconic Les Paul shape.

“The second point is we have an amazing team that engages with artists and puts that guitar in the hands of those artists – and whether it’s an Original or a Modern, it’s the iconic Les Paul shape. We know [that shape] from almost every generation and decade, and from the great players who played it. But we also want to put the Les Paul in the hands of the here and now. Our vision is all about being the most relevant, the most played and the most loved guitar brand. So ‘relevant’ is about [producing] the guitar that artists want; ‘played’ is [about ensuring] it’s the one they play the most; and ‘loved’ is [about understanding], of all the guitars, which do they love the most? We want it to be a Gibson and specifically the Les Paul.”

You’ve succeeded in bringing Epiphone Les Pauls, 335s, and so on, much closer to the experience of playing US-built Gibsons recently. What were the key decisions and changes driving that?

“In some ways everyone thought Epiphone was the sideshow to Gibson, but when you look at the heritage in history of Epiphone, it’s actually older than Gibson – and it was synonymous with premium quality back in the day, and I’m talking in the 1930s and 40s. And then when Gibson and Epiphone came together, it took a journey through different eras... We went through this era recently where you’d see a guitar that was very much taken from the shape of a Gibson – and we can do that because it’s part of our own company – but we called it something different, you know? We called the SG shape the G-400 at Epiphone.

“So, a few years ago, we just sat around and put everything in a room and said, ‘As the premium brand, Gibson, what if we just thought about what a collaboration, internally, with Epiphone would look like?’ And we said, ‘Well, it would look like the Epiphone ‘Inspired By Gibson’ range.’ And then it means we can be very clean and clear that this is now an Epiphone SG, this is an Epiphone Les Paul, this is an Epiphone 330, et cetera. Now, Epiphone still has its Casinos and its Rivas and its own heritage... it still has its Frontiers and its Texans. But in the core range, you can now get a Murphy Lab ’59 reissue at \$10,000, you can get a Custom Shop at \$5,000, you can get a Standard 50s or 60s for \$2,500. But now you can actually get into an Inspired By Gibson Les Paul for \$500 to \$700. So it’s really providing a very meaningful access point to a shape [that can be obtained within Epiphone] Inspired By Gibson to set the guitarist up on their guitar journey.”



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MORE 'PAUL

Whether it's to get better tone, fix tuning problems or make your guitar look as close as possible to a 1950s Goldtop or 'Burst, Les Pauls are among the most modified of all the classic guitar models. Here are our top 20 tips for making your Les Paul the best it can be

Words Huw Price

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 2. This 2014 Gibson Custom Series Billy F Gibbons Goldtop shows off a favourite and easy mod – top-wrapping the strings over the tailpiece. Just watch out for those sharp wraps! bxxxx
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1 TAILPIECE SWAP

The tailpiece can have a noticeable influence on the tone and dynamics of a Les Paul. Throughout the vintage era, Gibson tailpieces were cast using a cheap alloy called zamak that contains aluminium, magnesium and copper, and they're about a quarter of the weight of current Gibson zinc tailpieces.

Zamak produces a warm, woody and airy vintage-style tone, but some may prefer the midrange heft and sustain of zinc or brass tailpieces. Vintage tailpieces are very expensive, but aluminium tailpieces from the likes of Faber, Gotoh and TonePros sound very similar. For the full-on vintage experience, ensure the tailpiece studs are steel and measure the spacing carefully before ordering to avoid imperial/metric mismatches.

2 TOP WRAPPING

Wrapping the strings around the top of stop tailpieces has become increasingly popular, with Billy Gibbons and Joe Bonamassa being high-profile proponents. So, what's it all about? Some refer to a slinkier feel with easier bends due to the reduced break angle over the bridge, and tonal improvements are claimed, too.

Having tried top wrapping and stringing up with the strings passing through the tailpiece in the conventional manner, we find the latter generates more body resonance. Perhaps added downwards pressure on the bridge facilitates tone transfer, and if there is something to the slinkier playing feel, you can achieve similar results by using lighter



2



3

3. From the original ABR-1 bridges made of zamak to later zinc variants, the bridge is critical to tone. But you'll need to check compatibility of components before swapping anything out

strings. Trying it costs nothing, but consider threading the new strings through some ball ends to prevent sharp wraps from coming over the tailpiece and poking your hand.

3 TUNE-O-MATIC

The bridge has a particularly strong effect on tone. Vintage ABR-1s were moulded from zamak and had brass saddles. Originals have become prohibitively expensive, but Kiss My Strings and Four Uncles offer modern equivalents. Aluminium bridges sound similar and are usually cheaper, and vintage obsessives can source threaded brass posts while they're at it.

Nashville bridges are zinc, which sounds somewhat different. If you want to convert a Nashville-equipped Les Paul to ABR-1 specs, you'll need thumbwheel posts with a different diameter. Brown's Guitars Factory, Faber and others offer conversion kits. Alternatively, TonePros bridges come with grub screws that fix onto the posts for optimum stability.

4 BRIDGE SADDLES

1950s ABR-1-equipped Gibsons had nickel-plated brass saddles. Starting with the thinline models, from around 1963 Gibson started using nylon saddles. It may not seem like an obvious tone-enhancing material, but nylon saddles produce a warmer, mellow and sweet tone. Joe Bonamassa has specified a mix of saddles on some signature models, with brass for the wound strings and nylon for the plain ones.

Players seeking extra brightness and definition should investigate titanium saddles. Graph Tech

saddles are also popular among players who tend to snap strings. When ordering saddles, confirm that they are compatible with your bridge, and establish whether your saddle screws are metric or imperial.

5 WRAPTAIL RETHINK

Between 1953 and 1956 all Les Paul Standards had wraptail bridges. Besides little intonation-adjusting grub screws threaded through each 'ear', they're almost identical to stop tailpieces, but they serve as both a tailpiece and bridge. Many consider them sonically superior to the tune-o-matic/tailpiece combo that Gibson introduced on the Les Paul Custom, but Gibson

almost certainly developed the ABR-1 to improve on the wraptail's approximate intonation.

Like stop tailpieces, vintage wraptails were cast from zamak, but aluminium offers a reasonable alternative and brass offers fatter mids and extra sustain. Modern options combine vintage looks with mouldings that provide some degree of intonation compensation. Others have individually adjustable saddles for the best of both worlds. Also consider locking studs that prevent wraptails from tilting forward. And if you're lucky enough to own an all original and therefore unplayable '52 or early '53 Les Paul, MojoAxe and Glaser offer solutions.

6 50S WIRING

On 50s Les Pauls, the guitar's controls can be used without negatively impacting its sound. Newer Les Pauls can become muddy when volume knobs are backed off, which compromises your ability to clean up an overdriven amp from the guitar itself and achieve a range of classic tones.

6. The way that the controls were wired on 50s Les Pauls offered more clarity when volume was backed off

It may not seem like an obvious tone-enhancing material, but nylon saddles produce a warmer, mellow and sweet tone



6

During the 50s, Gibson soldered the tone capacitor to the volume's centre tag (output) rather than the outer (input) tag. Simply put, there's always some treble bleed through a tone circuit, and with a capacitor connected to a pot's input, the signal to treble bleed ratio skews towards the latter when volume is backed off. So if your capacitors are soldered to the outer lugs, try resoldering them to the centre tags.

7 TONE CAPACITORS

Early Sprague 'bumble bee' tone capacitors were paper-in-oil, but by the late 50s they were being made with plastic film. Some 'Bursts were fitted with ceramic capacitors in 1960. Very subtle differences may be discernible if you have good ears, but the impetus behind capacitor 'upgrades' is often cosmetic, rather than sonic.

The standard value is 0.022µF, but if you buy New Old Stock, the actual value and stated value may differ. Experiment with different values, such as 0.01µF or 0.015µF to reduce treble bleed and open up dull neck pickups. Conversely, a 0.047µF, 0.068µF or 0.1µF may sweeten the top-end of a harsh bridge pickup. Try hooking up a bunch of capacitors to a rotary switch to make A/B comparisons and choose the ones that work for you.

8 PICKUP SWAPPING Of all the contributory factors, pickups have the biggest influence on the tone of any Les Paul. Pickup swapping is a huge topic and clearly beyond the scope of this feature. Those chasing vintage tone can choose from a bewildering range of options promising faithful reproductions of 1950s PAFs or even 'improvements' on the theme. But relatively few pickup makers get to hear genuine PAFs in vintage Les Pauls, so regard these claims with caution.

Metal players may prefer active pickups, such as the EMGs Zakk Wylde favours. Rockabilly players can get PAF and P-90-sized Filter'Trons from TV Jones and The Creamery, and Oil City offers a PAF-sized Firebird pickup. Plenty of manufacturers offer PAF-sized P-90s, and hum-cancelling P-90s are widely available. For the ultimate in versatility, the Seymour Duncan P-Rails combines a P-90, humbucker and blade single coil in one PAF-sized package.



9 PICKUP MODS The modular construction of P-90s and humbuckers makes them relatively easy to modify, and it's a cheaper option than pickup replacement. Swapping magnets is a great starting point because every grade of Alnico sounds different. Alnico III can give P-90s an early 50s tone and make a humbucker less aggressive. Alnico V and ceramic magnets sound brighter and will make pickups louder and more aggressive. You can also change pole screws, with low-carbon steel sounding sweeter and high-carbon having more treble bite.

P-90s' fixing screws and humbucker bobbin screws are usually brass, but they can be changed to steel for fatter mids and extra cut. Removing thick metal covers from humbuckers will improve clarity. You can leave them off or replace them with thinner and lighter covers. Lastly, oven baking can remove some of the potting wax to provide a tad more vintage-style microphony, but it's best left to a professional.

10 POTS FOR PAULS Whether your Les Paul has P-90s or humbuckers, 500kohms has always been the stock value for potentiometers. Since both types



7. The well-known Sprague 'Bumblebee' caps, originally a paper-in-oil design but later plastic film

8. Classic PAF tone not your thing? Why not take an active leaf out of Zakk Wylde's book and try EMGs?

of pickup can sound slightly dark in comparison to Fender single coils, the presence lift provided by 500k pots enhances clarity and definition. Nevertheless, Gibson installed 300k pots for a considerable period of time, and if your Les Paul sounds muddy, check that 500k pots are installed before falling down the pickup-swapping rabbit hole.

Vintage pots generally read north of 500k and of the modern replacements we have tried, Bare Knuckle Pickups' 550k pots with a 10 per cent taper are the closest in tone and response. If you're less fussy, any 500k CTS potentiometer with a split shaft

The modular construction of P-90s and humbuckers makes them relatively easy to modify, and it's cheaper than pickup replacement

will do the job, but decide if long or short shafts are required. When upgrading Les Pauls made in Asia, you'll need to widen the shaft holes and buy US-spec control knobs to install CTS potentiometers. Push-pull and push-push switching pots are also preferable to drilling holes in the body for activating non-standard pickup settings.

9. Alnico is an acronym comprising three different metallic elements: aluminum, nickel and cobalt. This USA Slash Les Paul has exposed-coil Seymour Duncan Alnico II Pro pickups



11 CONTROL WIRING

Pre-assembled wiring harnesses have become popular because they 'drop in' with minimal soldering required. They're a great option for replacing printed circuit boards and generally feature CTS potentiometers hand-wired with high-quality capacitors. A number of parts suppliers now offer these in various configurations, so check out Six String Supplies, House Of Tone Pickups, Monty's Guitars, James' Home Of Tone and Radioshop Pickups.

Stock Les Paul wiring is fairly straightforward, but pre-wired harnesses really come into their own for customised controls. If you need phase switching, coil-tapping or series/parallel switching, then a pre-wired harness makes a lot of sense. Six String Supplies' Jimmy Page harness is a great option for the most complex Les Paul wiring setup of all.

12 CUT-OUT FIX

In the middle position, either volume control will kill the output when it's turned all the way down with stock Les Paul wiring. Most Les Paul players happily live with it, and it allows you to do that staccato pulsing trick using the toggle switch. On the other hand, it does limit pickup-blending potential.

If you'd prefer your volume controls to function independently, simply reverse the wires on just

one of the volume pots. The pickup's hot connection moves to the volume control's centre tag, the switch wire goes to the outer tag, and the ground connections are left unchanged.

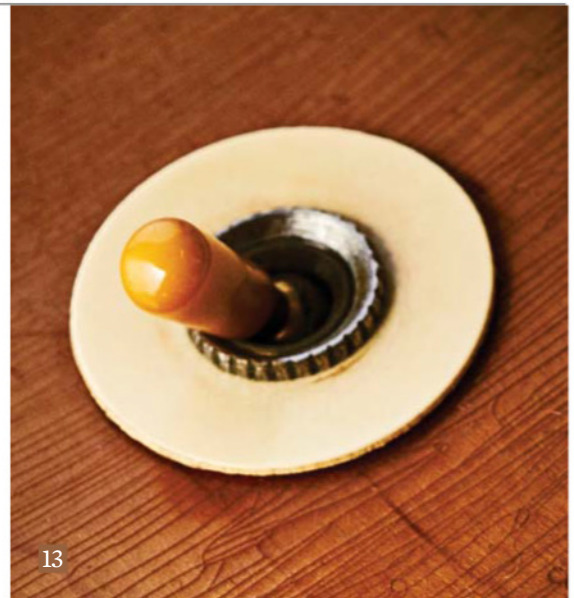
13 SWITCHING SWITCHES

Switches are subjected to mechanical stress and can occasionally fail. Some don't feel that good and others are prone to noise. Whatever the issue, upgrading to a USA-spec Switchcraft can improve things. Wiring them up is fiddly, but pre-wired switches are available from Six String Supplies, and Fake 58 offers excellent vintage replica switch tips.

If your guitar was made in Asia, the existing switch hole may need to be enlarged. Also check out the Free-Way six-position switch, which allows you to access all those tricky wiring settings from the switch rather than push-pull pots. Jimmy Page has one in his Les Paul Custom.

14 NUT STUFF

There are various reasons to consider nut replacement, but the most valid is improving tuning stability. Les Paul strings are obliged to veer off at angles between the nut and tuners, and to make this work, the nut needs to be expertly cut to minimise friction. This is why so many Les Pauls tend to go out of tune and tuners are



13

There are various reasons to consider nut replacement, but the most valid is improving tuning stability and playability

often needlessly changed when the nut is the actual cause.

Replacing a nut requires specialist files, but it can greatly improve tuning stability and playability. Choose between Corian, Graph Tech, bone or mammoth tusk. Metal players may prefer brass, and the vintage-inclined should try nylon. If you're cursed with perfect pitch, consider a Buzz Feiten conversion. Nut material does impact tone, but only when you're playing open strings.

13. If you're seeking the classic vintage Les Paul Standard look, as typified in this pic, vintage-replica switch tips are available

14. Suffering with tuning problems? The tuners themselves may not be the culprit, but instead the nut

15 PLASTIC PARTS

An aftermarket-parts industry now offers plastic fittings of varying quality. Most are targeted at players who want their Les Pauls to look more authentically vintage, and plenty of high-end R8, R9, Collectors Choice and Murphy Lab models end up being cosmetically enhanced. M69 pickup rings are especially fetishised, with die-hards insisting on butyrate plastic and all the vintage-correct mould markings.

In contrast, some opt for bright colours, customised pickguards, or dispense with plastic parts in favour of wood or metal replacements. Whether you're creating a vintage replica or shooting for an individual or contemporary look, no specialist tools are required. But just to be clear, upgrading plastic parts won't improve your tone.



14



16

16 TUNERS

Players have been swapping tuners on Les Pauls for so long that even in the vintage 'Burst market, an old set of Grover or Schaller tuners isn't necessarily detrimental to a guitar's value. But DIY die-cast tuner conversions often resulted in headstock damage, as holes were drilled out to accommodate wider units. Conversion bushings allow you to reinstall vintage-style tuners – and for that shrunken keystone look, check out Fake 58.

A decent set of vintage-style tuners should do a more than adequate job, but die-cast tuners may feel more precise. Added mass can enhance sustain at the expense of dynamics and neck heaviness, but it's pretty subtle. Also consider locking tuners if you break a lot of strings.

17 BIGSBY INSTALLATION

Just as the 80s was the decade of the locking vibrato, the 60s was the decade of the Bigsby, and many vintage Les Pauls ended up getting 'snake bit'. Les Pauls do look undeniably cool with a Bigsby and you'll need a B7 with the front roller to achieve the necessary break angle over the bridge.

These days, there's no need to drill extra holes to fit a Bigsby. Check out Vibramate brackets, which attach in place of the stop tailpiece, and at the back the hinge fixes to the body via the strap button crew. It's a quick and easy install that's fully reversible.

Using keen ears and a screwdriver, you can make those pickups really sing and your Les Paul may seem easier to play

18 VIBRATO OPTIONS

For Les Paul players requiring a decent vibrato, there are now options besides a Bigsby, and those nightmare-inducing Floyd Rose conversions are hopefully consigned to the past. There are several options to choose from, including the Duesenberg Les Trem, Goldō LT2, Schaller 'Tremolo Les Paul', Stetsbar Stop Tail and Floyd Rose FRX.

These are mounted using the existing stop tailpiece bushings, and besides the FRX's optional locking nut, no additional holes are required. These vibratos are only suitable for non-wraptail Les Pauls, and if you change your mind, they're fully reversible.



17

16. Factory fitted on many Les Paul Customs, Grovers were and are a frequent retro-fit on used Les Pauls – so common in fact that they are often tolerated on the vintage market

17. A retro-fitted Bigsby on a glorious player's grade early 50s Les Paul Custom owned by Barrie Cadogan, see p.118

20. Fine-tuning the height adjustment of your pickup and its pole screws will yield optimal tone and may improve playing feel as well

19 JACK PLATE

All guitars have their weak spots and the jack socket plate is even more prone to breakage than the headstock. After all, most jack plates are made from thin and brittle plastic. Fortunately, it's far less traumatic and much easier to fix when they do get damaged.

For a permanent repair, ditch the plastic and fit a metal plate instead. You should be able to find one that lines up perfectly with the existing screw holes. If you're keen to retain the classic look, fix a metal plate under the plastic one for added strength.

20 PICKUP ADJUSTMENT

P-90 and PAF-style pickups really need to be carefully set up to bring out their best tones. P-90s often have springs or foam on the underside, which allow for easy height adjustment. Once you've settled on the optimum distance from the strings, we'd suggest measuring the gap and replacing the springs or foam with wood shims. With humbuckers, the end screws are your only option.

Once you've decided on the overall pickup height and achieved an even balance between low to top E strings, try finessing the string-to-string response by adjusting the pole screws. Using keen ears and a screwdriver, you can make those pickups really sing and your Les Paul may seem easier to play. **G**



20



MAKING HISTORY SINCE 1958



Jimi Hendrix & Noel Redding
talk strings with Rotosound's
Alan Marcuson. March 1st, 1967.
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Legendary tone starts with authentic strings.
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Peter Frampton

From early pop stardom with The Herd to releasing the biggest album on the planet with *Frampton Comes Alive!* and finding salvation in Bowie's band, Peter reflects on a rollercoaster career and the darker side of fame...

Words David Mead Portrait Austin Lord

Peter Frampton is currently on a farewell tour having been forced into retirement owing to the onset of Inclusion Body Myositis, a degenerative condition that affects the muscles and looks to end his playing career for good. However, rising above the tragedy, he's in high spirits when we strike up our Zoom call. We mention that it's been a long time since we saw him perform on this side of the Atlantic: "We were supposed to be there in May 2020," he says ruefully. "Then, of course, the pandemic shut us all down..." And thus the performances rescheduled for this November in the UK take on an extra level of significance.

Once hailed as the most famous artist in the world, he tells us how those heady peaks were a mixed blessing and very nearly his undoing. But every story has its beginnings and Peter's starts in the late 1950s...

What got you interested in playing guitar in the first place?

"Probably Buddy Holly, Eddie Cochran and Lonnie Donegan first. Lonnie was the first person I saw on

TV doing skiffle, then when he came out with *Rock Island Line*, it was starting to be more rockabilly. Then Cliff and The Shadows: I became obsessed. I wanted to be in The Shadows from when I was eight years old. From *Living Doll* on, it was like every kid that was musical wanted to be Hank Marvin. They were the instrumental Beatles. I can still play just about any Shadows number you'd care to mention, note for note."

What was your first instrument? Obviously, you would have wanted a Strat, but they wouldn't have been available in Britain at the time.

"No. I mean, the most I could have hoped for at the very beginning was a Höfner, a Futurama III or something. But no, when I was seven, my dad and I went up to the attic to get out our summer holiday luggage and I noticed this little leather case. I didn't know whether it was a violin or what it was. I said, 'What's that?' and he said, 'Oh, your grandmother gave me this – she thought you might want to learn to play it one day. It's a banjolele.' My dad got it out and played a couple of chords

on it, then I think we left it up there for a few months until I said, 'Dad, can we get that instrument down?' That's when I started. He showed me *Hang Down Your Head Tom Dooley*, *Michael*, *Row The Boat*, that kind of stuff. Once I'd mastered those pretty quickly, my parents thought, 'Wow, he picked that up quick.' I think they knew pretty early on they were in for trouble."

And it was from here that you progressed onto guitar?

"Yes, when it was time for Christmas – it would have been 1958 – I asked Father Christmas for a guitar. I got a guitar and the world was my oyster at that point. I wanted to electrify it as soon as I could. I got all the magazines, the Selmer magazines, the Hofner, the 'this, that, whatever'. I looked and there was a pickup that you could get to amplify an acoustic so I got one. Once I got the pickup, I said, 'Dad, I need an amplifier.' He said, 'Well, I think we can plug you into the living room radio.' He found out that even in those days there was an auxiliary input in the back. Bingo. I had an electric guitar – that was it."

Were you eventually caught up in the British blues boom?

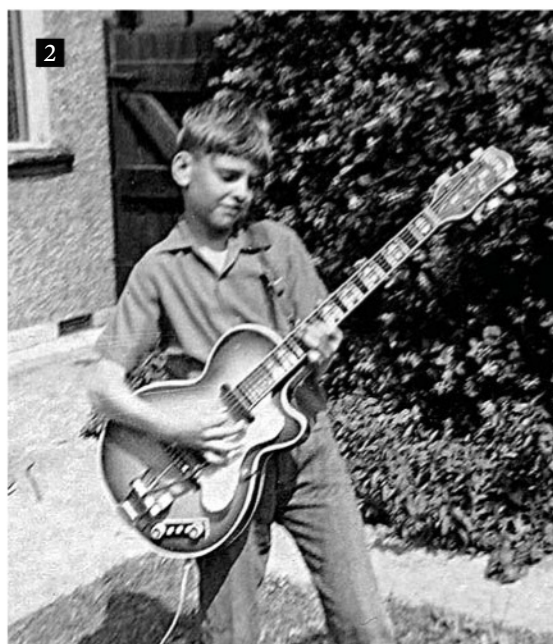
“Oh, yes. When I was in my teens, before The Herd, I was going up to see John Mayall’s Bluesbreakers with Eric Clapton. I saw Graham Bond with Ginger Baker and Jack Bruce and Zoot Money’s Big Roll Band with Andy [Summers] on guitar. It was just a phenomenal time for music then because it was all so new, so there were no rules.

“We relied on the seamen coming in from America to bring albums because the BBC obviously wasn’t playing what we wanted to hear. You’d have Mantovani and then something else and then you might have a Cliff Richard track or something. I think we all relied on everybody saying, ‘Have you heard this album? I’ll lend it to you.’ You’d have to give it back, but unfortunately I still have George Underwood’s Coral Records’ *Buddy Holly*, the very first album, George being David Bowie’s best friend for life and mine, too. I better bring that album with me [to the UK] to give it back to him. It’s only been 60 years...”

You ended up joining The Herd in 1966. How did that come about?

“Andrew Brown and Gary Taylor from The Herd came to see me play. We knew each other anyway because I’d sat in with The Herd when I was a little upstart. After the show they said, ‘Look, we’re reorganising the band. Would you come and play rhythm guitar for the summer?’ Then when I joined the band, it seemed like it changed almost overnight. They put me on lead guitar. Gary switched from lead guitar to bass. At the end of the summer they asked me, ‘Would you join the band?’ I said, ‘Well, my dad’s a teacher and my mum works in a school, so I don’t think that’s going to be happening,’ because I’d planned on going to music college, going back to the sixth form and all that stuff and getting my A Levels.

“I found a pickup that could amplify an acoustic. And when my dad plugged me into the living room radio, bingo – that was it”

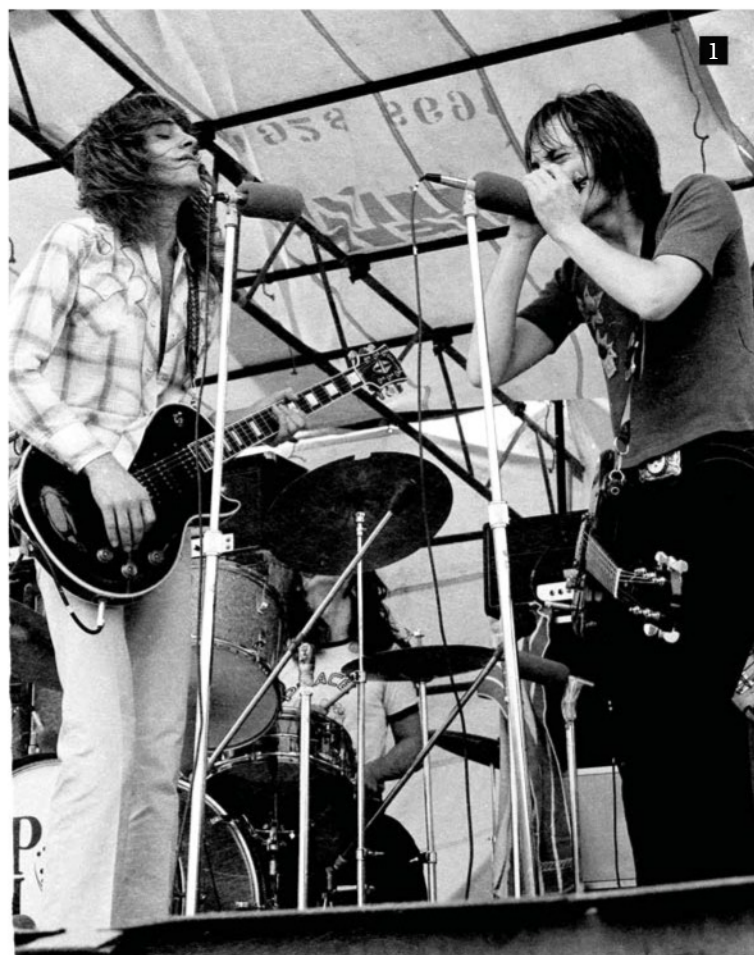


“Anyway, I really wanted to join the band so I popped the question to Mum and Dad together. Dad had smoke coming out from his eyes, his ears, his mouth, everywhere. Mum was going, ‘Leave it with me.’ They came back to me a little later and said, ‘Okay. We know this is what you’re going to do anyway so we’re going to say yes.’ My dad said, ‘But you’ve got to earn £15 a week minimum otherwise the deal is off.’”

After quite a lot of success with The Herd, you joined Humble Pie.

“When I saw the Small Faces on *Ready, Steady, Go!* doing *What’cha Gonna Do About It* live, my jaw was on the floor because you couldn’t help but catch the fact that Steve [Marriott] was amazing. I said to myself, ‘I want to join the Small Faces.’ Anyway, that wasn’t to be, but I left The Herd and I did get to go and do this week of sessions in Paris for Johnny Hallyday with Glyn Johns being the engineer/producer and Small Faces being the band and me being another guitar player. I think at that point Steve really wanted me in the band.

“Anyway, we flew back from Paris with Glyn and he said, ‘Let me just play you this album. We just recorded and mixed this in 12 days. It’s a new band, but you might know the guitar player, Jimmy Page.’ He puts on *Led Zeppelin I* in his living room. Again, jaw to the floor but not so much for the guitar – it was Bonham that just floored me. As it got to the end



1. Humble Pie performs at London’s Hyde Park free festival in July 1971 (left to right): Peter, Jerry Shirley and Steve Marriott. Watch out for the eight-CD *The A&M CD Box Set (1970-1975)* released on 2 December!

2. A young Peter poses with a Bigsby-loaded Höfner Club 60, which he went on to use in his first band, The Truebeats, in 1962

3. Taking centre stage aboard Joe Bonamassa’s *Keeping The Blues Alive At Sea* in August 2019



of side one, the phone rang. It was Steve. He'd just got off stage at the Alexandra Palace and had done his last gig. He said, 'Can I join your band?' We had Greg Ridley and Jerry Shirley, and with a snap of the fingers we had a band. That was it. Humble Pie was formed. By the next week we were in Jerry Shirley's parents' front room with little tiny amps, practising."

It must have been a tough decision to leave Humble Pie?

"Little things really are hard for me. Big things, I can really make a decision. I don't think I'm cold-hearted or anything; I think that I'm able to change on a dime if I have to, if pushed. I just felt that the way we were going, which I loved, was a little harder-edged. I was riding the riffs just as much as Steve. I mean, *I Don't Need No Doctor* is my riff. *Stone Cold Fever*, my riff, *One Eyed Trouser Snake Rumba*,

my riff; Steve's lyrics, though. Steve and I were starting to butt heads a little bit. I think I was coming into my own. Even though I knew that *[Performance] Rockin' The Fillmore* would be our biggest record so far, I had no idea it would be their first gold record because I'd done a lot of the mixing with Eddie Kramer in New York for that album.

"But no, I just decided in the end that this would be the best time, before they really break. Otherwise, if I had stayed in the band, I would have still been in Humble Pie, I think. It was just I wanted to be in charge of my own destiny finally and not have the band."

After four solo albums, you released the phenomenally successful *Frampton Comes Alive!* in 1976. It must be difficult to put into words the impact that had on your career.

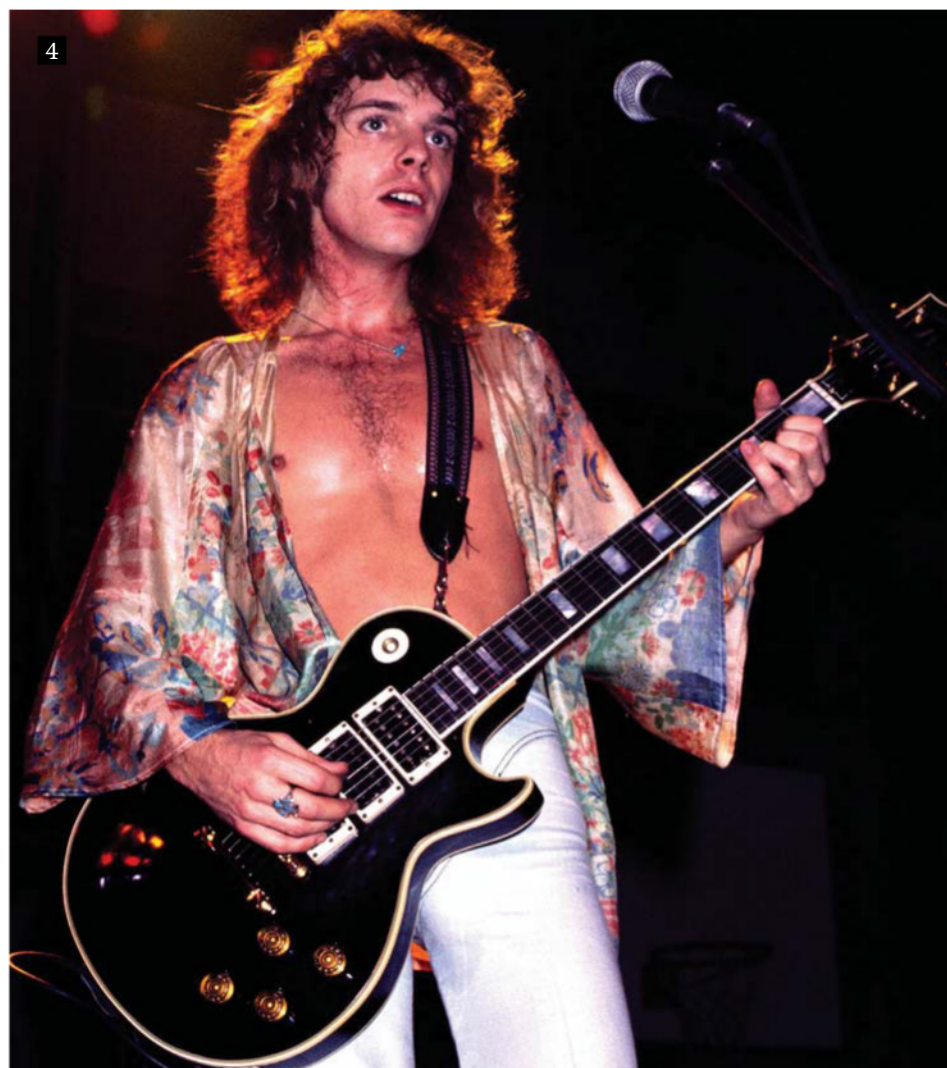
"I have to use the word 'surreal' because four or five years

4. After making the decision to leave Humble Pie, Peter launched a solo career that led up to the phenomenally successful *Frampton Comes Alive!* in 1976

beforehand I thought I'd made the biggest mistake of my career by leaving Humble Pie because *Rockin' The Fillmore* was jumping up the charts all over the world. I thought, 'This is it. I've done well so far, but this is it'.

"But it was all up to me at that point, I realised. I thought, 'If I play my cards right and I go out and do a lot of touring for this, maybe this will be my first gold record.' A week later it was a gold record. It came out and just exploded. All of a sudden I realised that I had a lot of friends that I didn't have before. Everybody had their two cents to put in, especially the people that were rubbing their hands together like

"Frampton Comes Alive!' was a blessing and a curse... In the end, though, I'm so proud of it because it made me fight for my career"



this because I suddenly became the hen that laid the golden egg.

"I went away over Christmas to the islands just to get some sun as I knew we'd be touring all year. I came back and not only did we have one show at Cobo Hall [Detroit], which I think is 8,000 capacity, we had three. Within 10 days it had gone from one to three shows. Then we sold out two shows at Madison Square Garden. Then I got the call: 'Are you sitting down? The album is No 1.' I couldn't believe it. But on the next call I was told that I'd broken Carole King's *Tapestry* album record and I was now the biggest-selling album of all time. And that's when I got nervous..."

Why was that?

"Because I knew that I couldn't follow it. That album took me six years to write; it was a live 'best of' up until that point. There is a number from Humble Pie, *Shine On*, I cherry-picked *Wind Of Change*, *Frampton's Camel*, *Somethin's Happening*... I felt I'd lost before I'd started after that phone call. That was when I think I started to over-imbibe and wanted to numb myself. The golden hen was now constipated..."

"When I heard that the album was No 1, I think I went and sat down and wrote *I'm In You*, which is a great song. It shouldn't have been

the first single [of the album of the same name], but it's a great song. It's a great ballad because I was so up on everything. Then once I'd heard that I was the biggest, I hated hearing that. I think it shut me down creatively more than anything.

"Truth be known, I should have probably commissioned every great writer there is and sat down and written with all of them. That would have been the only way to have dealt with that situation. I didn't want to make [the album] *I'm In You*. I didn't even want to hand it in. I didn't like it. I knew it wasn't good enough, but everybody was 'rush, rush, rush'. Everybody, one by one, would come to me with their own hidden agenda and say, 'The longer you wait, the harder it's going to be,' and all that stuff. I wanted to wait until I had the best material I could come up with, however long that would have taken. It could have taken a year, it could have taken two years. Various things

happened. I lost a cassette tape that had a load of ideas on it – that was devastating to me. I remembered some of them but not all of them. The bulk of my new material that I had up until that point disappeared. It was a painful record to make."

Was *I'm In You* critically well received, do you remember?

"I don't believe so. I don't read a lot of reviews, especially when I know they might not be good. Even though *I'm In You* was a huge single in the States and the album went right up the charts straight away, things dropped off pretty quickly. The *I'm In You* tour was fine, that was good. Then after that, when that had sunk in, I think that's when I started to lose a lot of audience. That was the situation. I felt like I was in a sinking ship."

Looking back, what was that level of fame generated by *Frampton Comes Alive!* like for you?

5. Peter rocks out with Joe Bonamassa on an epic version of *While My Guitar Gently Weeps* in 2019. Check out the video on YouTube!

"It's very enjoyable to start with because you go to the front of the line, you get into the club, now you're a celebrity or whatever you are. But it was the biggest album in the world so I guess that comes with it. Everybody wanted a piece of me, whether it was an autograph or whether it was some money. I was glad that we were on the road as much as we were at that time because I had the guys around me. But at that point, management was trying to separate me from my band so my band didn't give me any bad info as far as they were concerned. My band was threatened and all kinds of stuff. Crew members were threatened, basically, not to talk to me. It was a lonely period.

"I remember my brother came to see me on the *I'm In You* tour in '77. I was sitting in this ginormous suite. One of the high roller suites, whatever, somewhere in Vegas. I'm there with my tiny room service

PHOTO BY JOBYSESSIONS





"I'm a musician first and foremost – and David Bowie inviting me to record and tour with him gave me the credibility back I felt I'd lost"

FRAMPTON ALIVE!

Peter on his current stage rig

"It's three Marshall cabinets, dry/wet situation. It's a stereo rig, it's enormous. I feel embarrassed that it's so big... but you need to have a big rig to be able to do all that, and lots of effects. There are about eight or nine guitars that I'll use in a show, acoustics as well as electrics. Basically, I have an old 70s Marshall head that's been modified to drive all the effects and to come out in stereo either side of the one Marshall cabinet, which is dry in the middle. It's very involved, but it sounds godly. I've worked on it for years and years until I got to what I really liked. I could just as well come up there with a little 2x12 combo and a couple of floor effects and do the same thing, but why when I've got all that beautiful stuff? I want it to be good."

Is your Les Paul Custom still your main guitar?

"Yes and no. Yes, for the numbers that it recorded with *Somethin's Happening* and *Lines On My Face*, *Do You Feel [Like We Do]*, *[I Wanna] Go To The Sun*, numbers like that are on the live record. But on numbers I've done since, I have the '64 ES-335 Gibson, the Freddie King year, which is an incredible guitar. If I could only have one guitar other than the Custom, that would be it. A 335 just about covers every aspect of what a guitarist does. It's not a Fender, but I don't use Fenders that much – I'm a humbucker guy."

There has been some talk on the internet recently about the switching system on your Custom. Does it differ from a standard three-pickup Les Paul?

"It's very simple. Forget about the middle pickup for a minute. If you think about the bridge and the neck pickup and the selector switch, the selector switch still works exactly the same way with those two. You can have one on, the other on or both on. They are then only wired to the top volume. They're both wired to one volume and one tone. Then the middle pickup is just wired directly to the bottom volume. There is no switch for it, but I can blend it in. It changes it from a Gibson to a fat Strat because you bring that middle pickup in like a Stratocaster. It's in and out or it's on its own because I can turn the other two off and just use it, which is another sound. You don't have time to get bored with it. You can change the sound on a whim."

tray and all I hear is the knife and fork on the plate. It reminded me of that scene at the end of [the movie] *2001: A Space Odyssey*. That was me now. Then my brother came in and sat on the other side of my table, and I started crying. I didn't want to be on this tour, even though I've just said I loved being around the guys. But I could feel it slipping away. I was so tired. I was exhausted."

How did you deal with the vacuum that happened after that time?

"It was a very difficult period for me because I had it in the palm of my hands, as it were. But once you experience it, you go, 'Oh, well that's good. I like that.' Instead of going and working with as many writers as I could and getting a great producer in or having a different producer for every track on the next record, I just went back and thought, 'Well I've done it all myself, I'll do it all again.' But I didn't have the material. We were doing a lot of covers on the next record, *Where I Should Be*. It was hard. I got let go by A&M in '80/'81, after *The Art Of Control*, which was obviously done by an artist who had no control over himself. I bottomed out there – I'm sure substances didn't help. I have a family history of depression, it all comes into it. When you go that high, there is a pretty good likelihood that you're going to go that low. I felt like I was starting again from a negative position."

How did you come to do the tour with David Bowie?

"I did a record for Atlantic called *Premonition* [in 1986]. It still wasn't a great record. It had much better material, but wasn't where I should have been. That's the album David Bowie listened to. He would check me out and he said, 'Can you come and play some guitar for me?' That's when I went to Switzerland and we recorded *Never Let Me Down*. Then he asked if I would be one of the guitar players on the *Glass Spider* tour, which blew me away. Finally, having been on the same stage the same evening many times before, I was going to be Dave's guitar player. He could have chosen anybody. He'd had Stevie Ray Vaughan the album before, but he chose me. I can never thank him enough for that. He knew what he was doing for me before I knew what he was doing for me. It was a Dave plan."



It sounds like you were much happier in that role.

"Oh, yes. That's my comfy chair. I've always been more comfortable playing guitar, not singing – maybe the occasional song like in *Humble Pie* – but playing behind a great singer, a great frontman. But I wanted to do everything myself. It's a juxtaposition between being in a band and following the consensus, and being a solo artist and making your own mistakes. I wasn't doing very well at it and I think it was because the shock and awe of *...Comes Alive!* was always on my shoulder going, 'Remember this?' I've said it before, but it was a blessing and a curse."

"In the end, I'm so proud of it. It was a definite blessing because it made me fight for my career. It made me get up, brush myself off and do it again, work myself up the ladder. David inviting me to do the album and tour changed my credibility; I got my credibility back that I felt I'd lost when *I'm In You* came out. A teenybopper star, his length of career is about 18 months, whereas a musician's career is a lifetime. I'm a musician first and foremost. David gave me back that credibility to continue and bring people back to me."

After such a long and varied career, is there a moment that you'll always remember if you could just pick one?

"Meeting George Harrison. I'm up in town at The Ship Pub on Wardour

6. After being diagnosed with the autoimmune disease Inclusion Body Myositis a few years ago, Peter has embarked on a farewell tour

7. Peter in his "comfy chair" role, accompanying David Bowie on the *Glass Spider* tour in 1987

Street [in Soho, London] with Terry Doran, who was John Lennon's assistant for years, and we're just catching up. He said, 'Do you want to come and meet Geoffrey?' I said, 'Geoffrey who?' He said, 'Harrison.' I said, 'Oh, they've all got code names, have they?' I was shaking, literally. My first Beatles sighting or meeting. We walked into Trident Studios and there was George. He looks up from the console and he goes, 'Hello, Pete.' It was unbelievable that he knew who I was – a Beatle knew who I was. He comes round and we start talking. He goes, 'Hey, do you want to play? We just wrote a song downstairs for Doris Troy. I'm producing her first album in a while. Come down and play.'

"I thought I was going to wake up and it was a dream. He gave me what I now know was Lucy, the red Les Paul that he used, but, more importantly, it was the one that Eric Clapton played on *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*. As I went to move my chair, I looked round and sitting right next to me was Stephen Stills. He had just written the song with Doris and George. Now I'm totally nervous. Anyway, we start it and I'm playing a very quiet rhythm. George goes, 'No. Pete, I want you to play lead.' I thought, 'Oh crikey.' I just played all these licks in the intro and between the vocals and everything. After the session, he came over to me and said, 'Can you make the rest of the sessions?' It blew my mind." **G**

www.frampton.com

PHOTO BY BET ROBERTS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



Naked Ambition

Some two decades since they first appeared, Gibson's Faded series instruments are back in what-you-see-is-what-you-get style: no options and not a lot of finish, either. What's going on?

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Phil Barker





GIBSON LES PAUL STANDARD 50S FADED, LES PAUL STANDARD 60S FADED & SG STANDARD '61 FADED MAESTRO VIBROLA

£2,169, £2,169 & £1,899

CONTACT **Gibson** WEB www.gibson.com

Since coming under new ownership in late 2019, the good ship Gibson is now very much back on track making some of the best guitars we've seen for many a year. With a focus on quality and consistency, the uptake on the new-spec models from the standard Gibson USA lines – not to mention the 'pandemic effect' – has meant new models have been scarce. Until now, with the release of three new Faded electrics you see here, and three acoustics that we'll feature in our next issue.

"The original run of Les Paul Standard Faded models began shipping in 2005 and shipped into 2009," clarifies Lee Bartram, Gibson EU's head of marketing and cultural influence. "There have been some similar limited runs since. Over the years the Faded models have built up an amazing

reputation, so we are bringing the Faded line-up back: the fan favourite is back."

Part of the appeal of the original Faded concept was the more simple satin 'worn' finishes – a faster manufacturing process – that allowed a lower price. But these new models seem to have a slightly different aim. "When the original Faded series debuted in 2005, the idea was to create a very vintage vibe without a glossy finish while streamlining some of the specs," continues Lee. "Players and collectors took to them because of the vintage look and because they provided the perfect platform for modification and historic parts upgrades. The finish of those original-run instruments was intended to have a worn look, but this time we did not want to break the lacquer – just provide the vintage vibe."

Concept and finish aside, the specification of these three new models is very similar to the gloss-finish models we've been seeing since late 2019.

Les Paul Standard 50s & 60s Faded

Along with minor details such as the absence of pickup covers and pickguards on these Les Pauls (which will be included as case candy), the major difference is the *au naturel* satin nitro finish, and there's just the single colour for each that you see here. Our 50s Les Paul Standard is spec'd with a Honey Burst finish, although there's precious little colour to the stained top. Our 60s Vintage Cherry Sunburst has some deeper red colour but looks positively anaemic next to our much



more richly hued 2019 Les Paul Classic reference in its Heritage Cherry Sunburst. Both have AA-grade flamed tops with bold striped figure and a few 'dirty' flecks: classic Gibson. Tops aside, the rest of the mahogany body and neck backs have the same thin finish, albeit with what appears to be a light walnut stain or grain-filler rubbed on.

As we've said many times before, a natural finish leaves nowhere to hide, so any tooling marks or gaps in joints are instantly visible. And perhaps this Faded concept is another way to remind people that Gibson really has its act together. Outwardly at least, the craft is excellent. The two-piece bodies are immaculately centre-joined, and without any weight relief aren't over-heavy (although the 60s LP is the weightiest), while neck angles on all three appear very consistent. Little if any actual grain filler is used, which is most evident on the 'open pore' appearance of the SG; both Pauls are very slightly smoother feeling to the touch. The top edge binding on the Les Pauls is left a little sharp, likewise the fingerboard binding, which does give the impression these were grabbed off the production line with effectively just a sealer finish and sent directly to assembly.

1. Along with the 'unfinished' vibe, the Burstbucker pickups on all three new Faded models are uncovered

2. On our two Les Paul models, only the figured maple tops are coloured; the mahogany backs and necks have what appears to be a light mid-brown stain/grain filler



3

3. As with the gloss-finish models, the tuners are different. On the 50s model we get these Kluson-style Vintage Deluxe types, while on the 60s we get Grover Rotomatics

Aside from different pickup specs and the fuller neck carve of the 50s, it's only the tuners that differ: the 50s goes for vintage-style Gibson Deluxe types; the 60s has Grover Rotomatics – just like the standard gloss-finish models.

SG Standard '61 Faded Maestro Vibrola

The Faded trio is completed by an all-mahogany Cherry SG and at least this has some depth to its colour, which is applied to the whole body and neck. It is rather oddly named as this would still have been a Les Paul Standard in 1961; it didn't become 'SG' until later, in 1963, after Les and Gibson had parted company. A '61 Les Paul/SG would have also featured the sideways Vibrola – most famous, basically, for not working. Thankfully, the later long Vibrola is fitted here and that works just fine. "The '61 SG is a long-standing model at Gibson USA, made for over 30 years," Lee Bartram tells us. "It is also the best-selling model in that time, so we didn't want to change the nomenclature,

rather offer it as fans knew it. And calling it an 'SG Standard 60s' wouldn't make sense because of the different specs and pickguard styles used in that range."

What can't be disputed is the change in design compared with the original Les Paul, which is massive. The Les Paul's depth was 50mm at the rim with an overall depth of 61mm at the apex of the carved top, while the slab body here is thin at 34mm, the famous edge chamfering making it seem even thinner. The neck joins the body at the 22nd fret and, aside from the small heel, it is completely unsupported along its length, as opposed to the Les Paul's 16th fret neck-to-body join. The quarter-sawn mahogany used for the neck does result in a pretty stiff structure with little flex – not always the case with SGs – although, again, that edge binding to the rosewood 'board is crying out for a little final sanding to smooth the ledges on either side.

Neck profile and pickups are the same as the 60s Les Paul, but we have those vintage-style Gibson Deluxe tuners of the 50s here.

The oh-so-new feel of the guitars may be a little alien, but there is also a whiff of small-shop boutique construction style



4

Feel & Sounds

The oh-so-new feel of the guitars may be a little alien, but there is also a whiff of small-shop boutique construction style. For example, many high-end makers use a 'hand-rubbed' satin finish, a bare wood or rubbed-through style for the neck backs, and these feel very similar – they're smooth yet slightly tactile. As with the standard models, the 50s neck here is the fullest: 22mm deep at the 1st fret, 24.9mm by the 12th – a small finish thickness away from the previous 50s Standard we evaluated back in issue 448. The 60s drops to 20.7mm at the 1st fret and 23.7mm by the 12th – again, very close to the fully finished 60s Standard and Classic of that previous review. These SlimTaper profiles have a slightly flatter back but still keep the relaxed shoulders.

The SG's neck actually feels a little asymmetrical with more shoulder on the bass side. It also has that slight ledge where the finish has been scraped from the binding. While that might take a while to wear in, even after our relatively short test time it's



5

4. The classic ABR-1 tune-o-matic bridge and lightweight aluminium stud tailpiece you see here are the same as on the standard gloss-finish models

5. While the plastic body edge and fingerboard binding are left a little sharp to the touch, the edges of the plastic jack plates on both our 'Pauls are all rather nicely rounded and smooth

6. Another subtle change to the 60s Les Paul is these metal-topped bonnet control knobs; the 50s model's are the amber bonnet style

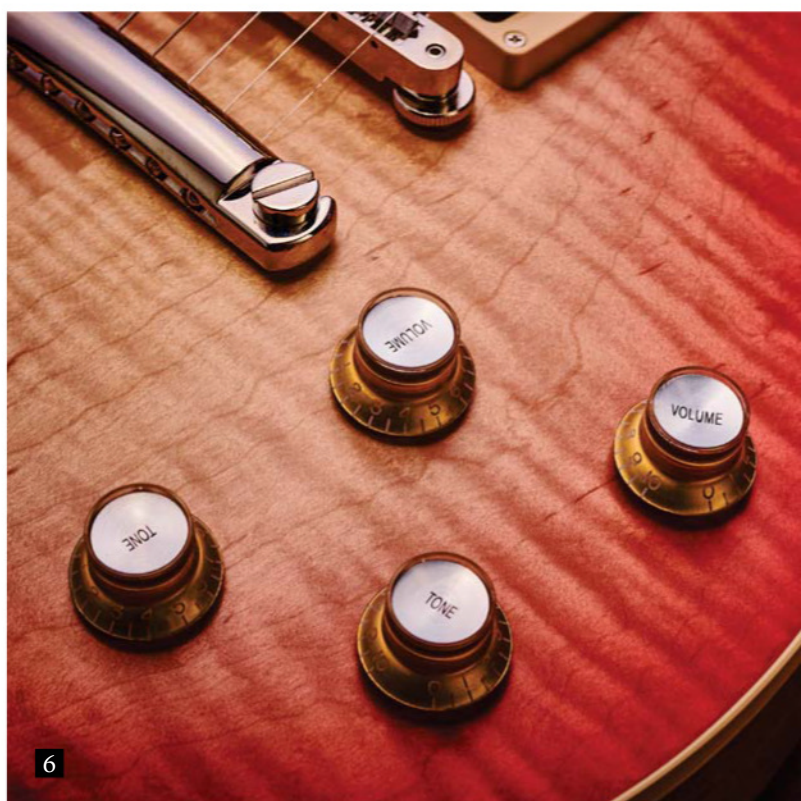
7. One of the many design differences with the SG style is the relatively cramped control layout: the four controls, selector switch and output jack all fit into the single rear cavity

the SG's finish that is most notably beginning to slightly burnish to a subtle gloss.

The fretwire feels pretty classic, too, as it's relatively low and medium in width. Like those binding edges, a little more polishing to the fret tops would add some slinkiness, but the setups are consistent and we really have zero problems here.

Of course, the difference in feel between the Les Pauls and the SG is marked. You can only imagine what Les Paul would have said back in the day when Ted McCarty handed him one of these! The neck seems extended, then there's that thin body depth, the pointed horns and a very different, lighter weight. Yet its delicate feel is very endearing, along with a lovely ring and sustain that's enhanced with some light waggle from the Vibrola. There is a slight neck-pull strapped on, plus the heel-placed strap button means that the guitar tips forward a little. But with the right strap it's all easy to manage, the light weight compensating in spades.

Pickup position will play a part in what we hear. The screw coil of the LP's bridge pickup sits 596mm from the face of the top nut; the SG's is 598mm – very similar.



Finish can have a dampening effect, so the lack of it here seems to give slightly more crispness to the high-end response

UNDER THE HOOD

Are there any tricks inside the control cavities?

Like the previous Les Pauls we looked at, the circuits on both here are wired modern-style with Gibson logo'd 500k pots (made by CTS) and .022 microfarad (223J) Orange Drop tone caps. All the controls mount onto a metal grounding plate, although the cavities aren't shielded, nor are the plastic cover plates. However, you can clearly see that mid-brown grain filler/stain that's applied over the slightly redder hue of the raw mahogany. Rather oddly, the knobs on the 50s LP sit higher from the body face (although they could be easily realigned) compared with the 60s, which are virtually flush. The knobs are different, too, with the 50s using amber bonnet types and the 60s going for the post-1960 metal-topped style. The SG doesn't have that metal grounding plate, but is otherwise identically wired – again, the knobs sit a little high (certainly the volume and tone for the bridge pickup) and they are the black bonnet types.

The original Burstbuckers date back to the “early 90s”, says Gibson today, although (USA retailer) Sam Ash's website suggests it was much later: “The initial demand for Patent Applied For replica pickups came from Japanese collectors, and the Burstbucker was offered exclusively in Japan beginning in 1996. By 1999 word [had] spread of the unique replica tones produced by Burstbuckers. Gibson USA put the first Burstbuckers on a production model with the Gary Moore Signature Les Paul in the summer of 2000, and Gibson's Custom division then equipped the Class 5 Les Paul, Custom Authentic '68

Les Paul Custom and Custom Authentic '58 Les Paul Standard models with Burstbuckers.”

“With historically unmatched bobbin windings,” continues Gibson today, “and Alnico II magnets they produce an airy, full tone, and when overdriven they achieve a magical distortion with the slightly enhanced highs that made the originals famous.”

The Burstbucker 1s are ‘underwound’, the BB 3s are ‘overwound’, and the BB 2s sit in the middle. Our BB 1 measured 7.45kohms at output; the BB 2 7.94k at the bridge. Reflecting the gradual change to the specs of PAFs in the early 60s, the Burstbucker 61T and 61R swap to Alnico V magnets, but the interesting thing about both sets fitted here to our 60s Les Paul and SG is that they share virtually identical DCRs – the bridge, for example, isn't hotter. So our SG's 61T at the bridge measured 7.64k ohms; the 61R at the neck is 7.77k. The 61s on our 60s Les Paul are even closer, measuring 7.7k at the bridge and 7.71k at the neck.

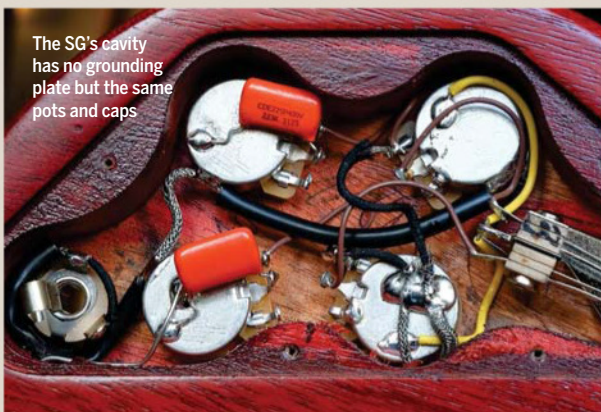
The Burstbucker 1s are ‘underwound’, the 3s ‘overwound’, and the BB 2s sit in the middle



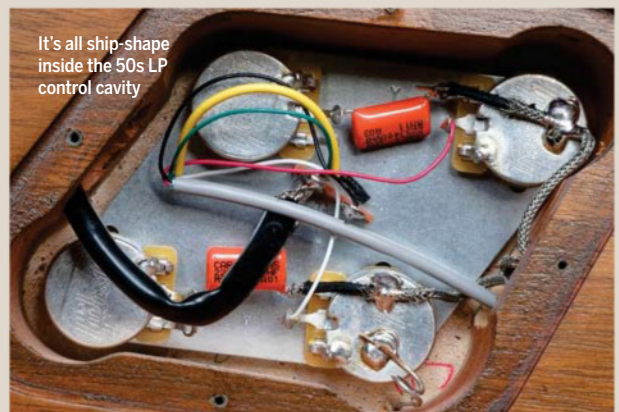
Top: Both our SG and 60s LP use the same 61 Burstbuckers – all appear to have been wax potted
Above: The 50s LP uses a Burstbucker 2 at the bridge and a 1 (pictured) in the neck position



Only the neck on the SG extends into the neck pickup cavity



The SG's cavity has no grounding plate but the same pots and caps



It's all ship-shape inside the 50s LP control cavity



8. The Maestro Vibrola actually appeared slightly later in the 60s as a replacement (and improvement) for the sideways Vibrola that was fitted on the earliest SG-style Les Paul Standards

9. Like the 60s Les Paul, the '61 SG comes with uncovered 61R and 61T Burstbuckers, reflecting the subtle changes towards the end of the classic PAF designs. Interestingly, both pickups on both models have virtually the same DCRs: the bridge units aren't 'hotter'

61 years on, the SG has earned its stripes on countless stages and classic recordings – and this one is a beaut

But the centre of the screw coil of the neck pickup on the Les Paul is 474mm, as opposed to the SG's 489mm measurement: closer to the bridge to allow more wood in that neck joint, with the gap covered with a plastic plate. To narrow the gap as best we could, we set all the humbuckers 1/16th inch from the top string on the treble side, fretted at the last fret, and 3/32nds on the bass side. Let's plug in...

Finish can have a dampening effect on what you hear, so the lack of it here seems to give slightly more crispness to the high-end response; likewise the absence of pickup covers. Our Les Paul Classic reference (retrofitted with covered and unpotted Burstbuckers 1 and 2) sounds a little more rounded and smoother in the high-end, but it's also been a guitar for a lot longer than either of these Faded models and played a lot. Like any modern version of the PAF, Burstbuckers have their fans and detractors. They're relatively low in output (see Under The Hood on the previous page), and there's a beautiful

old-blues 'honk' to the 2 at the bridge with a smooth but clean response from the 1 at the neck. Plugging in the 60s with its 61 pair – which both have very similar outputs – there's slightly more high-end presence and perhaps a slight scoop to the mids, but they're in a very similar ballpark.

The SG does sound more different, seemingly with less highs and lows but such a sweet juicy voice, especially when we begin to add some crunch and volume. The slightly closer placement of the pickups creates the most Fender-y mixed position, and overall there's a lovely vintage-y character, too. It's the sum of its parts, for sure, but 61 years on, the SG has earned its stripes on countless stages and classic recordings – and this one is a beaut.

Verdict

While these new Faded models might simply be an opportunity for Gibson to offer guitars that are slightly reduced in price (by around 11 per cent) when compared with the fully finished equivalent



models, they neither feel nor sound like instruments Made In Hurry.

On the one hand there's a raw, stripped vibe to the Les Pauls that shouts 'gig me', but to be honest there's a more boutique-like vibe going on here. The SG looks much more normal, of course, with its cherry-over-mahogany shade, and while the LPs are good, it's this beautifully delicate instrument that stands out.

But we have to be realistic, don't we? Not everyone is going to get on with the colours of the Les Pauls – and that price reduction is unlikely to cover the price of a professional refinish. And while many of us enjoy our modding adventures, you're going to need to be pretty confident before you start work on a £2k guitar.

So there's plenty to consider and there are a few sharp unfinished edges, but sound-wise this trio is superb. Finished, unfinished? Well, you now have a choice, and anyone who thinks that Gibson isn't making great guitars once more really needs to think again. **G**



GIBSON LES PAUL STANDARD 50S FADED

PRICE: £2,169 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Single-cutaway, solidbody electric
BODY: 2-piece mahogany with carved AA figured maple top
NECK: 1-piece mahogany, Vintage 50s profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 624mm (24.6")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech/42.61mm
FINGERBOARD: Single-bound rosewood, Acrylic Trapezoid inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: ABR-1 tune-o-matic bridge, aluminium stopbar tailpiece, Vintage Deluxe tuners w/ keystone buttons – nickel-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: Uncovered Gibson Burstbucker 1 (neck) and Burstbucker 2 (bridge), 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, volume and tone for each pickup
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.96/8.71
RANGE OPTIONS: The fully glossed finish Les Paul Standard 50s costs £2,429; the Les Paul Classic is £2,169
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Honey Burst (as reviewed) – satin nitrocellulose

8/10

PROS Excellent build, vibrant 'raw' voicing and good weight

CONS Lack of colour on our sample; no colour options; binding feels a little unfinished



GIBSON LES PAUL STANDARD 60S FADED

PRICE: £2,169 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Single-cutaway, solidbody electric
BODY: 2-piece mahogany with carved AA figured maple top
NECK: 1-piece mahogany, SlimTaper profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 624mm (24.6")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech/42.82mm
FINGERBOARD: Single-bound rosewood, Acrylic Trapezoid inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: ABR-1 tune-o-matic bridge, aluminium stopbar tailpiece, Grover Rotomatic tuners w/ kidney buttons – nickel-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: Uncovered Gibson Burstbucker 61R (neck) and Burstbucker 61T (bridge), 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, volume and tone for each pickup
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4.25/9.35
RANGE OPTIONS: The fully glossed finish Les Paul Standard 60s costs £2,429
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Vintage Cherry Sunburst (as reviewed) – satin nitrocellulose

8/10

PROS Like the 50s LP, excellent build and good voicing; slimmer neck profile here

CONS Hardly a great Vintage Cherry Sunburst; no colour options; binding feels a little unfinished; noticeably heavier than our 50s LP



GIBSON SG STANDARD '61 FADED MAESTRO VIBROLA

PRICE: £1,899 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Double-cutaway, solidbody electric
BODY: 2-piece mahogany
NECK: 1-piece mahogany, SlimTaper profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 624mm (24.6")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech/42.69mm
FINGERBOARD: Single-bound rosewood, Acrylic Trapezoid inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: ABR-1 tune-o-matic bridge, Maestro Vibrola tailpiece, vintage deluxe tuners w/ keystone buttons – nickel-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: Uncovered Gibson Burstbucker 61R (neck) and Burstbucker 61T (bridge), 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, volume and tone for each pickup
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.96/8.71
RANGE OPTIONS: The fully glossed finish SG Std '61 Maestro Vibrola costs £2,089; the hardtail SG Standard '61 is £1,739
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Vintage Cherry satin (as reviewed) – satin nitrocellulose



9/10

PROS Like the LPs, the build here is excellent and this is a more normal colour; great weight; a very good example of early SG style

CONS Again, no colour options and the fingerboard binding is a little sharp-edged



Shine On

One of two limited-edition models that celebrate Takamine's 60th Anniversary, both of which engage the charms of Hawaiian koa in their construction. Let's move in for a closer look

Words David Mead Photography Olly Curtis



TAKAMINE LTD2022 £2,450

CONTACT **Korg UK Ltd** PHONE **01908 304600** WEB **www.takamine.com**

What You Need To Know

1**60th Anniversary? Has Takamine really been around that long?**

Yes! The Takamine story really begins in 1959 when a small family-run instrument workshop was opened in Sakashita, at the foot of Mount Takamine in central Japan. Building on a larger scale began in 1962 and the rest, as they say, is history.

2**That's an odd colour for Sitka spruce, isn't it?**

That's because Takamine has tinted the finish used on the top of the guitar to match the natural honey-coloured hue of the koa used for the instrument's back and sides.

3**Is koa really that rare?**

When you consider that the genuine Acacia koa found on the LTD2022 is grown only on Hawaii (although other species are grown elsewhere) and that the highly figured variety used in guitar making has to be carefully selected, then yes, it meets the criteria of being considered rare.

Takamine celebrates its 60th anniversary this year with not one but two special models created for the occasion. The one we have before us today is the LTD2022 and is limited to 350 units worldwide, and the other, named 'The 60th', will have only 60. The former will sell for around £2.5k, whereas its far more grand stablemate tips the scales at a smidge under £10k! We're not about to compare the two, however, seeing as we haven't even laid eyes upon The 60th model, and so we'll instead focus our attention on the LTD2022 we have here.

We take a look at the history of Takamine in the feature that follows this review, but to take a peek into the company's past from a purely UK-based perspective then the story really begins around the mid-70s. This was when adverts began to appear in the music press from Ivor Mairants' music shop in Rathbone Place, just off London's Oxford Street, displaying Martin lookalikes for around the £50 mark. Reviews indicated that these were remarkable value and, just to add context, seeing as it was still comparatively difficult to get hold of a decent acoustic guitar without spending





1. An abalone trim around the body's edge enhances the look of this celebratory guitar
2. The Sitka spruce top has been tinted to match the golden tan colour of the Hawaiian koa used on the LTD2022's back and sides
3. A special diamond-style inlay features at the guitar's 12th fret, marking Takamine's 60th Anniversary

The finish is silky smooth, the smaller body is comfortable, and the neck is a generous C shape

a fortune in those days, curious players began to form an orderly queue.

This writer succumbed and still owns an original 1975 Takamine F307 from that period, the quality of build and tone apparent from the first strum. Of course, those early UK imports are now known colloquially as being from the 'lawsuit' period as it wasn't long before more original designs, free of any derivative encumbrances, began to appear.

Coming up to date, Takamine has enjoyed quite an illustrious few decades, its instruments appearing in the hands of many top players from Jon Bon Jovi, Glenn Frey and Garth Brooks to Steven Wilson, Bruno Mars and Brent Mason, to name but a few. Innovations have included the celebrated CoolTube pickup and preamp system, and reaching further back, the 'Brownie' Palathetic pickup, elements of which are included in the new CTF-2N featured here. More of that later, meanwhile let's take a look at what makes this celebratory model tick.

Another nod to Takamine's history is the LTD2022's body style. This classical body shape first appeared in Japan around 1969





4. The LTD2022 is limited to only 350 guitars worldwide and so if you want one you'd better be quick!

5. All the guitar's hardware has been carefully matched to the colour scheme of the koa – from the endpin jack socket here, to the Gotoh tuners on the headstock

6. The preamp is an updated version of Takamine's celebrated Palathetic unit that gained popularity during the 1970s

with the PT-05E and is reintroduced on both this and The 60th, updated to include a cutaway. The body itself features a laminate of Hawaiian koa for the guitar's back and sides, with a high-grade Sitka spruce top that has been colour-matched to the golden brown hue of the koa using what Takamine refers to as a 'Burnt Sienna' tint. Needless to say, the top, back and sides look wonderful, the grain featuring koa's signature 3D shimmering in the light. The top is particularly worthy of note as the grain here is shown off to great effect and the abalone trim sets things off a treat.

Takamine tells us that the bracing underneath the Sitka top has been specially designed to bring out the best spectrum of sound – basses, mids and trebles – from a small-bodied instrument and we're talking really quite trim dimensions hereabouts, with a maximum lower bout width measuring only 370mm (14.5 inches).

The LTD2022's neck is mahogany with an ebony 'board that features a special 'diamond' marker at the 12th fret, another tip of the hat to Takamine's 60th anniversary. Tuners are weathered-looking





6

THE RIVALS

If koa is a tonewood that rings your bell then we'd suggest you check out Taylor's new 724ce, which we reviewed in issue 488. Despite a retail price just shy of £3k, we've seen it streeting at around the £2,300 mark – and it's all solid koa throughout, too. It's also worth remembering that Taylor has other koa models in its range and so the website is well worth perusing.

Martin also has models that feature koa, starting with the 000-12E (£1,499), which features koa laminated back and sides, as does the SC-13E at £1,699.

Takamine itself is no stranger to the charms of koa as its catalogue will tell you. As an example, the EF508KC (£1,249) features the wood on the top, back and sides. Other manufacturers that use koa in their instruments include Faith, Breedlove and Eastman, and so we would recommend an intense Googling session to reveal all.

brass-coloured Gotoh Grover style, and the perfectly seated 20 frets are low-profile medium in dimension.

Build quality is practically faultless throughout, as you might expect from a limited edition, and we can't wait to hear what the guitar sounds like. But before we venture further, a few words about the specially developed CTF-2N pickup system.

As already revealed, this is modelled after Takamine's original 'Brownie' preamp – but with a few modern twists to the tale. It was originally designed to partner the Palathetic pickup, and players have apparently been requesting a return to the Brownie system for quite a while. Always willing to listen to customer feedback, Takamine obliged with this new take on the original FET-powered design, but the company has included a notch filter to tame any errant frequencies on the live stage and a chromatic tuner to keep everything sweet to the ear. When you consider that enthusiasts for the Brownie system included connoisseurs of tone such as Ry Cooder and James Taylor, it will be interesting to hear what Takamine has done with its reinstatement here.

The top, back and sides look wonderful, the grain featuring koa's signature 3D shimmering

Feel & Sounds

Turning the LTD2022 over in our hands reveals an early feel-good factor. The finish is silky smooth, the smaller body comfortable to sit or stand with – and we haven't played a note yet. The neck is a generous C shape, chunky enough to feel substantial but falling far short of anything that could be described as 'clubby'. The nut width of just under 43mm will be welcomed by players used to the dimension of electric guitar necks, but will just possibly cause a frown among fingerstylists who demand those extra few millimetres at this end of the fretboard to allow for their more gymnastic capabilities.

Sound-wise, the LTD2022 isn't a particularly loud instrument in that it



The LTD2022 is topped out with Takamine-branded Gotoh tuners



TAKAMINE LTD2022

PRICE: £2,450 (with semi hard case)

ORIGIN: Japan

TYPE: Concert cutaway

TOP: Solid Sitka spruce

BACK/SIDES: Laminated koa

MAX RIM DEPTH: 97mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 370mm

NECK: Mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 644mm (25.35")

TUNERS: Takamine logo'd Gotoh

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42.67mm

FINGERBOARD: Ebony

FRETS: 20

BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony/53mm

ELECTRICS: CTF-2N w/ volume, treble and bass controls plus notch filter and tuner

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.97/4.34

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: Takamine is also producing another anniversary model entitled 'The 60th', limited to 60 guitars worldwide with seriously upgraded appointments including a genuine diamond embedded in the headstock. The selling price is an eye-watering £9,999

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: Gloss

doesn't overwhelm or run away with itself dynamically. Instead, we find a very controlled voice with basses and mids in proportion with each other and particularly sweet trebles. It's worth noting that this sweetness – and, for that matter, sustain – is present all over the fretboard and not just down at the campfire chord end. So whatever Takamine has done in shaping the guitar's bracing has certainly had a beneficial effect on the tone overall.

It's difficult to tell how much of an influence the presence of koa is to the sound of the guitar as it's a laminate rather than solid. This is not an impediment, of course, because some makers – up to and including boutique level – insist that laminated back and sides gives a more solid foundation for the all-important vibration of the instrument's top. So koa's sonic reputation for girthy basses and mids maybe isn't quite so much in question here, but it might just be that it's had an influence on the sweetness of the trebles.

Through an amp the new CTF-2N preamp system comes into its own, and it's simplicity itself to operate. The three sliders control bass, treble and volume, and the notch filter scans the frequencies with that familiar 'wah' sound as you turn the dial. The tuner, meanwhile, mutes the signal to allow silent tuning on stage. We found it was easy to dial in a sound we were happy with through our AER Compact 60 and so no complaints there.

Its sweetness – and, for that matter, sustain – is present all over the fretboard and not just down at the campfire chord end

Verdict

Needless to say, any guitar that is in any way limited or a special model is aimed principally at the collector market. But in this case, the hardcore is perhaps going to chase after The 60th model with its more rarefied accoutrements and very much more limited 60-unit distribution worldwide. With that model, Takamine has included a genuine diamond on the headstock in the form of the dot on the 'i' in the Takamine logo, just to give you an idea of how luxurious the appointments are on offer there.

But our LTD2022 is a quarter of the price of its illustrious cousin and represents a very well-made and good-sounding instrument, the collectability being a factor on top. As with anything that is in any way rarefied, these guitars are likely to sell out quite soon, and so if you want a guitar with a few unique features, a good set of larynx and is so typically for Takamine eminently stage-ready, we'd advise you not to hang around for too long. **G**

8/10

PROS A very well-built, sweet-sounding instrument with the allure of collectability

CONS Plenty of competition in the marketplace at this price point if a limited-edition isn't your thing

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ADAM AUDIO

Diamond Days

Master luthier Makoto Terasaki joins us to celebrate Takamine's 60th anniversary as we reflect on some of the company's landmarks from the past six decades

Words David Mead

The Takamine story really begins in 1959. Could you tell us a little about the origins of the company?

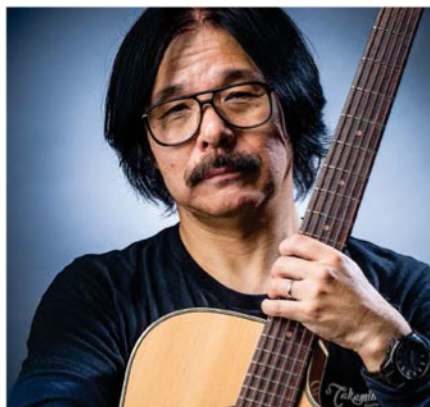
"In 1959 as a small family-run guitar shop nestled at the foot of Mount Takamine in the central Japanese town of Sakashita, the fledgling company took the mountain's name in 1962 and began in earnest the journey that led to the phenomenal success that is the modern Takamine company."

The company grew during the 1960s – was this a response to the growing popularity of the guitar in Japan?

"Certainly, folk music was popular in the 1960s in Japan and it was a tailwind for guitar manufacturing as well."

As Takamine became established as a builder of quality instruments, you began innovating with some design characteristics of your own, notably the Palathetic pickup. Tell us about this period of growth for the company.

"The Palathetic pickup was used on the guitars for the first time in the late 70s. It was the development of the under-saddle Palathetic pickup that revolutionised amplified acoustic guitar design. It became a pioneer of electric acoustic guitars. In addition, the playing of Takamine guitars by many big names resulted in further awareness, and it spread around the world. It's one of the reasons Takamine has been able to grow as a brand."



Makoto Terasaki has been hands-on at Takamine since 1988, from hand-building acoustics to artist relations



Taking its name from Mount Takamine in central Japan, the company has been dedicated to expert guitar craft since 1962

PHOTO COURTESY OF TAKAMINE

Takamine quickly became known as one of the leaders in electro-acoustic design. How influential was feedback from the artists who played the instruments?

"Artist feedback has always been very important – for example, how guitars respond to changes in the environment on professional stages such as large stadiums and outdoor situations. There were many things that we had never thought of, and the longterm accumulation of experience by overcoming these matters led to the next stages of development."

The 1990s saw Takamine pioneer laser inlay work along with some major artist signature models. Was this another fertile time for design innovation in the company?

"Takamine was the first to introduce a laser cutting machine as a way to achieve the more elaborate and ornamental designs of the time, when CNC routers were the norm in guitar woodworking. The Santa Fe, which was released in 1993, is a typical model for introducing a laser cutting machine. The delicate processing of the Santa Fe fan-shaped rosette is one of the technological innovations we launched."

The CoolTube preamp was another landmark design – what was the thinking behind introducing this?

"At that time, we developed the CoolTube preamplifier as one of the ways to make the best use of the Palathetic pickup. The first digital inset preamplifier AD-1 was released in 1998, and in 2004 the first generation of CoolTube preamps, the CTP-1, was released. A few years later, the CT4-DX was released, in 2007, and offers the ultimate preamp flexibility."

"For the 60th anniversary we returned to our early roots with the new CTF-2N preamplifier, which revives the sound of our early FET preamp model, which is affectionately known as the 'Brownie'. The CTF-2N has that legendary sound, while at the same time adding the more modern functions of easy battery access, a chromatic tuner and a notch filter."

The company continues to innovate and move forward with new ideas for building acoustic guitars. What does the immediate future hold for Takamine?

"We will continue to devote ourselves to innovation and continual improvement of craftsmanship in Japan, and continue to send guitars to the world from here in Nakatsugawa. I think it is important to continue to be a guitar maker that will be able to celebrate in the next 70, 80, 100 years and more."

www.takamine.com



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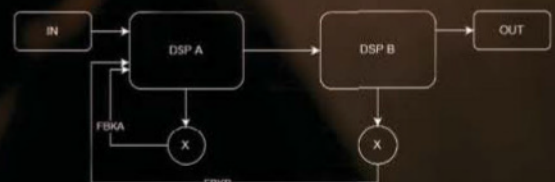
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Outside The Box

In collaboration with ThorpyFX, this new range of pedals from Victory aims to capture the tones and performance of its current amp range in solid-state stompbox format

Words Nick Guppy Photography Olly Curtis





VICTORY V1 SERIES PEDALS £199 EACH

CONTACT **Victory Amplification** WEB www.victoryamps.com

What You Need To Know

1 What's going on here? Doesn't Victory make amps, not pedals?

It does, but this new series of effects are built to reproduce the sounds of its amp range but in solid-state pedal format. They're designed by Victory's Martin Kidd in collaboration with Adrian Thorpe of ThorpyFX.

2 Didn't Victory release some pedals a while back?

No, you're thinking of the V4 ultra-compact and lightweight single-channel guitar amplifiers, which are pretty feature-laden and employ Two Notes cabinet emulation.

3 What's in this new range?

There are five pedals with the familiar Victory family voicings: The Copper, The Duchess, The Jack, The Kraken and The Sheriff. Along with the V4s and these new V1 pedals, each Victory family includes various combo and head formats, plus cabs, of course. The choice is yours.

1. While the other V1s have regular midrange tone controls, The Copper's Tone knob replicates the master tone control found on some old Vox amps. It works backwards, reducing highs as it's turned clockwise

Victory has enjoyed considerable success in recent years with its compact V4 preamp and amplifier ranges, the latter loaded with features including a 180-watt Class D power stage, built-in Two Notes cabinet emulation, digital reverb and balanced outputs. While the V4 format defines what many of us want from a modern guitar amplifier, there are legions of guitarists who get their sounds purely from pedals and don't need amplifiers to do anything more than just make them louder. That's where the new V1 range comes in: five analogue solid-state pedals that distil the essential tones of Victory's award-winning amplification range into compact one-button, DC-powered stompboxes.

The result of a collaboration between Victory founder Martin Kidd and pedal guru Adrian Thorpe from ThorpyFX, all five V1 pedals share the same robust steel clamshell enclosure, with the bottom half painted black and the top half decorated with colour-coordinated graphics to match their corresponding amplifier family: copper (of course) for The Copper, cream for The Duchess, graphite for The Jack, silver grey for The Kraken, and gold for The Sheriff. Small rubber feet cover the four machine screws that secure the chassis top and bottom halves.

Apart from The Copper, the V1s share identical controls, featuring five knobs – Volume, Gain, Bass, Middle and Treble. The Copper's mid control is replaced with a knob called Tone, which acts as a master tone control, similar to that found on Victory's other Copper amps.

Each pedal has a single footswitch and blue jewel 'on' LED, with rear-facing signal and power connections to make the best use of your pedalboard's real estate.

The V1's electronics are mounted to the top half of the chassis, with a main PCB linked by minimal wiring to smaller boards for the switch and jack sockets. As you'd expect from Victory, the component standard is high, with through-hole metal film resistors and quality capacitors alongside surface-mount FETs and op-amps. The resistors are close tolerance metal film types, which helps to keep the noise floor as low as possible. Overall, the V1 stompboxes are typical of Victory's high build quality; not only will they look smart on any pedalboard, they're built to last and handle any gig with ease, from occasional pub nights to full-on professional touring.



2. The Sheriff's controls are the same as on the other V1 pedals except for The Copper, with knobs for gain, volume, bass, mid and treble. Each pedal's controls are specifically tuned for that circuit; for example, The Sheriff's midrange isn't as pronounced as that of The Jack or Kraken

3. The V1 pedals all have the same connections with rear-facing mono input and output jacks and a standard nine-volt DC power connector. Current draw for each pedal varies slightly, but they're all between 15 and 17mA, so you shouldn't have any issues fitting at least one on your 'board



THE RIVALS

Dave Friedman has emerged as one of the top names in modern high-gain amplification, with famous users including Joe Bonamassa and Jerry Cantrell. Friedman's BE-OD (£219) emulates the huge distortion tones of his highly covetable BE100 amplifier, while the Golden Pearl (£179) delivers a dynamic bluesy overdrive.

633 Engineering's superlative hand-built valve amplification range was recently expanded to include two pedals: the X2 Classic Overdrive (£285) and the wilder X3 Multistage Overdrive (£285), both designed by 633 founder Cliff Brown. They're expensive, but both are handmade in the UK and have garnered rave reviews for build quality and tone.

Formerly known as the Ecstasy, Brian Wampler's Euphoria Overdrive (£199) is highly versatile, with an expanded D-style character that goes way beyond being just another ODS sound-alike. If your tone needs more bite, try Wampler's Ratsbane Mini (£149), a compact but flexible distortion based on the legendary 70s ProCo design.

Feel & Sounds

We tried out Victory's V1 pedals with our regular Duncan Alnico Pro-equipped Strat and a Les Paul loaded with a pair of old PAF humbuckers, with each pedal used one at a time into the low-gain input of a 1x12 valve combo, EQ'd for a flat tone response.

The Copper V1 takes its inspiration from the EL84-powered combo, which was the sonic foundation for many legendary British acts in the 1960s and 70s. Like Victory's other Copper amps it has a complex harmonic structure, producing a satisfying chime at lower gain settings, then shifting to a rich, medium-gain overdrive that's great for classic rock and blues. Though there's not quite enough gain for some of the bigger, fully saturated Brian May sounds, The Copper satisfyingly nails many other signature tones, from The Beatles to Bryan Adams and Rory Gallagher. This pedal is very touch-sensitive and cleans up nicely if you back off the guitar volume or vary your picking attack. The midrange control is replaced with a knob called Tone, which acts as a master tone control, progressively rolling off highs as you turn it up, in a cool tip of the hat to the reverse tone control found on early AC30s.

Next, The Duchess V1 is designed to emulate the V40 Duchess but with an extra

The Sheriff's midrange is particularly satisfying, carefully sculpted to capture classic Brit-rock tones

dose of gain. Starting at lower settings, we found the glassy treble and smooth bass often associated with 60s-era Fenders, adding extra depth and bite to our Strat's single coils without muddying the sound. Turn up the gain and things get wilder, with black panel-inspired sustain and crunch that's great for blues soloing.

The Jack V1 is based on one of Victory's most popular amps, V30 The Jack, which was designed in collaboration with legendary shredder Guthrie Govan. The Jack V1's huge gain range goes from fat medium-gain crunch to soaring sustain with a turbo-charged tweed sparkle that sounds great with single coils but really good with a beefy humbucker. The tone controls on this pedal are powerful, particularly the Middle knob, which can be used to dial in a satisfying 'scoop' for those big 80s hair metal sounds, all without pulling out too much treble or



4. Each of the pedals boasts specially designed graphics to complement the full-sized amp versions. The Duchess pen-and-ink style artwork is typical of the care and attention to detail that Victory is renowned for
5. All five V1 pedals feature a large, friendly blue LED indicator just above the heavy duty footswitch. When in off mode, all the V1 pedals are true bypass, so the guitar signal isn't buffered



bass – similar to the ‘V’ shape setting you might use on a graphic EQ.

With a more British-influenced voicing, The Sheriff V1 produces a broad palette of vintage rock and blues at lower gain settings, while turning up the gain on this one is perfect for emulating Slash, Van Halen and many other rock icons. It's surprisingly complex, with smoothly interacting tone controls and a particularly satisfying midrange, carefully sculpted to capture those classic Brit-rock tones.

Finally, The Kraken V1 is all about gain, gain and more gain, differing from the British-flavoured sounds on Channel 1 of Victory's VX, to the extreme American-influenced sounds found on Channel 2. Like the Jack V1, The Kraken V1's midrange is very powerful and needs to be carefully dialled in for the best results.

All five pedals benefit from impressively low background noise, which means they'll sound great into desks as well as amplifiers, and you can significantly increase your sonic arsenal by using more than one without any appreciable signal degradation. We had the best results using The Duchess, Sheriff and Copper V1s, which all blended nicely with the wah, delay and modulation pedals on our 'board. All five pedals are true bypass, and with sub-20mA current

draw, they'll sit happily on any pedalboard without the need for any special power supply considerations.

Verdict

To take the core tones of Victory's entire V4 amp range and translate them into solid-state stompbox format must have been a daunting task. In the words of Adrian Thorpe, who collaborated with Victory on the V1 designs: "We were keen to make the V1 pedals sound as close to the full-bore valve amps as possible, but working with Martin and the team meant that we had to be even more precise to do their amp designs justice in solid-state pedal form. It took a long time, and many times we had to go back to the drawing board."

As you might expect from pedals made in the UK with the Victory pedigree, the V1s aren't the cheapest overdrives out there, but they stand up well compared to other boutique products and look great on the 'board. Our personal favourite is The Copper, but all five have their own distinct characters, which in itself is an impressive achievement and means there should be a V1 to suit all tastes. In a practically infinite ocean of boutique overdrives, Victory's new V1 range could well make a significant splash. **G**



VICTORY V1 SERIES

PRICE: £199 each

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Solid-state, analogue overdrive pedals

DIMENSIONS: 125 (l) x 43 (d) x 66mm (w)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 0.47/1

CHASSIS: Steel

CONNECTIONS: Input & Output: ¼" mono jack socket, Power: standard 2.1mm centre pin negative DC socket

POWER: 9VDC from external PSU (not supplied), 15-17mA current draw depending on model. No battery option

CHANNELS: 1, with true bypass when off

CONTROLS: V1 The Copper: Volume, Gain, Bass, Tone and Treble; The Duchess, Jack, Kraken & Sheriff: Volume, Gain, Bass, Middle and Treble

FOOTSWITCH: Single button switches effect on/off

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: None

OPTIONS: None



VICTORY V1 THE COPPER 9/10

VICTORY V1 THE DUCHESS 9/10

VICTORY V1 THE JACK 9/10

VICTORY V1 THE KRAKEN 9/10

VICTORY V1 THE SHERIFF 9/10

PROS Good-looking design, with unique artwork to match the full-size amps and a choice of five distinct sonic flavours that capture the original amp design's character

CONS Not the cheapest of overdrive pedals, but the V1s are made in the UK and benefit from a design collaboration with top pedal guru Adrian Thorpe of ThorpyFX

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« BLUEPRINT »

FIT FOR A KING

Christone 'Kingfish' Ingram is one of the most viscerally exciting blues guitarists working today. As Fender launches a version of its 70s-era Tele Deluxe, tweaked to Christone's needs, we join him to find out more

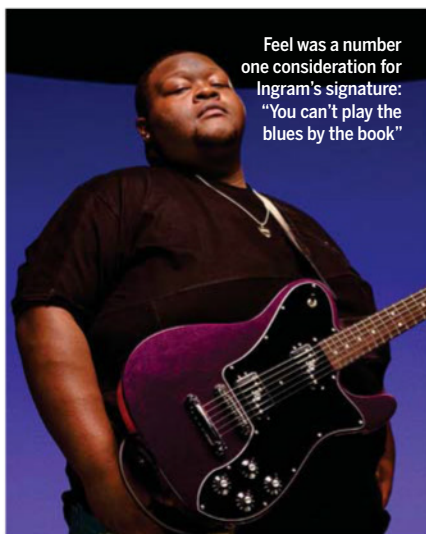
Words Jamie Dickson

He's the kind of player who can make people's heads turn with just a few notes. Christone 'Kingfish' Ingram has that rare quality that

BB King had – the ability to imbue solos with weight and feeling, even when playing simple phrases. However, the Clarksdale, Mississippi, bluesman is also a blisteringly effective player in the faster sections, too, never losing his phrasing when he's laying down the notes thick and fast. He's used a wide range of electrics in the past few years, from custom electrics to Les Pauls and Strats. But it seems he's finally settled down – teaming up with Fender to launch the Kingfish Telecaster Deluxe recently.

The guitar forms part of what seems like a minor resurgence for Fender's 70s twin-humbucker single-cut, which had – it's fair to say – languished among the company's less widely used designs for many years. Now, however, a Tele Deluxe forms a central model in Fender's newly revamped American Vintage II range, announced last month, and it's well represented in Squier's Classic Vibe and Fender's flagship American Professional II ranges, too.

The key component of an original Tele Deluxe, its brace of CuNiFe-magnet Wide Range humbuckers, is no longer a given, however. The magnets went out of production for many years and Fender has only recently resurrected its use in authentic Wide Range replicas, which feature on the American Vintage II model. One side



effect of that scarcity, however, is that it's become accepted that more conventional humbuckers will also work brilliantly on the Tele Deluxe platform, which – outside of the Parallel Universe series Troublemaker Tele guitars – represents Fender's nearest approach to a Les Paul-style electric. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, Christone's signature Tele Deluxe moves it even further into traditional twin-humbucker single-cut territory, while retaining some quintessentially Fender elements.

The US-made Kingfish Telecaster Deluxe, which will set you back £2,249 in the UK, is clad in a striking Mississippi Night purple finish. A quick glance at the

spec reveals further details that stray away from 70s orthodoxy, such as a Gibson-style intonation-adjustable bridge with a stopbar tailpiece and a roasted maple neck – the latter being a very on-trend way to increase neck stability, while lending the maple an attractive caramel tint.

While the neck has the expected 648mm (25.5-inch) Fender scale, the 305mm (12-inch) radius of the fingerboard tilts things back in a Les Paul-like direction. Less obviously still, the Custom Kingfish Humbucking pickups – while outwardly resembling Wide Range units – offer a rich, chunky classic humbucker tone that suits hot blues very well. We join Christone to find out more about the creation of his tailor-made electric and learn more about his sound and approach to blues...

How did the Kingfish Tele Deluxe project come about?

"Well, we started it round the time the pandemic was at its [height], so we all got on Zoom – me, my manager, a couple guys from Fender – and I told them what I wanted and we went through a couple of models [from Fender's range of historic platforms] and all settled on the Tele Deluxe. Originally, I wanted to have something based off its Troublemaker Tele – you know, when they started doing the Les Paul-like features – so I wanted something of that nature. We all mashed ideas together and that's how the guitar came about."

A Fender Telecaster guitar with a dark purple or maroon finish and a black pickguard is the central focus. The guitar has a maple neck with a dark fretboard and a light-colored headstock with the Fender logo and 'TELECASTER DELUXE' text. It is positioned in front of a red brick wall. To the left, a microphone on a stand is visible. In the background, a drum kit and a large amplifier are partially visible. The floor is dark and reflective, showing the guitar's reflection. The overall lighting is warm and slightly dim, creating a moody atmosphere.

"Me, my manager
and Fender, we
all got on Zoom
and mashed ideas
together – that's
how the guitar
came about"



1



2

1. Vintage-style tuners and a minimal signature maintain the Tele's classy, modded-classic vibe and retro-modern looks

2. The custom neckplate is a nice exclusive touch and ties in the artist connection again

3. With its flared headstock and striking Mississippi Night finish, the Kingfish Telecaster Deluxe is a real looker

4. A Gibson-style bridge and tailpiece and custom humbuckers make the Kingfish Tele a hybrid of contrasting design traditions



3

You've used a variety of guitars up to now, including conventional Teles and Strats – what made you decide on a twin-humbucker format?

"I kinda just became primarily a humbucker player... I relaxed and [discovered] that's where my sound is at. I tried Strats and other things, but that wasn't me because I'm more a hard-hitting humbucking guy. So I was trying to go to the classic sound. Like I said, humbuckers, overdriven, hard-hitting – you know, just straight. But I also want to be able to dial the volume back a little bit and turn the pedals off and get really good clean tones for jazz, R&B, gospel – the list goes on and on. That's where we were going with the pickups."

Tell us more about the pickups – you mentioned that they are versatile but how far do they go to covering the ground that a selection of electrics previously did?

"Well, I have a lot of music that calls for overdriven hard-rock sound. And I like to make the guitar scream in certain ways. So when it needs to do that, it does that. But on certain other songs, you can dial it back a little bit and play some smooth jazzy-type

"I tried Strats and other things, but that wasn't me – I'm a hard-hitting humbucking guy"

stuff that it does as well – it works perfectly for all that. I used to take another guitar on the road with me, but this [new Tele] has pretty much been the Number One for me for the last couple of months."

What other elements of the Tele Deluxe design did you tweak to better suit your personal needs?

"I wanted a V-shape neck [profile] – something that was not too big, not too thin, just right in-between, in the medium. Not only that, I have an Adjusto-Matic bridge on there that's [similar to] what you normally get on the Les Pauls, which was all about 'comfortability' for me. And I had the vintage-style tuners rather than new [locking] tuners – those were all things that I had picked out."

Some blues players, such as Robben Ford like their Telecasters set up on the high side so they can really dig into each note. How do you have the Kingfish set up – with a generous action or fast and low?

"Definitely low because low is more comfortable for me, especially because I use heavy strings: I like 11s. The low action from these is definitely better for my fingers – I can hit chords better. Even with the licks, I can hit licks better."

What amp or amps will you be pairing the Kingfish Deluxe with?

"Yeah, it's kind of a mixture, but I use primarily Fender Twins and Fender Hot Rod DeVilles. Or sometimes I use a Peavey Delta Blues or a Peavey Classic. I most definitely like a loud, clean punchy type of sound where I can get either the distortion or the cleanness."

Those are traditionally high-headroom clean amps, so presumably you're getting a lot of your drive tones from pedals.

What are your go-to overdrives?

"I'm down to using one, but I went from a couple: from an MXR M294 Sugar Drive to



4

the Way Huge [Smalls] Conspiracy Theory Professional Overdrive and then to the MXR M251 FOD [Marshall-style pedal based on the former Dookie drive]. I like a good overdriven natural sound when it comes to overdrives.”

What was your route into blues music as a younger man?

“Music has always been a part of my life in one way or another – I mean, I lived right next to a blues band. My mom’s side of the family, all of her uncles would get up to sing, so I was always around that. Clarksdale, Mississippi, is a blues city and I just fell into it that way. And that’s kind of how my interest in the guitar and instruments came about.”

Did you have any mentors on the local blues scene or direct influences? Who in particular caught your ear?

“Yeah, a lot of the older guys in the blues community back home, like T-Model Ford and Wesley ‘Junebug’ Jefferson and Dr Michael James... all of these were known as bluesmen in the area that I was coming from, even some church guys as

well. Definitely the local people in my area were a big influence on what I do.”

What’s your best advice for players who want to play better blues?

“As over-used as the term ‘feel’ is, feel has always been the number-one thing for me: you always want to say something when you play the blues, you always want to feel. You can’t play the blues by the book.”

Often that means leaving a bit more space, choosing notes really judiciously. It can be really easy to over-play – so how do you achieve a good balance?

“Oh, yeah, I’ve been there. I’ve had my moments where I was being ‘shred’, when what I really had to learn was that you just gotta go back and study the masters. Were they doing it? Was Freddie King, Albert Collins and all these guys doing it? It all goes back to that feel thing.

“For me, I like to have a balance [between fast licks and slow, melodic sections] because here’s what it is: the shredding is what got me most of my fanbase. So I have to manoeuvre that in a way, so I can shred here and there just to keep their attention,

but other times break it down to something with lots of feel that’s really bluesy.”

Are there any records that are musical touchstones for your style of playing?

“I’m not necessarily really into [specific] records, but Jimi Hendrix *Are You Experienced*, a couple of BB King records, *Indianola Mississippi Seeds* and stuff like that. Even early Robert Johnson records, you know, anything of that nature: funk, blues, R&B...”

What’s coming next for you and the Kingfish Tele?

“The plan is to write more songs. I just got off a tour with Buddy Guy and I had a chance to sit and talk with [producer] Tom Hambridge. I’ve been on tour with him [Buddy Guy] three other times, so this was kind of like a family reunion, like coming back home. I got to hear more of his stories... it’s always a good time to soak up info from the OG [laughs]. So now the plan is to write more and record my music. As soon as we get done with touring, I’m just recording my music, man.” 

www.fender.com



BARRIE CADOGAN

The Little Barrie main man opens up about a stellar deal on a '62 Epiphone Crestwood and his fondness for P-90 pickups

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

"Well, I inherited a little bit of money when I was a kid from when my grandfather passed away, and I guess the first really good guitar I ever bought was a 1964 Fender Mustang. And they were cheap at the time. You know, I didn't inherit millions or anything, just a small amount of money. At the time it was £350 or something. I guess that was my first really cool guitar. It's sort of before I went on to a Gibson phase."

What was the last guitar you bought?

"The last guitar I bought was a Squier 40th Anniversary Jazzmaster. And it's great, it's a really good guitar for the money. I liked the look of it because it had a maple neck and it had the Desert Sand finish – kind of a 50s look to it, you know, a bit like the old Duo-Sonics and Musicmasters. I just couldn't resist it. So I bought one and all I had to do was get it tweaked by someone. It took about 10 minutes, and it's great."

Barrie was drawn to the Epiphone Casino after seeing players such as Keith Richards and Paul Weller with one on stage. "With hollowbody guitars with P-90 pickups, you can't go wrong," he says

"I do think that the more budget-friendly guitars are a lot better than they used to be. The only way you could get a really good guitar cheap when I was younger was if there was something vintage that was out of fashion, you know? Or something that people hadn't cottoned on to yet. But yeah, I think the Squier is brilliant. I've got a Squier bass that I use for demos and stuff as well and it's ended up on a few recordings."

What's the most incredible find or bargain that you've had when buying gear?

"Oh, it's probably stuff that I haven't got now. I mean, I've worked out how many guitars I've had in my lifetime... and it's a stupid amount. I've had loads that have come and gone over the years. I used to have a 1962 Epiphone Crestwood Custom that had two mini-humbuckers in it and it was in player's condition; it had had two neck breaks, one at the top and one at the bottom. I bought it from someone for about £400 and it was such a good guitar, it sounded phenomenal. I ended up trading it to buy

"I bought a Squier 40th Anniversary Jazzmaster in Desert Sand – it has a 50s look, like old Duo-Sonics and Musicmasters"

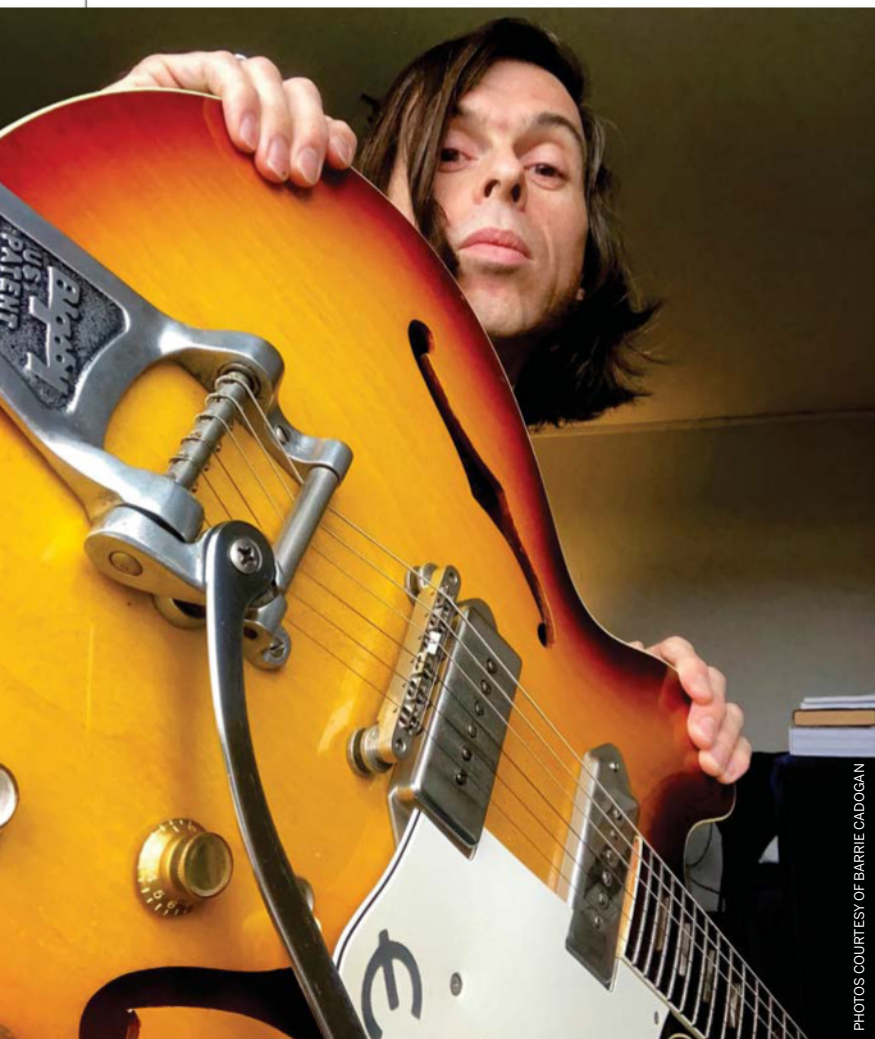
an old acoustic guitar at one point. Crestwood Customs are daft money now as well. I wish that was one that could have been held onto, but that was probably the best bargain I ever got."

What's the strongest case of buyer's remorse you've experienced?

"I've bought a few things that I thought would be great because I liked other people playing them, but they weren't right for me. Like years ago I bought a Fender Jaguar because I thought they were really cool, but it just wasn't my guitar. I love the Johnny Marr Jags because Johnny fixed some of the wonky bits and made it his own. But I bought a Jag and it wasn't right. Sometimes you don't know until you live with them for a bit or take them to certain jobs, you know?"

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

"Yeah, the one that eats away at me the most is that I used to have a 1962 Jazzmaster, and it was all straight. It was sunburst and it had its brown case, and I owned it for about a year. I sold it to buy an old Stratocaster because I thought it was a kind of step up, but I never used the Stratocaster anywhere near as much. My friend still has



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BARRIE CADOGAN



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that guitar, but I can't afford to buy it back from him. I don't think he'd sell it anyway, but I sold it to him 19 years ago. I bought it cheap, in the early days of looking at eBay and stuff, and it's a guitar that I wasn't using much because I wasn't using it live with the band at the time. I didn't think it was right for [the] live [environment]. So that's why I moved it on. But I used it a lot on our first album and it's still the one that got away."

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"You've got to look at the budget you've got, I suppose, and if you're really not sure what you want, try as many things as you can. Sometimes the guitar that's right for your heroes isn't always right for you. I guess it's about having that neck and that feel because you might be able to change the pickups and stuff on a new guitar. And I don't care what anyone says, it's got to look right."

When was the last time you stopped to stare in a guitar shop window, or browsed online, and what were you looking at?

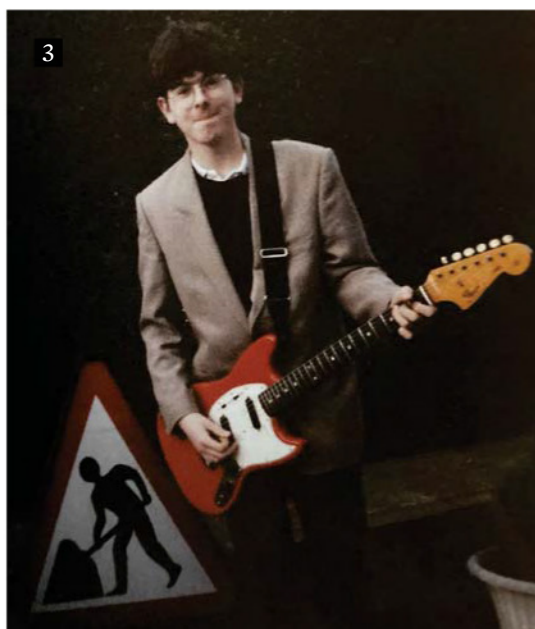
"I was looking at something this morning. I'm not a pedal guy, but I was looking at the [Jackson Audio] Silvertone Twin Twelve pedal. It's based on the old Silvertone Twin Twelve, a sort of piggyback amplifier and it supposedly emulates that in a pedal form. I think you could use it as a preamp when you're recording, as well. I'm not really a fan of drive pedals, I find they sort of shrink the sound a bit, but I was interested in that one. It's something I might use more for recording or making demos, or something where I can't mic stuff up."

If forced to make a choice would you rather buy a really good guitar and a cheap amp or a cheap guitar and a top-notch amp?

"Cheap guitar and a really good amp, definitely. You could



2



3

1. The latest addition to Barrie's collection is this Squier 40th Anniversary Jazzmaster Vintage Edition in Desert Sand with a maple 'board

2. This vintage Kay/Airline model ticks the P-90 box for Barrie with its 'Kleenex box' pickups

3. A teenage Barrie in 1993 with his 1964 Fender Mustang, the "first really good guitar" he ever bought

buy a really, really amazing guitar, a really major vintage guitar, but if your amp's lousy it ain't gonna sound very good. You can get a half-decent guitar into a really nice old amp and it'll sound great. If I put my cheap Squier into an old Fender amp it sounds really good. If you buy a 50s Gibson and stick it into a lousy amp it's not going to do much, really."

If you could only use either humbuckers or single coils for the rest of your career, which would it be and why?

"It would be a single coil as long as it was a P-90. Most of my guitars have P-90s in them. I've got a 330/Casino and I've got other guitars that are P-90-esque – I've got an old Kay/Airline that's got those 'Kleenex box' pickups, which are kind of like P-90s. So a lot of my sound leans that way." **[JD/DM]**



Barrie Cadogan's latest album, *Quatermass Seven* (with Malcolm Catto), is available now on Madlib Invasion www.littlebarrie.com

OFFSET DIY (PART 2)

With the chassis smoothly sanded, the fingerboard and frets looking good, Dave Burrluck considers the sonic options for his offset kit-build

I was going to give this piece the provocative title 'The Great Pickup Swindle!', as choice is exactly what we *don't* get on so many instruments. Our StewMac offset kit, which we started to put together in the last issue of The Mod Squad, is similarly one-choice with its pair of P-90 soapbars, their position fixed by the open holes in the scratchplate. If you want to fit Jazzmaster or Jaguar-style offset staples, for example, or simply a humbucker at the bridge, you would need to get a new scratchplate made.

But I don't actually feel swindled, just strangely limited, particularly since this offset kit's body has a rectangular 'swimming pool' rout. This means that, in theory, we could fit numerous styles of pickups, just as long as they are able to be direct-mounted to the body. Of course, we'd then need some kind of adapted scratchplate to hold the volume, tone and output jack on the treble side, and another to hold the toggle switch on the bass-side shoulder.

While I ponder my options, I uncover a more fundamental problem: a Jazzmaster pickup inside its cover is too wide to fit in that rout. It seems like an epic fail by StewMac, as widening that rout by under

2mm would mean you could fit in the wider pickup and then perhaps mix it up with a Tele-style single coil at the neck, or a Gold Foil. If you have a sharp flat chisel and know how to use it – which I do – it's easy enough to pare away a little wood on the treble side of the cavity, meaning a Jazzmaster pickup now fits and the poles sit under the strings. So at least that's done if I decide to follow that path. But while these potential ideas percolate, I decide to get on with the job: load in the supplied pickups and get this offset electrified!

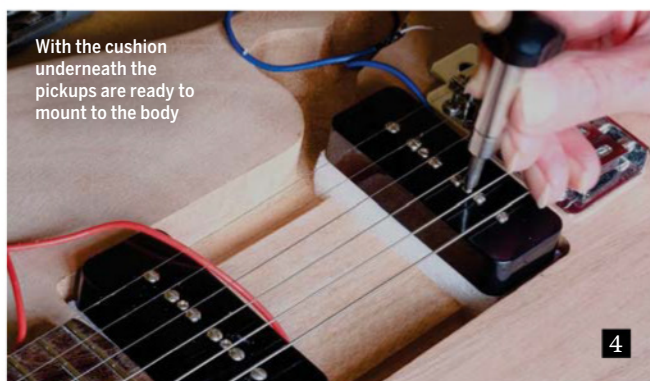
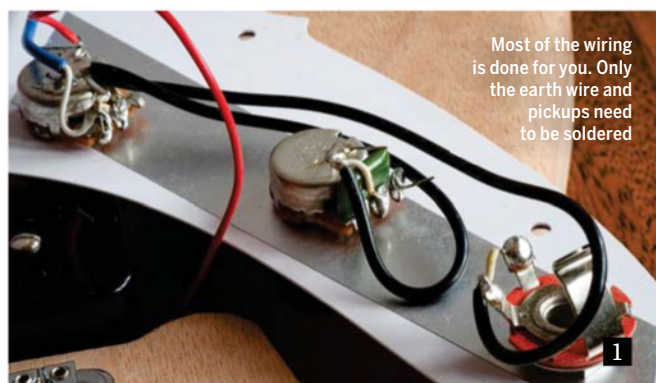
Powering Up

Like Fender's original offsets, and unlike the beautifully considered 'modular' Stratocaster, the idea with StewMac's offset is that the two pickups screw directly to the body, while the controls and output jack are pre-fitted (and wired up) onto the scratchplate [pic 1]. It means positioning those soapbars has to be accurate. I load everything onto the guitar after slackening the strings, then retighten, which proves to be the perfect way to line everything up. Using a long thin bradawl I mark the two screw holes that are used to mount the soapbars and drill two 2mm diameter

"A soapbar needs some kind of 'cushion', so I simply cut some of the kit's packing foam and use that"

holes approximately 12mm deep [pic 2]. A soapbar needs some kind of 'cushion' between the pickup and the body to allow for a firm mount that is height-adjustable. Although springs are provided, I simply cut some of the kit's packing foam [pic 3], which is quite dense but not too hard, and use that.

With the pickups mounted [pic 4] you can lay over the scratchplate, but you'll find that because it fits under the fingerboard overhang for the 22nd fret you'll have to take the neck off to finally fit it; once the pickups are to height you simply can't remove the scratchplate without doing this. There is a central hole in the swimming pool rout that could take the vibrato earth lead (which goes from the back of a pot to the spring claw), but I actually drill a 3mm hole from the control cavity close to the spring claw. Easy to do and a bit neater.



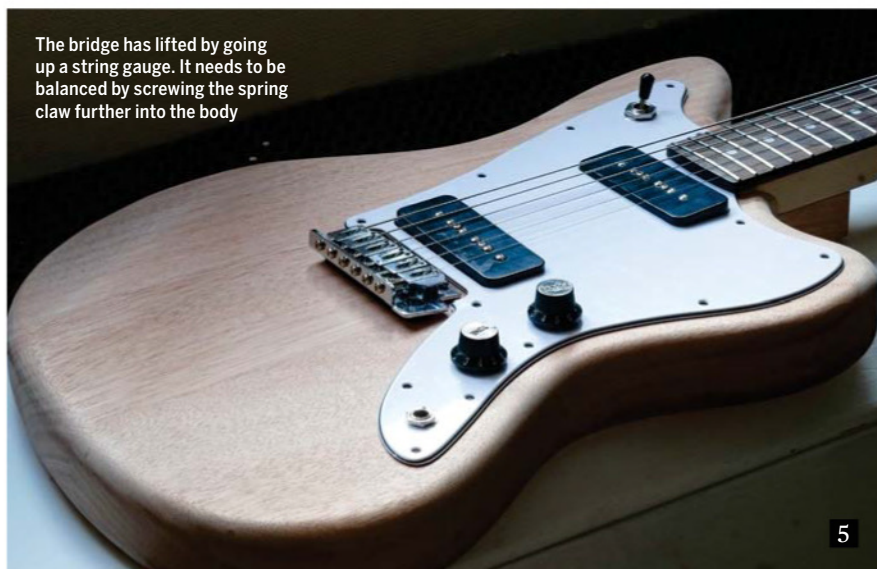
Our far from instant pickup-swapping offset platform! Next we have to apply a finish...

"While potential ideas percolate, I decide to get on with the job: load in the supplied pickups and get this offset electrified"



With the soldering irons fired up there's nothing tricky here – all you have to do (apart from that vibrato ground wire) is solder the pickups to the toggle switch. A word of warning, though: the slightly hotter blue-leaded soapbar is the bridge pickup (it has a 'B' stamped on its base) and the red is the neck, something I mix up when mounting the pickups and have to redo.

Normally, at this stage you'd drill small holes and screw in the scratchplate screws. But because I'm still not decided where I'm going to take this build I don't want to do that: the scratchplate is held in place by that fingerboard overhang and the precise holes that tightly surround the soapbars, which is certainly enough to get an idea of how it sounds. Meanwhile, I bin the cheap kit strings and put on a decent set of PRS Classic 10 to 46 [pic 5].



The bridge has lifted by going up a string gauge. It needs to be balanced by screwing the spring claw further into the body

5

Let The Voicing Begin

There's nothing quite like plugging in a self-build for the first time. Excitement, trepidation, elation, disappointment... Yes, all of those and more. Obviously, things aren't 100 per cent dialled in at the moment: the bridge has tilted up from going up a gauge and while I didn't want to fully fine-tune that as yet, I wanted to make sure I got a little waggle – for many, this is the key to the offset. For the record, it weighs in at 3.45kg (7.59lb), a little under my estimate.

Pickup heights need some experimentation and levelling, too. Although the bridge is slightly hotter, the neck seems a little too forward, but after mucking about a bit and playing through some sounds, it ain't bad at all. The 8.54kohms neck pickup actually has a rather old Gibson pluminess to it that's not particularly Jazzmaster-like but actually suits the title more. In comparison, the 9.64k bridge is a little, erm, bland. There's a nice middy character that just about

jangles, but it seems to be attracted to a gainier amp sound and some dirtier rock 'n' roll. Now, that might be you done, and for what you've spent – and learned along the way – I don't think you'd feel short-changed. But I was imagining this offset bird to have a little more jangle, a little more twang...

Going Off-Piste

Perhaps it's Cream T's pickup-swapping guitars that have got to me, but the ability to instantly revoice a guitar is rather appealing. Our lowly offset doesn't do that, of course – and, to be honest, for any future mods it is a bit compromised. As I said, if I want to fit Jazzmaster pickups then I'd have to get someone to make me a new scratchplate. Even with that done, not only are the pickup positions fixed but you have to remove the neck to even get the scratchplate on or off to simply tweak the circuit. The Jaguar got it right with its separate control plate, as did the Telecaster.

"I fashion a pair of partial 'plates from Perspex. I can then colour them, Gretsch-style, with paint"

And that was the starting point: why don't I simply make a control plate for the volume, tone and output jack and another for the toggle switch? This would leave that swimming pool rout open, so, in theory, I could fix *any* pickups I wanted and easily reposition them. If I want to experiment with the circuit, I can just unscrew the separate control plate: easy. If I can find a small screw-in terminal block, I wouldn't even need to unsolder/resolder any new pickups in place – rather like Gibson's Quick Connect system. I wonder if I should trademark it: 'Quick-ish Connect'?

Decisions made, I decide to fashion a pair of partial 'plates from 3mm clear Perspex. I can then colour them, Gretsch-style, by painting them on the back. I made a couple of templates from a sturdy piece of card, using the areas of the original scratchplate to draw around [pic 6].

Using a coping saw with the blade reversed so it cuts on the downstroke, and a jewellers bench peg – a piece of floorboard with a 'V' cut into the front that you clamp to your work table – it's not too difficult to rough-cut the shapes. The edges will then need to be filed and sanded smooth [pics 7 & 8]. I then need to drill holes for the toggle switch, controls and smaller ones for the screws, which need to be countersunk to hold them in place. Working like this with clear acrylic sheet is pretty easy (again, the internet is your friend for tuition videos), but always make



Laying out the new control plate templates on the Perspex sheet

6



7. A quick move to the garden table to begin cutting the Perspex on the hastily made bench peg

8. Once rough cut, you can begin to file and sand the edges smooth

sure you clamp it to a piece of waste board before you drill: a hand drill is perfectly good, although a bigger hand drill brace will be needed for the larger, approx. 9.5mm diameter holes for full-size pots, toggle switch and output jack.

It's a couple of hours of concentrated work, but I'm happy with the result, and although the guitar is looking a bit, ahem, experimental (it still doesn't have a finish after all), in theory I can revoice my offset. Endlessly. A modding mate's bits-box supplies a couple of pairs of – “er, I think they're Fender” – Jazzmaster single coils. There's no ID or logos on the pickups, so I measure the DCRs and select the hottest pair (Jazzmaster pickups should be hum-cancelling when both are selected; one is reverse wound and reverse polarity, so the magnetic poles will attract), which measure 6.42k ohms and 6.29k [pic 9]. They've clearly been cut rather than unsoldered from their original guitar because the leads are only 100mm long,



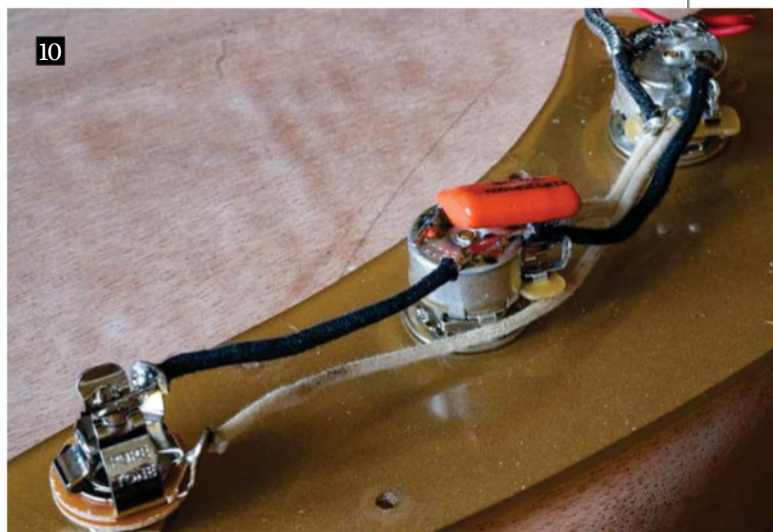
which normally might mean you'd have to lengthen them. But my idea is to wire up the toggle switch to the volume, tone and output jack, while connecting the pickups to a small screw-in terminal block that will mount in the swimming pool rout. That way, all I need in order to change the pickups is a small screwdriver.

9. The Jazzmaster pickup has a wider aperture than a Strat single coil and is one reason it sounds different

10. The new wiring mounted and soldered up on the gold back-sprayed control plate

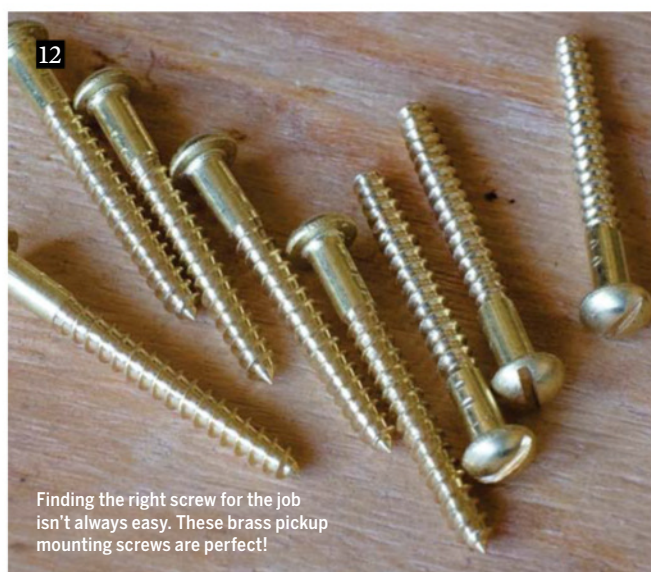
Nearly Finished

One thing about completing a kit build such as this is that it underlines just how much work is involved, even in a 'simple' project. If I'd stuck to the brief (and simply built the StewMac kit) I would have saved a lot of time, but my 'what if...?' intentions have added more hours. I also don't want to mess with the wiring loom of the kit, just in case my experiments didn't work out, so I refit the simple circuit with some quality CTS 550kohm mini pots, an Orange Drop tone cap, a short frame Switchcraft toggle switch, a Pure Tone output jack and some nice cloth-covered wire [pic 10].





11
The heart of the 'Quick-ish Connect' system is this Halford's screw-in connector block



12
Finding the right screw for the job isn't always easy. These brass pickup mounting screws are perfect!



It might look experimental, but now any direct-mount pickup can be installed without soldering

13

The screw-in terminal block adds yet more time – which was actually spent mainly on various electronics parts' websites trying to find what I needed. In fact, I found a small 'Connector Block' in Halfords (pic 11), where I'd popped in to buy some gold spray paint for those new Perspex control plates. Even the mounting screws for the Jazzmaster pickups took some thought – yes, you can buy those from most guitar parts suppliers, but they're overlong for what I needed so I ordered up some 2.5mm diameter, 25mm long, slot-head brass wood screws from Westfield Fasteners to match those gold-sprayed control plates [pic 12].

While the prototype 'Quick-ish Connect' concept does look a little 'Heath Robinson' [pic 13], it works perfectly and I now have

"While the prototype 'Quick-ish Connect' concept does look a little 'Heath Robinson', it works perfectly"

an offset that sounds like one and, more importantly, a pickup-testing platform for future sonic adventures. But I'm still going to need to dismantle it all so I can apply a finish to the body and neck. And I'm already wondering if I can upgrade that vibrato a little bit to match the mods I've already made... Before I get to that lot, though, I'm going to get some playtime in and evaluate my creation. **E**

WHAT'S THE COST?

A few pounds spent here and there soon add up. On top of our kit price, here's what we've outlaid so far (excluding a pair of donated Jazzmaster pickups and bits-box finds, such as control knobs)...

- StewMac Offset Trem Guitar Kit: £165 (at time of writing)

Shipping (exc import taxes etc): £86
www.stewmac.com

- Gotoh SD91 tuners: approx £48

6x Gotoh 10.2mm conversion bushings: £12.95

CTS 550k mini pots x2: £13.90

Switchcraft 'short frame' toggle switch: £23.95

Sprague Orange Drop .047 microfarads capacitor: £5.95
www.wdmusic.co.uk

- Clear acrylic sheet (350 x 250mm x 3mm): £10.58
www.theplasticman.co.uk

- 8x brass slot-head wood screws (approx £0.42 each, inc VAT and delivery): £3.36
www.westfieldfasteners.co.uk

Total spend (so far): £369.69

That should give you something to think about till our next issue.

In the meantime, if you have any modding questions, or suggestions, drop us a line – The Mod Squad.



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Huw Price's *Nitty Gritty*

After last issue's focus on preamp valves, Huw looks to their higher-voltage brethren

Power Valves

Preamp valves are usually triodes, with pentodes occasionally used and tetrodes not featuring at all. In contrast, power triodes are rarely used as power valves, but tetrodes and pentodes are commonplace. That said, power triodes have a following in hi-fi circles where their supposedly superior audio characteristics take precedence over sheer volume.

Triodes had been around since 1906 and tetrodes can be traced back to Walter Schottky's work on bi-grid valves in 1919. Early tetrodes were devised to outperform the high-frequency response of triodes, but they were only partially successful, for reasons we'll discuss later. Meanwhile in Holland, valve technology was about to take a big step forward.

Pentode Push

Bernard DH Tellegen and Gilles Holst invented the pentode valve in 1926, while they were working for the Philips Physics Laboratory in Eindhoven. Mullard was a subsidiary of Phillips and the name would later become synonymous with the best pentode power valves.

Power and preamp pentodes work in exactly the same way, as we described in last issue's *Nitty Gritty* column. With a negatively charged suppressor grid added to reflect secondary electron emission caused by the screen grid, pentodes can produce far greater amplification than triode and tetrode power valves.

The most famous example is probably the EL34, which has been used in various

Marshall, Orange, Vox, Selmer and Hiwatt amps. These valves have become closely associated with 'British' rock tone, where their powerful midrange and break-up characteristics become an asset. The lower power EL84 is a smaller pentode that unusually slots into the type of mini nine-pin socket that's usually used for preamp valves. EL84s powered the Vox AC4, 10, 15 and 30, as well as Marshall 18-watt and 20-watt models, plus various lower-power WEM amps. They also featured in Gibson amps under the US designation 6BQ5.

Tetrode Types

As we described last time, the tetrode's screen grid causes electrons to hit the anode so hard that more electrons are emitted from the anode. This secondary emission effect occurs within a specific anode voltage range and causes increased distortion and lower amplification. When the valve's anode current to anode voltage response is plotted out on a graph, the current dip or 'kink' is clear to see on the curve.

Pentode valves provided a viable alternative, but with the Phillips Corporation holding the patent, other manufacturers would have to make royalty payments. Instead, electronics engineers redesigned the tetrode using carefully aligned control and screen grids made from wire coils to provide electrons with an unobstructed path from cathode to anode.

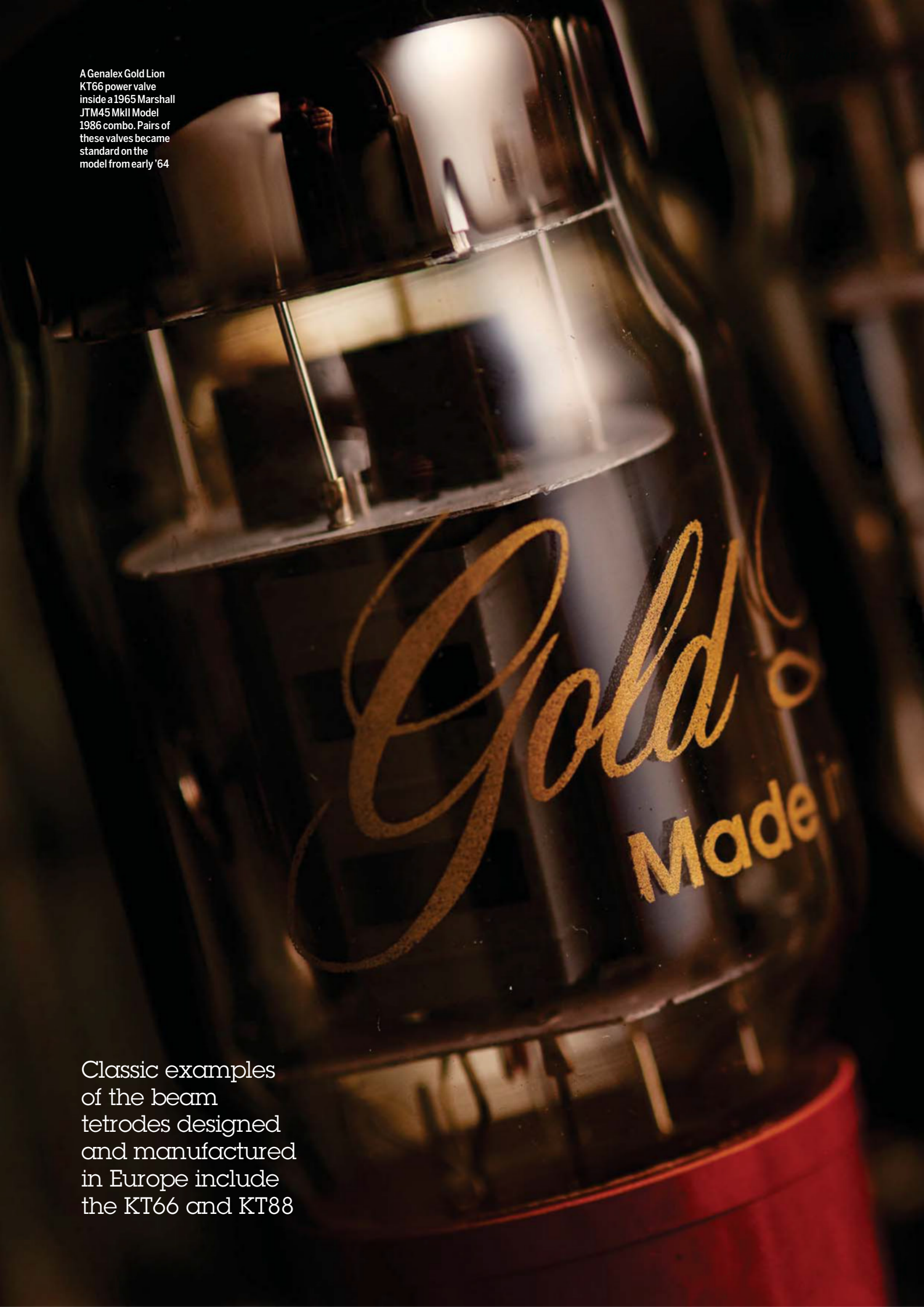
Class A amps generate more heat than Class AB and are associated with a smoother overdrive

They also employed negatively charged beam confining plates to direct the electrons towards the anode. This focuses the electrons so they converge between the screen grid and the anode before continuing to the anode. This area of convergence forms a 'virtual' suppressor grid to knock any secondary emissions back to the anode and eliminate the 'kink' that typifies tetrode valves.

The tetrode power valves used in guitar amps are more accurately known as 'beam tetrodes', 'kinkless tetrodes' or 'beam power



Lower-powered than the famous EL34 that defined the 'British' rock sound, EL84s featured in Vox's AC amps and are pictured here in a Carr Lincoln combo



A Genalex Gold Lion
KT66 power valve
inside a 1965 Marshall
JTM45 MkII Model
1986 combo. Pairs of
these valves became
standard on the
model from early '64

Classic examples
of the beam
tetrodes designed
and manufactured
in Europe include
the KT66 and KT88

1. The EL34 became synonymous with British rock, appearing in amps from Marshall, Orange, Vox, Selmer and Hiwatt

2. The KT66 is a type of 'beam' or 'kinkless' tetrode power valve

3. Original GEC KT66 and KT88 valves are very rare and their sky-high prices reflects this, but modern-production alternatives, such as those used in amps including Blackstar's Studio 10 KT88, pictured here, are also available

4. Single-ended operation means that only one power valve is used in an amp – such is the case for this vintage Fender tweed Champ



tubes'. Compared to pentodes operating at the same anode voltage, the screen grid current remains very low, so there is almost no loss of signal, and power output can be up to 20 per cent higher with lower third harmonic distortion.

The list of beam tetrodes used in guitar amps is extensive. Most will be familiar with the 6V6, 6L6, 5881 and 6550 used in countless US-made amps, as well as British amps destined for the US market. Beam tetrodes were also designed and manufactured in Europe by Marconi-Osram, and classic examples include the KT66 used in early Marshalls and the KT88 seen in high-power Marshall, Hiwatt and Ampeg amps.

By now, you can probably guess what 'KT' stands for ('kinkless tetrode', for anyone who missed it). Original GEC KT66s and KT88s are now rare and eye-wateringly expensive, largely because hi-fi enthusiasts are even crazier than guitarists when it comes to vintage valves. Things have gone much the same way with classic US beam tetrodes, but in both cases viable modern-production options are available.

Single-Ended

Using only one power valve in an amplifier is known as 'single-ended' operation and examples of single-ended amps include

the Fender Champ (as pictured, opposite), Vibro Champ and tweed Princeton, the Vox AC4 and the Carr Mercury.

In single-ended operation, the power valve amplifies both the positive and negative phases of the audio waveform. Although rare, some amp designs feature two power valves operating in parallel single-ended mode to generate more power. But where power is the priority, push-pull operation is the industry standard.

Pushing & Pulling

In push-pull mode, one valve amplifies the positive side of the waveform and the other valve amplifies the negative. This means the power valves can 'rest' when they're not pushing signal, and this sharing of the workload allows push-pull amps to generate power more efficiently and with less harmonic distortion.

Depending on the power requirements, push-pull amps can utilise pairs, quartets, sextets or even octets of power valves. The only stipulation for 'parallel push-pull' is that the same number of valves operate on each side of the audio signal.

Class Systems

Guitar amps are usually designated Class A and AB, but contrary to appearances, Class A isn't necessarily superior to Class AB.

When power valves 'rest' for portions of the audio cycle, that's Class AB. In Class A the power valves never shut down and they all work continuously. Class AB operation is more efficient and it makes amps louder and punchier. All single-ended amps operate in Class A because there is no second power valve to share the work. Push-pull amps can also operate in Class A, with the Fender Tweed Deluxe being a classic example.

These Class A amps generate more heat and are associated with a smoother overdrive and harmonic complexity. But it's not always a straightforward 'A versus AB' thing because amp designers can adjust the supply voltage and bias to place an amp anywhere on the A to AB spectrum.

Being Biased

Understanding the basics of biasing should make it clear why changing power valves is not like changing light bulbs, and why you can't simply replace 6V6s with 6L6s if you want more power – or vice versa. The bias setting equates to a car's idle revs. In other words, the level at which the valve or engine ticks over when it's at rest.

In the case of valves, biasing means setting the idle current flowing through the valve when there's no audio signal present. The overwhelming majority of valve amps have power tubes operating in either fixed bias or cathode bias mode, so let's examine





4

how each method works and discuss the resulting sonic characteristics.

Higher-power amps tend to have a fixed bias arrangement, which is usually associated with tighter lows, clean headroom, more punch and less compression. You'll find it in most Fender, Hiwatt and Marshall amps rated over 20 watts, and virtually any high-gain amp.

But 'fixed bias' is slightly misleading because the point at which it's fixed it can be varied. A diode 'half wave' rectifies a negative voltage from power transformer, which connects to the power valve control grids via bias and grid resistors.

The negative bias voltage can be adjusted by changing resistor values or using a potentiometer. On a related note, bias tremolo actually functions by modulating the bias voltage, which causes the valve output to fluctuate. Some technical knowledge is needed to bias a set of power valves, and that's beyond the scope of this article. However, bias should be checked and, if necessary, reset when swapping valves because they all vary to some degree.

The bias setting will affect tone as well as the lifespan of the valves, and every valve will have a recommended bias range for any given plate voltage. Running a valve at the hotter end of that spectrum generates more power and potentially distortion. This

stresses the anode/plate and you will need to change valves more regularly – assuming they don't 'red plate' and blow up.

Cool running valves sound cleaner and they should last longer, but you may find the tone somewhat sterile and uninspiring. Generally speaking, most techs will set the fixed bias voltage to generate about 70 per cent of a valve's maximum power. There is always a sweet spot, so drawing conclusions about the tonal characteristics of various power valves operating in fixed bias mode is spurious unless the bias is checked and adjusted for each set.

Cathode biasing is simpler and to some extent self-adjusting. Rather than connecting directly to ground, as is the case with fixed biasing, the cathode is grounded via a bias resistor with a capacitor generally wired in parallel. Pairs of valves usually share the same cathode bias components, but they can also be biased individually. Cathode bias sonic characteristics may

Higher-power amps tend to have a fixed bias arrangement – for tighter lows and clean headroom

include extra touch compression, smooth overdrive, harmonically rich midrange and early break-up.

So long as the cathode resistor and capacitor test good, a new set of equivalent power valves can replace the old ones without any need for a bias check. Having said that, checking the bias is never a bad idea given the cost of valves these days.

In cathode bias mode, valves can be run at close to 100 per cent of their power potential. Typical examples of cathode biased amps include all the tweed Fender Deluxe models, the Vox AC10, AC15 and AC30, and Marshall 18 Watt. Vintage-inspired modern examples include Lazy J's J10 and J20, and various offerings from the likes of Carr, Matchless and Swart.

Power Switching

Power switches are becoming more prevalent on amps, and pentodes can be reconfigured to work as triodes to achieve low power mode. In order words, taking the pentode's screen and suppressor grids out of circuit leaves only the cathode, anode and control grid as the active components. This method of power reduction can be preferable to onboard or outboard attenuation and, relatively speaking, it has little effect on an amplifier's tone. 

www.huwpriceguitar.com



Old Timers

Paul Gough of Zilla Cabs sings the praises of vintage speakers – with a few choice warnings to consider before buying used

These days it feels like we fetishise most things vintage, while at the same time trying to modernise – and guitarists are no different. Guitars from the 1950s and 60s can fetch prices in the tens of thousands. But what are the implications for guitar speakers? Having a soft spot for vintage guitar sounds and being a cab builder has led to me owning a fair few vintage speakers. Mixing this with 20 years of repair work, I have been fortunate enough to play some real stonkers... but I've come across some real stinkers, too.

I'm a big believer that there are no rights or wrongs in music, and although I've played plenty of speakers that most people would struggle to make sound good, most of the stinkers have actually been caused by mechanical faults. Unlike guitars, speakers are mostly moving parts, and it's not hard to see that issues can arise over time. Since speakers don't come with a certified mileage history, buying vintage can be a risky business. Other than just being lucky, there are a few key things to look out for.

Until recently, with the scaling down in size and weight of rigs, 4x12s could be acquired at a reasonable price – and it's not surprising considering the state most

old cabs are in. Many a time I have opened a beat up old, beer-soaked Marshall 4x12 and found four lovely looking Greenbacks. Should I have to replace any one of these speakers with a modern-day equivalent or reissue, the cost would be comparable to what I paid for the entire cab. It's true that not everyone wants four speakers, but it's better than having none! The risk here is that most cabs pre-1980s come with lower powered speakers, and from an era where playing a 100-watt amp at full volume wasn't considered a faux pas. It's not uncommon to find at least one blown speaker (case in point: the Rory Gallagher 4x12 with four different speakers inside from last issue).

One way to reduce this risk is to buy individual speakers, and this will often be from someone who took them out of a vintage cab. This may sound great, but it isn't always pain-free. A lot of people will play vintage gear before they buy it, but this is rarely possible with speakers – and speakers aren't really the kind of thing to hang up on your wall (even I don't do that...), so they need to be played. Unfortunately, with the price rises in vintage speakers it has become a little like the Wild West. Sellers have

been known to describe speakers as having 'vintage bite' or 'grit', when it would be more accurate to describe them as 'broken'. A few years back I bought six vintage speakers with the intention of making a video for my YouTube channel (the first time I've mentioned that in almost a year, not bad!). We set up the studio, got the speakers fired up... and not one worked as it should.

On the plus side, there are a few obvious signs to look out for. Cone repairs will affect how the speaker sounds, but the massive reduction in price that they often yield doesn't always mean they're a write-off. Bits hanging off are never a good sign. Take a look inside the back of the speaker chassis/basket: behind the cone there is a ribbed material called a spider and that can often come unglued. It helps keep the voice coil centred, which leads to one of the

"Many a time I have opened a beer-soaked Marshall 4x12 and found four lovely looking Greenbacks"



What lies beneath: your next set of replacement speakers could be sourced used – but always do a quick health check if possible

most obvious signs – voice-coil rubbing. There are a few causes, but the result is not good. There are two giveaway signs of voice-coil rubbing. One, when the cone is gently tapped it will rattle (in bad cases), rather than sound tight like a drum. The other check is similar: by gently moving the cone down with your fingers, testing the speaker's suspension, you will hear a slight rub. This isn't good, and therefore signals this is not a speaker you should buy.

Despite all those caveats, I don't want to scare people off. There are some fantastic speakers out there and some bargains to be had, too, but it can be a minefield at times, so go into it carefully. No names mentioned, but there are some real gems at rock-bottom prices if you use your ears, rather than go on what the internet says. To sum things up, go into this with an open mind and there's every chance you'll love the results. **G**



Since it's often difficult to 'play' vintage speakers before buying, it pays to check out the cones for old repairs, damage and excessive wear and tear



Rod Brakes' ClassicGear

A true workhorse of the Martin line, this iconic guitar is a zenith of flat-top design

Martin D-18

The instrument you see here – Mark Knopfler's 1935 Martin D-18 – represents an apex of acoustic guitar building. Despite the vast technological advances of the post-war period, many would argue this perennially popular design has never been bettered. One of the most imitated flat-top blueprints in history, Martin's Dreadnought (originally spelled Dreadnaught) is the archetypal American acoustic guitar. But it would be a mistake to think that it suddenly appeared from out of nowhere; there was an entire century's worth of innovation leading up to its arrival.

If you look at a Martin headstock from the past 90 years, you'll probably see a decal that reads 'CF Martin & Co Est. 1833'. It was 1932 when the firm began using this transfer – nigh on 100 years after company founder Christian Frederick Martin Sr arrived in New York City in November 1833. Having spent two months on an epic voyage from Germany, the Johann Stauffer-trained luthier set up shop and was producing guitars within months.

During the 1830s, he started moving away from building maple-bodied, figure-of-eight guitars with ornate/moustache bridges and Strat-like Stauffer headstocks in favour of Spanish-style rosewood instruments with smaller upper bouts and rectangular bridges and headstocks. At the same time, he began experimenting with X-bracing and in 1843 produced the first ever X-braced Martin for famed Spanish

guitarist Madame de Goñi. Nearly 180 years later, this style of bracing is still in use.

Madame de Goñi's X-braced guitar provided noticeable improvements with respect to tone and volume, and dealers soon began asking for "the de Goñi model". Hers was a size 1 guitar. It was the largest Martin available at the time, measuring 12 3/4 inches in width. Seeking to further increase volume and low-end by way of expanding body size, Martin then introduced the 13 1/2-inch wide 0 size, followed by the 14 1/8-inch wide 00 size in 1854 and 1858, respectively. It was also during the 1850s that the first style 18 guitars appeared. These instruments were originally constructed using rosewood and cost \$18 wholesale (hence the name/designation).

The next important steps in acoustic guitar evolution leading up to the Dreadnought came in 1902. Not only did Martin's first 15-inch wide 000 size guitar, a 000-21, arrive that year, but so too did the company's first steel-string model, a special order 00-21. While Hawaiian music grew in popularity, Martin began offering

CF Martin Sr began experimenting with X-bracing in the 1830s and this style of bracing is still in use today

steel-string guitars as a regular option in the 1910s. Its first steel-string only model, the 2-17, appeared in 1922 and by the late 1920s, steel strings, rather than gut strings, were the norm.

During this transitional period, Martin built its first ever Dreadnought for Hawaiian musician Mekia Kealakai in 1916. Although the firm began producing Dreadnoughts exclusively for retailers Ditson that year, Martin started branding the large 15 5/8-inch wide D models under its own name in 1931 after the Ditson company folded. Finally, in 1934, Martin changed the Dreadnought from a 12- to 14-fret neck design, following the introduction of its first 14-fret flat-top, the OM-28, in 1929. Now, with its century-long evolution complete, the Martin Dreadnought had at last achieved its iconic form. **G**

The Evolution of the Martin D-18

1850s

First 18 Series instruments; rosewood back & sides; spruce top

1916

Mekia Kealakai custom Dreadnought; first production Dreadnoughts (Ditson 111 model)

1917

18 Series changes from rosewood to mahogany back & sides

1923

Steel strings standard for 18 Series

1931

First Martin-branded Dreadnoughts (D-1/D-18 and D-2/D-28); 12-fret necks

1934

Change from 12- to 14-fret necks

1946

Change from ebony to rosewood fretboard & bridge; Sitka spruce replaces Adirondack spruce

1969

East Indian rosewood replaces Brazilian rosewood

Mid-80s

Adjustable truss rod

2012

Return to ebony fretboard & bridge



This headstock decal first appeared in 1932, almost a century after the company's inception



1935 Martin D-18

1. SERIAL NUMBER

Five-digit number between 58680 and 61947 stamped on neck block

2. HEADSTOCK

Decal reads 'C F Martin & Co Est. 1833'; Brazilian rosewood veneer

3. PLASTICS

Tortoiseshell celluloid pickguard

4. HARDWARE

Ebony belly bridge with six pins; open-back Grover tuners

5. BODY

15 ⁵/₈ inches wide; Adirondack spruce top; scalloped X-bracing; mahogany back and sides; multiple-ply (b/w) top binding; bound back (b); multiple-ply (b/w) soundhole rings; nitrocellulose lacquer finish

6. NECK

Mahogany; steel 'T'-bar reinforced; 25.4-inch scale length; 14th-fret body join; ebony fingerboard; dot inlays to 15th fret; 20 'T' frets; Brazilian rosewood neck heel cap; nitrocellulose lacquer finish

Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks

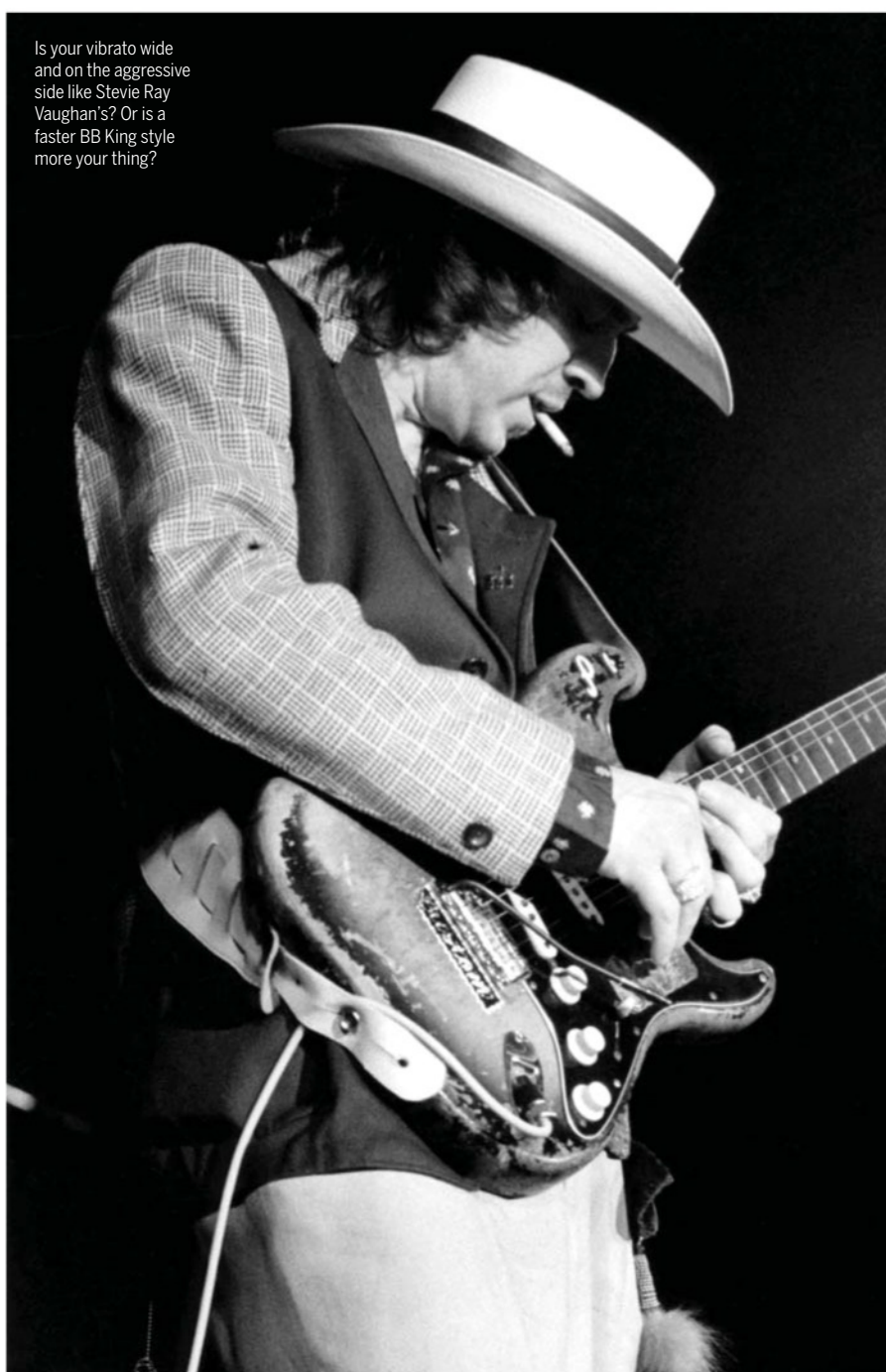


Vibrato

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Knaggs SSC, Boss Keeley SD1 & Vox AC15 C1

Difficulty ★★★☆☆ | 10 mins per example

Is your vibrato wide and on the aggressive side like Stevie Ray Vaughan's? Or is a faster BB King style more your thing?



ONE OF THE MOST distinctive features of any electric guitarist is their vibrato. In this Blues Headlines, I'm dealing with finger vibrato rather than whammy bar, inspired by players such as Paul Kossoff, Peter Green, SRV and BB King, whose vibratos differ greatly in terms of speed and depth. In another case, that of Gary Moore, this can also stretch to how long you might sustain a note before introducing the vibrato gradually. As a starting point, I'm identifying some distinct elements of this technique that have been helpful to recognise over many years – and explaining them as coherently as I can!

The permutations are obviously huge, but we can zone in on details such as raising a note momentarily sharp, then releasing it back to the original pitch, or partially releasing a string bend then returning it up to pitch in a 'down-and-back' pattern (think Peter Green). We can also combine both above and below the central pitch of a bend, like Paul Kossoff.

There are tell-tale hand positions that go with certain vibrato styles, so it's worth searching out whatever video footage you can of players whose vibrato you admire. BB King and Eric Clapton favour lifting the fretting hand thumb away from the back of the neck and rocking the whole wrist and forearm to add vibrato to static (namely, not bent) notes. For vibrato on string bends, there is a similar rocking motion but with the thumb anchored over the top of the fretboard. The fretting fingers remain locked in position, with the wrist and forearm muscles providing the movement – the same muscles we use when turning a key or opening a door. To get the full effect of these examples, you'll need to hear the audio in addition to the transcription here. Hope you enjoy these ideas and see you next time! 🎸



Richard Barrett's album, *Colours*, (complete with backing tracks), is available now from www.richardbarrettguitar.com

Example 1

THIS FIRST EXAMPLE is inspired by Peter Green. A 'down-and-back' vibrato is generated by partially releasing a string bend then returning to the target pitch, which gives a very distinctive effect, which you'll also hear in Gary Moore's playing sometimes. This approach seems to be most effective when added to a pre-bent note. After holding still for a second, you can increase the vibrato gradually or dive straight in. These subtleties are what makes this technique so personal and distinctive.

Example 2

ADDING VIBRATO TO STATIC (NON-BENT) NOTES like this means going slightly up in pitch then releasing to the original note. This can be done quickly or slowly according to taste, with BB King erring on the faster side and Eric Clapton slightly slower and more subtle. In both cases, the fretting hand thumb is lifted away from the back of the neck to allow the wrist and forearm to rock to and fro. The fretting fingers are kept relatively rigid.

The image shows a musical score for the song "The Sound of Silence" by Simon & Garfunkel. It includes a guitar part (top staff) and a bass part (bottom staff). The guitar part is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The bass part is written in bass clef. The score is divided into four measures. The guitar part features various chords (Em, G, A, Bm) and melodic lines with triplets and slurs. The bass part includes fret numbers (7, 9, 10, 12) and rhythmic markings (7/9, 9, 10/12, 9-7, 7-9, 9, 7-5, 7). The bass part also has a 1/4 note marking. The score is labeled "E B B G A E M" on the left side, indicating the notes of the bass line.

Example 3

IN THIS EXAMPLE, I'M ADDING VIBRATO to a string bend going above then returning to the target pitch in an 'up-and-back' pattern. It gives a different quality and emotional impact and was favoured very much by Gary Moore. The fretting hand thumb is clamped over the top of the neck to give leverage and the fingers are held pretty rigidly while the wrist and forearm adopt a rocking motion, similar to twisting a door knob. It is this that generates the vibrato, rather than the fingers themselves.

Example 4

PAUL KOSSOFF AND ANGUS YOUNG have a very distinctive vibrato – which is very difficult to copy! In this example, I've tried to highlight how a wider 'above and below' vibrato can give us another option. Different speeds will give different results, and it's sometimes fun to go over the top then rein it back in for dramatic effect. Ideally, I would like to have wobbled that last note a bit wider and quicker, but you get the idea!

Example 4 is a guitar solo in B minor (Bm) in 4/4 time. The notation features a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The solo consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, often grouped in threes. A wide vibrato is indicated by wavy lines above the notes. The fretboard diagram below the staff shows the following fret numbers: 17(19), 17, 17(19), 17(19), 17(19), 15, 16, 17(19), 17(19), 17, 15, 17, 15, 17(19), 17, 14, 17, 15, 16. The diagram is labeled with 'BU' (bend up) and 'BD' (bend down) for specific notes, and 'PB 17' (pull bend) for the final note.

Example 5

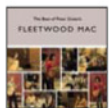
THIS SLOWER, WIDER VIBRATO is most distinctive on static notes, but as you'll hear I've applied it to a bend near the end of the phrase. Jimi Hendrix, SRV and Zakk Wylde are great examples of players who employ what can be quite an aggressive-sounding vibrato. Though the static notes limit us to 'up-and-back', I've gone a little above and below on the bends. The best way to assess how you're doing with all this is to record yourself and listen back.

Example 5 is a guitar solo in E minor (Em) in 4/4 time. The notation features a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The solo consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, often grouped in threes. A slower, wider vibrato is indicated by wavy lines above the notes. The fretboard diagram below the staff shows the following fret numbers: 17, 0, 7, 9, 9, 7, 9, 9, 9, 7, 9, 7, 9, 11, 7, 10, 9, 10, 12, 10, 7, 9, 11, 9, 7, 9. The diagram is labeled with 'BU' (bend up) and 'BD' (bend down) for specific notes, and 'PB 9' (pull bend) for the final note.

Hear It Here

PETER GREEN

THE BEST OF PETER GREEN'S
FLEETWOOD MAC



Starting with *Albatross*, you can hear the rapid 'down-and-back' vibrato in Peter Green and Danny Kirwan's super-accurate harmony guitars. It's also on *Black Magic Woman*, but like many of the finer things in this world, it's subtle, so listen closely. Finally, you'll hear it through the layers of guitars on *The Green Manalishi*, though some of the older tracks such as *Stop Messin' Round* showcase a fine BB King-style vibrato, too.

FREE

FIRE AND WATER



It would be easiest just to cite every track on here, but some particular highlights are the title track, featuring almost endless sustain and vibrato. Also, check out *Oh I Wept* and *Mr Big*. As well as Paul Kossoff's famous vibrato, there are some unusual and very effective chord voicings. It's also quite educational to hear how much power and drama they were able to create with a bare minimum of overdubbing or effects from the recording studio.

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN & DOUBLE TROUBLE

PRIDE & JOY



Another case of being able to recommend the whole album: this posthumous release from 1990 pulls in material from a variety of sources, including live recordings. At certain points you can hear SRV mixing and matching pretty much all the techniques we've looked at here; *Texas Flood* is a great example, as is *You Better Leave My Gal Alone*. Perhaps the ultimate display of his prowess is the blistering cover of *Voodoo Chile*.



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