

BERNIE MARSDEN
A TRIBUTE TO THE LATE WHITESNAKE LEGEND

LIFESON LES PAUL
THE RUSH ICON'S VERSATILE NEW EPIPHONE



Guitarist

Issue 503

OCTOBER 2023

THE PLAYERS
JONATHAN WILSON
ROBIN TROWER
JESSE DAYTON
& More

"THE KIND OF GUITAR PLAYING I LOVED BECAME PRETTY MUCH ILLEGAL..."
Chris Shiflett

Chris SHIFLETT

HIS JOURNEY FROM FOO FIGHTER TO COUNTRY-ROCK KING

ROBBIE ROBERTSON
A TRIBUTE TO *THE BAND*'S GUITAR GENIUS

Reviews
ORANGE OR30 HEAD
BARE KNUCKLE TRIPTYCH
EHX NANO EFFECTS PEDALS
& More!

PLUS FREE 36-PAGE GUIDE
ICONIC GUITARS VOL.2

FUTURE



Blackstar®
AMPLIFICATION

the sound in your head

Designed & Engineered
by Blackstar Amplification UK

Find your nearest dealer at
www.blackstaramps.com

Guitarist

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

Shine On



Just a few days before sending this issue to press, we learned the sad news that Bernie Marsden had passed away. A man who had known fame in Whitesnake and a host of other high-profile rock outfits, Bernie always had the knack of making anyone he spoke to feel like an old friend. So when the world learned he had died, there was a palpable sense of personal loss, not just *pro forma* regret.

One heard the same things said of Bernie time and again: that he was 'a lovely bloke' who spoke to people like a 'regular guy', though he could have easily lorded it over mere mortals who hadn't played stadiums in their time. But his modesty was disarming – for Bernie was co-writer behind huge hits that were landmarks of 80s rock, such as *Here I Go Again* and *Fool For Your Loving*. It takes something special to create music that becomes part of the fabric of people's lives, but Bernie had that gift.

He will also be remembered as a man who was devoted to the guitar. Though a very fine player himself, he never tired of listening to other players he admired, such as Rory Gallagher and T-Bone Walker. It says a lot about his character that praise for musicians he loved was on his lips far more often than his own achievements, which were many.

To paraphrase the Beatles, in the end the love you take is equal to the love you make. Bernie takes with him the affection of countless fans, friends and fellow guitar-lovers, partly because he gave his time, his advice and his considerable talents so freely to others. In truth, he never went alone down 'the lonely street of dreams' – he had too many friends for that. He has them still. This issue of the magazine is respectfully dedicated to his memory. Rest well, Bernie.



Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights



Last Waltz

Sadly, we also said goodbye to another great, Robbie Robertson, this month. We salute his musical triumphs with Dylan and The Band **p70**



Chris Shiflett

He's rocked the world with the Foo Fighters but Chris Shiflett has rediscovered his country-rock roots on his superb new album **p60**



Rush Hour

Epiphone's new Alex Lifeson signature model is a superbly capable prog-rock machine that could cover all the bases in your musical world **p8**

COVER IMAGES: MAIN PHOTO BY ADAM GASSON BERNIE MARSDEN & EPIPHONE ALEX LIFESON PHOTOS BY OLLY CURTIS

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

Art Editor
Darren Phillips
darren.phillips@futurenet.com

Deputy Editor
David Mead
david.mead@futurenet.com

Reviews Editor
Dave Burrluck
dave@daveburrluck.com

Managing Editor
Lucy Rice
lucy.rice@futurenet.com

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

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

Contributors
Richard Barrett, Alex Bishop, Rod Brakes, Trevor Curwen, Eva Garis, Paul Gough, Nick Guppy, Martin Holmes, Richard Hood, Glenn Kimpton, Neville Marten, Huw Price, Davina Rungasamy, Gary Stuckey, Stuart Williams, Henry Yates

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@ 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 Sarah Harrison sarah.harrison@futurenet.com

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

CIRCULATION
HEAD OF 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 **Jon Steinberg**
Non-Executive Chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief Financial and Strategy Officer **Penny Ladkin-Brand**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

All contents © 2023 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

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


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

Contents



COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY
Adam Gasson

COVER FEATURE

Chris Shiflett

60 With his new album *Lost At Sea*, Foo Fighters guitarist Chris Shiflett has made the jump from alt-rock superstar to country-rock king look easy. We find out how the West was won

ISSUE 503 OCTOBER 2023



REGULARS

032.....Gas Supply
034.....Fretbuzz
036.....New Music
038.....Tones Behind The Tracks
042.....Opinion
046.....Substitute
048.....Feedback
094.....Subscribe
106.....Longterm Test
108.....Bought & Sold
110.....The Mod Squad
116.....Nitty Gritty
120.....Talking Loud
122.....Classic Gear
124.....Vintage Icons
130.....Next Month



FEATURES

052.....Obituary: Bernie Marsden
056.....Jonathan Wilson
060.....Chris Shiflett
070.....Obituary: Robbie Robertson
100.....Blueprint: Sunbear Pickups

NEW GEAR

008.....**Epiphone** Alex Lifeson Les Paul Custom Axcess
014.....**Orange** OR30H Head
018.....**Haynes** Demeanour
024.....**Bare Knuckle** Triptych Set
026.....**J Rockett** HRM V2
028.....**Beetronics** Octahive V2
030.....**Daniels Guitars** Pugilist
074.....**Cream T** Aurora Custom V2
084.....**Turnstone** TG
096.....**Electro-Harmonix** Nano Deluxe Memory Man, Nano Pulsar, Nano Q-Tron & Nano Metal Muff

TECHNIQUES

126.....Blues Headlines with Richard Barrett

VIDEO & AUDIO

To enjoy all of the video and audio content in this issue, type the following link into your browser and follow the instructions in the post entitled 'Guitarist video and audio': **http://bit.ly/guitaristextra**

music radar SCAN TO GET OUR WEEKLY NEWSLETTER



EPIPHONE ALEX LIFESON LES PAUL CUSTOM AXCESS
£1,449

WHAT IS IT? Custom-style version of Lifeson's previous Epiphone Standard with thinner contoured body, Floyd Rose and expansive switching

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

Different Strings

Epiphone unveils its second Alex Lifeson signature model, this time as a Les Paul Custom. However, there's a Ghost (or not) at the feast...

Words Stuart Williams **Photography** Olly Curtis



Signature guitar design is easy, isn't it? Take an off-the-peg model, give it a lick of paint, put a squiggle on it somewhere, and talk up the proprietary tonal benefits until the cash rolls in? Well, actually, no. If you know anything about Rush legend Alex Lifeson, it should be that he has an eye for detail when it comes to the music he makes, and the instruments he uses to make it, so a guitar bearing his name is likely to be a little bit outside of the norm.

Sure enough, this is evidenced by his Gibson and Epiphone signature models. The former first appeared in 2011 as a Custom Shop model, and in 2021 Gibson and Alex ported many of that high-end model's features – most notably the Les Paul Axcess heel and Graph Tech Ghost-equipped vibrato – over to Epiphone for the Alex Lifeson Les Paul Axcess Standard. The guitar was a hit, offering some out-of-the-ordinary features at a reasonably affordable price point. And, now, Epiphone has turned its attention to the tuxedo model, putting the Lifeson styling into a Les Paul Custom.

Here, we get a mixture of improvements, similarities and one or two big differences


RHYTHM
TREBLE
Epiphone



1. As we've seen on previous applications, the Axcess heel makes taking a trip up the mountain incredibly comfortable. It's a feature we're used to seeing on some rival single-cuts, and a great addition away from tradition

(we'll get to those). It starts with the thinner mahogany body design. That's clad with a AAAA-grade, quilted maple veneer and offered in the Lifeson-approved Ruby red finish. This being a Custom, the laurel fingerboard of the Standard model has been swapped for a darker, arguably classier-looking piece of ebony, and, of course, there's the split diamond inlay on the headstock.

There are some more subtle visual tweaks, too: the multi-ply body binding, LP Custom block inlays (rather than trapezoids), and black top hat knobs where the Standard had gold. Talking of gold, there's a lot of it, courtesy of the covered Epiphone Ceramic Pro (neck) and ProBucker 3 (bridge) pickups, Grover Rotomatics and the Floyd Rose 1000 vibrato.

Which brings us to the elephant double-locked in the room because the Custom's Floyd Rose is just that. Gone is the Graph Tech Ghost, leaving us with a regular Floyd Rose and no piezo voice. Given that it's been a distinctive part of previous Lifeson models, we asked Epiphone for the reasoning: "Alex wanted something different," we're told, "so he went with the Custom appointments and the simplicity of just the Floyd sans-piezo."

So, bad news for Lifeson fans looking for pseudo-acoustic tones, but the good news is that the coil-splitting remains for both pickups via the push-pull volume

Gone is the Graph Tech Ghost, leaving us with a Floyd Rose and no piezo voice… but coil-splitting remains for both pickups



2. We aren't lacking voicing options, with individual coil-splits for each pickup on the volume pots. The neck pickup can be placed out of phase, which makes for some added dimension in the blended middle position



3

controls. Turn to the neck tone knob and we're rewarded with another switch, this time knocking the neck pickup out of phase when engaged. However, a second gripe also emerges when you look at the price. The 2021 standard came in at £799, while the Custom has a whopping jump of around 80 per cent at £1,449.

Feel & Sounds

Still, we're here to look at what we could be buying, rather than what we could have won. Out of the case, Alex's Custom cuts a sharp, impressive figure. The Ruby finish is much more at home with what we're used to seeing him play, and while the sheer presence of a Floyd Rose on a Les Paul is divisive, there's no denying that the blend of gold, black appointments and red quilt veneer give this guitar a striking 'sports car' visual that will be a magnet for some players out there.

The upmarket feel continues with the playability, too. There might not be any weight relief by design, but we get it by proxy instead with the thinner body and a large amount of wood chewed out to make way for the Floyd. It's a sturdy but not overly bulky guitar that is balanced on the strap and isn't going to curve your spine after long playing sessions. The comfort is aided by the same belly carve we've seen on the Standard, also nestling in nicely when played seated.

Then there's the neck, whose profile is described by Epiphone as 'rounded' but in reality is a fairly modern-feeling, medium-thin profile that maintains a bit of chunk in the palm. Epiphone has hit something of a stride in the past 18 months, and the ebony fingerboard on our review model follows the likes we've seen on the Adam Jones and Jerry Cantrell Les Paul Custom models. Combined with the medium-jumbo frets, the journey around the fretboard is smooth and glassy with no hint of grit.

That gets even better when you venture to the upper frets and discover the Axcess heel. It's really a joy to play, with the neck flowing seamlessly into the body for a smooth take-off in a way that isn't there on regular LPs. It's a similar story with the Floyd Rose, which arrives with us perfectly balanced and takes care of tuning business even after some heavy-handed divebombing.

Tonally, there's a lot on offer. The neck pickup packs a punch with a slight compression to our ears, which we think will help it cut through when played clean.

3. Alex's Les Paul Standard had a Graph Tech Ghost-equipped double-locking vibrato, while this Les Paul Custom version settles for a standard Floyd Rose 1000. As such, this version reverts to a standard single-jack output

4. This Custom model's class continues to the headstock with its split diamond inlay, plus that dark bound ebony fretboard and block inlays



4



There's a Ceramic Pro in the neck position and a ProBucker 3 at the bridge. Together with the switching options they deliver a full house of tones, with the single-coil and out-of-phase positions proving genuinely useful

It's got some brightness (for its position), too, maintaining its clarity even under heavy gain, and with the height adjusted certainly works well with the bridge position ProBucker. With the coil-split engaged, we're transported to some convincing neck single-coil tones, and these are enhanced with a funky quack if you flip the phase and put the selector in the middle position.

Talking of which, if you're the kind of player who skips over the midpoint on a Les Paul, the full humbucker sounds, switched out of phase with each other, might be enough to make you revisit it. With this voicing, it's a bit like having a bandpass filter or a more subtle cocked-wah in the chain.

Finally, there's the bridge pickup in isolation, which we've seen before in many Epiphones. Here, the story is very much what we're used to – fat, meaty bridge tones that excel under medium crunch and higher gain settings. There's clarity and heft with an edge of aggression, but it's coupled with some headroom and dynamics so you don't feel like you're playing a full-metal magnet.

The journey around the fretboard is smooth and glassy with no hint of grit… it gets even better when you discover the Axcess heel

Verdict

There's no doubt this iteration of Alex Lifeson's Les Paul has a lot to offer. The problem is that there's no getting away from the fact that a couple of years ago, Rush fans could pick up a similar guitar – admittedly with less visual appeal – for a lot less money. At the time of writing, there are some brand-new Standard models still available in retailers, with used prices heading skywards. Which begs the question, does the existence of the Standard add to the Ruby red face of the Custom by being too good for too little money? Or is the Custom a victim of Brexit, increased component and material costs, wars and global inflation? Whatever the reasoning, if you can live without the piezo and take the Alex Lifeson Les Paul Custom Axcess at face value, it's a great guitar. It all depends on how big an 'if' that is for you. G



EPIPHONE ALEX LIFESON LES PAUL CUSTOM AXCESS

PRICE: £1,449 (inc case)
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany with AAAA quilt maple veneer
NECK: Mahogany, 'rounded' profile, glued-in with Axcess Contour Heel
SCALE LENGTH: 628mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Floyd Rose R4 Locking/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound ebony, pearloid large block inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Floyd Rose 1000 series double-locking vibrato, Grover Rotomatic tuners – gold-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53.35mm
ELECTRICS: Epiphone ProBucker 3 (bridge) and Ceramic Pro (neck) humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector, 2x volumes (with pull-switch coil split), 2x tones (pull switch phase on neck)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4/8.8
OPTIONS: No
RANGE OPTIONS: Jerry Cantrell 'Wino' Les Paul Custom (£879), Adam Jones Les Paul Custom collection (£1,299), Jared James Nichols 'Blues Power' Les Paul Custom (£999)
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes
FINISH: Ruby – all gloss

8/10

PROS Impressive guitar with bags of tonal options and great playability, in no small part thanks to that Axcess heel

CONS The price tag and lack of piezo – had it not been available before for (let's face it) a lot less, we wouldn't miss it, but it could be a niggle in the minds of Lifeson fans

Fender

THE PLAYER SERIES



ICONIC SOUND. TIMELESS STYLE. NEW COLOURS.

OUT NOW

©2023 FENDER MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS CORPORATION. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



ORANGE OR30H HEAD
£1,699

WHAT IS IT? All-new UK-built design based on the smaller OR15H

Free The Juice

The first offering from Orange in a while highlights some very cool features such as a footswitchable solo volume control and a valve rectifier

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Olly Curtis

It's been a dire time for the music industry over the past few years, and yet with the memory of pandemic lockdowns receding, there's cautious optimism as festivals return and live music comes to terms with the new post-Brexit normality. Orange has been quieter than usual, like most amp manufacturers. However, confidence is climbing and once more we're seeing new models being announced, including this much-anticipated British-made head, the new OR30H.

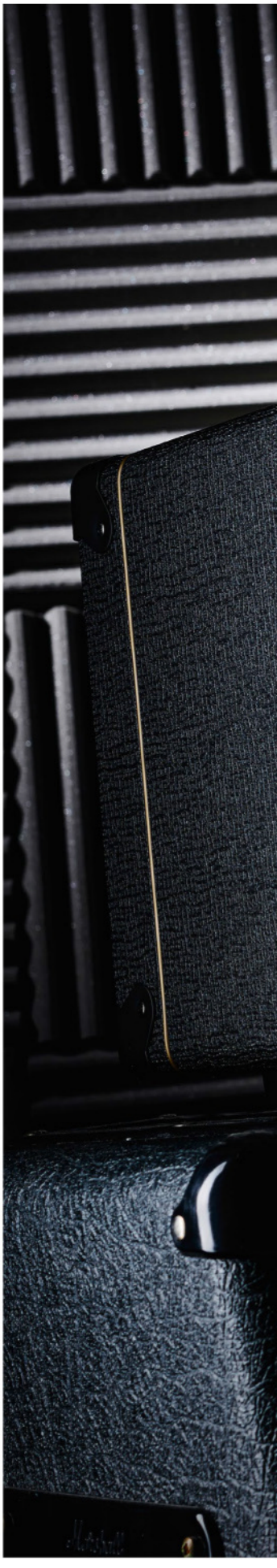
While Orange's well-known steel-jacketed Tiny Terror was one of the first compact and lightweight heads, arguably kickstarting the 'small and portable' trend, it's fair to say most people's perception of Orange is the big, heavy picture-frame plywood cabinet surrounding an armour-plated steel chassis (that needs a weight-lifting course or a team of roadies to move it). The OR30H just makes it into the lighter end of that category, with a heavy white-enamelled steel chassis surrounded by a thick birch ply sleeve.

Our sample is covered in Orange's alternative black vinyl and finished to a typically high standard, with a smart gold-trimmed carry handle set off by two neatly inlaid lines of gold piping.

Essentially an OR15H on steroids, the OR30H boasts a quad-EL84 power stage driven by typically outsized transformers but with a GZ34 rectifier valve instead of the OR15H's silicon diodes. Inside the chassis, most of the electronics are held on one large high-quality PCB, including all the front-panel controls and valve bases. A smaller PCB strip holds the rear-panel jack sockets, which have gold-plated contacts to prevent corrosion. All the wiring is neatly twisted and bundled to keep noise pickup to a minimum.

The control panel features Orange's 'pics only' graphics, which first appeared in 1972 and add to this amp's bell-bottomed vintage appeal. From left to right, there's a presence control followed by two master volume knobs, the first of which is footswitchable, allowing for easy level-boosts for solos. A trio of smaller knobs handle the passive bass, mid and treble EQ, followed by the all-important gain control and a bright switch, which is a first for Orange. This switch has two bright options, with a centre off.

On the rear panel, there's a trio of speaker outlets and a send/return for the OR30H's valve-buffered effects loop, together with a jack for the foot-switched second master volume control. Lastly, a Headroom/ Bedroom toggle switch varies the output





In Orange tradition, the OR30H's front panel uses 'pics' to explain the control functions. Once you've figured out the footswitchable second master volume knob, the head is straightforward and easy to drive



1

1. The OR30H has two master volume knobs – the second can be activated from a footswitch for rhythm/lead changes
2. On the rear panel, you'll find a valve-buffered series effects loop, a footswitch jack to activate the second master volume control, and a power reduction switch that drops the output from 30 watts to approximately two watts, for home practice or recording
3. Conventional presence controls lose some of their effectiveness at low volume, while the OR30H uses a special 'cross-line' presence control that's equally effective across the full volume sweep
4. The OR30H is the first Orange amp to feature a bright switch; it's a three-way affair with a narrow-band presence lift and a wider band increase in highs, plus a centre-off position



2

power from a full-throated 30 watts down to just two watts, for home or studio use. Overall, the OR30H is a typical modern Orange, with instantly recognisable looks and sound, built to handle anything the road can throw at it.

Feel & Sounds

There's a big in-rush of current to the OR30H's power supply that you can almost feel as well as hear when the mains toggle is switched on. Flip the standby switch (renamed on this amp as a 'warmup' switch), and the OR30H comes alive without any appreciable hiss or hum. It takes a few minutes for voltages to stabilise properly on a valve-rectified circuit, after which the OR30H is ready to rock.

And rock is what the OR30H excels at, with a fat midrange that instantly evokes the heady days of the early 1970s. This is easily balanced with the OR30H's smooth passive EQ and a clever 'cross-line' presence control, which has the same effect no matter where the master volumes sit. The ingenious bright switch has two options: one is a subtle notch that enhances highs without affecting anything else, while the other option has a broader effect, more in line with the typical bright switch function found on most vintage amps.

Armed with just these two simple enhancements and the footswitchable second master volume, the OR30H is capable of flattering any guitar, with a gain range that runs from subtle blues to full-on Brit rock saturation. Played at typical gig levels, the valve-rectified power supply sweetens what might otherwise be a stiff and unforgiving response, adding fluid, bouncy dynamics that make the amp feel alive and reactive to the slightest nuance.

> Rock is what the OR30H excels at, with a fat midrange that evokes heady days of the early 70s

Amplifiers such as this often have a tendency to put fluffed notes under a magnifying glass, and yet the OR30H seems to do the reverse, making it easier to pull off tricks like harmonic squeals and controlled feedback. You'll hear more of the fundamental with single coils like a Strat, while a decent Les Paul thickens things up for an almost fuzzbox-like distortion. At low to medium gain settings it's great for reproducing many 1970s classic riffs, from Led Zep, Free and early Fleetwood Mac, while maxing out the gain will take you into 90s-era Britpop along with many modern blues-rock players.





Another cool trick is to turn the OR30H into a non-master volume amp by setting both master volumes to 10 and using the gain knob to control loudness. This will bring the clarity of the OR30H's massive power supply to the fore, turning the head into a superb pedal platform, with headroom that some 50- or even 100-watt amps would have difficulty matching. Modulation, delay and reverb effects work particularly well in the OR30H's valve-buffered series effects loops, while a wah and fuzz plugged into the input jack will provide all the vintage mojo you need.

Verdict

Orange's OR30H is a serious tone machine that's equally at home with modern rock, vintage covers or blues. Single coils and humbuckers both sound great thanks to the versatile bright switch and presence controls, and there's plenty of volume to handle any size of gig. Compared with Class D amps that weigh no more than a packet of cigs and take up similar room, the OR30H is a behemoth, albeit a relatively portable one that can be teamed with any size of speaker cabinet.

Aimed squarely at the pro end of the market, it's not the cheapest 30-watt valve amp out there, but you're buying into proper quality; the OR30H is made in the UK and built to give its lucky owner a lifetime of great British tone. G



ORANGE OR30H HEAD

PRICE: £1,699
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: All valve pre and power amp
VALVES: 3x 12AX7 preamp, 1x 12AU7, 4x EL84, 1x GZ34 rectifier
OUTPUT: 30W RMS, switchable to 2W, 8 ohms minimum load
DIMENSIONS: 550 (w) x 240 (d) x 270mm (h)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 18.3/40.3
CABINET: Plywood
CHANNELS: 1
CONTROLS: Presence, foot-switched master volume, master volume, treble, mid, bass, gain, 3-way bright switch
FOOTSWITCH: Single-button footswitch (not supplied) toggles master volume controls
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Headroom/Bedroom power switching (30/2 watts), valve-buffered series effects loop
OPTIONS: Available in traditional orange or (as here) black vinyl
RANGE OPTIONS: The OR15H head retails for around £639

Orange Amplification
020 8905 2828
www.orangeamps.com

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Relatively compact; cleverly designed; does a lot with a simple circuit; tonally versatile; outstanding pedal platform; hits loudspeakers with a ton of gain

CONS A hefty lift; no DI output; a bit on the pricey side for a single-channel head



HAYNES DEMEANOUR
£2,600

WHAT IS IT? Fresh take on the classic offset with chambered alder body, mahogany neck, Gotoh hardware and in-house pickups

Purple Haze

With some three decades of guitar-making experience behind him, Neil Haynes finally gets around to making his own-brand electrics. Worth the wait? Definitely

Words David Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker



Headed by Neil Haynes in Banbury, Oxfordshire, Haynes Guitars is an extension of the long-running Guitar & Bass Builds, which makes necks, bodies and pickups, that Neil established in 2012 after his previous life as a cabinet maker. "I've been building guitars for about 30 years, since I was 21," reflects Neil today. Work started on the new range around two years ago, and with the S-style Inflection, T-inspired Fidelity and the new SC22 (a 22-fret single-cut), our offset Demeanour makes up a pretty impressive four-guitar range.

These might use shapes based on those we've seen countless times before, but the Haynes menu includes a seven-strong choice of metallic colours – along with other limited-run hues such as our Ultraviolet. "I use a modern polyurethane on the body," says Neil. "It's really thin and very different from what I was using back in the day; it's faster to apply, too. The neck is an acid-catalysed lacquer, which we call a modern cellulose finish."

The necks across all the Haynes models are one-piece mahogany and have dual


shall



1. It's hard to argue with Gotoh's 510 series hardware: this is a superb vibrato. The bridge humbucker sits in a proprietary design mounting ring and gives the Demeanour a very rock-ready vibe

graphite rod reinforcement – which is a big change from the ubiquitous maple. "I always liked Gibson's necks and like to fade the finish from a lighter neck back into a darker headstock," says Neil. "That doesn't work so well over maple. So, yes, there are tonal considerations, but I like the wood, it stains really well and it's readily available here in the UK. And it's a bit different; it's mixing up the styles a bit. Also, we've just launched our first glued-in-neck guitar and I never think maple on that style looks right."

The classic-feeling neck and simplified drive create a juicy, rock-ready offset that we'd take on a gig without a thought



2. The neck here is mahogany, although we have a back-angled six-in-line headstock style. Tuners are rear-locking by Gotoh and the nut is Graph Tech

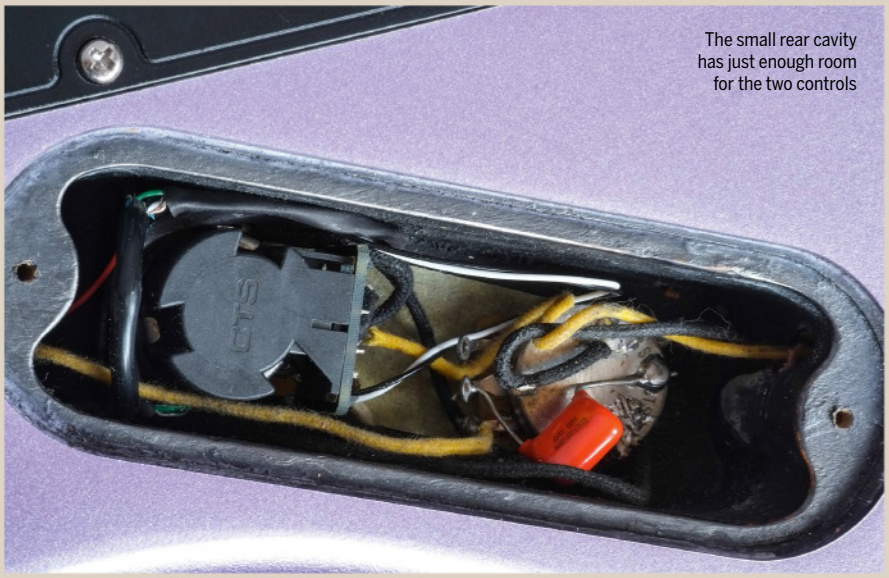
An opaque finish hides the American alder body, which is not only chambered (the cavities are small 'pockets' as opposed to being large chambers) but also shows off a larger forearm chamfer and deep vintage-like ribcage contouring. The heel is heavily contoured, too. There's a lot of detail here, not least the aluminium back and neckplates, the scratchplate in an aged 'black Japan' finish, and the brushed aluminium truss rod cover that's recessed

UNDER THE HOOD

Modern style with a classic drive

The controls here are back routed and the small cavity has quite a thick, weighty aluminium cover that is recessed flush with the back's top surface. Inside, we find 250k pots by CTS that are wired modern-style, and the volume is the pull-switch PCB type to engage the coil-split for the bridge pickup. We also get a .022mf Orange Drop tone capacitor.

As we mention, the Haynes pickups, which were available before the guitars themselves, are made in-house. "I've been hand-winding pickups for some time now," says Neil of this endeavour. "Initially with this new range, we were thinking, 'Well, it's hard enough to sell a new brand of guitars,' so we were going to go with an established UK pickup maker. But then I thought, although it's ground zero for the new guitars – even though I've been making for years – I really wanted to do my own pickups, too; I want to be in control of the tone. They're hand-wound, scatter-wound, and it's an area I want to invest in so I can make more."



The small rear cavity has just enough room for the two controls

The Haynes P-90 at the neck uses Alnico V magnets with a measured DCR of 7.34kohms. The humbucker at the bridge uses "a slightly longer than standard cast Alnico V bar magnet", says Neil. "I re-gauss these to make sure that all match outputs within five per cent. I've used 43 AWG copper wire there to allow for more winds on the coils to help with the output required, and less top-end so it pairs better with the P-90 – to my ears, anyway! Then we have maple spacers and butyrate bobbins, the coils are dipped in nitro, and there's a nickel silver baseplate." The DCR here is 15.5k (which drops to 8k when split, voicing the slug coil, which is slightly overwound). One of the neat things about these new models is that you can choose your favourite pickup combo: dual P-90s, for example, or a pair of humbuckers.

slightly below the headstock face, which bears the instrument name. Then there are the 'falling leaf' fingerboard inlays that certainly give these Haynes guitars a different visual. The fingerboard here is ebony and has a pretty modern compound radius, while the top edges are pretty heavily rolled; from the side the 'board looks scalloped yet it isn't. The Jescar frets are very well installed – the tangs are notched before installation, so you don't see then from the fingerboard sides.

Overall, it's a stylish design topped with a classy six-in-a-line back-angled headstock, with Gotoh tuners that have dual-height posts so string trees aren't necessary.

The NS510T-FE1 vibrato also comes from Gotoh's high-quality stable and uses all-steel construction with a tension-adjustable arm. It floats parallel to the body, so there's just under a semitone up-bend on the high E and around six semitones down-bend on the G. And like an increasing number of UK makers, the pickups across the range are wound in-house. Let's take it for a spin...



Like the rear coverplate, the neckplate has a large engraved logo and is made from aluminium. The heel contouring means that top-fret playing is very comfortable

Feel & Sounds

The wood choice and chambering certainly produce a good weight for an offset such as this, which can be heavy, as many will know. The neck feels really good, with a matt feel to the back; it's much smoother than many



The neck pickup is a pretty classic-sounding soapbar that direct mounts to the body with the usual height and polepiece adjustment. The 'falling leaf' inlays are abalone with epoxy stems

bare or oiled necks we've had through our hands. Its profile is well considered, a not-too-skinny or over-big C with quite relaxed shoulders, a nut width of just over 42mm, and a depth at the 1st fret of pretty much 21mm and 24mm by the 12th. The heavy edge-rolling seems to make the fingerboard radius feel less 'flat' than it actually is, and setup as supplied is very good. However, the top E bridge saddle looks rather too close to the large domed vibrato post, and maybe a little more neck back angle would mean the saddles were raised a little. But, as is, we have no complaints: there's nothing here that gets in the way of playing, especially those well-polished frets.

While Haynes has pushed the boat out in numerous aspects of this design, the master volume, tone and three-way toggle pickup selector mean it's a simple drive. And although the Demeanour's outline is based on the trendy Fender offset, it certainly doesn't sound like one. No, this ticks a much rockier box: the bridge humbucker kicks nicely with a juicy, slightly cocked-wah voice that laps up gain, the mix offers pretty full-sounding jangle, and the neck soapbar is well matched in output, creamier but with a little edge, and played clean, it can certainly cover any jazzier duties, too. But with the pull-switch on, unusually the volume control works really well to split the bridge pickup, giving a pretty gutsy and well-voiced single coil that produces strident jangle through to alt-rock strummage with some fuzzier gain. It mixes really well with that P-90 and really broadens the voices on offer. A big-sounding guitar with considerable versatility.

Verdict

It's very hard to find fault: this is well considered, thoughtful guitar making and sensibly priced to boot. It's a modern take on the offset with a great weight, but the oh-so-classic-feeling neck, not to mention the simplified drive, create a juicy, rock-ready offset, with subtlety if you need it, that we'd take on a gig without a thought.

It's impressive craft at every level and a pleasure to feature on our pages. We really are in a golden age for UK guitar making. G



HAYNES DEMEANOUR

PRICE: £2,600 (inc hard case)
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Double-cutaway offset solidbody electric
BODY: American alder (chambered)
NECK: African Mahogany with two carbon fibre rods, standard 'comfort C' profile, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech/42.3mm
FINGERBOARD: African ebony, 'falling leaf' epoxy/abalone inlays, 229-356mm (9-14") compound radius
FRETS: 22, medium (Jescar 2.28 x 1.4mm)
HARDWARE: Gotoh NS510T-FE1 vibrato, Gotoh SG381 dual height locking tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54mm
ELECTRICS: Haynes P-90 (neck), Haynes humbucker (bridge), 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume and tone
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.59/7.9
OPTIONS: Pickup configuration, custom colours. Just ask!
RANGE OPTIONS: The start-up range includes the T-style Fidelity and S-style Inflection (both £2,600) and the set-neck SC22 single-cut (£2,995)
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, same price
FINISHES: Ultraviolet (as reviewed) plus standard British Racing Green, Burnt Orange, Opal Blue, Electric Blue, Smoke Grey, Midnight Purple, Charcoal Black, Blood Red metallics – thin modern polyurethane body; modern cellulose glossed headstock, matt neck back

Haynes Guitars
01295 574500
www.haynesguitars.com

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Superb modern offset design; good weight; excellent playability and neck; rock-ready voicing; excellent hardware

CONS High E bridge saddle is too close to mounting post



PLAY IN FULL BLOOM

MARK LETTIERI SIGNATURE MODEL

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

- Mark Lettieri

PRS PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS

© 2021 PRS Guitars | Photo by Hunter Selman



BARE KNUCKLE TRIPTYCH SET
From £320

WHAT IS IT? Versatile signature single-coil set for Rabea Massaad designed to play well clean or with plenty of gain

Definitive Tones

One of the most talked about pickups this year, Bare Knuckle's Triptych set might just be what you need to cover all bases without losing *those* sounds

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Neil Godwin

1





1. Bare Knuckle's Triptych set is available with plenty of custom options including a wide selection of covers to match your guitar. You can also specify flat poles, rather than the staggered ones here. The standard set comes with zinc-plated steel baseplates on the bridge and neck, but again you can choose

Can it really be two decades since Tim Mills kicked off Bare Knuckle Pickups? Since then, it's not only become the pre-eminent pickup maker in the UK, inspiring many others to follow, but it's also one of the most respected worldwide, by players and guitar makers from Fender downwards.

I'd struggle to name a Bare Knuckle pickup I haven't enjoyed. Like many, I use them daily for gigs, recording and as a reference for comparison. 20 years on, the company offers an extensive range of models, but its most recent pickups have been signature models such as the Chris Robertson Peacemaker for the Black Stone Cherry guitarist, and Rabea Massaad's Silo humbuckers. Joining them when it launched earlier this year is Rabea's ultimate set for Stratocasters, the Triptych.

Rather than coming up with a radical new design, the Triptych set plays with the time-honoured recipe and creates what many players might consider a do-it-all set for Stratocasters. For example, the set uses plain enamel coil wire, which replaced heavy Formvar in Fender's production from around 1964. You'll find Alnico III rod magnets in the bridge position, as used in the first couple of years of the Stratocaster, while the middle and bridge use the more common Alnico V.

Both bridge and neck pickups use a zinc-plated steel baseplate, while the middle pickup is reverse-wound with reverse polarity (RWRP), which means positions 2 and 4 on your five-way selector are hum-cancelling. You also have a wide choice of cover colours and flat or staggered poles, and each pickup can be ordered with or without that inductor baseplate.

Bare Knuckle supplied our set on a scratchplate with its full-size screening plate, CRL five-way lever switch, Bare Knuckle/CTS 10 per cent audio taper pots, and a Bare Knuckle .022µf PIO cap, all wired with cloth-covered push-back wire. I loaded the set onto a first-version Fender Road Worn 60s Strat. I also had a well-gigged partscaster with a Bare Knuckle's '63 Veneer Board set; the coils are heavy Formvar wire and use Alnico V rod magnets slightly smaller in diameter than those on the Triptych. With fresh strings and both sets adjusted to the same distance from the strings (fretted at the last fret the underside of the string to the outer polepiece was 1.6mm on the treble side, 3.2mm on the bass), it's time to take a listen.

Sounds

This is one very well-balanced pickup set. Running through the sounds, there's no nasty surprise when you get to the bridge, with no risk of a thin, bright and weedy sound – there's good body, with a clarity on cleans that avoids being over-spiky and really balances with the neck's woodier percussive bite. Compared with the '63 Veneer Board set, the brighter high-end seems pulled back a little; the Triptychs actually sound a little more refined. Adding some crunch and gain, that bridge pickup impresses again, with a well-voiced tone control that can just be pulled back when needed, while the neck benefits in similar fashion.

Of course, this is nothing radical for a good Stratocaster, but our impression is that this set is very well behaved. The mixes rein in the spike, providing real musical depth; bridge and middle is another stand-out sound, while our Veneer Board comparison veers on the over-brittle. But don't confuse well-behaved with polite – even the middle pickup's subtly lighter voicing has real vocal character, especially when you dig in hard. Far from over-wound rock monsters, these are very carefully voiced and very musical pickups that really cover a lot of ground exceptionally well.

Verdict

Let's face it, there's no shortage of pickup sets for Strats out there – Bare Knuckle itself already offers well over 10 different flavours, some aimed at specific sounds or eras, others made for higher-gain needs. These Triptychs come across as having a foot in both camps. The overriding impression is that this is not only a beautifully crafted pickup set but one that just seems to tune those oh-so-classic sounds to a point that whatever style or sound we imagine is easily achieved: a pickup set for any player who needs more than just a vintage-style genre-specific set. These play extremely well with some cranked gigging amps or digital simulations, and offer exceptional cleans, too, all the while retaining their definitive Strat-y-ness. G



BARE KNUCKLE TRIPTYCH SET

PRICE: From £320
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Modded Strat-style signature set designed for Rabea Massaad
MOUNTING TYPE: Standard
POLE PIECE SPACING/STYLE: 52mm/56 vintage stagger
HOOK-UP WIRE: Vintage-style push-back cloth-covered single conductor
MAGNET TYPE: Alnico III (bridge), Alnico V (middle & neck)
COIL WIRE/WIND: 42 AWG plain enamel/scatter-wound
POTTING: Yes
DCR (kohms): 6.8 (bridge); 5.9 (middle) 5.9 (neck)
OPTIONS: RWRP middle (as supplied); flat polepieces, zinc-plated steel baseplates (on bridge and neck, as supplied), cover colours. Pre-wired scratchplates from £222.

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Superbly made; excellent multi-use voicing; balanced outputs while retaining definitive Strat character

CONS Not cheap – but premium products usually command premium prices, don't they?



J ROCKETT HRM V2
£239

WHAT IS IT? The second iteration of the brand's Hot Rubber Monkey Dumble-style drive pedal

Primate Power

With its latest HRM V2 pedal, J Rockett refines that Hot Rubber Monkey modified Dumble sound

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

1. With tall silver knobs, the V2 looks classier than its predecessor. Although close together, the knobs are easily tweakable
2. The wide-ranging Top End control lets you set the overall treble where you need it to suit your amp. It's also capable of dialling in some real zing if needed
3. The Midrange knob covers a range of frequencies that are essential to valve-amp character, and is especially able in thickening and warming your sound

Alexander Dumble didn't build many amplifiers in his lifetime, so if and when one comes up for sale it's going to be for silly money. Fortunately, there are some pedal manufacturers out there that have a handle on how to get close to the Dumble feel and tone – and that includes J Rockett.

In its line-up, J Rockett has a pedal called The Dude, which was based on a Dumble Overdrive Special amp owned by Keith Urban. It also had another pedal, the Hot Rubber Monkey (HRM), which featured the brand's interpretation of an ODS with an EQ modification. Alexander Dumble did what he called the 'Hot Rubber Monkey' mod on certain later amps and it comprised a passive tonestack (treble, mid and bass on trimmers inside the amp) after the overdrive stage for fine-tuning. Now, Version 2 of J Rockett's HRM is with us.

This time, the company got hold of an actual Dumble amplifier with the HRM EQ mod and spent two years trying to come up with an HRM pedal that improves on its original version. This included sourcing some NOS parts for authentic sound. With the Gain knob set at minimum, unity gain is around one o'clock on the Volume knob and you start off in clean-with-grit territory. From there, the Gain has plenty to tap into and runs the gamut of what you'd expect from a hot-rodded valve amp. There is marvellous touch-sensitivity here with the pedal really responding as you dig in.

In terms of the EQ, engaging the pedal immediately tightens up the bottom-end, and the overall tonal impression is a nice warmth and thickness in the midrange with a singing top-end. Both qualities have plenty of adjustment with the two tone knobs that just happen to be called Midrange and Top End. The former works on the lower mids, adding girth to the tone, while the latter can dial in a silvery bell-like brilliance. Between the two, you can bring out a throatiness that will definitely be heard in a band mix.

Verdict

We obviously can't say that we compared the HRM V2 to an original Dumble amp, but it's certainly in the ballpark of tonal qualities that one might expect. It's a beautifully voiced drive pedal of the sort that, once you've started, encourages you to keep playing.



J ROCKETT
HRM V2

PRICE: £239
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Drive pedal
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Level, Gain, Top End, Midrange, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 30mA
DIMENSIONS: 58 (w) x 103 (d) x 51mm (h)

FACE bvba
+32 3 844 67 97
www.rockettpedals.com

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Solid build-quality; compact size; excellent sound quality; solid EQ options

CONS None if you want a D-style pedal, but expensive if you just want a drive pedal



3

THE RIVALS

The Wampler Euphoria (£219) has variations via a three-position toggle switch (Smooth, Open, Crunch) that allows you to select one of three different gain stages. Elsewhere, look out for The Dude (£199) if you want J Rockett's take on the unadulterated Dumble sound without the mod. If you have plenty of money to spend and don't mind a bigger footprint, you may be persuaded by boutique offerings such as the US-made Ethos Overdrive Preamp (from $399), which can be built with optional HRM EQ and a bypass switch for it. Also try Shin's Music Dumbloid Twin (£649), handmade in Japan.



Try J Rockett's The Dude for its take on the pure Dumble sound



BEETRONICS OCTAHIVE V2
£215

WHAT IS IT? Second incarnation of Beetronics' octave fuzz pedal

Total Buzz

Beetronics presents a vintage octave fuzz with all the modern benefits of convenient switching technology

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

1. The left LED (white) indicates that you're in Buzzz mode while the right LED (blue) indicates Octave mode
2. This Pre knob adjusts the level going into the circuitry – select your neck pickup and roll it back to bring out the octave harmonics
3. The footswitch operates as a bypass footswitch with a single tap, while a double-tap toggles between Buzzz and Octave modes. There are also handy momentary hold functions

The original Octahive, with its blue distressed finish, was one of Beetronics' earliest pedals and, according to the company, the "high gain fuzz with a well-pronounced high-pitch octave" was based on the 70s Tycobrahe Octavia. That version has now been superseded with a refreshed V2 design that Beetronics says retains the circuitry and sonic qualities of the original, while adding new features.

On the original unit, the octave mode was turned on and off via a toggle switch on the chassis' side. But this time round, the V2 uses the footswitch to do the job; it's certainly more convenient in a live context than reaching down for a toggle switch. To switch between straight fuzz (Buzzz mode) and Octave requires a quick double-tap on the footswitch. There are two LEDs that indicate which mode you're in. You can also engage momentary switching by holding the footswitch; switch from the active mode to the other by holding down the footswitch until released. Also, when the pedal is in bypass, hold the footswitch to momentarily activate the pedal and bring in the effect. If you're worried about the accuracy of your footswitching, the pedal lets you set one of three different profiles for the momentary switching: Fast (20ms), Medium (100ms) and Lazy (250ms).

Buzzz mode is aptly named, this is a buzzy and brightly voiced fuzz that works brilliantly with chords and riffage. The Honey knob adjusts fuzz gain, and the Pre knob, which sets the level going into the circuit, can be balanced for a variety of sounds with plenty of scope to find your favourite – edgy or full-fat, smooth and squidgy. With Octave mode engaged for added harmonic texture you can dial in some familiar Hendrix-like tones, but roll the Honey knob back further for harder tones reminiscent of sitar or ring mod. There's plenty of variation on offer as the Pre knob has influence on the intensity of that upper component of the sound, which is most prominent with Pre rolled back.

Verdict

The Octahive V2 would be a great buy for the sound alone, but that clever switching really gives this Beetronics pedal an edge. Playing through the fuzz sound and just bringing the octave in momentarily for single notes or a whole passage is a joy. We urge you to give it a try. G



BEETRONICS
OCTAHIVE V2

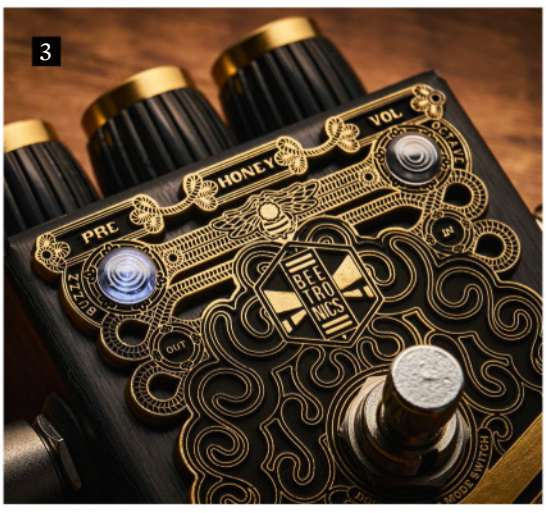
PRICE: £215
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Octave fuzz pedal
FEATURES: True bypass, footswitchable octave, 3x footswitching profiles
CONTROLS: Pre, Honey, Vol, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 50 mA
DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 120 (d) x 50mm (h)

FACE bvba
+32 3 844 67 97
www.beetronicsfx.com

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Compact size; really flexible switching options; cool fuzz and octave fuzz sounds

CONS Awkwardly situated knobs



THE RIVALS

There are plenty of Octavia clones out there, but nothing matches the Octahive's switching. There are, however, some octave fuzzes with a switchable octave and added control for the level of octave, such as the EHX Octavix (£99), which also has a switch to change power rails for different sounds. The Vahlbruch Octavia V2 (£188) has a toggle-switched octave and adds an Edge knob for treble content. The Danelectro 3699 Fuzz (£175) is a revival of the Foxx Tone Machine by its original designer and has a separate footswitch for its octave, as has the Wampler Fuzztration (£199).



The EHX Octavix offers that classic late-60s fuzz tone



the Wishlist

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

Daniels Guitars Pugilist FROM £2,499

CONTACT **Daniels Guitars** WEB **www.danielsguitars.co.uk** WORDS **Dave Burrluck** PHOTOGRAPHY **Phil Barker**

Darren Horton has built an enviable reputation for his custom-build vintage replicas and highly accurate aged refinishing, but the guitar you see here certainly isn't modelled on an original from 1959. A recent addition to his Daniels canon is the Pugilist, so-called because "I figure it'll fight with what's out there", says Darren today. And it's quite the illusion: a new, original offset design that feels more like a Les Paul Special that was built decades ago.

"I've played and built Les Paul-style guitars for years," Darren continues, "but then I built an offset, based on a Jazzmaster, and it turned out to be one of the best I'd built – really good. But I thought it needs a set neck, Gibson scale and a smaller body."

The first things you notice when you pick up the Pugilist are the light weight (2.8kg/6.16lb) and big neck – both informed by the material choice. The 45mm thick solid body is obeche, as used by an increasing number of UK makers, but "it's the first Pugilist I've made with an obeche neck, too", says Darren. "It's quarter-sawn, obviously, and it's been unbelievably stable: no movement, nothing. I didn't know what the obeche was going to do, so it's fatter than I'd normally do, but it's been so stable: I'm really impressed."

If the material choice and shape are different, the rest of the build references 1950s-era Gibson. Under the lightly aged nitro finish, the neck joins the body "with a full-width long tenon like a Les Paul Junior, but I extend the tongue so it's as far back as I can get it into the body", says Darren, who allows the heel area to be beautifully shaped. He uses hot hide glue to attach the neck to body and also the Madagascan rosewood fingerboard. The scale length is vintage Gibson, likewise the single-action truss rod, while the Jescar frets are "medium jumbo, typical '59 style", he says.

This doesn't feel like a new guitar at all – and it doesn't sound like one, either. The Mojo Firebird-style neck pickup is like a wider, fuller and slightly smoother Telecaster, which is sort of where the soapbar-sized Staplebucker bridge pickup lies: some PAF-y honk with an almost Tele-like bright attack, blended with some 'bucker width. The low string response is a little rounded, which helps that old guitar illusion, while the pickups sound only lightly potted, creating a quite inspiring and lively drive.

This is glorious vintage-inspired guitar craft, with models all individually made by hand in the Surrey countryside. Which one is going to be yours? G

1. The headstock here was one of the first things that Darren changed by reducing the string splay from the nut to the tuners: "When you're flaring out the strings over the nut, you're asking for trouble," he says. "You're always fighting the tuning"

2. Here, a Faber tune-o-matic-style bridge is paired with a Gotoh stud tailpiece, but "I'm switching over to Faber exclusively", says Darren, "including the tuners – those are actually by Kluson"

3. Thanks to the deep-set full-width neck tenon, the heel area is beautifully sculpted and top-fret access is extremely easy. "Even my single-cuts are fully sculpted like this," Darren tells us



1


2


3



4. The neck itself is on the big side, measuring 43.8mm wide at the nut, 22.6mm deep at the 1st fret and 24.8mm by the 12th. "My stuff is based on vintage guitars I've looked at," says Darren. "There's variation in all of my necks, but they all have a soft 'V' and the shoulders are rolled off. They're so comfortable and you can get your thumb over the top"

5. "Both pickups there are wound with 42 AWG plain enamel and have Alnico V magnets," says Mojo's Marc Ransley. "The Firebird-style is around 6kohms with double blade magnets and reflector plates. The Staplebucker? Well, it measures around 8.5k and one day I was thinking, 'What if Gibson had gone down the route of using magnets for poles – rather than screws and slugs – in a more Fender way? And what if Seth Lover had developed the PAF from a Staple P-90 rather than a standard P-90?'"

6. Although Darren showed us some pretty tricky own-design control configurations, here we have a simple master volume and tone using CTS 500k pots and a .022µf Orange Drop capacitor, wired vintage style

THE LINEUP

Gas Supply

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

New Releases From £129

CONTACT **Various** WEB **See below**

We find ourselves saying this often, but there's never been a more vibrant time to be a gear-obsessed guitar player. This is evidenced by this month's instalment of Gas Supply where we've stumbled across new releases ranging from a nearly forgotten Leo Fender design, a surprisingly low-cost electric from a legend of British guitar making, and new takes on the humble overdrive from equally revered pedal designers. There was so much, we could barely fit it all in. Don't light a match, there's been a GAS leak! **[SW]**



ORIGIN EFFECTS
HALCYON GOLD **£249**
Guitar player certainties: your lost plectrum is in the washing machine; you will fish-hook yourself at least once when changing strings; and you will one day own a Klon-style overdrive. But while Origin's new Halcyon Gold wears its inspiration on its chassis, there's more than a simple borrowing of a circuit. Two toggle switches provide additional options. The first flips between classic Klon-style or Origin's own "smoother, more neutral" voicings, while the second introduces Origin's Adaptive Circuitry for added playing dynamics. Finally, Origin has added a Dry blend control to help maintain clarity. We'll be checking one out shortly.
www.origineffects.com



SHERGOLD TELSTAR **£375**
Shergold has unleashed its new Telstar design – a retro rocker with what looks like garage-rock tones at a garage-sale price point. As you probably know, Shergold was revived under the watchful eye of Patrick James Eggle, meaning this guitar is likely to grab a lot of attention. It features a poplar-bodied mash-up of offset/T-style/single-cut styling. The maple neck is a bolt-on, with a laurel fingerboard and 22 medium-jumbo frets, and the bridge is a through-body, hardtail. Pickup-wise, we get a pair of Page FilterSonic humbuckers, wired to a three-way switch and master volume/tone controls. The Telstar comes in Champagne Gold and Pastel Blue finishes. Did we mention it's £375?
www.shergoldguitars.com



TC ELECTRONIC
AMPWORX HI-GAIN **£129**
TC Electronic might have been a bit quiet of late, but its most recent pedal releases are designed to be anything but. The Ampworx Hi-Gain Series of preamp pedals aims to squeeze the tone of three classic high-gain heads into individual stompers. There's the Dual Wreck, JIMS 800 and V550 (no prizes for guessing what they're based on). Each pedal features two channels, with six top-mounted controls, including three-band EQ, plus a Presence control and switchable pre/post boost circuit at the back. Connectivity is simple with input, output and a cab-simulated DI out, and they won't break the bank, either.
www.tcelectonic.com



DINOSAURAL
COGMEISTER **£299**
What happens when you leave two pedal boffins in a room to collaborate? The Cogmeister, that's what. Lovetone/Dinosaural founder, Dan Coggins, and Thorpy FX's Adrian Thorpe have created a three-in-one gain pedal, with three circuits wired in a fixed series from right to left with Push (treble booster), Drive (transistor-based OD) and Solo (Zener diode clipping solo booster), designed to work with each other tonally, rather than overlapping.

There are strategic EQ options, too, each centred to enhance the tonality and purpose of the section it belongs to, both in terms of frequency and curve type. For more info, head to the Coggins Audio's website.
www.cogginsaudio.co.uk



PHOTO BY ERIC DOWD VIA MARTIN

MARTIN JOHN MAYER 20TH ANNIVERSARY MODELS
FROM $3,999

Marking 20 years since John Mayer's Martin OM-28JM signature acoustic first launched, Martin has released two Anniversary models, both finished in a striking Gray Sunburst. First is a commemorative edition version of the OMJM ($3,999), with Engelmann spruce top, East Indian rosewood back and sides, mahogany neck, ebony 'board and Fishman Gold Plus Natural. But the showstopper is the blingy OM-45 John Mayer ($18,499), featuring an Engelmann spruce top/Guatemalan rosewood back and sides, mahogany neck and ebony 'board. It borrows the aluminium headstock-and-bridge detailing from the original OM-28JM and expands it to outline the fingerboard and optional scratchplate. Both feature John Mayer's digital signature on the soundhole label, and will be time-limited runs for 2023 only.
www.martinguitar.com

ALSO RELEASED

G&L ESPADA HH ACTIVE £1,999



G&L has unearthed a 'lost' Leo Fender original design from 1969 with the Espada HH Active. Not only does it round-off the edges of what was on Leo's mind in the early 50s, it adds some characteristic active electronics, too. There's a hard-rock maple neck and 21-fret Caribbean rosewood fingerboard (241mm/9.5-inch radius), bolted to a swamp ash body. The pickups are G&L's own AS4255 (neck) and AW4368C (bridge) humbuckers, which are controlled by a three-position switch. Key to this guitar is the active preamp, giving bass and treble controls, plus Active and Active Bright modes. The coils can be split with the third toggle switch, and G&L has included Leo's 1979 Saddle Lock Hardtail bridge. Phew! Available now from Andertons in Jet Black, Vintage White, Honeyburst and Cherryburst.
www.glguitars.com



GIBSON LES PAUL STANDARD CUSTOM COLOURS £2,599 TO £2,899

Gibson has revised its Les Paul Standards with four variations: '50s Vintage and '60s SlimTaper neck profiles with Plain maple (£2,599) or AA Figured maple tops (£2,899). Other differences between the 'eras' include Burstbucker 1 (neck) and 2 (bridge) humbuckers and Vintage Deluxe tuners for the '50s models, while the '60s versions have Grover Rotomatics with 'kidney' buttons and Burstbucker 1 and 2 pickups in the neck and bridge positions respectively. Each top type comes in a number of finishes: Honey Amber, Ocean Blue, Translucent Oxblood and Translucent Fuchsia for the Figured models, and Inverness Green, Pelham Blue and Cardinal Red for the Plain tops.
www.gibson.com

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: Emma Tricca

Album: Aspirin Sun (Bella Union)



Aspirin Sun is Emma Tricca's fourth album, and her first on Bella Union
www.emmatricca.com

Rome-raised and London-based Emma Tricca is something of an adventurer, both in life and her art. Her music is rich and textured, and unafraid to challenge standard tropes, while remaining solidly in that singer-songwriter bracket. It feels like she could have applied her colourful approach to any art form. "I don't think I chose music, I think it chose me," she begins. "I was on tour with Robyn Hitchcock and he asked me how I got into music, and fingerpicking specifically, and I remember talking about a magazine I saw when I was five years old with Joan Baez and Bob Dylan on the cover. I remember thinking that this was what I was going to do."

The Other Side Of Grief

Emma's newest album, *Aspirin Sun*, is her boldest and most personal work yet, a rich and engulfing record of many layers, that is careful to sound uncluttered. "We wanted to make something that was atmospheric and not mimicking anything else," she explains. "We also wanted to do something simpler, but Steve [Shelley's, drummer] playing is multi-layered, and when Jason [Victor, guitars] comes in he sprinkles on the magic, as does Pete [Galub, bass]. But, really, this record is about coming out of grief [Emma's father died shortly after the release of her previous album, *St Peter*, in 2018], so I went over to New York because I wanted to start working on these feelings."

Time For Ideas

The *Aspirin Sun* sessions in New York ended just as Covid hit, meaning a shift in lifestyle for Emma and more time to hone the 10 tracks she brought back to London. "I was sitting at home with these pockets of time where I could go to the studio to start working on bouncing ideas off of the guys," she says. It was a transatlantic process, with Jason writing brass parts on synths from New York and [keyboardist] Sean Read playing them in London. "I sing well with Sean," Emma says, "so we also recorded harmonies together and it was fun. But, really, it was all part of coming back out again."

Writing On The Move

Emma's creative process can be chaotic, she admits, and is often fed by travel and locations. "Movement certainly does it for me," she nods. "*Minor White* [Emma's debut album] was completely written between airports. I'm scatty, I keep notes but not a diary or anything. I would get obsessed with a melody or chorus and I'd have it in my head and then frantically write the song with that melody in my head, waiting to board a plane! This record has been less like that because all of the songs have come from being in New York, which is where I'm most comfortable writing now."

Trio Of Treasures

Emma is passionate about her guitar playing, being a keen fingerpicker, and her instruments of choice reflect this love. "This guitar is quite a new one," she says, reaching behind her for a shiny Martin 00-18. "It's from 2016 and it's amazing, but I have a 1960 00-18 that I keep under lock and key now. I got this one because I wanted something to take on the road that was similar to the 1960 one. I also have this 1929 Martin parlour," she says, producing a stunning size 2 instrument. "I've just discovered a little dent and it needs new strings, but it's amazing. But I'm a little bit of a punk, so I have a pickup in it because you have to use them. Look at how beautiful she is!" **[GK]**



PHOTO BY SEBASTIAN SHARPLES

Emma's songs come to life via her fingerpicked melodies, delivered on a trio of Martin acoustics

Standout track: *Ruben's House*
For fans of: Joan Baez, Karen Dalton, Judy Collins, Jessica Pratt



SIGNIFICANT PLAYER

John Renbourn's impact on Emma's music

Fingerstyle guitar is key to Emma's music and life, but one important player had a significant effect on her career. "I went to see John Renbourn one time at a folk club in Rome and was at the aftershow party," she tells us. "We were all a bit drunk and I picked up the guitar in front of Mr Renbourn and he made lovely remarks, which led to me getting a show. I stayed in touch with John and we played some shows together. We were going to do some music together before he passed away. He was incredibly supportive and a good friend and I miss him."

PHOTO BY CHRISTINE NAVIN

THE LINEUP

Albums

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



JoBo's back for a second round of Blues Deluxe

PHOTO BY CHRISTIE GOODWIN

Joe Bonamassa

Blues Deluxe Vol 2

J&R Adventures (available October 6)

9/10



JoBo takes on blues classics and more...

Joe Bonamassa is pretty much the king of modern blues these days and it's hard not to be aware of him if you're a fan of BB King/Eric Clapton/Gary Moore, et al. With this new album he's celebrating the 20th anniversary of his *Blues Deluxe* album (recorded when he was 26) with a second volume that features two new originals and eight covers. Of the covers, the span goes from Bobby Bland's *Twenty-Four Hour Blues* to Guitar Slim's *Well I Done Got Over It* via Fleetwood Mac's *Lazy Poker Blues* and Albert King's *You Sure Drive A Hard Bargain*. With a killer band, it's a rich variety of songs that swing, chill and emote with Joe at the centre with great vocals and an array of killer guitar tones.

In many ways, this feels like fresh terrain, such is the power and range of JB and the band; he's going for it here and not treading water in any way. Standout tracks include some stinging guitar statements with gorgeous string bending on *Twenty-Four Hour Blues* and *Well, I Done Got Over It* – the band sounds huge with the brass section, plus an emphatic guitar solo. Then there's the great swinging rhythm section and Joe's vocals on *I Want To Shout About It* and the Josh Smith-penned closer, *Is It Safe To Go Home* with its singing guitar melodies, masterful band dynamics and Gary Moore/EJ-esque guitar solo. There's a reason why JoBo is *the* man! **[JS]**

Standout track: *Twenty-Four Hour Blues*
For fans of: Eric Clapton, Gary Moore, BB King

Joni Mitchell

Archives Vol. 3: The Asylum Years (1972-1975)

Rhino (available October 6)

9/10



The third collection of in-depth archive material from America's finest

The Grammy-winning first volume of this series focused on Joni Mitchell's early career during 1963-67, while the second dived into her 1968-71 era, which established her as a major force singer-songwriter with the release of *Ladies Of The Canyon* and *Blue*. And now, Volume three examines what many believe is her most fruitful chapter.

Focusing on three albums – *For The Roses*, *Court And Spark* and *The Hissing Of Summer Lawns* – there are demos (featuring the likes of Graham Nash, Neil Young and James Taylor), alternative takes and live performances, notably her 1972 Carnegie Hall concert with Tom Scott and the LA Express, and London's Royal Festival Hall. To label this five-CD set simply as a treasure trove wouldn't do it justice as it documents an artist at her creative peak. A must for all Joni fans! **[DM]**

Standout track: *Don't Interrupt The Sorrow*
For fans of: CSN&Y, James Taylor

Nick Moss Band

Get Your Back Into It!

Alligator Records (available now)

10/10



Time-machine blues from Chicago-based duo

Headed up by guitarist/vocalist Nick Moss and harmonica/vocalist Dennis Gruenling, this Chicago band focuses on blues styles heard during the 40s through to the 60s, with an authentic vintage sound and a good-time feel.

With 14 new songs, it's a rich album with rousing guitar playing that evokes T-Bone Walker and Muddy Waters among other icons. Opener, *Bait In The Snare* is a killer uptempo jump blues song with joyful harmonica and guitar solos, all geared up to get your feet tapping. Laidback groover, *Aurelie* is bluesy RnB bubbling with a great guitar riff soaked in spring reverb.

If you're a fan of Muddy Waters-styled sad blues, *Living In Heartache* is the track for you; it drips with feeling and authenticity. All in all, with old-school production and great songs it's hard not to give the Nick Moss band anything but full marks. **[JS]**

Standout track: *Bait In The Snare*
For fans of: JD Simo, Reese Wynans, Muddy Waters



Joni Mitchell's *Archives Vol. 3* covers her most accomplished period

PHOTO © JOEL BERNSTEIN

John Scofield Trio
Uncle John's Band
ECM (available October 13)

8/10



Eclectic jazz set from guitar legend

The album's title is taken from a Grateful Dead song and is one of several covers on this double CD. It might sound a little eccentric, but Scofield tells us he's a big fan of The Dead and so, why not? "One of my favourite of the Garcia/Hunter Grateful Dead tunes. I learned it from Phil Lesh," he says in the album's liner notes. While we're here, Sco also includes Dylan's *Mr Tambourine Man* and Neil Young's *Old Man* in this set alongside the more straight jazz tracks from the likes of Miles Davis and Ray Brown, plus a smattering of Scofield originals and jazz standards like *Stairway To The Stars*.

Sco's guitar sound is unmistakable and his sinuous, inventive lines are well to the fore in the trio comprising Vicente Archer (bass) and Bill Stewart (drums). Tracks like *The Girlfriend Chord* which, in case you were wondering, is apparently a Cmaj7#5, *Mo Green* and *TV Band* – just three of the Scofield originals here – intrigue and delight, adding up to a memorable and worthwhile listening experience. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Budo*
For fans of: Miles Davis, John McLaughlin

Roman Bulakhov
Surfing
Independent Release (available now)

10/10



Ukrainian jazz-shred that astonishes and beguiles

Made against the terrible backdrop of Russia's ongoing war of aggression on Ukraine, *Surfing* – by Ukrainian D'Angelico endorsee Roman Bulakhov – is a gem shining amid the gloom. The album is a dazzling, deftly eclectic dance through shred, hip hop, metal and neo soul – knocking down the walls of the genres effortlessly to build something fresh in their place.

From the impossibly fluid jazz-shred of *Lonely Sad Tbilisi Dog* to the poignant folk themes of *Ukrainian Song*, Bulakhov's playing has a rare blend of total precision and superb feel. Yet he wears his virtuosity lightly and the album abounds with spark-bright flashes of wit that recall Zappa at his mercurial best. Recommended. **[JD]**

Standout track: *Lonely Sad Tbilisi Dog*
For fans of: Guthrie Govan, Larry Carlton, Tosin Abasi, Frank Zappa



Your Capo
Your Style
Your Choice

Nashville Guitar **Capo**

FREE LIFETIME WARRANTY

NEW
NOW AVAILABLE IN
RED, WHITE, GREEN AND BLUE
ALSO AVAILABLE IN SILVER AND BLACK

The Capo Company

www.G7th.com

THE LINEUP

Tones Behind The Tracks

Robin Trower looks back to the days when guitar-led power trios shook the foundations with high-decibel progressive rock

Artist: Robin Trower

Album: Twice Removed From Yesterday 50th Anniversary (Chrysalis)

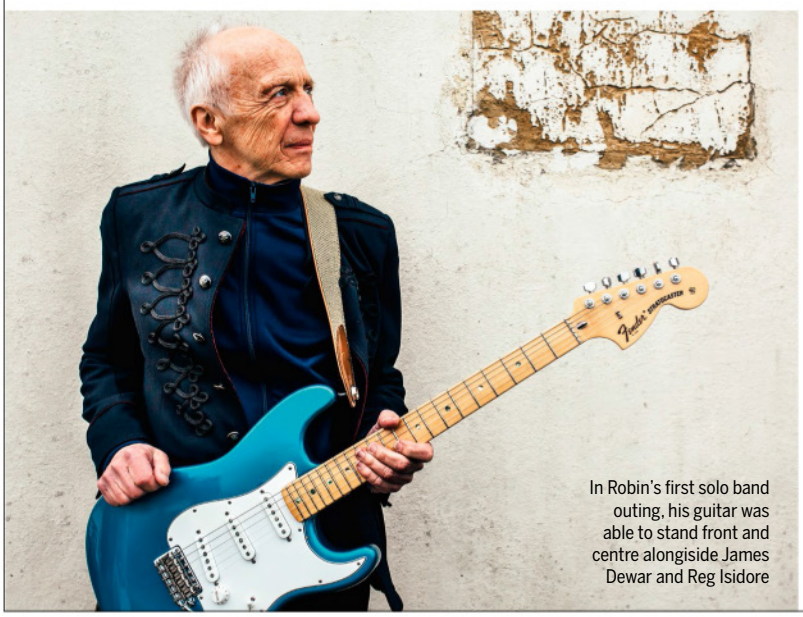


Twice Removed From Yesterday was released in 1973, a few short years after Robin left the Procol Harum line-up

The fact that we're enjoying so many 50th anniversary album re-releases now proves the point that the early 1970s was an absolute treasure hoard of brilliant music. One such gem is the first solo album from Robin Trower. Initially coming to prominence with Procol Harum, it wasn't long before Robin flew the nest to put his own band together with his signature Uni-Vibe-drenched psychedelic guitar sound to the fore. We catch up with Robin to reminisce about the album that set the course for his solo career.

How did you come to put the band together for the album?

"When I left Procol Harum I actually teamed up with a singer called Frankie Miller and we put a band together. It was Clive Bunker, from Jethro Tull, on drums, and Frankie brought in a friend of his, James Dewar, on bass and background vocals. The band didn't really work, we didn't make any real headway and we never recorded. But I did discover what a great singer Jimmy was. Working with Frankie sort of fell by the wayside and I decided I wanted to have a three-piece and Jimmy was absolutely ideal for that on bass and vocals. So he and I got together and searched for a drummer. I think it was Jimmy, actually, that found Reg Isidore and we started rehearsing material for the first album."



In Robin's first solo band outing, his guitar was able to stand front and centre alongside James Dewar and Reg Isidore

PHOTO BY ROB BLACKHAM

The power trio was a big thing back in those days, with bands like Cream, Taste and Mountain blazing a trail.

"Yeah. I think I liked the idea of it because it just gave me a bit more room, a bit more space, so it became more about the guitar than the singer, if you know what I mean. Even though Jimmy was a fabulous vocalist. But the writing became more about what the guitar was doing."

What was it like to be a touring band in the early 70s?

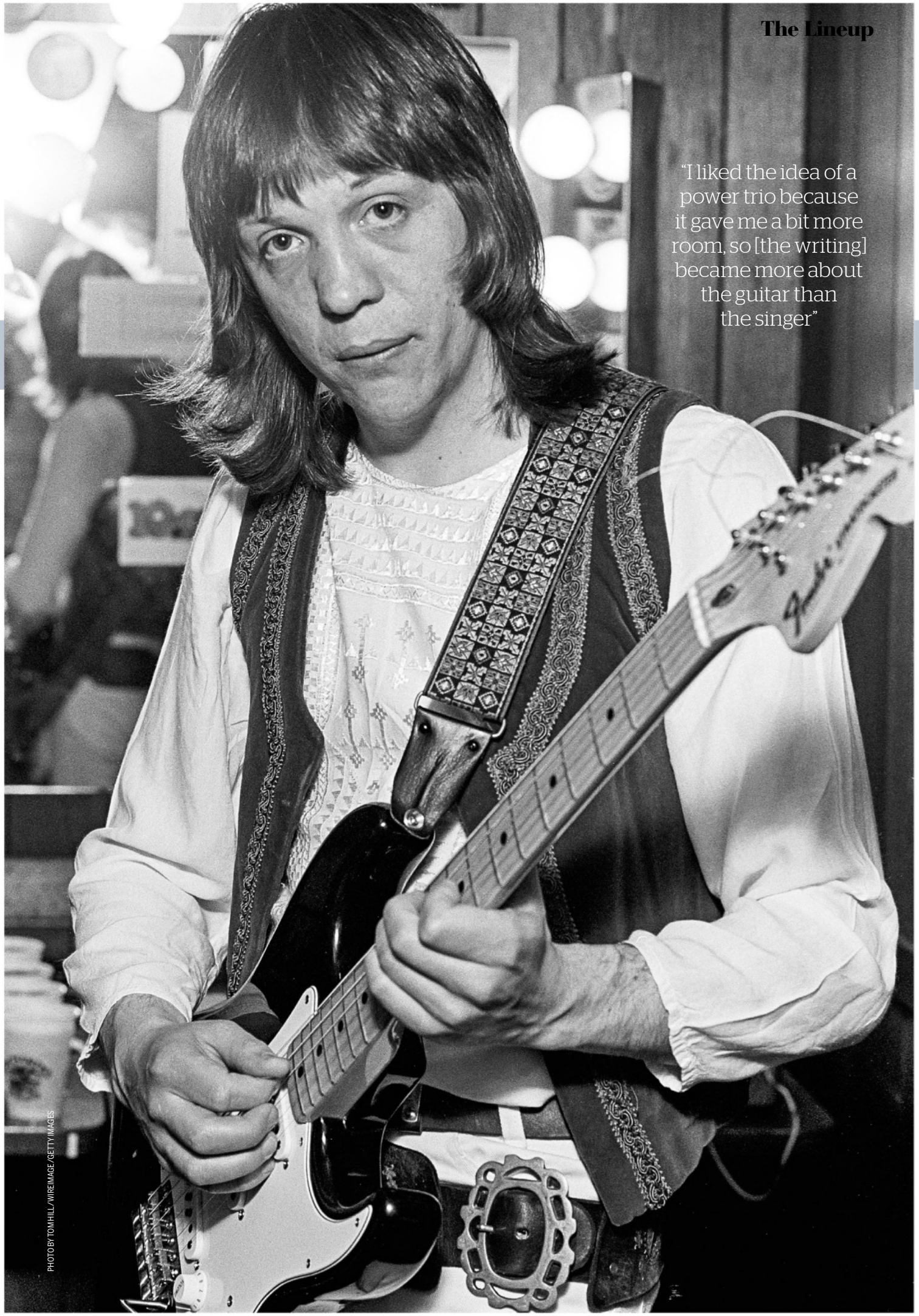
"Well, we did a little bit of gigging around London, but when the album came out the record company, Chrysalis, put us on as support for two of their big acts. One was Jethro Tull and the other was Ten Years After, so we got incredible exposure – in the States, especially. And because it was such a big tour we were travelling very comfortably, flying and staying in nice hotels, which we wouldn't have been if we'd have just been going around playing clubs and what have you."

Can you remember what the writing sessions were like for *Twice Removed From Yesterday*?

"I think what would happen was I would bring in the guitar parts for the song and Jimmy would do the vocal part. We used to do it mostly in rehearsal and I think we used to rehearse down in the studio that belonged to The Rolling Stones, which was south of the river somewhere. I can't remember exactly now. So long ago!"

What about gear for the recording sessions?

"Well, for that album I was using Marshall 100-watt amps and I had a Uni-Vibe, which I started using in Procol Harum, and a Fuzz Face. There weren't very many effects pedals then, you know. The Uni-Vibe was quite a unique thing. I think they were trying to imitate a Leslie effect, and that became very much part of my signature sound, especially on *Bridge Of Sighs*. I'm pretty much convinced that *Twice Removed From Yesterday* was all done at Olympic Studios in Barnes. We had Matthew Fisher producing and they had very, very good engineers. We played live and the vocals went on after we laid down the backing track – as did probably most of the lead work as well. I think the only song on the album that the lead and everything went down live was *Daydream*."



"I liked the idea of a power trio because it gave me a bit more room, so [the writing] became more about the guitar than the singer"

PHOTO BY TOM HILL/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

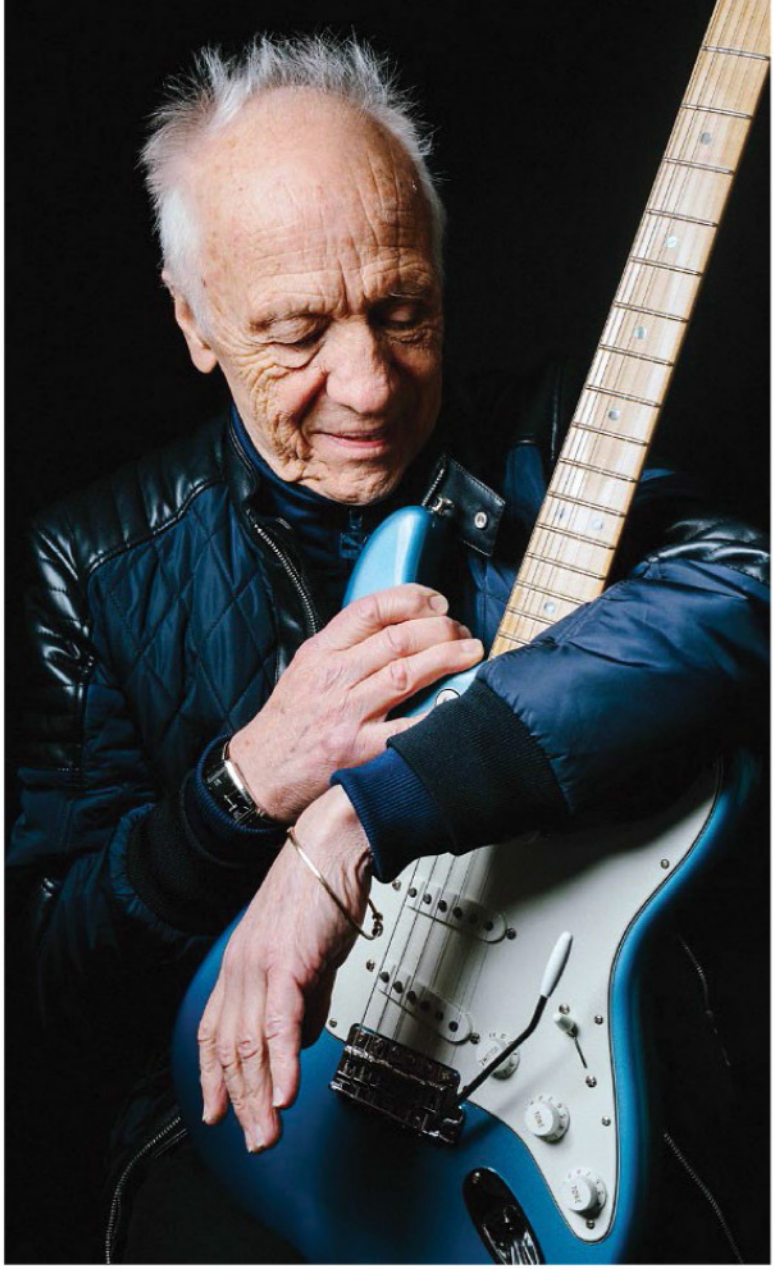


PHOTO BY ROB BLACKHAM

The Stratocaster has been Robin's one and only since the early 70s, when he took Martin Barre's Fender for a quick spin

Were the Marshalls wound right up when you were in the studio?

"I can't remember if I was using one or two, but, yeah, I think I was playing pretty loud. And the Fuzz Face, as I remember, when you were plugged through it, even though it was off, it still boosted the signal. So that's what I used it for mostly, there's just that slight boost, rather than actually putting the effect in. It must have gone through part of the circuit even when it wasn't on."

It's been said that, where Fuzz Face pedals were concerned, they varied a lot and sometimes you had to try a few of them before you found a good one. Was this your experience?

"No, I've just been lucky with the one I had. I only had one during that time – and I think it probably was the only album I actually used a Fuzz Face on. After that I had a custom boost built by a friend of mine."

You've been using Strats practically all your career. When did you first come across one?

"I discovered them when I was in Procol Harum when we were opening up on a UK tour for Jethro Tull. Their guitarist, Martin Barre, had a Strat as his second guitar and it was on the stage one day when we were getting ready to soundcheck and I picked it up and plugged it into my amp. I must admit it was very rude because I hadn't asked him! Immediately, I thought, 'I like the voicing of that...'. It had such a different voice to the Gibson I was using at the time. So I think I went out the next day and bought a Strat and started using them there and then. Once I had the Strat, even though I still had the Gibson I'd been using, I only used the Strat and I think I left the Gibson at home."

Are you still using similar gear now to the equipment you were using back then?

"What I use now is my signature model Strat that the Fender Custom Shop made for me and a couple of Marshalls, an overdrive pedal and a pedal that has replaced the Uni-Vibe called a Deja'Vibe, which is made by Fulltone. I still like a basic guitar tone, I don't like to mess with it too much. Even though I use an overdrive I'm still trying to keep that Strat sound."

After the release of *Twice Removed From Yesterday* you must have begun to work towards *Bridge Of Sighs*.

"Yeah, I mean, we were very fortunate to be on those big tours in the States. At the time the radio would play stuff that wasn't in the Top 30, as it were, or wasn't pop or that kind of thing. So you could get a lot of airplay as well to go along with the tour. But I think we did really well and it really set us up for *Bridge Of Sighs*."

Which of the tracks from *Twice Removed From Yesterday* do you think have stood the test of time?

"Well, *Hannah*, obviously, *Daydream* – I've always sort of had a soft spot in my heart for that one. I like *Man Of The World*. Those are my three favourites. But there's nothing I'm ashamed of on that album. It was just a matter of the ideas I was coming up with. You know, I'd come up with an idea and we'd work on it. I was really just starting to get into composing for the guitar – more and more as we worked on the material for the album."

Coming up to date, what does the immediate future hold for you?

"I've got an album coming out in October and it features an amazing singer called Sari Schorr. The album is called *Joyful Sky* and I'm chuffed with it. It's absolutely wonderful. I mean, she's dynamite! I'm looking forward to the album coming out. At the moment I'm in and out of the studio working on another album, which is, I should say, 75 per cent finished. I wanted to have something in the can in case I bought the farm!" **[DM]**



The 50th Anniversary edition of *Twice Removed From Yesterday* is available now on Chrysalis Records ***www.robintrower.com***



FUNDAMENTAL SERIES

Introducing the Walrus Audio Fundamental Series. Designed with the tonal integrity that's required to live on a professional's pedalboard, but with simplified controls friendly enough for even the newest effect pedal users. Each Fundamental pedal has three sliders for sound tweaking and a three-way switch for changing pedal modes. The result is a line of pedals that will keep you covered from your first band practice to a sold-out arena.

Learn more at walrusaudio.com



FACE Exclusive UK-Distribution - www.face.be

NEVILLE'S ADVOCATE



Je Ne Regrette Rien (PEUT-ÊTRE!)

As someone who typically doesn't fall in love with gear, selling it as he fancies, **Neville Marten** sometimes wishes he could turn back time

When the *Guitarist* team meet for a get-together (like the one we recently had to celebrate our 500th issue), the topic of conversation often turns to guitars we regret selling. Now, I'm an impetuous fellow, so the instruments that have come and gone in my life are many and varied. Actually, not so varied since they tend to number the same few models that I lusted after as a kid. So it's Strats, Les Pauls, Teles, ES-335s, Martin, Epiphone and Gibson acoustics, latterly PRSes, Taylors, Takamines,

"I've owned 50s Strats, 60s Teles, plus Martin 000-18s, Gibson J-45s and an Epiphone Texan. I nearly took out a mortgage on a '59 'Burst once"

a Yamaha or two with the odd waif and stray thrown in. It's my musical preference to own these models, and nothing against any of the brilliant instruments that we are lucky enough to see and play on a daily basis.

I've also owned many vintage guitars, including 50s and 60s Strats, 60s Teles, '61, '63 and '66 SG, and '59 Les Paul Junior, etc. Plus Martin 000-18s, Gibson J-45s and Epiphone Texan. I nearly took out an £18,000 mortgage on a '59 'Burst once, too – oh that I had! And if you count 70s as vintage, the list is embarrassing.

I have none of them now, and don't particularly regret it, other than what they might be worth today. But that shouldn't be what it's about... However, there are two instruments that still haunt me. First, because they were fabulous guitars; second, because they have exploded in value, despite what I just said; and third, because they were unique (two-nique)?

Cruz Control

When I was the editor of *Guitar Techniques* I'd ring various companies to borrow instruments for cover shoots if we didn't have something suitable ourselves. One day we were running a Stevie Ray Vaughan piece, so I called Fender to see if they'd loan me a rosewood-'board Strat. What turned up was a stunning three-tone sunburst John Cruz Masterbuilt, with just the right ageing – it was perfect. It was love at first sight, so I worked out a way to buy it. It became my stage guitar and I used it on pub gigs and theatre shows for ages.

Several months later I was in Coda Music in Stevenage. There was a rack of Telecasters, and almost hidden at the back I spied a three-tone sunburst model. I fished it out and, guess what? It was another Cruz: same colour and relicing as my Strat and, even though I had no intention of doing so, I walked out with it having traded my lovely Custom Shop Esquire.

I told my Tele-loving pal Stuart Ryan about the guitar and he arranged to come round for a viewing, as he'd not yet seen the Strat, either. I posed the two tantalisingly on my sofa, like fraternal twins, and Stuart picked up each one, played them thoroughly up and down the neck, then ran his eagle eyes all over them. "They're amazing," he had to agree. "And what a coincidence that they're consecutive serial numbers, too." What?! I hadn't even realised this myself. It was pretty incredible. I proudly sported the pair at gigs and absolutely adored them.

Of course, you can guess the next bit. It was a sunburst ES-335 with P-90s that caught my attention in World Guitars. Perhaps it's the mental scars, but I forget what the deal was. I do remember imploring my late, great friend and WG owner Jeff Pumfrett to only sell them as a pair, and I believe he was true to his word. But my matching couple was gone, and so was the 335 in just a matter of months.

I'll say no more, except that if you have your own sob stories, you know the drill. And if you have my Strat and Tele, please don't tell me. I couldn't afford to buy them back even if you wanted to sell them. See you next time.

GAS OF THE MONTH

Boss Loss!

What? Boss CE-2W & DM-2W Waza Craft
Where seen? Andertons
Price? £219 & £169



Back in the early 80s I was swapping cars so emptied the current one's contents into a black bin liner. This included pedals (both of the pictured's inspirations, plus a Maestro phaser, Boss tuner and Cry Baby wah), various cables, straps and other bits. I was sharing a house with my mother at the time and put the bag in an annexe by the front door. The next day I picked up my new wheels, but when I went to retrieve the bag, it was gone. Mum had put it out with the rubbish... Those pedals were warm, musical and game-changing.

Luckily, today Boss's superb Waza Craft range replicates and improves them. The DM-2W provides a Custom mode with twice the delay time, plus expression pedal input, and the CE-2W has CE-1 mode with chorus and trem, plus stereo operation. Perhaps an indulgence is due?

PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDERTONS MUSIC CO

POWER SUSTAIN LONG LIFE

TYPE 52 ALLOY ELECTRIC GUITAR STRINGS



Rotosound's next generation **Ultramag** strings use a premium material to produce a stronger, longer lasting string with an unrivalled tone.

Type 52 alloy combines the excellent resonant properties and magnetic response of steel with the accentuated middle and bass frequencies offered by nickel.

ROTOSOUND®

@rotosound_uk

CONFESSIONS OF A LUTHIER



Hammer It Home

This month **Alex Bishop** faces the tricky challenge of binding his latest build and guiding his students in the process...

Often, I will explain to my guitar-building students that when their work is scrutinised by an experienced luthier, it is not likely to be the sound of the instrument that provides the first measure of the craftsmanship. Nor is it the playability of the fingerboard. Or the carve of the neck. A fancy inlay here or there may distract the casual viewer, but not the eye of a veteran guitar maker. The craft is, in fact, found in the decorative, curvaceous trim of the binding.

Binding is a strip of material installed into a channel cut along the corners of the body of an electric or acoustic guitar. It can be a plain celluloid strip running around the perimeter of the instrument on the front (and, more often than not, the back as well), or it can be a deeply figured band of exotic hardwood. More embellished instruments are likely to also include a purfling, which typically consists of a number of thin veneer lines that run between the binding and the front (or back), and can also be found beneath the binding against the sides. The most coveted instruments may even be adorned with mother-of-pearl or abalone inlays in place of veneered purfling lines for an ornate, museum-quality appearance.

"Subjecting a finely crafted guitar body to a high-speed router is not for the faint-hearted; one false move and weeks of work can be destroyed"

The process of binding not only adds a decorative element to the guitar that demonstrates the builder's skill, it also provides some insurance against impact damage



PHOTO BY JOSEPH BRANSTON

But the role of binding is not just about decoration; impact damage to the vulnerable corners of a guitar can sometimes be absorbed by the binding, avoiding damage to the soundboard or back along the grain. Purfling lines also play a role in stopping the development of cracks by acting as a 'firebreak' in vulnerable areas, such as around the soundhole as a rosette, or offset from a soundboard edge as on a violin.

As I tell my students, a successful binding operation is contingent upon a high degree of preparation, which begins with cutting the channels. I use a fairly sophisticated setup with a high-speed router riding up and down a column to keep it coplanar to the top (essential when working on curved surfaces). It must be said that subjecting a finely crafted guitar body to a high-speed router is not for the faint-hearted; one false move and weeks of work can be easily destroyed or severely damaged.

Fastidious Work

The router rides along the top surface of the guitar, with a bearing-guided cutter running against the side of the instrument to guide it. The bearing is a little smaller than the cutter, resulting in a ledge cut that woodworkers refer to as a 'rebate'. The rebate must be oversized to account for the swelling of the wood once water-based glue is introduced (I normally opt for an extra 0.3mm). Without this tiny adjustment, the binding ends up with an unsightly overhang, which requires a lot of extra work with a sharpened cabinet scraper to clean up.

The guitar on my bench is on commission for a client, and he has requested a binding scheme along the same lines as a 1930s guitar from which it is inspired. Unfortunately for me, this requires a 1.8mm binding, with no less than five inner purfling veneers (an attractive ebony-maple-mahogany-maple-ebony scheme), as well as a further three purfling lines beneath the binding; no less than nine strips of wood in total. Cutting this much material off the corner of the instrument could actually destroy the join between the top and the sides altogether, so a stepped cut is required to ensure the linings are not compromised – a single cut for the binding and a second shallower cut for the purfling that doesn't go deeper than the thickness of the top.

Fortunately, this has sufficiently intimidated most of my lutherie students enough for them to opt for a simpler binding scheme. Despite that, the heat bending of the wood bindings presents a challenge, bringing back memories and the aroma of bending the sides. Once glued into place and scraped back, the binding decoration comes into full effect, transforming the guitar at last into a piece of art. G



MAKE A BOLD STATEMENT

WITH OUR NEW CUSTOM COLOR COLLECTION

The world-renowned Les Paul quality, playability, and sound you know and love is now available in eye-catching custom colors! Translucent and solid custom color finishes are available on Les Paul Standard 50s and 60s models. Stand out from the crowd and get yours today.

Shop the new Custom Color Series at gibson.com.

Gibson®



Open Tuning Chords (PART 1)

Richard Barrett takes a leaf out of Keith Richards' book and presents some chords in open G tuning, no sixth string required...

Of all the alternative tunings in use today, open G must be a contender for 'most popular'. But before we continue, please allow me to be pedantic for a moment and point out that 'altered' and 'open' tunings can mean different things. An open tuning is where the open strings of the guitar are tuned to a chord: in this case, G major (low to high: DGDGBD). An altered tuning can be almost any combination of notes; Jimmy Page, Nick Drake and Joni Mitchell have all used both altered and open tunings.

With this issue's examples below, you could say I'm coming from the Keith Richards' school of thought, but open G is also very popular with slide players. Robert Johnson used this tuning on several of his most famous tunes, too. So, like Mr Richards himself, I haven't used the sixth string. In fact, he doesn't even fit a sixth string to his open G-tuned guitars anymore... I'll be looking at some further voicings next time, so come back for more next issue. G

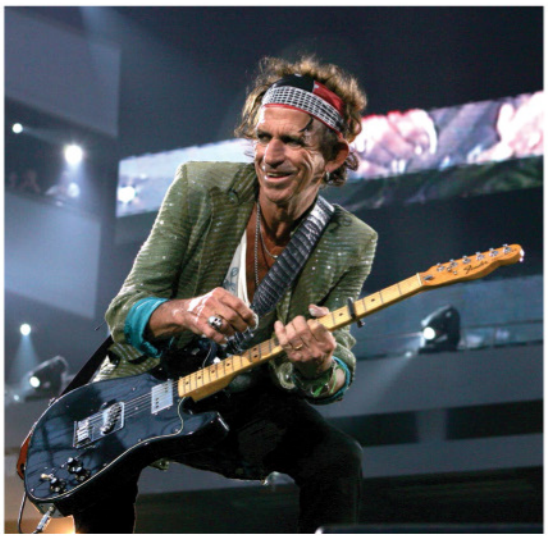
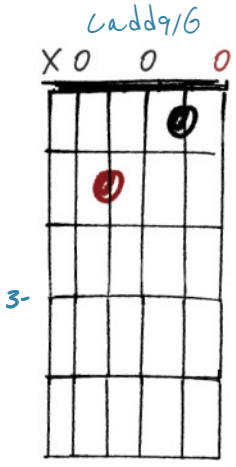


PHOTO BY GREETSIA TENT/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

Keef's not the only one to embrace the open tunings, of course: Joni Mitchell and Jimmy Page also offer much inspiration here

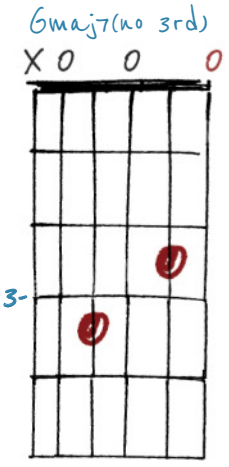
Example 1

Obviously, using the open strings as Example 1 would have been cheating, so this first example is our starting point. The most logical name for this is Cadd9/G, though G6sus4 could also be correct. As you can see, it's a two-finger shape, which would give us Amin7 in regular tuning.



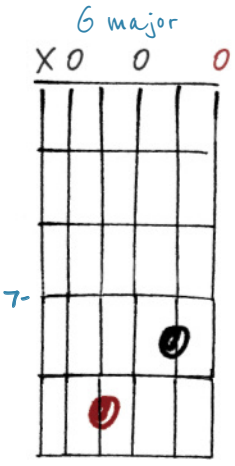
Example 2

Quite dissonant on its own but great in context, this chord goes by the name of Gmaj7 (no 3rd). Though the missing 3rd doesn't disqualify it from taking the place of a regular Gmaj7, it's different enough to warrant the extra bracketed description. Note this is the same shape as Example 1, moved two frets higher.



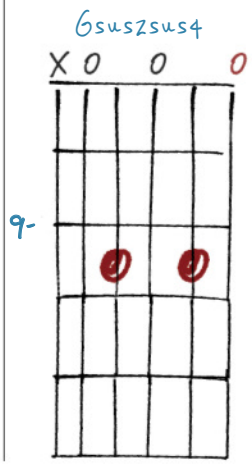
Example 3

One more use of the same shape: here, it gives us an alternative version of G major. This sounds great when tracked with a regular tuned G chord. Tune the guitar up a tone to open A and you'll have a fragment of Gordon Giltrap's acoustic tour de force *Heartsong*.



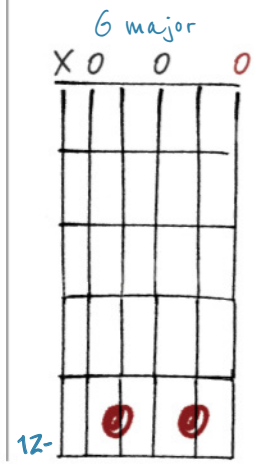
Example 4

This is the same chord shape as A7, moved up to the 10th fret. Combined with the open strings, it's a simple-to-play but hard-to-name chord that I will call Gsus2sus4! The sus2 (C) is played on the fourth string, with the sus2 (A) on the second. There's no 3rd, but we do have the root (G) and 5th (D) on the fifth and first strings respectively.



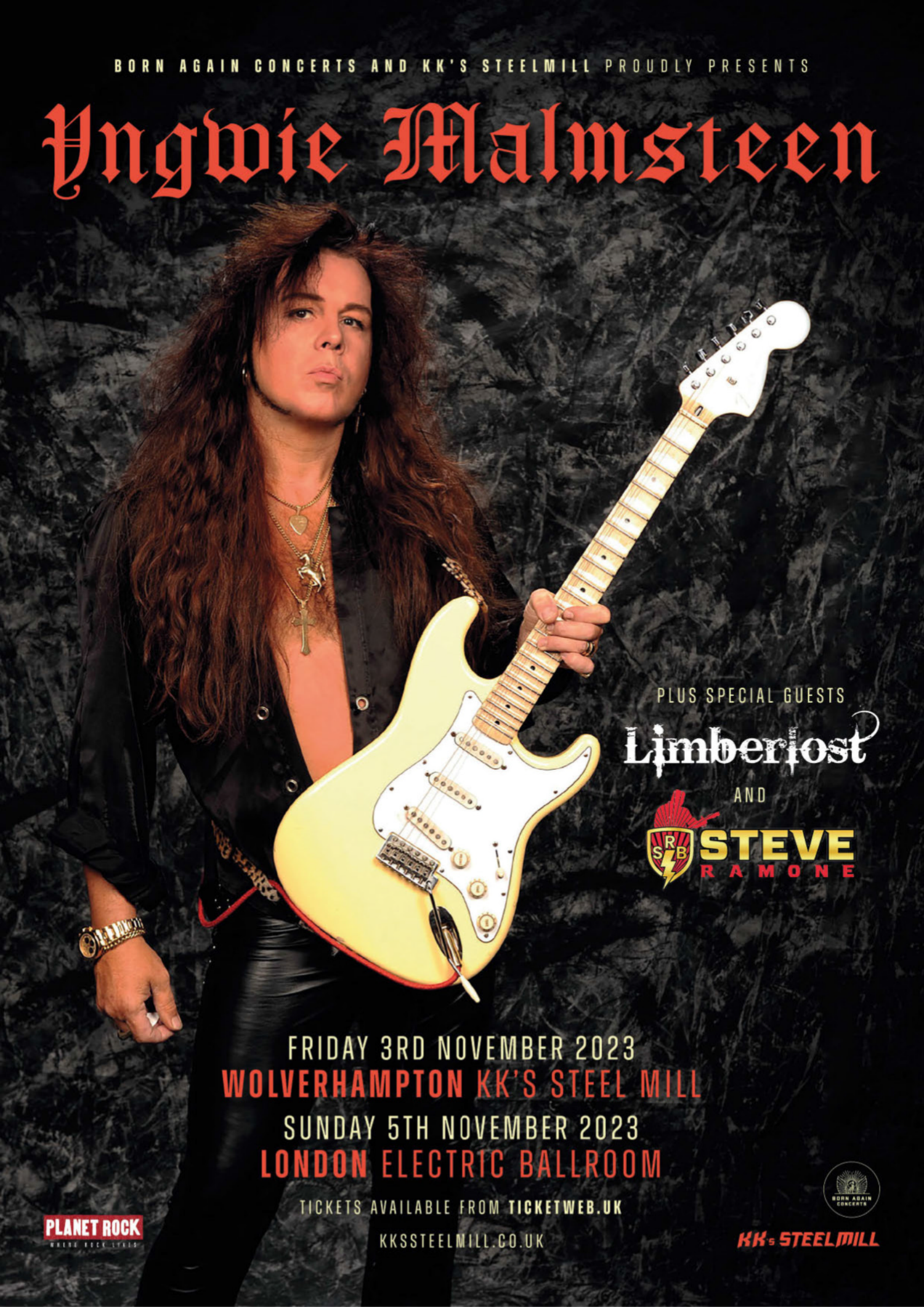
Example 5

Slide Example 4 up two frets and things become easier to name again! This is another version of G major, with a different 'stacking' of notes. Moving different voicings around can be a great way of arranging a 'chord melody' style. Check out the end of Led Zep's *That's The Way*.



BORN AGAIN CONCERTS AND KK'S STEELMILL PROUDLY PRESENTS

Yngwie Malmsteen



PLUS SPECIAL GUESTS

Limberlost

AND

STEVE RAMONE

FRIDAY 3RD NOVEMBER 2023

WOLVERHAMPTON KK'S STEEL MILL

SUNDAY 5TH NOVEMBER 2023

LONDON ELECTRIC BALLROOM

TICKETS AVAILABLE FROM **TICKETWEB.UK**

KKSSTEELMILL.CO.UK

PLANET ROCK

BORN AGAIN CONCERTS

KK's STEELMILL

Feedback

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

STAR LETTER

ANNIVERSARY WALTZ



I bought a new Epiphone FT-150 in the early 1970s from Norman Hackett's music shop in Reading. I couldn't believe how cheap it was until the shop pointed out it was 'Made in Japan', as noted on the label inside the guitar. This didn't deter me in the slightest, it's a lovely thing that plays well and looks good. Epiphone, in my mind at that time, was a revered guitar brand, looked like a Gibson but was more exclusive.

It was to replace my Gibson SG Special bought in 1966 on HP. My biggest regret is selling the SG, but it had to be cashed in at the time, probably to go towards a car, having given up my group days as other priorities came to the fore.

After a break of only 50 years, and prompted by a conversation with an old friend, I thought it was about time I played my old Epiphone. This developed into a serious GAS situation leading to another Epiphone, this time a '61 SG standard (inspired by Gibson Custom), which I absolutely love. So I bought my first Epiphone in their centenary year, and my second during their 150th Anniversary. That's what you call a loyal customer.
Mick Miller

Thanks for your story of rekindled desire to play your old Epiphone, Mick – and nice that your relationship with Epis has been in step with their big anniversaries. The great thing about guitars is that a good guitar, if well maintained, will always be a good guitar. We may get bored of them over time or yearn for another hit of GAS but that's our problem, not the guitar's.

We'd be interested to know how the FT-150 sounded when you took it out of the case after its lengthy hiatus. And as you say, the new range of Inspired By Gibson Epis gives their Gibson counterparts a real run for their money – glad you are happy with your two fine guitars from both ends of a half-century of tone.



VOX AMPLIFICATION LTD.

Each issue, the Star Letter will win a pair of Vox VGH AC30 guitar amplifier headphones!
www.voxamps.com



Simon Grove scooped up some true Peter Green treasures at a recent Bonhams auction

GREEN FOR GO

I was lucky enough to win an amazing collection of Peter Green memorabilia at the recent Bonhams auction. It includes two Peter Green autographs, as well as autographs from the Splinter Group and John Mayall. There are some handwritten notes by Peter, some huge posters, a press kit, a set list from 2009 (unknown handwriting), as well as concert programmes dating back to the Fleetwood Mac days, including one from a BB King and Fleetwood Mac concert at The Royal Albert Hall in 1969 (with Peter's handwritten annotations on the front). It's an awesome collection!

My good friend Remi Harris, who I went to the auction with on the night, took some photos of the items for me (see pictures, above). We were bidding on a few guitars but as we had sensibly set a limit, we soon got outbid on those. But, I persevered as I was determined to get something and, to be honest, the guitars were mostly from a later period. However, this collection dates to the beginning of Fleetwood Mac.
Simon Grove

Congratulations on collecting the mementoes of your hero Peter Green's life in music, Simon. The 'Man Of The World' sale of Peter's guitars, art and memorabilia at Bonhams was really eclectic and, unusually for a high-profile guitar auction, it could truly be said that there was something for everyone.

The editor of this tome, Nev Marten and That Pedal Show's Mick Taylor enjoyed talking to bidders about Peter's guitars at Bonham's London salerooms and there was a real feeling of love for Peter's life and music. So pleased you're now steward of some really special reminders of the great man's music.

MORE UNSUNG SOLOS

I noted with interest [the letter from Rob Leeder last issue] about Be Bop Deluxe's *Crying To The Sky*. I was Bill Nelson's guitar technician (or 'roadie' in those days) for a number of years in the 70s and I distinctly remember setting up his gear to record the solo in Studio 2 at Abbey Road. His 345 was virtually out of control due to the amp being so loud, as it was set much higher than stage volume, which is what Bill wanted. He had to stand at the other end of the studio to maintain control of the feedback...

If any readers want to indulge themselves further in Be Bop Deluxe, the Live CD set from Hammersmith in March 1977 [*Live! In The Air Age*] is a must.

Stu Monks

NELSON'S COLUMN?

What a welcome surprise on page 44 last issue with Bill Nelson and Charlie Tumahai mentioned by Rob Leeder. I can recall hearing *Axe Victim* and *Futurama* in the mid 70s, and being overwhelmed by the passion and precision of Nelson's playing, not to mention the speed of the solos at times. *Crying To The Sky* is, as Rob says, a gorgeous up-volume rainstorm. It would be interesting to read about Bill's guitars at some point, as well as his amp choices.

Chris JP Smith

Thanks Stu and Chris for your excellent Bill Nelson suggestions. We certainly agree with Chris that it would be great to see Bill's guitars in detail in the mag – we'll put out feelers and see if he might be up for it. Watch this space...

CAREER PATHS

Firstly, a belated congratulations on your 500th edition. I enjoyed reading your fascinating accounts of favourite memories but couldn't help feeling a little envious! This led me to think about my formative years in the 80s and early 90s, when the only guitar-related career path I was aware of was to become a rockstar – and you can guess how that worked out...

In my later years I found a way to further my interest, working as a part-time luthier alongside the day job, having attended the GTC setup, fret-dressing and guitar-build courses with the brilliant James Collins. I also gained experience doing setup work for a local guitar shop.

Maybe it would be good to do an article exploring the various avenues that today's young guitar enthusiasts could take to make a career from their passion?

David Elliott





Paul Chitty's original Selmer Buzz Tone alongside a DIY wah-wah

Nice idea, David – the editor of this magazine went to music college and, while one or two of the alumni of his degree course went on to become well-known rock and pop musicians, many more of his classmates subsequently enjoyed interesting and fruitful careers in guitar (or closely related areas) that didn't involve stepping on stage.

From luthiery to working in music retail there is more than one way to make your passion for guitar into a rewarding livelihood. We'll look into it and hopefully put together a feature on the subject soon.

BUZZWORDS?

I was most interested in an article back in issue 470 (April 2021) about the Fuzz Face. Some time around 1967, I purchased a Selmer Buzz Tone (which I still have) to use with my Futurama guitar to give it a distorted, interesting sound. In 1969, I progressed to a Telecaster and obviously got a much better sound.

In the photo [above right] is my wah-wah pedal. I made it in 1968 during the first year of my electronics apprenticeship (I did the metalwork in training school and the electronics at home). The circuit came from *Practical Wireless* magazine and I had to buy the components from various electronics shops and make the circuit on Veroboard.

It would be interesting if you featured an article around the Buzz Tone to enlighten the readers about it.

Paul Chitty



Regular columnist for this magazine and all-round guitar-wizard Richard Barrett inspires readers around the world

As I'm sure you're aware, Paul, vintage fuzz has become a whole field of interest in itself, and that's certainly reflected in the prices of the much-sought-after models. And consequently there's also interest in the design and history of old fuzz pedals – do any readers have any interesting insights on the Selmer Buzz Tone to share? If so, send them in and we'll print the best right here.

VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

I'm an American who occasionally buys *Guitarist* on the newsstand. Over the weekend, while paging through an older issue (497 with Dave Gilmour on the cover) I discovered two sections that I haven't noticed before. The first is Huw Price's 'Nitty Gritty' column. In this particular issue he was covering vintage fuzz pedals. I follow Huw for his great repair tutorials and lessons, but this was the first time I've read this particular column. I don't know how I missed it! It's simply a great column with a historical angle, written by a legend in the world of guitar journalism.

Second was Richard Barrett's lesson 'Blues Headlines'. I not only found the basis of the lesson to be intriguing, as it focused around tying in passing notes to pentatonic scales (reinforcing some of what I'm learning in my lessons with my regular teacher) but the switching from 16th notes to 16th note triplets to quarter notes really helped with my rhythm diversification in lead runs.

In fact, I liked Richard's style so much that I immediately went back to issue 494 (The Telecaster Issue) and found a lesson around Leslie West to learn. From there I drove down to my local bookstore to buy the Rory Gallagher issue for the Gary Moore lesson.

Guys, I'm hooked. Between amazing features, a regular column from Huw and lessons from Richard I'm subscribing. Keep up the great work!

Spurgeon Dunbar

Thank you very much for the kind words, Spurgeon – we're glad you got a kick out of two very different regulars in the magazine. Both Huw and Richard are, in their individual ways, such experts in their areas of interest that we're very pleased and proud to have their insights in the mag. And we're glad readers feel the same way, if you're happy then it's job done for the *Guitarist* team.

Do any readers have any great suggestions for themes that Richard and Huw could, respectively, tackle in future editions? Send them in and we'll run them past our esteemed contributors – who knows, they might take on your suggestions in their next column.

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

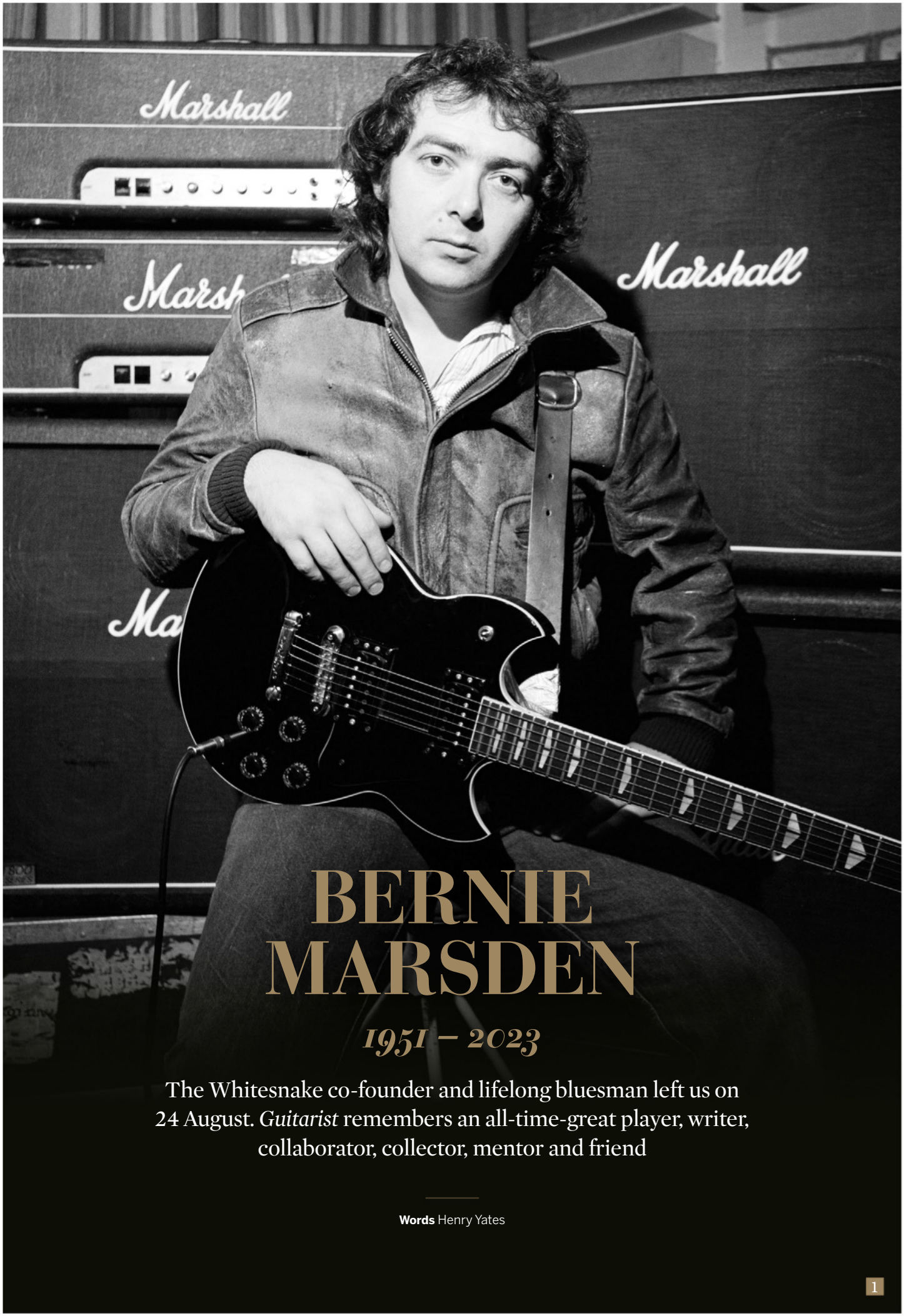


WELCOME TO THE SLINKY FAMILY



ERNIE BALL®

SINCE 1962



BERNIE MARSDEN

1951 – 2023

The Whitesnake co-founder and lifelong bluesman left us on 24 August. *Guitarist* remembers an all-time-great player, writer, collaborator, collector, mentor and friend

Words Henry Yates

PHOTO BY FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

BERNIE MARSDEN

7 May 1951 – 24 August 2023

To the uninitiated, Bernie Marsden might have been easy to miss. In an industry of leather, motorbikes and top hats – and from a generation where 'lead guitarist' was shorthand for 'show-off' – the man once dubbed 'British blues-rock's secret weapon' had the unstarry, affable, anecdote-ready demeanour of a pub regular.

But as the guitar community well knows, there was much more to Marsden, who died at the age of 72 as this issue went to press. The myriad reasons to toast the great journeyman's final flight span from the anthems he wrote (which included Whitesnake's *Here I Go Again*) through to the young musicians he mentored, the sweetness of his touch and the treasures of his superb vintage guitar collection.

Perhaps above all, among the pan-generational cohort of *Guitarist* journalists, we will miss a marvellous storyteller who often felt more like a friend than an interviewee – and whose generosity even extended to letting us play his fabled 'Beast' 1959 Les Paul Standard.

Born in Buckingham on 7 May, 1951, Marsden caught a glimpse of the world he wanted to occupy, at a young age:

> *"The myriad reasons to toast the great journeyman's final flight span from the anthems he wrote through to the treasures of his unrivalled vintage guitar collection"*



2

"People would take me to pubs when I was 14 because there was a band playing. Once I'd had a taste, that was it". And then Clapton did the rest. Bernie shared that the Yardbirds and Bluesbreakers ace was "the first guitar player I really adored, because I was old enough to relate to it".

But it was perhaps Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac that made the defining impression, Marsden following his future friend's live itinerary across the UK and later recalling in *Guitarist* that he was incandescent when Green recruited the 19-year-old Danny Kirwan: "How dare they get a guitar player the same age as me?"

Coming up in the early 70s, Marsden made his own mark, though his career would prove a slower burn than Kirwan's precocious rise (and fall). Early outfit Skinny Cat was an invaluable apprenticeship that went nowhere, and while Marsden hoped that moving to London in 1972 after passing an audition for UFO would "be like the cover of a Beatles EP, with everyone jumping in the air", what briefly seemed like his big break crumbled into onstage fist-fights and a sour exit.

The guitarist moved on, repeatedly. He was variously spotted in Glenn Cornick's Wild Turkey, Cozy Powell's Hammer, and

1. (Left) Bernie during his post-Whitesnake days in the early 1980s. Worried now that his career lay behind him, in fact he went on to play with a whole host of top names

2. During one of his visits to the *Guitarist* studios, Bernie produced a copy of *The Beano* he'd bought from eBay. It was the same issue Eric Clapton was reading on the cover of the John Mayall Blues Breakers album

PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS

18+

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

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

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

18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

All languages
Brand new content
One site



AVXLIVE.ICU

AvaxHome - Your End Place

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



PHOTO BY FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

3. Bernie (plus The Beast) rocks out with Micky Moody (right) on stage with Whitesnake, 1978

4. Striking up a friendship with Joe Bonamassa back in 2009, Bernie was a frequent guest at JoBo gigs, including here on The Blues Cruise

5. On another visit to *Guitarist*, Bernie brought along his Nik Huber signature model – note how the wood grain underneath the guitar's stop tailpiece appears to spell out '59': the year of The Beast

Hertfordshire rockers Babe Ruth. He filled the gaps with session work and reflected on his higher-profile stint in Paice Ashton Lord as "a flash in the pan, but one of the best things I've ever done". He might even have auditioned for Bad Company, had housemate Mick Ralphs not been first in line for the gig.

Next, meeting singer and fellow blues fanatic David Coverdale at a Munich studio led to the partnership in Whitesnake that many fans consider to be the band's best period. Let off the leash creatively for the first time, Marsden – always a disciple of The Beatles' pop smarts – began writing hooks for the ages on the Beast LP he had bought for £500 in '74 and played on every Whitesnake record. "When I played *Here I Go Again* to Jon Lord he had a certain look in his eye," Marsden told Rob Hughes. "He said, 'You're a clever little sod, aren't you?'"

True to form, Marsden would be long gone by the time a reboot of *Here I Go Again* topped the US chart in 1987, and "only started to see royalties after taking the company to court many years later".

Post-Whitesnake, the 30-something guitarist worried he was washed up, but his later period heralded some of his most soulful playing, whether in bands like Alaska, across his prolific solo blues career (his work ethic sometimes stretching to two studio albums in a single year) or as a foil to such luminaries as Ringo Starr, Gary Moore, Joe Bonamassa and Robert Plant.

With Marsden also latterly serving as a guiding light to younger players such as Laurence Jones, he often seemed like the glue that held the blues-rock scene together, a figure so omnipresent you sometimes wondered if he had a team of doppelgängers (this writer once found him in Walter Trout's dressing room, debating whether to step in on bass after the US bluesman's own four-stringer went AWOL).

Decades earlier, as a teenage gunslinger, Marsden had teased his mother when she worried her would-be-musician son was headed for a wayward life of bacchanals ("I said, 'That's what I want to do this for!'"). In truth, the boundless joy of making music with those who felt the same way was reward enough for this most modest of guitar heroes. "I suppose I am proud of what has gone on," Marsden wrote on his website. "After all, I only ever wanted to play the guitar for a living." G



PHOTO BY JOBY SESSIONS

> *"When I played* Here I Go Again *to Jon Lord he had a certain look in his eye. He said, 'You're a clever little sod, aren't you?'"* **BERNIE MARSDEN**

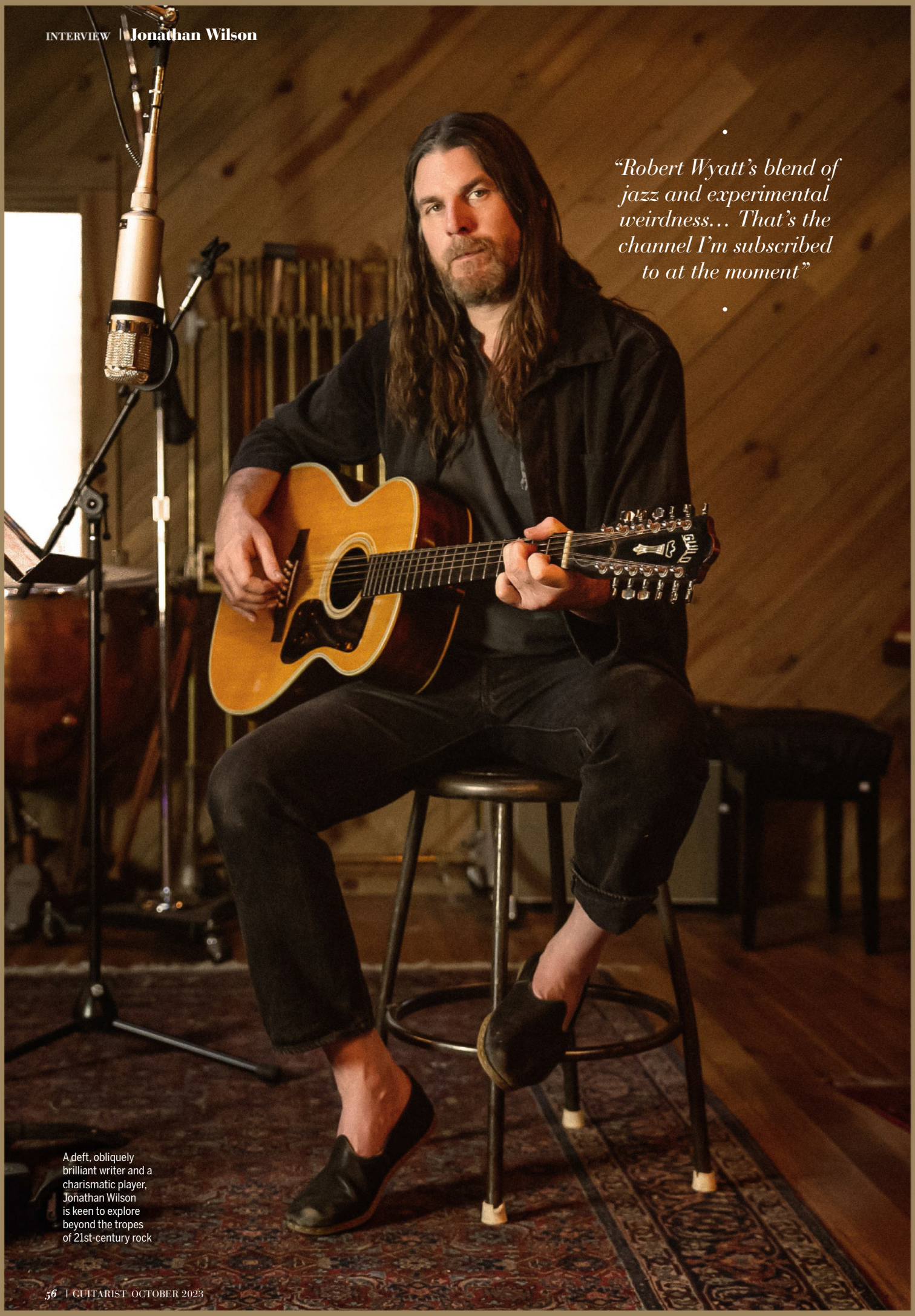
BERNIE MARSDEN

7 May 1951 – 24 August 2023



PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS

"Robert Wyatt's blend of jazz and experimental weirdness… That's the channel I'm subscribed to at the moment"



A deft, obliquely brilliant writer and a charismatic player, Jonathan Wilson is keen to explore beyond the tropes of 21st-century rock

JONATHAN WILSON

Eat The Worm, the new album from polymath producer, ex-luthier, songwriter and dynamic performer Jonathan Wilson, is a strange and multi-layered work of art. We chat pitfalls, frustrations, building guitars and letting them loose in the car

Words Glenn Kimpton **Photography** Andrea Nakhla

Laurel Canyon-based Jonathan Wilson is an achiever, be it at making highly sought after electric guitars (which he did for some years), touring with Roger Waters, producing work for the likes of Roy Harper and Father John Misty (among many others) or making his own broad, experimental and often thrilling records. His latest, *Eat The Worm*, is partly a love letter to 1960s jazz, partly a beatnik poem about the decline of modern culture. Beguiling, baffling, beautiful, it is a cryptic mescaline dream of an album.

"It was at some point during the pandemic that I started some new songs," Jonathan explains. "I had an album [*Dixie Blur*] that came out on 6 March 2020, which was a bit of a joke because it was when it all [the pandemic] started. And then during that period I started gathering some new songs and ideas, so it's been a long process. But, then, there was no deadline and no hurry."

Positive Experimentation

Listening to the record, there is an almost playful quality to the songs, with fresh and adventurous arrangements but also an underlying sense of these songs having teeth, unsurprising considering the turmoil the world was facing at the time. "I guess it's a sort of statement on the state of affairs," Jonathan nods. "But it's also [a comment on] playing it safe in a standard song structure kind of way. It looks at opposing those standard tropes and the pitfalls of getting into them within the studio."

Tropey this is not and the sound is happy to swell to euphoric from almost minimalist in places, like on the track *Bonamossa*, a Hunter S Thompson-esque warped reality (hence the misspelling), hallucinatory song, with the narrator hitting up a joint in Memphis: 'Think I'll play the blues like Bonamassa / nasty filthy sleaze / nasty filthy sleaze.' Ironically, instead of guitars, the song is built on an odd drum machine beat and jaw harp, with sweeping strings and horns offsetting the weirdness. "Yeah, that's a good thing," he grins. "There is a bit of negativity in some of the observations on there, so I was careful to balance that; it'd be a drag to make an album basically saying, 'It sucks now!'"

Going Alone

Spending a lot of time in the studio as producer, Jonathan gets to tinker with sounds and tools a lot, which gave him a broad canvas in terms of what he wanted on his new album. "I was inspired to stretch out and get away from the standard rhyme structure and chordal structure that we've all heard a thousand times," he explains. "But it's also sort of a reaction to me being a bit baffled in the studio. I've been in there with some amazing fucking artists and I'll say, 'Hey, let's try a crazy idea on the fretless bass, it'll be like *Sunset Grill* by Don Henley,' and someone would just say, 'Er, I don't think so.' And I'll think, 'But you haven't even heard it yet.' That's the spirit of the thing, like the fuzz that starts off the Stones' *Satisfaction* or something, which was wild at the time! Things like that happened, so this is like a response."

Getting Weird

Eat The Worm is, at its heart, an exploratory album and one that is unafraid to dive down sonic rabbit holes, a characteristic of Jonathan's creative energy. "To be honest, probably since 2010 I've been obsessed with Soft Machine and I listen to Robert [Wyatt]'s shit almost every day," he smiles. "His blend of jazz and experimental weirdness, plus the fact that he plays drums like he does, or did, all that kind of stuff. That's the channel I'm subscribed to at the moment."

We wonder if this is where a lot of the strangeness of the new album stems from. "Well, yeah, and I have a huge appetite for jazz," he answers. "But for this particular batch of songs I was listening to this band from Finland called Wigwam in the 60s and 70s. Jim Pembroke [from the band] died during the process of this album [in late 2021] and somebody showed me a video of him, which I saw and thought was fantastic! So I found this album

MAKING 'EAT THE WORM'

Jonathan takes some time to explain the sounds behind the album. "Most of the fuzz on there is DI," he says. "My preference is not to use an amp, I like to go straight in. I'm using the Colorsound fuzz, that's a big one, and my own pedal, the [Jext Telez] Canyon Climber, which is a signature fuzz. And then there's the Vox amps, I have two 1960 AC10s, and a 1965 Fender Princeton that I've had since I was 13, so that's on there for sure. And there's a variance of Teles and Strats on the album, but I'm a big fan these days of the Fender Bass VI, so that's on there too. There's a song called *The Village is Dead*, which has a kind of incomprehensible solo, which was done with a Moogerfooger [MF-102] Ring Modulator [an analogue synthesiser pedal], which is kinda cool." And is he pleased with the finished album? "Oh yeah, man, the finished version I'm definitely stoked about."



Archtops and round-shouldered dreadnoughts all have their place on the rack in Jonathan's studio – classic tones put to dazzlingly original purpose on his new album *Eat The Worm*

Jim did in 1972 or something with, like, 6,000 strings and it's like Frank Zappa meets Beefheart meets a high school talent show. It's so good, so fucking weird – and it got me going."

All of this being said, there are moments of intimacy across *Eat The Worm*, like a particularly beautiful and subtle guitar string buzz on *Lo And Behold* that brings the listener back to Earth. "The archetype of that song was about my friend Roy Harper," Jonathan says. "I was thinking about the vibe of his stuff and some of the gigs I had done with him and the string arranger David Bedford. So it has that feel and the vibe of those albums where it was just Roy and basically strings and horns."

The Other Craft

Going back to the early 2000s, Jonathan decided to veer off into a new direction within the music industry and start building high-end electric guitars. "It was me trying to get out of the business of bands and companies," he admits. "I was a bit like, 'Fuck the music business' at the time and I was on the outskirts and built guitars from 2004 until 2011."

While Jonathan is quite modest on the subject, his guitars were sought after instruments and highly regarded. "They were fucking expensive!" he laughs. "What I was doing was like a better version of the aged relic stuff. [Fender] had done an aged Broadcaster for Keith [Richards] and at the time I was sharing a studio and it had a '57 Telecaster in and it was incredible. When the guitar went back, I set a goal to build one exactly like it, from the neck to the finish and weight. I had seen the Custom Shop stuff and it didn't look great, but the idea was there and I thought it was cool and it could be done. So I worked on it for a long time and basically got it down. It was fun."

> *"I was inspired to get away from the standard chordal structure we've all heard a thousand times"*

Tools & Treasures

When it comes to how Jonathan considers guitars in his own music, his practical, productive thinking comes through strongly. "Nowadays, they're objects for higher midrange [music] for me," he says. "I'm also a big fan of that aggression and fuzz and the high-end scrunkiness that they have. I haven't been as much into long guitar solos and stuff like that on this album, but they're so complex in the midrange that they're great to have around."

As for the instruments themselves, Jonathan is not particularly precious as their owner, but there is still plenty of respect there. "If I have a session to go to in town, then I'll put six guitars in the car without cases and if they bang around it's okay. So I guess that would mean that they're tools." He jumps up a moment to grab a pretty beat-up looking guitar. "This is my main Stratocaster and it's all fucked up; it's horrible! So this is a tool, but it's the main one – it's just a partscaster that my dad actually made in 2004. This thing has done a lot of gigging..."

When we mention acoustic guitars, the impression is had that they are handled less roughly than the electrics. "I have a ton of them and most of the best ones are very old, like from the 40s," Jonathan says. "That was the golden time for Gibson and for Martin." He springs up again and goes to another room to grab an example. "So this is a 1947 000 Martin," he tells us, flashing a beautiful 18 series model. "This is head and shoulders above the rest. These things are just so great. They all have a certain sound, but this is like [gesture of reverence]..."

We suggest that he wouldn't let the old Martin bounce around in the back of a car. "Oh no," he laughs. "Not that one."



Jonathan Wilson's new album, *Eat The Worm*, is available now on BMG

www.songsofjonathanwilson.com



CHANGING LANES

THE Guitarist INTERVIEW

AS HE DROPS THIRD SOLO ALBUM, 'LOST AT SEA', IN THE BREATH BETWEEN FOO FIGHTERS DUTIES, CHRIS SHIFLETT TELLS US ABOUT BREAKING BAD HABITS, THE "BLASPHEMY" OF HIS NEW BACKLINE, KEEPING THE DEVIL AT BAY, AND THE PERILS OF THE PROVINCIAL CLUB CIRCUIT

Words Henry Yates & Jamie Dickson **Photography** Adam Gasson

Chris Shiflett has the best kind of identity crisis. Back in 1999, when the 28-year-old Californian won out at auditions to become lead guitarist for the Foo Fighters – a triumph he succinctly put down to "learning the fucking songs" – it seemed this one-time punk rabble-rouser had forever traded the sticky-floored basements and roiling circle pits for corporate-sponsored stadiums and catering.

But since then – and with the exception of the band's Duracell Bunny-ish leader, Dave Grohl – Shiflett has been the busiest Foo in the firmament, juggling the day job with de facto solo projects The Dead Peasants and Jackson United, a fistful of albums under his own name, plus shifts in larky covers outfit Me First And The Gimme Gimmes. "There's nothing better than those big Foos shows," he once told this writer. "But equally, Dingwalls is fun, too."

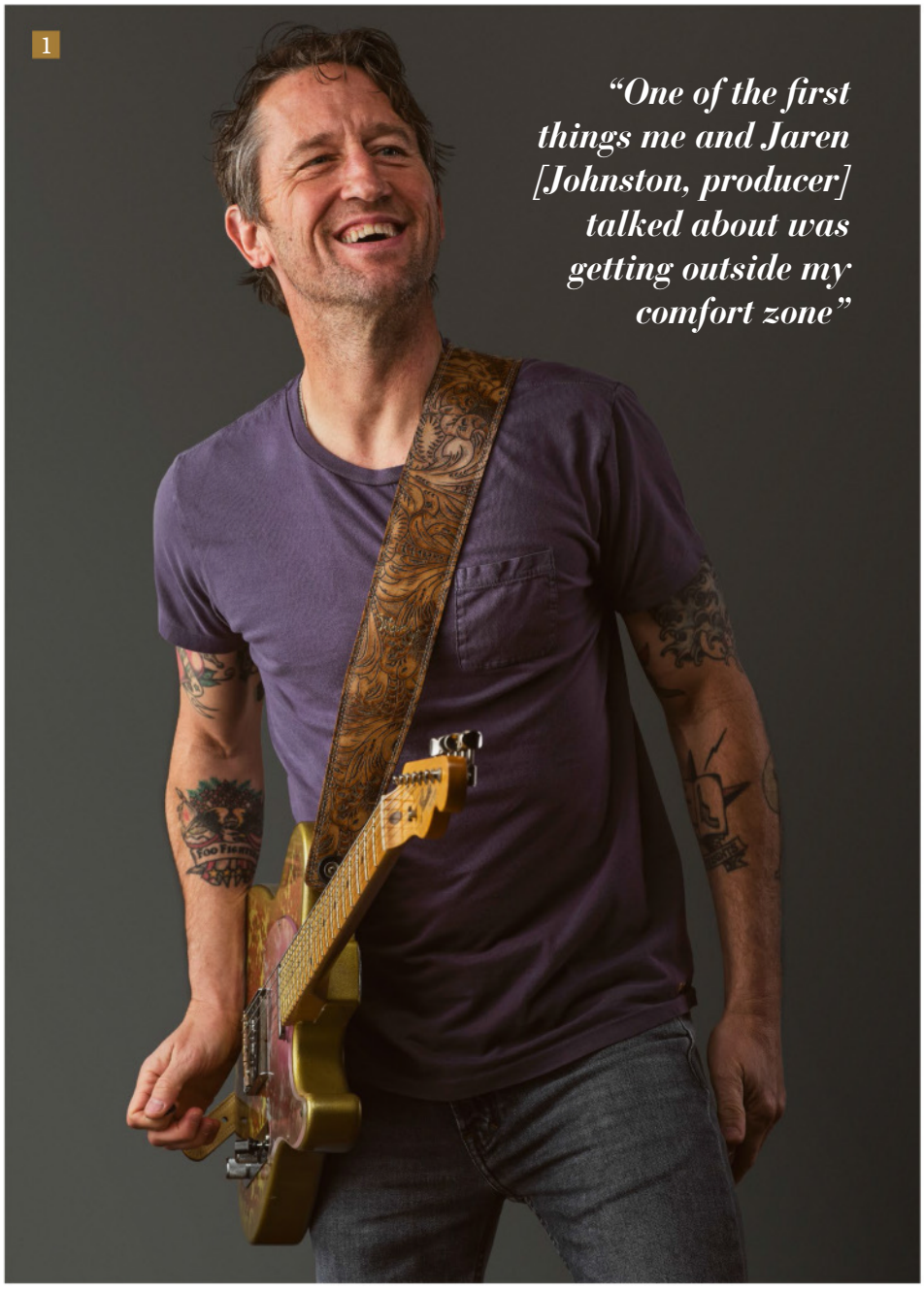
Depending on the day you catch him, Shiflett is either a star or a slogger, a tech-assisted princeling or a man unloading his own flight cases, spotted backstage at Wembley Stadium or – on this particular afternoon – setting up at Bristol's 400-capacity Thekla. But as the 52-year-old tells us, both sides of that dual existence scratch a different creative itch, with this year's eloquent third solo album, *Lost At Sea*, airing alt-country flavours with added rocket fuel.

Do you enjoy the opportunity to front your own material?
"Yeah, it's a thrill, but it's still an evolution because I always think of myself as a guitar player first. It's funny, when I started fronting my own band, I realised that all these years, whenever I played a guitar solo, I wouldn't breathe. I'd hold my breath – which would fuck me up for singing!"

Broadly speaking, you could describe *Lost At Sea* as alt-country...
"One of the first things me and Jaren [Johnston, producer] talked about was getting outside my comfort zone. We definitely did that. With writing, it's business as usual. Then tracking is me in a room of musicians, banging it out. But what happens after that – tweaking what you've recorded and messing with sounds – is where it gets into different sonic territory. I'm a tinkerer. I think I drove Jaren crazy. If somebody didn't take this album out of my hands, I'd still be tinkering now. *Carrie Midnight Texas Queen*, *I Don't Trust My Memories Anymore*, *Dead And Gone* – those are all classic country chord progressions and melodies, but they kinda get revved up and we drive the guitars a little harder."

"My favourite country music is the older eras. Like a lot of people, I wrote off modern country for a long time, but I've totally flipped on that"

1. Learning to stop tinkering with songs and let the die be cast was key to the live-wire energy of Chris Shiflett's new album



Tell us about your history with country music.
"I came to it through alt-country in the 90s. Like, when Uncle Tupelo broke up and became Son Volt and Wilco, that was my jump-off. Through that, I found my way to Steve Earle, Lucinda Williams, then went back and landed on the other stuff. My favourite stuff is Buck Owens, Merle Haggard, Waylon Jennings, those older eras. Like a lot of people, I wrote off modern country for a long time, but I've totally flipped on that. Like, I listen to Eric Church and Brothers Osborne. I just love the storytelling. And obviously I fucking love the playing. Right about the time I came of age and started playing in bands, the kind of guitar playing I loved became pretty much illegal and you couldn't play a long guitar solo any more. That kind of shifted to country and Americana and, to me, that's where the best guitar playing lives nowadays."

The slide work evokes Joe Walsh at times. Was he a touchstone?
"Sure. *Weigh You Down*, I played that slide solo. *I Don't Trust My Memories Anymore* is the only B-Bender solo I did on the record. But if you're thinking of the dobro on *Dead And Gone*, that's Charlie Worsham. Basically, the breakdown on this record – there's me playing electric and all the solos. But then, anything that's acoustic – whether it's guitar, mandolin, banjo, dobro – that's all Charlie. *Black Top [White Lines]* and *Dead And Gone* have Tom Bukovac on electric. For the other eight songs, it was Nathan Keeterle playing the real vibed-out stuff, like the trippy delay and sonic textures.

"I think of the stuff I played as the straightforward meat-and-potatoes, kinda bangin' the chords. But then, we got Charlie and Nate bringing some details. For each song, we'd do about five takes and maybe Charlie would switch to different instruments, so by the time you start tracking, you've got a bunch of stuff to choose from. Then I would take the session home, overdub stuff, rework parts.

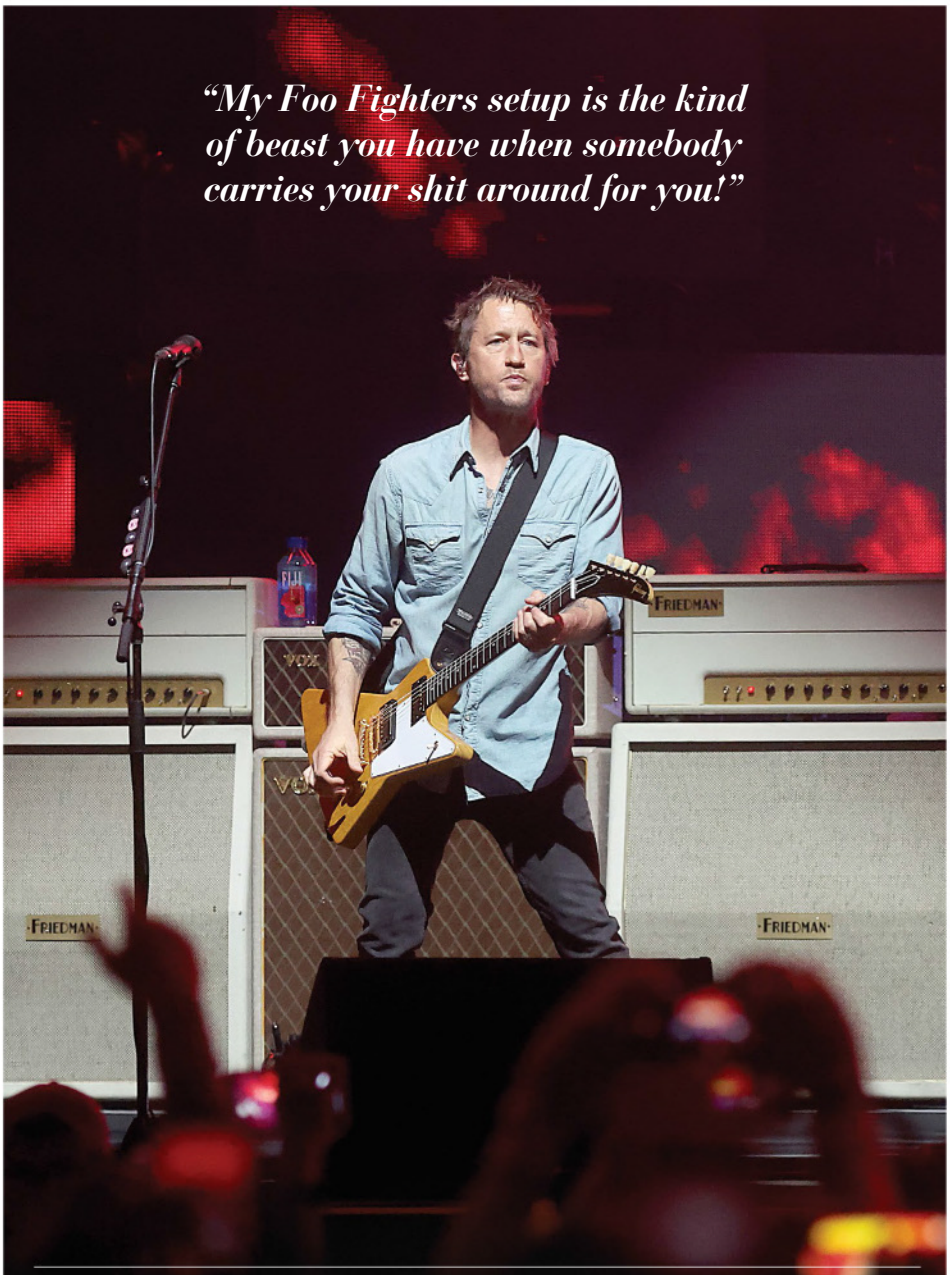
2

2. Shiflett's current main guitar is this 1953-spec Fender Custom Shop Blackguard Telecaster that features suitably authentic ageing of the maple fretboard. He says it's "that classic Butterscotch Tele with pretty hot pickups"









"My Foo Fighters setup is the kind of beast you have when somebody carries your shit around for you!"

PHOTO BY PHOTO BY GARY MILLER/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

HEAVY DUTY

Follow Chris Shiflett in all his forms and you'll notice that the stripped minimalism of his solo rig gets a shot of steroids when he steps back onto the stadium circuit. "My Foo Fighters setup is a very different animal," explains the guitarist. "I have two Friedman half-stacks. I have the Brown Eye, most people call them 'BE' or whatever. I bought mine years ago now. I can't remember if it was the *Wasting Light* or *Sonic Highways* tour, but I've had them for a long time. They're practically vintage now – just a few more years! So I don't know if those amps have evolved since I bought mine, but I love them. That's my favourite, y'know, that Marshally-type sound.

"Alongside the Friedmans," he continues, "I also have two AC30 half-stacks and I A/B them. And then Dave Friedman literally just built me a new pedalboard setup, so I'm using one of those RJM controllers. I haven't even seen it yet – it just arrived after I left for the UK – but my tech has been sending me photos and he says it sounds great. And then I bring that '57 Goldtop on the road with the Foo Fighters, too. You've got to play old guitars or they start to get wonky.

"So that setup is a very different beast to my solo rig," smiles Shiflett. "That's the kind of beast you have when somebody carries your shit around for you...!"

"I've never made a record like that before. But right about when I started this, in spring 2021, we started touring with Foos again, so there would be months on the road not even thinking about my record. Then I would come back to it when I had a minute at home, open the files and be like, 'Oh yeah, we got some cool stuff here.'"

You have broad tastes in guitars, but your signature model is a Tele.

"The first real guitar I got was a Gibson Les Paul, for my 15th birthday. Through high school, then in bands coming up, through No Use For A Name, right up to joining Foo Fighters – that was the only guitar I had. I'd always played music that pretty much requires a humbucker sound, so that was my comfort zone for a long time.

"But I always wanted to play a Tele because I loved Keith Richards, The Clash and all these cats. But I was just never comfortable on them. Finally, I bought a Tele Deluxe. I loved it and played it a lot, from the time I made the first Dead Peasants record. But it wasn't crunchy enough for Foos stuff. So I bought some Warmoth parts, put in humbuckers, put together a parts guitar. I built a couple of them, then Fender called me up and said, 'Why don't we just make a Chris Shiflett model?' I hadn't even thought of that. I just took that Deluxe, which I think was like a '72, changed it to a four-bolt neck, with rosewood fretboard and humbuckers. There you go!"

Is there something about that combination of humbuckers and Fender scale that does something different for you?

"It's, like, you can put humbuckers in a Strat or a Tele and it's not gonna sound like a Les Paul or Flying V – it's got its own colour, y'know? And that's why it's been a thing for me, especially in Foo Fighters. We're a three-guitar band and we all sit in different places tonally. Around that time, I started playing through an AC30 a lot. I was always tweaking, trying to find something that sits in a different place. My signature Tele, it's got that good rock crunch, but it's not as dense a sound as a big Les Paul or 335. Those have a woofiness I love – but it's not what my guitar does. And then, after that was when I started to get comfortable playing traditional Teles with just single coils. Which is pretty much all I do in my solo thing."

3. It might look the part but, bought second hand, Chris's paisley T-style electric is in fact not a product of the Corona, California-based company... This close clone probably shouldn't be adorned with the Fender decal, although it certainly evokes the late-60s Telecaster spirit. It's currently loaded with Lindy Fralin pickups, which "brought it to life," Shiflett says







Let's talk about the guitars you've brought out on tour.
"It's a lean-and-mean rig. I would really prefer to have about four guitars, but I'm in a van schlepping this stuff around, so I figured I could pull it off on two and, knock on wood, it's been fine so far. I've got two Teles. One is a Fender Custom Shop I bought at Gruhn's in Nashville when I was there with the Foos recording *Sonic Highways*. It's supposed to be a '53 – just that classic Butterscotch Tele, with pretty hot pickups. That's been my go-to Tele for quite a while, for my solo stuff. It's almost the only guitar I used on this new album because I was flying into Nashville, so I'd just bring one guitar and my pedalboard, then Jaren would bring different amps.

"[Forgoing a backline] feels like total blasphemy! But I loved the way the Strymon Iridium sounded and it cuts out the middle man"

"The other one I've brought is just a parts guitar – it says 'Fender' on it, but it's not a real Fender. I found it at a shop down in Austin years ago and it's beautiful. You know how Paisleys look when they fade and get that gold kind of colour? It sat in my garage for probably 10 years. It didn't sound very good. Then I put in a set of Fralins – whatever their vintage Tele pickup is – and they just brought it to life. I haven't been able to put it down since."

You don't seem to come across as a guitar snob...
"I mean, I *am* a guitar snob, in my own way. There's a handful of things I love and then there's a lot of shit that you'll never see in my hands under any circumstances. But I don't get too precious about guitars. If they feel good and sound good, then it sorta doesn't matter. And when you're taking things on the road, you want something you can drop, break and scratch – and not be too upset about it.

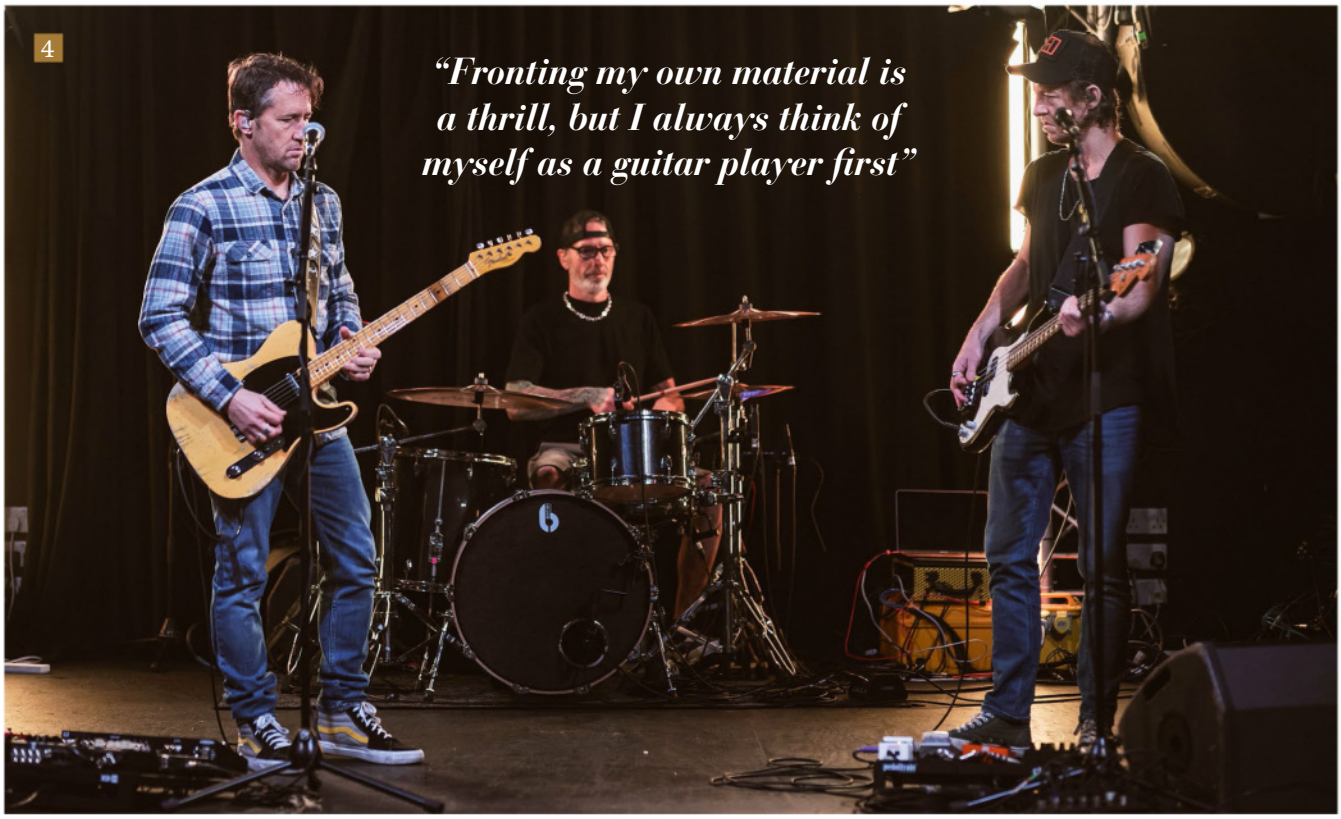
"I was never a vintage guy growing up. I don't remember even hearing the words 'vintage guitar' until the 90s, and I didn't have money anyway, so you don't worry about what you can't afford. I always liked the idea of workhorse guitars you could put through their paces. But that started to change. I sold a bunch of guitars through Reverb and bought a '57 Les Paul, which was a Goldtop originally, but somebody had taken the paint off. It's not like I didn't know vintage guitars were great – but actually owning something of that vintage, it was like, 'Okay, I see what everybody is raving about.'"

What do you pick up a Gretsch for, and what's your relationship with that brand?
"I actually have a beautiful Masterbuilt White Falcon. I so badly wanted to bring it out for the solo tours. But I'm just afraid: I don't even want to nick the case! I could play my whole set on that thing, for sure. It's got a jangle and growl, all at the same time. If you want high-gain stuff, it works really well. And if you want a cleaner old-school sound, you can't go wrong. I was a rock 'n' roll kid, listening to whatever my brothers had in their record collections: Aerosmith, Stones, Zeppelin, KISS. But when Stray Cats came along, that was the one non-rock band I was obsessed with. I've always loved Brian Setzer's playing and was drawn to Gretsches because of him."

You're now using a Strymon Iridium amp modeller for your solo shows.
"It feels like total blasphemy! But doing my solo shows, I play a lot of shitty bars with shitty PAs, and oftentimes I'm not travelling with my own sound man and it's a real roll of

4. Touring his new album has brought Shiflett back to the immediacy and connectedness of playing club venues

5. Chris's adaptable touring board features plenty of Strymon kit, including the double-tracking short-delay Deco, the reverb- and trem-providing Flint and the delay machine that is the TimeLine. A GigRig G3 switching system minimises tap-dancing by engaging preset groups of pedals together



5

STEPPING OUT

Take a tour of Chris Shiflett's solo pedalboard and you'll find this sometime punk isn't shy of a stompbox, with his collection spanning from MXR's Phase 95 to the DigiTech Drop and Wampler Tumnus. But the biggest departure in his modern club-show rig, the guitarist reminds us, is the absence of the traditional backline mothership.

"Oh, man, this setup that I'm playing with now is so crazy. I just got one of those GigRig G3 channel switchers, and I'm not even playing through an amp right now – I've got a Strymon Iridium instead. You can arrange it however you want, but I have it so it's all the effects first and then a Strymon Deco, then the Iridium, the Strymon TimeLine and the Strymon Flint. And then I have it coming out stereo on one of those Walrus Canvas DIs."

Isn't the Iridium a big departure for a valve amp aficionado? "100 per cent," nods Shiflett. "Of course, my preference would be a wall of amps. They're beautiful and everything. But you're hemmed in with budgetary realities in this solo thing, y'know? And just to know that every night, the tone is gonna be unaffected by power or air in the room or somebody's bad EQ-ing. I mean, I guess it still could be, but you know what I mean – it's just a little more direct, a little easier with the Iridium. And those things sound fucking great, man, they really do."



Strymon's Iridium digital amp and cab modeller has provided the otherwise analogue-loving Shiflett with tones on tap, on tour



the dice – sometimes it's great and sometimes it's fucking terrible.

"I just found that dragging around my old combo amps – because I normally play through a Deluxe Reverb or old Princeton – they're so susceptible to dirty power and things colouring your tone. And then, having people mic them: I just never liked the way they sounded coming back. It drives me crazy. I mean, I don't want to shit on any local sound person, but when you don't have somebody who really gives a shit and knows what they're doing putting your sound together, it's fucking horrible and a vibe-killer.

"I'd bought one of those Iridiums to fuck around with in my studio and just loved the way it sounded. Live, it just cuts out the middle man [see boxout on the previous page]."

Do you have an ethos when it comes to soloing?

"Most of the time, I work it out before I even get to the studio. But it really depends on the song. I like noodly shreddy-spaghetti solos where you just play whatever the fuck you want. But more often than not, with my favourite rock solos, like Eddie Van Halen solos, they're kinda like parts and melodies unto themselves within the song."

"The hardest thing with performing is not letting the devil get in your head. It can be the best crowd… and one guy's laughing at the back"

6. Blackguard Tele and check shirt? It's a formula that's served country guitarists well for decades but Shiflett isn't giving up on hard rock (or his many other musical interests) just yet

As an artist, do you ever question what you're doing?

"I think most musicians are battling insecurity on some level. It's funny because musicians are all narcissists, too. It does take some ego to say, 'This is my idea, listen to it!' The hardest thing with performing is not letting the devil get in your head. It can be the best fucking crowd and there's one guy at the back laughing – and that fucks up your whole thing. It's nuts, y'know? And the thing that fucks me up the most was in my younger years playing in No Use For A Name, where the barometer for whether it was a good gig was how hard the crowd danced and how wild the pit was. That ruined me for the rest of my life because I don't play music that garners that reaction. You just try to keep the dark thoughts out when you're on stage."

So what's next for you?

"I want to get back over to the UK before too long. With Foos, we've got touring [through to January]. Beyond that, it's like, I'm a fucking musician – so who knows what will happen? I gave up trying to even think about it because after these last two years, it's like the world has a funny way of changing your plans."



Chris Shiflett's third solo album, *Lost At Sea*, is released 20 October on Snakefarm

www.chrisshiflettmusic.com

LOUDPEDAL

60-Watt amplifier



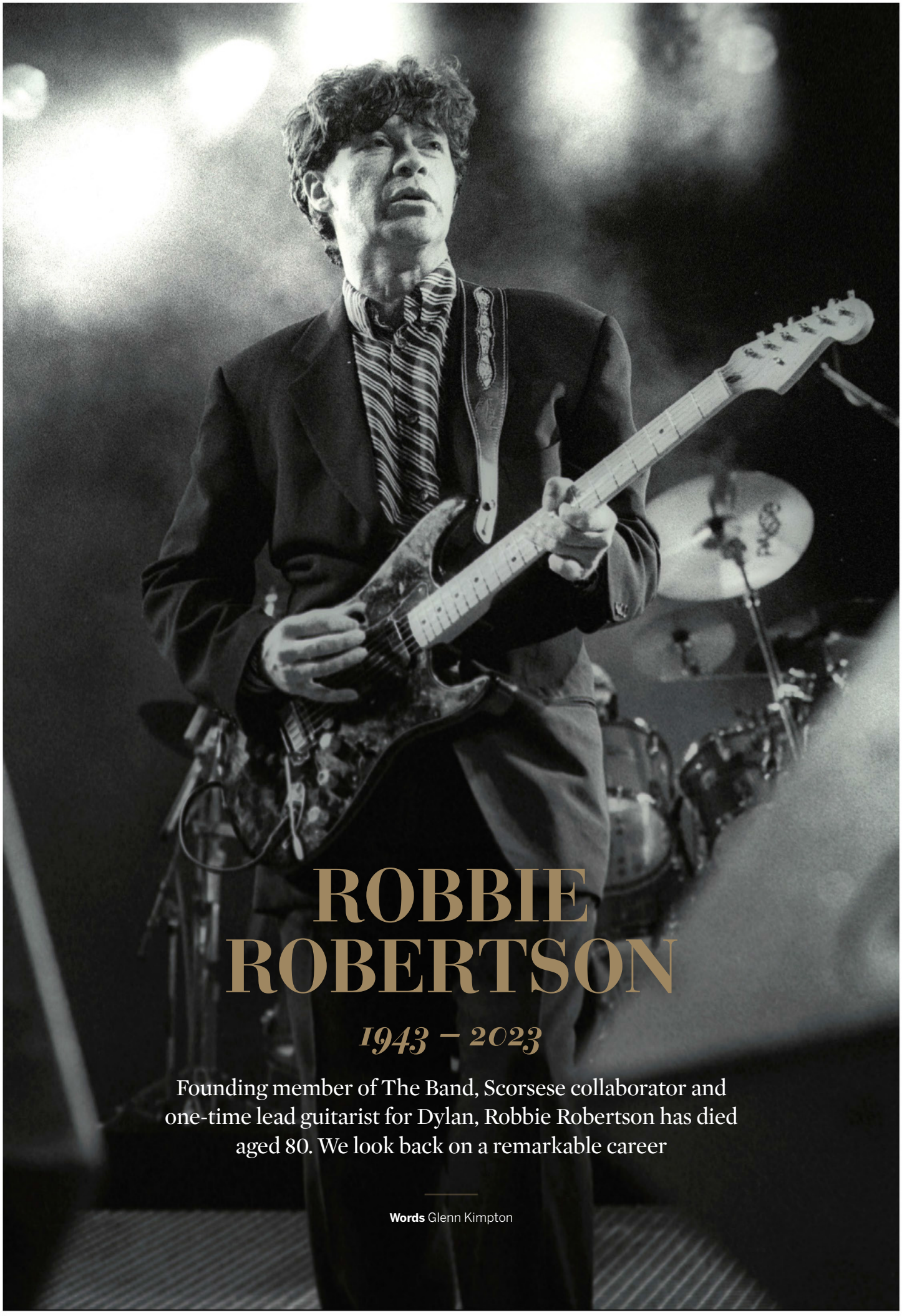
ACTUAL SIZE*

WWW.LANEYAMPS.COM

*PRINTING TOLERANCES COULD MARGINALLY DISTORT IMAGE, PLEASE SEE WEBSITE FOR PRECISE DIMENSIONS

Laney

FIND OUT MORE



ROBBIE ROBERTSON

1943 – 2023

Founding member of The Band, Scorsese collaborator and one-time lead guitarist for Dylan, Robbie Robertson has died aged 80. We look back on a remarkable career

Words Glenn Kimpton

PHOTO BY JORDI VIDAL/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

ROBBIE ROBERTSON

5 July 1943 – 9 August 2023

Jaime Royal 'Robbie' Robertson was born and raised in Toronto, Canada. He started learning the guitar at the age of 9, and, as a young teen, cut his teeth in popular music bands in the mid- to late-50s. By the time he was 16 he had received his first break when Ronnie Hawkins spotted the young musician in Toronto playing with The Suedes, and joined them on stage. Hawkins then invited Robbie to play bass for his backing band The Hawks, joining drummer and singer Levon Helm and later recruiting bassist Rick Danko (Robbie switching to guitar), pianist Richard Manuel and keyboardist Garth Hudson in the early 60s. The line-up would go on to become The Band.

By 1964, tired of playing rockabilly, the group parted from Hawkins. For years, they had toured, living in hotels and camping out in disused cars. "We've played such far out places that I couldn't even begin to tell you about them," Robbie told *Rolling Stone* back in 1968. "We played places where the people didn't come to hear you, they'd come to mess with you. They'd flick cigarette butts at you and throw money at you and steal your things, and, if you got past that, then they'd listen to you."



Bob Dylan (left) on stage with the "mathematical guitar genius" Robbie Robertson, 1966

PHOTO BY CHARLIE STEINER - HIGHWAY 67/GETTY IMAGES

Robbie's favourite guitar was a Fender Stratocaster, a 1954 model, which was something of a catalyst in shifting his focus away from the favoured Tele

A backbone was needed to press on through this adversity, a solidity that could be heard in The Band's music and Robbie's playing – something that shunned the flamboyance and virtuosity of the time for a more economical style that carried the song. This method impressed many, not least Eric Clapton, who apparently disbanded Cream after listening to The Band's remarkable debut album, 1968's *Music From Big Pink*.

During this time, the group also drew the attention of Bob Dylan, who considered Robbie a "mathematical guitar genius", and wanted the musicians to accompany him for his controversial and infamous electric band tours. "We got booed all over North America, Australia, Europe, and people were saying this isn't working," Robbie told *Mojo*. "But we kept on and Bob didn't budge. We got to a place where we would listen to these tapes and say, 'They're wrong and we're right.'"

This confidence is clear on *Music From Big Pink*, which was made in the basement of 'Big Pink', a house in West Saugerties, New York that the band shared with Bob Dylan, and also featured in the sessions that would eventually become Dylan's *The Basement Tapes*.

Music From Big Pink thrilled from the off, with some suggesting it was the beginning of Americana: a rich fusion of country music along with the blues, gospel and rockabilly, all tied together by the voices of Robbie, Levon Helm, Rick Danko and Richard Manuel.

The Band's second album, also known as 'The Brown Album', is widely considered to be their masterpiece, with songs like *Up On Cripple Creek* and *King Harvest (Has Surely Come)* among many classics. As with the majority of The Band's 10 albums, Robbie was named as principal songwriter, a credit that caused friction in later years, particularly from Levon who considered the process of songwriting to be organic. "Sometimes we would grow the songs from scratch," he told *Performing Songwriter*. "Sometimes we would just pull them out of thin air."

Favourite Guitars

For the tours with Bob Dylan, Robbie sought an electric guitar they could both use, eventually landing on a stock 1965 Fender Telecaster, serial number L97811, with a standard alder body and maple neck. At the time, Robbie preferred the Telecaster's 7lb weight for long shows and its workhorse stature and reliability, finding some of the Stratocasters he started out playing too fickle, heavy and prone to performance issues.

Bob and Robbie's Telecaster saw at least two Dylan tours, plus the recording of the *Blonde On Blonde* album and The Band's *Stage Fright*, as well as numerous other shows. In later days, the guitar had lost its original black finish to natural wood, and its single-coil neck pickup to a Gibson PAF humbucker. Towards the end of its career, the Tele would also have a Bigsby fitted to further enhance its sound.

However, Robbie's favourite guitar was a Fender Stratocaster, a 1954 model, serial number 0234, originally finished in red' – it was something of a catalyst in shifting his focus away from the favoured Telecaster.



PHOTO BY LARRY HULST/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

1. Robbie performs with Muddy Waters (left) at The Last Waltz – the legendary concert held at the Winterland Ballroom, San Francisco

2. Fender's limited-edition Custom Shop replica of Robbie Robertson's fabled Last Waltz Stratocaster with its antiqued bronze finish

"I had played Telecaster for years, starting back with Ronnie Hawkins," he told *Guitarist* in 2017. "We had to play long hours and it was one of their lighter guitars. It didn't hurt your shoulder at the end of the night."

When deciding on his new instrument, Robbie lined up the red Strat next to a Tele and found himself rather surprised. "I had played the Stratocaster years earlier, but because of the tremolo bar on it and the way the whole thing works, if you break a string it goes wildly out of tune," he said. "But when they gave me this [Strat] to try, it felt amazing. There was something about the neck on it, the balance. And when I plugged it in, the sound. It just completely swayed me in that direction."

Robbie bought the guitar in 1973 and, although the red finish was unusual enough for the year, it became iconic in November 1976, when he unveiled the newly bronze-dipped Strat for the now-legendary Last Waltz show, a farewell concert appearance for The Band.

In 2016, 40 years after the show, Robbie's Strat was monumentalised by the Fender Custom Shop who created a meticulous copy of the bronzed guitar called the 'Last Waltz Stratocaster'. Fender's master builder Todd Krause wanted the guitar to replicate the original down to the finest detail, with the same tension knobs, an intricate 'wear beneath the wear' finish on the neck, exact replica dents and dings, and Robbie's preferred relocation of the Strat's middle pickup adjacent to the bridge pickup.

The Last Waltz concert took place at San Francisco's Winterland Ballroom, and featured a wealth of special guest performers, including Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton, Dr John and Joni Mitchell, among others. In 1978, Martin Scorsese (at the request of *Mean Streets* fan Robbie) directed *The Last Waltz*, a concert film and documentary juxtaposing footage from the show with interviews from The Band members, discussing the group's history.

The Last Waltz signified the beginning of the end for The Band, with the group drifting apart after the release of their 1977 album, *Islands*. In 1983, however, The Band reformed to tour without Robbie. Meanwhile, the musician went on to enjoy



"Long before we ever met, his music played a central role in my life"

MARTIN SCORSESE

ROBBIE ROBERTSON

5 July 1943 – 9 August 2023

success as a music producer and solo artist, and his first album, *Robbie Robertson*, was released in 1987.

Although Robbie always played down suggestions of rivalry and discontent within The Band, the gripes that formed through his early writing credits seemed to remain, especially with Levon, who highlights his disgruntlement in his 1993 memoir, *This Wheel's On Fire* – although this features claims that Robbie dismissed. "Levon made statements years after The Band that were just blatantly unfounded," he told *Mojo* in 2017. "He'd never said one word to me about that in all our times together."

Although Robbie claimed The Band were like brothers ("There are five of us but we think like one," Richard Manuel once told *Rolling Stone*) and he and Levon the closest, his time with them was done and he was moving on.

Film Music

Following Scorsese's *The Last Waltz* documentary in 1978, Robbie's relationship with the director bloomed and they became firm friends and successful collaborators. "Long before we ever met, his music played a central role in my life," Scorsese stated in a recent tribute to Robbie. "The Band's music, and Robbie's own later solo music, seemed to come from the deepest place at the heart of this continent, its traditions and tragedies and joys."

Together the pair worked to create more than 10 scores, including *Raging Bull* and *Casino* and Robbie's impressive body of work continued to the last, with the soundtrack to Scorsese's acclaimed new epic *Killers Of The Flower Moon*, released in October. Robbie's last solo album, 2019's accomplished and reflective *Sinematic*, dropped in the same year as his soundtrack to Scorsese's *The Irishman*.

Working on these prestigious projects with Scorsese meant that Robbie missed the chance to work with Bob Dylan on his 2020 album *Rough And Rowdy Ways*, with the folk legend wanting Robbie's touches on the project. Robbie told *Rolling Stone*, "I said, 'Right now, I'm in the middle of this stuff'. I think [by then] he just felt like it was cooked and he needed to bring it out of the oven."

To have such accolades (and could've-beens) in a four-year period near the end of such a rich career neatly sums up Robbie's life and work – a rich and revolutionary musical journey from a gifted and quietly trailblazing musician. G



From Scorsese to Dylan, Robbie's working relationships and friendships were a testament to his brilliance

PHOTO BY EVERETT COLLECTION INC/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO





Second Coming

Cream T's fledging guitar line-up was upended earlier this year, but now its core model, the Aurora, is back. A classic in the making? Let's find out

Words Dave Burrluck
Photography Phil Barker



CREAM T AURORA CUSTOM V2 £2,499

CONTACT **Cream T Custom Shop** PHONE **01695 570023** WEB **www.creamtcustomshop.com**

What You Need To Know

1. **Cream T? I thought that company made pickups, not guitars.**
Yes, it certainly does, but its first guitar – the original version of the Aurora you see here – was launched in the autumn of 2021. Billy F Gibbons was a part of the design team, along with Cream T founder, Thomas Nilsen.

2. **So why is there a version two?**
The original guitars were made by PJD Guitars and were one reason why UK Guitar Builders was set up: effectively a manufacturing hub to produce not only PJD and Cream T but also Seth Baccus and Chapman UK. That venture closed earlier this year and Cream T now has a new manufacturing partner with whom it tweaked and improved the design of the guitar.

3. **Is there still a pickup-swapping feature available?**
Yes, the new Aurora is available with the Relish system, which allows you to swap pickups in seconds. But if that isn't for you, there's a fixed-pickup version that's less expensive.

As we've documented throughout this year, the UK's guitar manufacturing scene has seen plenty of change. When UK Guitar Builders (UKGB) closed its doors early in the year, it left Cream T without a manufacturing base for its innovative and pretty new Aurora and Crossfire models – both employing that instant pickup-swapping feature licensed from Relish Guitars in Switzerland.

Many will know Cream T as a pickup maker, of course, and that continued apace throughout at its Ormskirk base, even though original founder, Thomas Nilsen, left the building to pursue more bespoke pickup designs. It's been a time of change all round, for sure.

But behind the scenes a dizzying amount of work was being undertaken. And from the ashes of UKGB a new manufacturing company was established (although at the time of press we can only say "somewhere in the UK") that, as of the past few months, has been making V2 versions of those original Cream T guitars, staring with the Aurora Custom you see here.

One reason we were so interested in that original Aurora was not only its pickup-


1



2



3

swapping potential but the fact that the guitar was a co-design between Thomas Nilsen and a certain Billy F Gibbons – all brought to life by PJD Guitars/UKGB founder, Leigh Dovey, and overseen by Tim Lobley, who is once again at the helm of the new designs.

Version two, then, doesn't stray far from the original unique design, although the branding has changed: it's now 'Cream T Custom Shop', reflected by the new headstock logo, which was designed by industry veteran Mark Smith, who is now onboard as brand manager. It's the most obvious way to tell new from old.

So, the original concept of the single-cut Aurora was to mix up a Telecaster with a Les Paul, topped off with that Martin-style headstock – and all of that is retained. The scale length is Gibson style, as are the hardware, the dual humbuckers and fingerboard inlays, though as before we have a master tone, rather than the dual tones of a Les Paul, plus individual

1. There's a very classic feel and look to the rosewood fingerboard with its trapezoid inlays and 305mm (12-inch) radius

2. You can split these humbuckers, or any others you load in, via pull switches on each of the volumes

3. While the top and headstock face are finished with a gloss nitro, the neck and body back are both a very smooth satin nitro



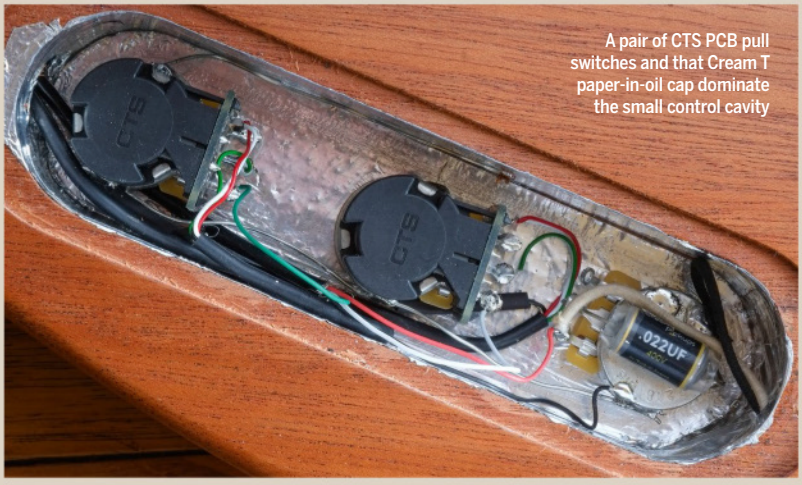
UNDER THE HOOD

Innovation in spades but with a straightforward player-led drive

Despite the Relish-licensed pickup swapping, which involves precision moulded mountings fixed inside the open pickup routs and the backplates that mount onto the pickup's baseplate, the actual circuit here is pretty simple. There two CTS PCB pull-switch volume pots (500k) and a standard 500k pot for the tone with a Cream T paper-in-oil .022µF capacitor.

While quite standard, the coil-splits simply dump the screw coils and can sound a little thin, certainly with lower-output pickups. When we carried out a Longtermers test on the original Aurora, it was one of the things we worked on. We just added a PRS-style partial tap via a resistor on each of the pull switches, plus a 500kohm resistor, so the partial split only is technically seeing a 250k pot, something that just seems to maximise the duality. We also added a treble bleed to both volumes, pretty much the same circuit as PRS's DGT, except it's the neck volume that's closest to the bridge here, whereas David Grissom's guitar puts the bridge pickup volume in that position. Tim Lobley liked our mod, and by the time you read this, the Aurora V2s should feature a slightly tweaked circuit.

The new Cream Of The Crop humbuckers employ the 'best bits' of Cream T's PAF-style humbuckers so far. So we get 42 AWG plain enamel wire, asymmetric windings, an Alnico IV magnet and coil potting only. DCRs are approximately 7.2kohms (neck) and 8.2k (bridge). These are available without the guitar from £299 a set, with options of various cover and bobbin colours.



A pair of CTS PCB pull switches and that Cream T paper-in-oil cap dominate the small control cavity



pickup volumes and that shoulder-placed toggle switch. It's effectively a slab body, a lightly chambered mahogany back (the chambering is slightly increased on the new models, we understand) and a bookmatched flame (or quilted) maple cap that's lightly arched from bass to treble side and around 6mm thick. Like a Junior or Special, there are no ribcage or forearm contours, and only the top and headstock face are glossed nitro; the neck, body back and sides are all satin.

One constructional change is that the neck now fits into the body in Gibson style, so the edge binding runs all the way around the treble cutaway and stops where the neck butts to the body. The previous design was more PRS in style where the whole width of the neck fits into the body, almost like a bolt-on neck that's actually glued. Whether or not there are sonic benefits to either design is up for debate, but the version two does, in that regard, look a little smarter.

More subtle changes include the ongoing improvements to the Relish pickup-swapping system. Here, the holes that accept the rear-mount pickups now match



4. The new Cream Of The Crop humbuckers compile the 'best bits' of Cream T's PAF-style humbuckers so far and come with various covers or black, zebra or cream bobbins (as here)

5. The backplate is held in place with small magnets. Pull it off and you can quickly pull out one, or both, of the pickups and replace them with something different

6. One of Billy F Gibbons' design flourishes, the headstock here is very much in the Martin style. Note the new script logo and model name – the quick way to identify the V2 guitars



the angle of the lightly back-angled neck; the mounting frames have been refined, too. Another minor difference is the pickup mounting rings (a visual feature only), which revert to a generic style, rather than the more stylish UK-made Anomaly rings that featured on the originals.

The pricing and the range have been rationalised, too. The fixed-pickup version of the Aurora Custom kicks things off at £2,299; with pickup swapping, as here, it's £2,499; while the specific BFGT is £2,999 with fixed pickups but can be special ordered with the Relish mountings.

Feel & Sounds

Whether or not it's simply lighter-weight wood and/or the new chambering in action, at 3.18kg (7lb), the V2 version we received is lighter than that first Aurora, which weighed in 3.67kg (8.1lb): a noticeable difference. The neck feels smoother in the hand, too, and less open-grained, although in shape and profile there's not a lot of difference. We have a 43mm nut width with a depth at the 1st fret of 21mm, 24mm by the 12th, with a pretty full C profile. The fretwork is excellent; there's a slightly wider and lower medium-jumbo wire, approximately 2.6mm wide by 1.2mm high. To be picky, the fingerboard sides feel a little square, lacking any incurve, and a little more rolling to the top edge would give it a less new feel. Likewise, the perfectly cut bone nut does have some sharp edges and is not quite as burnished as the original. The neck pitch is very slightly steeper, too, meaning the bridge sits marginally higher. But these minor differences aside, the Aurora's thinner, slab-body style feels considerably less bulky than a Les Paul. It's a very comfortable guitar.

> The beauty of the pickup swapping feature is that we can subtly – or profoundly – shape the sound

There's marginally more volume and new-guitar crispness to the acoustic response, although the character is very similar with seemingly less midrange push than a good Les Paul. Running through the

THE RIVALS

Bearing in mind our review model features pickup swapping, a Hiscox case and is made here in the UK, it's pretty competitively priced. For example, Patrick James Eggle's T-style Oz models kick off upwards of around £3k, while a carved maple top Macon will be priced from about £4,800.

You can certainly bag yourself a new Gibson Les Paul for this money; the current Les Paul Standard 50s Faded, for example, costs £2,299 with a similar satin nitro finish to what is used on the Aurora, aside from its gloss top/headstock face. The full-gloss version is £2,799. Still in the USA, PRS's S2 McCarty 594 Singlecut (£2,239) has a slab-bodied style with chamfered edges and well received 58/15 LT 'S' humbuckers.

Back in the UK, Gordon Smith always deserves a mention, not least its long-running slab-bodied GS2, which starts at £1,224 with the thick body option. The more classic single-cut Graduate model currently starts at £1,499.



One of the constructional changes to the V2 version is the more classic Gibson-style neck joint where the binding flows into the cutaway. It's very neatly done

available sounds with the new Cream Of The Crop humbucker set, we're clearly in the same ballpark as the Whiskerbuckers on our original Aurora, which we used for comparison here. There's a slightly better balance to the new set between the neck and bridge, and the latter sounds slightly fuller, with the uncovered pickups here possibly giving a little more crispness compared with the covered predecessors.

Of course, the beauty of the pickup swapping feature is that we can easily change pickups and subtly – or more profoundly – shape the sound. In-store, in theory, you could voice the guitar to what *you* want to hear from Cream T's different PAF-style flavours or single coils such as the Duchess P-90, Original Banger or the double Tele neck-style Banger & Mash. A unique new design is the Frankenbucker with its hefty kick, and screw and slug polepiece mixed coils. It's fascinating to use, not least if you're auditioning and creating sounds for a recording. Need a little more kick for a solo? No problem, just slot in that Frankenbucker at the bridge and away you go. A little cleaner and clearer? Whip that out and put in the Whiskerbucker. Fancy a jazzier neck voice for some rhythm comping or some cleaner jangle? Pop that Duchess in at the neck.

Verdict

Judging by this (albeit very early) sample, Cream T has found another manufacturing partner that can really deliver. There are a couple of minor points that we'd like to see improved upon, but this remains a very credible design, well crafted and with a very balanced voice.

It does have its own style, which not everyone will enjoy: the awkwardness of the acoustic headstock and that flattened body base, for example, not two mention those two big holes in the body for the pickup swapping if you go that route. And yet for other players it's exactly that individuality that's attractive. No, it's not a Les Paul or a Telecaster, but there's little doubt this is a quality single-cut that plays really well, and with these new Cream Of The Crop 'buckers, it sounds superb.

If you want to embrace the brave new world of pickup swapping, it will cost you an additional £200, as with our model, plus, the price of some different pickups, of course. But unlike a conventional fixed-pickup guitar, you can instantly swap or mix 'n' match units depending on your needs or your gig. Whatever route you choose, this really is a very valid design that's well priced for its quality, not to mention innovation. A class act!



CREAM T AURORA CUSTOM V2

PRICE: £2,499 (inc Hiscox case)
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Single-cutaway, chambered body hardtail electric
BODY: 2-piece mahogany
NECK: Quarter-sawn mahogany, '59 LP-style profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43.1mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, trapezoid inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Gotoh tune-o-matic-style bridge and lightweight stud tailpiece, Gotoh vintage-style tuners with keystone buttons – nickel-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: Cream T Cream of the Crop humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, neck and bridge volume controls (with pull-switch coil-splits) and master tone control
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.18/7
OPTIONS: The fixed pickup version costs £2,299. Quilt maple top option available soon
RANGE OPTIONS: The fixed-pickup Aurora BFGT2 is £2,999; the Aurora BFGT2PS with pickup swapping is special-order only at £3,299
LEFT-HANDERS: Not currently
FINISHES: Burnt Whiskerburst (as reviewed), Whiskerburst, Charcoal Whiskerburst, Laguna Madre, Tequilla Sunrise, Bubblegum, Naked Whiskerburst (over spalt maple top) – gloss nitro top and headstock face; thin satin nitro to both body back, sides and neck back

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Smartly made; light weight; improved pickup-swapping mounts; tasty new Cream T humbuckers; an excellent player

CONS Not everyone will enjoy that acoustic-style headstock or the flattened body base; fingerboard edges feel a little square

I am music

I live through your moments
Your first shake of the rattle
Your recorder lesson
Your match day anthem
Your queueing anticipation
Your hands in the air
Your main stage mayhem
Your favourite movie scene
Your first dance
Your last night of the proms
Your family singalong
Your swan song.

Musicians' Union

If you care about the future of music, join us as a supporter for free.

→ theMU.org

Rebuilding The Brand

While Cream T's guitars are slowly making a return, its pickups never went away and the range continues to expand. We grab Cream T's head honcho, Tim Lobley, for a chat

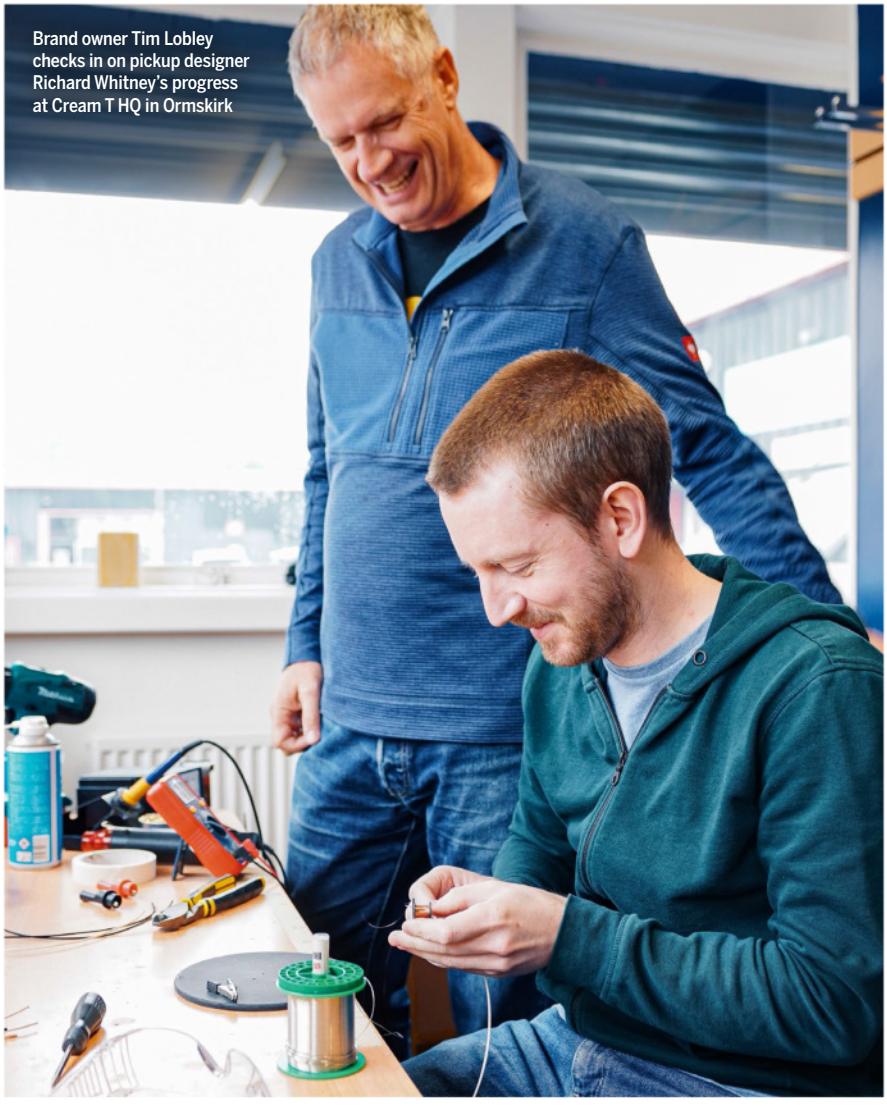
Words Dave Burrluck

For us consumers, it's virtually a full-time job to keep up with new designs from the UK's rich seam of pickup makers. A quick check on Cream T's new website, for example, reveals quite a few changes and some new additions that have sneaked in since we last took a look.

Along with the new Cream Of The Crop humbucker set on our Aurora Custom V2, another addition is the Spot humbucker set, although these actually go back to the early days of Cream T. "The idea to clone pickups [using Thomas Nilsen's Pickup Oracle Machine aka the 'super scanner'] actually came from Matthieu Lucas, the owner of Matt's Guitars in France," explains Tim Lobley.

The first guitar they scanned was the '59 Burst (serial number 9-1688) nicknamed 'Spot', which had previously been owned by Joe Bonamassa. They developed some pickups, while Thomas was still in Norway, and called them Spot Replicas. When Cream T's UK pickup-making venture kicked off, the Spot recipe actually appeared as the Scan 1. "We've subsequently spoken to Matt and the owner of the original guitar and they're now happy for us to use the name Spot," says Tim.

Along with that original Scan 1, there was also a 2 and 3, effectively identical to the Whiskerbucker and Berniebucker, but you could order them with different covers or four-conductor wiring, unlike the signature sets. "When we did the recent rebranding," continues Tim, "we felt the Scan 1, 2 and 3 concept was a little confusing as, basically, Thomas never wanted to allow anyone to order a Berniebucker with four-conductor hook-up or a gold cover, for example. Personally, I didn't agree, so that's why I came up with the 'Scan' versions that allowed the customer to order the same pickup but how they wanted it. Anyway, we've changed that so now you can buy a Whiskerbucker, Berniebucker or a Geoff Whitehorn GT57 in any format you want."

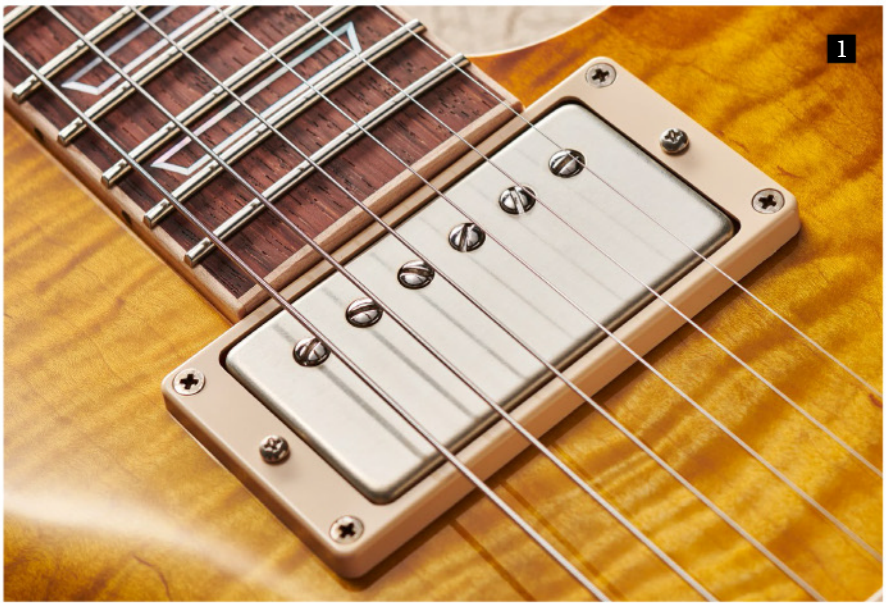


Brand owner Tim Lobley checks in on pickup designer Richard Whitney's progress at Cream T HQ in Ormskirk

> "We have the capacity [at Sound Affects] to produce somewhere between 3,000 and 4,000 pickups a year"
> ***Tim Lobley***

Other additions this year were the soapbar single-coil P90 BM Bernie Marsden signatures, which weren't scanned from a historic guitar. "They're actually based on an early 60s Gibson ES-300 with some slight changes," says Tim. "It was a newly developed design that was originally made for Bernie's signature Nik Huber Gold-Top guitars. We made them for those exclusive Hubers and now we're offering them as retrofits. So it's a standalone pickup that was made to Bernie's requirements."

Unlike the company's new guitars, Cream T's pickups have had a consistent manufacturing base for the past few years within Tim's Sound Affects retail outlet in Ormskirk. Currently, there's just a small team: "Richard Whitney is in charge of the pickup winding," says Tim. "He worked



1. Cream T's Whiskerbucker, seen here on a Patrick James Eggle Macon, aims to nail the exact sound of the pickups in Billy Gibbons famous 'Burst, Pearly Gates



2. Along with new releases that include the Hot Sauce humbucker, Cream T is now offering various finishes such as these hand-painted 'Mustang' covers

with Thomas [Nilsen] pretty much from the beginning of when he was here. He'd learnt a lot during that period, so when Thomas left, Richard took over. Basically, there's just the three of us: myself, Richard and Alan Hunter. We have the capacity here to produce somewhere between 3,000 and 4,000 pickups a year, although that's not to say that's what we're making at the moment – we've been doing a lot of R&D."

Indeed, our reviewed Aurora Custom V2 came with a brace of new prototype Cream T designs with names that reflect their intended styles. The prototype Frankenbucker is designed for the bridge position only with an Alnico V magnet and asymmetric-wound coils from 43AWG Polysol wire. Each coil mixes a 50/50 blend of slugs and screws, the screw halves are cream, the slug coils are black. They're fully potted coils, too, with a DCR of approximately 15kohms.

The Havoc is another design that moves away from the classic PAF style that's been the bread and butter business for Cream T so far. This one has an 'H' cover with dual rows of screw poles, uses 44 AWG Poysol wire, asymmetric windings and a ceramic magnet with a DCR of around 18.6k at the bridge and 18.3k at the neck. Again, it's fully potted.

The beauty of the Aurora Custom's pickup-swapping feature is that we can quickly and easily take a listen. That Frankenbucker is really impressive, especially to give the guitar a bit more kick at the bridge than the Cream Of The Crop. The Havoc moves even further away from those historic scans, but again underlines the potential of these guitars – you can choose what you want them to sound like for a specific gig or even an overdub.

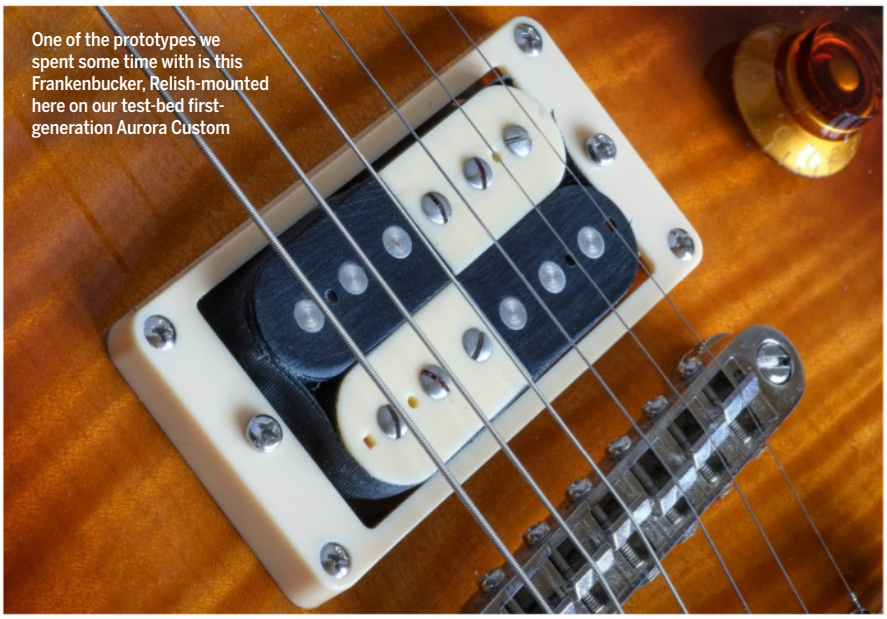
Just as we were going to press, this 'hot vintage' experimentation has resulted in the new Alnico V Hot Sauce humbucker, "a higher output humbucker that still retains vintage-style tone", says Richard Whitney.

Slow Burn

While the new guitar production is just getting started, we wonder whether Cream T's other design, the bolt-on Crossfire offset, will be making a return? "It probably won't be back until next year," Tim tells us. "To be honest, we have a bit of work to do in terms of pricing; it needs to be sub-£2,000. But there is another planned guitar in the works, which is actually an American design we might see before the end of the year. But at this stage that's all I can say. If that doesn't end up happening, we'll pull the Crossfire V2 forward.

"We're also looking at bringing back the Aurora Standard and we're going to look at that as a bit of a hybrid. So, rather than say, 'Here's a fancy maple-top version, the Custom, and here's the Standard with a slab of mahogany,' have we got some sort of natural wood that would just work as a top that would enable us to reduce the price point? The guitar would still look pretty and we'd use some nice wood on it. That's where we are with that. We're also developing a double-cut version of the Aurora. We're hoping for those by the end of the year."

And if all of that isn't enough to keep Cream T busy, it seems another new guitar might actually be the next one off the new production line, hopefully in October – the Polaris, an unashamed homage to the great guitars of Tom Anderson. With pickups, pickup swapping and new guitars on the way, here's hoping the Cream T empire continues to thrive!



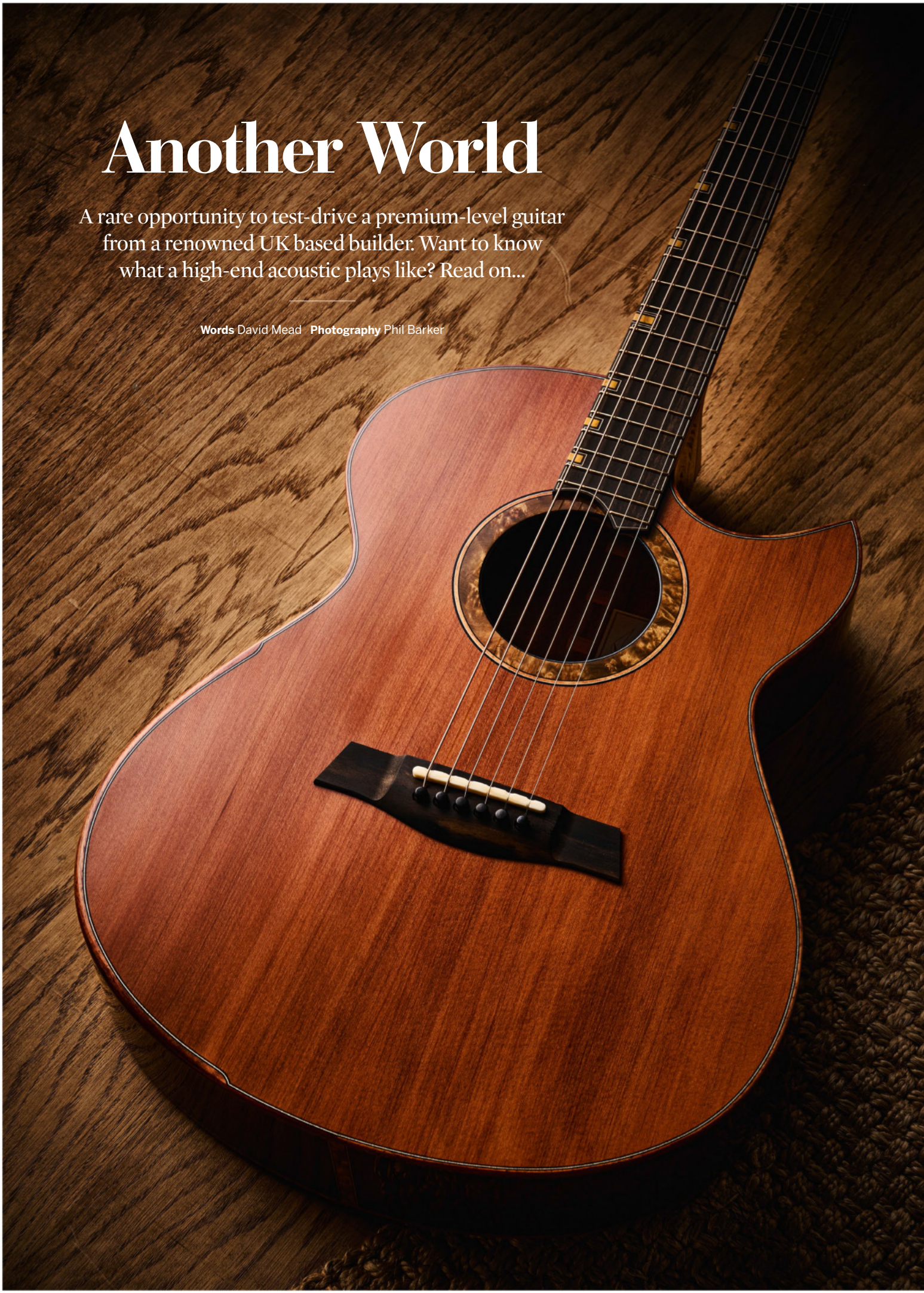
One of the prototypes we spent some time with is this Frankenbucker, Relish-mounted here on our test-bed first-generation Aurora Custom

PHOTO BY DAVE BURRLUCK

Another World

A rare opportunity to test-drive a premium-level guitar from a renowned UK based builder. Want to know what a high-end acoustic plays like? Read on...

Words David Mead **Photography** Phil Barker





TURNSTONE TG £12,240

CONTACT **Turnstone Guitars** PHONE **01342 545005** WEB **www.turnstoneguitar.co.uk**

What You Need To Know

1 Yikes. How much?
Well, yes. As we explain in the main body of this review, it's not often we get the chance to experience an instrument of this level. We thought it was a good opportunity to explore what exactly is on offer in terms of build quality and tone at the more rarified end of the market.

2 Is Madagascan rosewood the 'new Brazilian'?
In many ways it is, yes. As the export of Brazilian rosewood (yesteryear's go-to body wood for many premium acoustics) becomes more and more controlled and, hence, a rare commodity, Brazilian is rapidly approaching unobtanium levels and Madagascan is an able substitute.

3 Koa for neck timber, that's unusual, surely?
While it would be true to say that we haven't seen it very often in the past, there's no structural reason that koa cannot be used here. Although its density varies, it can be as workable as mahogany and, possibly more importantly, it brings its own set of tonal characteristics to the guitar, too.

To begin with, let's talk about the elephant in the room. This is not only the most expensive acoustic guitar we've ever welcomed into these pages, it's the most expensive guitar we've ever reviewed. Period. But a rare opportunity came our way to test drive a Ferrari-level instrument and we jumped at the chance to take a look at it. After all, we were as curious as you are to see exactly what is on offer when you go to the rarer atmosphere of the bespoke.

Turnstone guitars are built in the UK on the Surrey/Sussex border by Rosie Heydenrych and, as you can see from our interview that follows this review, she makes around 20 instruments a year and her base price for an acoustic comes in at around £8,400 – and there's a two-year waiting list. Under normal circumstances it's almost impossible for us to get our hands on an instrument like the Turnstone TG because independent makers tend to build to order and if a customer has already waited a couple of years for their new guitar, they don't want to wait another couple of months while we put it under the microscope.



Premium-grade North American redwood, an ebony bridge and bone nut sit atop the TG



1. A burl rosette adds that extra touch of luxury to the guitar's top – and check out the graceful curve at the end of the ebony fretboard

In this instance, Rosie contacted us and said she had an instrument that was available and wondered if we'd like to take a look. We thought about it for a couple of seconds and said we would love to, and so here we are, looking at an instrument that represents the pinnacle of UK-made acoustics.

How exactly do you approach a review of an instrument at this level? The answer is *very cautiously*. The temptation was to treat it like it was made from eggshell, but a guitar is made to be played at any price point, and so while we proceeded with all due care and respect, we gave it the exact same treatment as we would an acoustic guitar from any brand or maker. Let's have a look at what we found...

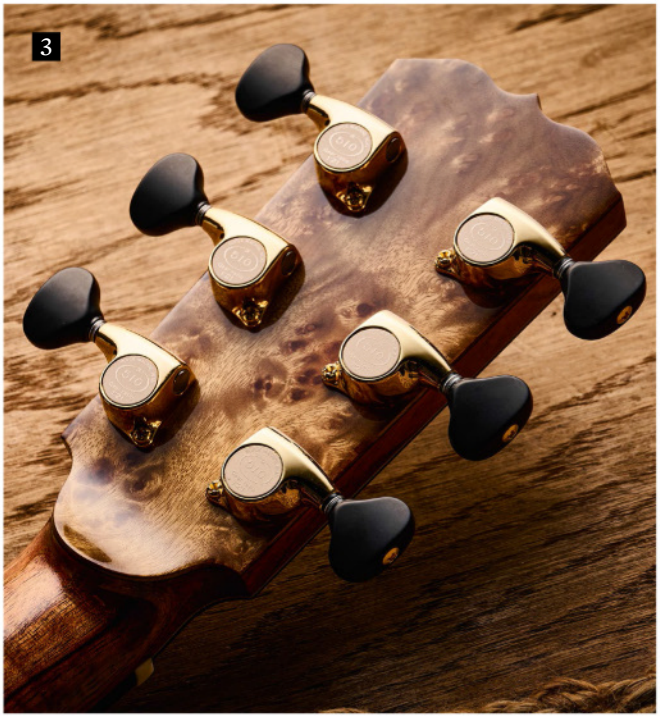
The Turnstone TG is a Grand Auditorium model and those familiar with this particular body size will agree that it's arguably one of the more comfortable guitars to play, either sitting or standing. In that respect it challenges the mighty OM for sheer playability – neither too big, nor too small.

Rosie Heydenrych's workmanship is faultless and the guitar is as much a work of art as it is a musical instrument

The top here is North American redwood, a timber that is similar in appearance to cedar but with a slightly more reddish hue. In recent years redwood has been elevated to a superior tonewood, renowned for having some of the tonal characteristics of cedar – a fingerstyle-friendly warmth for one – but also it has a little of spruce's brightness with a more robust midrange and a piano-like crisp sound.

Back and sides are made from Madagascan rosewood, a wood that is now becoming regarded as a worthy substitute for the mighty Brazilian rosewood, both tonally and visually, the supplies of which are becoming more and more scarce. Madagascan rosewood – or 'Maddie', as it is called among the tonewood fanbase – is





also veering towards a similar fate but is currently not on the endangered list. The grain pattern on the TG is wild with that chocolate hue common to premium rosewoods. What can we expect from Maddie in the tonal spectrum? Good highs, a mighty bass response and punchy midrange; but that's really only the tip of this particular tonal iceberg. In our experience both Maddie and Brazilian rosewood mature to a majestic tonal level, with an almost supernatural sustain and complex overtones. There's a sweetness there, too, and, as such, it's no surprise that both these timbers – and indeed some of the other rosewoods available – are highly sought after by fingerstyle players.

The body is bound with koa, with a bevel on the lower bout, player side. Unlike some armrest bevels we've seen this is very subtle, almost like the sharp edge has merely been rolled. It's both simple and effective and we were amused to read in the spec sheet that it's referred to as 'Rosie's Rollover'. A nice individual touch.

2. The TG's back and sides are made from Madagascan rosewood, a timber considered to be easily on a par with its Brazilian equivalent

3. Burl is used again as a veneer on the rear of the guitar's headstock with deluxe Gotoh 510 tuners completing the picture



4. The upper edge of the guitar's lower bout has been gently rounded off to produce an armrest bevel – what Turnstone refers to in the spec as 'Rosie's Rollover'

5. While the headstock bears no maker's name as such, the top edge is carved to represent a turnstone's wings open in flight

6. The distinctive fretboard markers are described as being 'custom stone'

Koa makes another appearance as the neck of the TG, with a stripey, figured maple-like grain pattern. While it's arguable that the wood used in the neck of an acoustic guitar has much less of an influence than those used for the soundbox, it still makes its presence felt. How many people swear that they can tell the difference between rosewood and maple necks on a Strat, for instance?

If you imagine that every wood used in the construction of an acoustic guitar could be looked at as balancing out the tonal output of the instrument like the controls on a hi-fi, then that's an appropriate mindset to adopt. What does koa bring to the party? Well, koa hails pretty much exclusively from Hawaii and is known for having a sparkly top-end with plenty of mids. But, as Andy Powers from Taylor Guitars once told us, koa has a tendency to offer a brittle treble response until it's been played in for a while. He added that by the time you do your first string change you'll certainly notice a difference.





6

THE RIVALS

Needless to say, if you're in the market for this level of acoustic guitar then practically the whole market is open to you. To provide a little context, a Martin D-45 can cost £10.5k – but if you wanted something like one of the company's Harvey Leach Lotus Flower D-45s, which is a limited run of just 25 guitars, then you'd have to save a little more as these roll out at £32.5k.

Take a look at Taylor's Custom Shop and you'll find instruments costing around the £20k mark – and this is before we look into some of the USA's premium builders. For example, Montreal-based Michael Greenfield's instruments start at $19k and Michael Bashkin's guitars, designed and built in Colorado, start at $11,200 for a basic model – and both of these builders have considerable waiting lists.

The label inside the TG's soundhole tells us that it only left the workbench in May this year. And this is something to consider; the woods of any new guitar are going to take a while to settle in and begin delivering their best tone. With a spruce top this could be a number of years, whereas cedar and redwood don't take anywhere near as long. When the investment of time results in all the woods of a guitar essentially singing from the same hymnbook, that's when you can say that the instrument has entered its prime. And this is something that is definitely worth waiting for.

Topping off the list of construction materials on the Turnstone TG, we have an ebony 'board and bridge, bone nut and saddle, a burl veneer to the back of the headstock and gold-coloured Gotoh 510 tuners to keep everything harmonious.

> We subjected the TG to a variety of playing styles and it fielded everything with considerable finesse

The quality of work here is immaculate and some of the best we've seen in an acoustic guitar. Nothing is out of place and everything has been done to the highest possible standards. But what exactly does it sound like?

Feel & Sounds

It has to be said that this is one of the most comfortable *new* guitars we've encountered in recent years. The neck profile – described by Turnstone as being a "shallow C" – is supremely comfortable in the hand and the overall balance is very good indeed when played sitting down. There are no strap pins on this guitar, but it's worth remembering that Turnstone works to custom orders and were this your guitar and you wanted strap pins, you'd only have to ask.

We subjected the TG to a variety of playing styles – fingerstyle, strumming,



Note how the guitar's heel curves to follow the contour of the player's hand

single notes, and so on – and it fielded everything we threw at it with considerable finesse. As luck would have it, acoustic guitar maestro Clive Carroll came by our studio during testing and we asked him if he would play a piece on video for us, the results of which can be found using the link above. We would encourage you to take a listen. After all, describing how an instrument sounds – particularly one of this grade – is a precarious area to venture into, but the video will speak volumes.

If we were to sum things up, though, everything you might expect from a top-end guitar is present: good basses, a midrange that's completely mud-free and clear, with sweet trebles. As we have said, this instrument still has to reach tonal maturity by being played in so that the woods have a chance to settle. Judging by what we've heard from high-end acoustics in the past, the basses will bloom and the trebles will attain even greater sweetness over the passage of time. What's there now surpasses any of the off-the-peg acoustics and time will bless it still further.

This instrument still has to reach tonal maturity, but what's there now surpasses any off-the-peg acoustic and time will bless it further

Verdict

This review was an adventure right from the start. It's not every day that we come across a guitar of this stature and we thoroughly enjoyed the time we spent with it. Rosie's workmanship is faultless and the guitar is as much a work of art as it is a musical instrument. Its tonal development has just begun and as the years pass it will attain its own unique voice – and by that we mean does it sound like a Martin? No. A Taylor? No. It has a personality of its own and a voice of its own to match. Sure, it's a price level that few of us will ever have the opportunity to consider, but as an investment, especially from the point of view of its future tonal development, it's an instrument that will bring joy to players and audiences alike. G



TURNSTONE TG

PRICE: £12,240 (inc Hiscox case)
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Grand Auditorium
TOP: North American Redwood
BACK/SIDES: Madagascan Rosewood
MAX RIM DEPTH: 110mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 395mm
NECK: Figured koa
SCALE LENGTH: 650mm (25.59")
TUNERS: Gold coloured Gotoh 510 with black buttons
NUT/WIDTH: Cattle bone/44.5mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony with custom stone markers
FRETS: 20.5 Evo gold
BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony with cattle bone saddle/53mm
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.88/4.16
OPTIONS: Base model is £8,400 w/ Sitka spruce or Red Cedar top, mahogany or English walnut back and sides. Upgrades to our review model includes North American Redwood top (£270), Madagascan rosewood b/sides (£960), koa neck (£420), arm bevel (£420). See website for more options
RANGE OPTIONS: Other models include the TD, TG and TS (see the interview with Rosie for more details) and the E Series made from English timbers
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes
FINISH: High gloss

Guitarist GOLD

10/10

PROS A superb hand-built piece of musical art with attributes that really do go a step beyond

CONS Okay, the price may appear steep, but in the context of other sole builders out there, it's on track for this level of instrument

LOVE TO PLAY GUITAR?





Guitar Techniques with moving tab synched to quality audio is available for iOS and Android

Then get properly serious with the world's finest tuition-only magazine. Every issue's packed with blues, rock, jazz, classical and folk lessons from the very best tutors, all with audio and backing tracks.

Print, digital and print/digital bundle offers at www.magazinesdirect.com

WE'LL MAKE YOU A BETTER PLAYER!

Soaring Success

We catch up with luthier Rosie Heydenrych to hear how Turnstone Guitars has become a force to be reckoned with in the bespoke acoustic guitar market

Words David Mead

It's been six years since we featured luthier Rosie Heydenrych in our Workshop series and, since then, her reputation as a builder has become established with players who seek out the very finest in custom-built instruments. Back in 2017, Rosie operated from a small unit on an industrial estate in Newchapel on the Surrey/Sussex borders. She's still at the same address, but has scaled up her facility considerably. "I've expanded quite a bit," she says, "I was just in one little room, then I moved into the unit next door, which enabled me to buy bigger machinery. I stayed there for a couple of years and then I outgrew that unit and moved back into my old unit, [while also keeping] the one I was in."

Rosie's husband, Karl, now works full-time for the business and the focus at present is on expanding Turnstone's manufacturing facility further in order to build more guitars. And the growth hasn't stopped there. Pausing to have a baby in February last year, Rosie is set to move on again. "Since we've been back we've been raring to go and are looking towards something bigger in the next few months."



A lot has changed at Turnstone since we visited back in 2017: larger premises, more machinery and an upturn in production

"You can't be a master of all timbers, you need to choose a few and really understand them"

PHOTO BY MICHAEL WATTS

1. Rosie ships guitars worldwide from her Surrey-based workshop

2. Turnstone offers guitars made exclusively from English woods, including cherry, English walnut and bog oak


1


2

So expansion with Turnstone Guitars is rife at present?

"Yes, we're shipping guitars internationally. We're trying to increase the number that we're building and we're starting to work with some shops all over the world as well. When you visited us [in 2017] I was probably making about five guitars a year. I was part-time then. But now we're working towards building 20 a year."

What sort of a customer base do you have for your instruments?

"It's a real mixture. Usually it's amateur players that have built up a collection of guitars. They kind of understand the handmade lutherie market and have heard about us through other players who play our guitars or through workshops, trade shows, websites, social media, etc. Or it could be somebody who collects guitars or is a professional player. Sometimes it could be a one-off guitar that they're thinking about. For example, the English woods thing that we do, some artists are interested in that and want a custom-made guitar. So that's brought them to us in particular."

Experience must have played a key role, too, since you began building?

"I guess the more you build, the more you understand the sound you're trying to create. That can come through all the build techniques that you've honed and refined over the years. The bracing pattern on the soundboard, bracing pattern on the back, the way the models sound in relation to their size. You start to understand your instruments more, and what the different materials can contribute to the end result. And although we build custom-made instruments, we're not building the same model over and over. I think in that instance, it would be easier. But what I am coming to understand, because I am using certain backs and sides or certain tops quite frequently, is that you definitely get to know the [woods'] characteristics.

"You can't be a master of all timbers, you need to choose a select few and really understand them. So I'm starting to draw down what I'm offering, especially now given the situation with scarcity. I will always be interested in new tonewoods, but I'll probably approach it with less [enthusiasm] than I would have in the past."

> "I guess the more you build, the more you understand the sound you're trying to create"

Could you outline the differences between the basic models you offer?

"We have four models – a TD, TM, TG and TS. The TS is the most recent one. Essentially, it's a small body to our own design, it's not like a traditional parlour. It's something that I designed to represent what I wanted a small body to be. The TM is mid-size, loosely based on OM dimensions, slightly larger than the small body but it's still got that quick attack. The TG is Grand Auditorium size, so a bigger lower bout and a deeper body. And the dreadnought, obviously, is what a dreadnought is supposed to be – more open, with a bigger sound that flatpickers and singer-songwriters like."

And, as you mentioned earlier, you're still building instruments using uniquely English timbers. Which ones are your favourites?

"People come from different angles of what they like, so I start from that point of view. But my personal preference, as far as the backs and sides are concerned, are English-grown black walnut and English cherry, which is very, very sweet, similar to mahogany. Bog oak, I build a lot with but that's got a different sound to the first two. I wouldn't say that out of those three that one is any better, they're just different. But also sycamore is a lovely wood and London plane. They're more in that maple territory, which is a bit more defined, a bit more articulate and mid-rangy. Those are probably my top five... and apple as well. I really like apple."

Do you find that there's still the demand for the exotic woods?

"Yeah, especially in the higher-end market, which we're definitely in. It comes down to the fact that they are incredible woods; that's undeniable and that's why I'm interested in building with them. I've always said from the beginning that I need to understand and appreciate what it is about these woods that makes them so great, and to see what the results are. From another angle, people, to a certain degree, know what to expect with guitars made of these woods and that's come from years of tradition. So it's all well and good wanting to use alternative woods, but to a certain degree, you have to give what the market wants."

And a customer ordering a guitar from you now would have to wait a couple of years before they receive it?

"Yes, we're currently delivering for early 2025. A long waiting list shows you're in demand, but to some people who perhaps aren't used to the way we work, it can come as quite a surprise! You just see their faces drop. But I think in this day and age, sometimes it's nice to wait for something." G

www.turnstoneguitar.co.uk

Subscribehere

VOX AMPLIFICATION LTD

www.voxamps.co.uk

FREE

VOX AMPLUG 2 LEAD†

WHEN YOU SUBSCRIBE TO Guitarist TODAY!



FREE GIFT WORTH £39.99



SUBSCRIBE ONLINE AT
www.magazinesdirect.com/C55W
Or call us on 0330 333 1113 and QUOTE C55W
(Lines are open Monday-Friday 8:30am-7pm, Saturday 10am-3pm UK Time)



FREE GIFT WORTH £39.99

VOX AMPLUG 2 LEAD

The perfect guitar headphone amp for practice anywhere. Just plug in, connect your headphones and jam instantly!

- Versatile mid-boost and high-gain lead tone for richer tones and powerful solos with analogue circuitry
- Foldable 180-degree rotating plug and auto power-off function for improved convenience
- Get serious sound in a compact space – the ideal choice for any guitarist

SUBSCRIBE TO Guitarist TODAY

Each issue is packed with the best gear reviews, in-depth interviews and pro lessons

- **FREE DELIVERY** direct to your door
- **SAVE** on shop price
- **FREE GIFT** worth £39.99

PRINT ONLY

ONLY £27.50 EVERY 6 MONTHS BY DIRECT DEBIT*



SAVE 34%



PRINT & DIGITAL

ONLY £35 EVERY 6 MONTHS BY DIRECT DEBIT

INSTANT ACCESS ANYTIME, ANYWHERE



SAVE 48%



SUBSCRIBE ONLINE AT www.magazinesdirect.com/C55W

Or call us on 0330 333 1113 and QUOTE C55W

(Lines are open Monday-Friday 8:30am-7pm, Saturday 10am-3pm UK Time)

OFFER ENDS: 13 OCTOBER 2023

Terms and conditions Offer closes 13 OCTOBER 2023. Direct Debit offer open to new subscribers only. Offer is available to UK subscribers only. *£27.50 (print) and £35.00 (print and digital) payable by 6-monthly Direct Debit/credit card. This price is guaranteed for the first 12 months and we will notify you in advance of any price changes. Please allow up to six weeks for delivery of your first subscription issue (up to eight weeks overseas). The full subscription rate is for 12 months (13 issues) and includes postage and packaging. †Your gift will be delivered separately within 60 days after your first payment has cleared. Gifts only available to subscribers on the UK mainland. Gifts not available with a digital subscription. In the unlikely event that we run out of this gift, we promise to offer you an alternative gift of the same value. Payment is non-refundable after the 14-day cancellation period, unless exceptional circumstances apply. For full terms and conditions, visit www.magazinesdirect.com/terms. For enquiries, please call +44 (0) 330 333 1113. Lines are open Monday-Friday 8:30am-7pm, Saturday 10am-3pm UK Time (excluding Bank Holidays), or email help@magazinesdirect.com. Calls to 0330 numbers will be charged at no more than a national landline call, and may be included in your phone provider's call bundle.

Great & Small

Electro-Harmonix helps you make the most of your pedalboard space with new Nano versions of its popular pedals

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker





ELECTRO-HARMONIX NANO PEDALS

FROM £79

CONTACT **Electro-Harmonix** WEB **www.ehx.com**

What You Need To Know

1 What's a Nano pedal?
It's all about the size! These are basically smaller, more 'board-friendly versions of larger pedals in the Electro-Harmonix roster.

2 Do they do exactly what the bigger pedals do?
Well, they have to squeeze the circuitry into a smaller chassis, so there may be differences in certain cases – for instance, the Nano Metal Muff loses the Top Boost footswitch of the current larger version, but it gains a noise gate.

3 There are other EHX pedals this size that aren't labelled as Nano...
That's right, that particular chassis is used for 59 products at the time of writing. Let's just call them Nano-sized...

Few pedals companies have been as prolific as NYC-based Electro-Harmonix over the years. And that tradition continues apace today, including the production of multiple versions of some of the brand's most popular pedals – but how many Big Muff versions do you need? Scrap that: we all know you can never have too many Big Muffs!

What we're looking at today is a selection of Nano pedals: the Nano Deluxe Memory Man, Nano Pulsar, Nano Q-Tron and Nano Metal Muff, all of which are smaller versions of established EHX pedals in really solid, space-saving compact enclosures that ought to slot in nicely to any pedalboard. So, let's get started...

Diminutive Delay

If there's any one single analogue delay pedal that's known to most guitarists, it has to be the Deluxe Memory Man, introduced in 1979, famously used by The Edge and, unusual for that time, endowed with modulation. There are currently two large versions in the EHX roster: the standard version and the 550-TT with tap tempo. But apart from just having a single output, rather than the Effect Out and Direct Out on the standard version, the Nano DMM seems to offer pretty much the same functionality from its six knobs.

This is BBD delay, and the repeats – while not squeakily pristine – are not as mushy or crusty as in some units. These are pitched



1. The Nano Q-Tron mode switch determines the frequency range that the filter allows to pass through: LP (low-pass) emphasises low frequencies, BP (bandpass) emphasises mids, and HP (high-pass) is for high frequencies



2



3



4



2. The Nano Deluxe Memory Man's Overload LED lights up when the delayed signal starts to smoothly clip. The Status LED lights when the pedal is engaged

3. To achieve the chorus and vibrato settings of an original DMM pedal, set the Rate knob to 9 o'clock for chorus and 2 o'clock for vibrato. The Blend knob needs to be at maximum for vibrato

4. The Nano Pulsar's Mono/L jack is for standard mono operation, but if you connect the R jack to a second amp, the Pulsar can act as a stereo panner

just about right to mesh organically with your guitar tone and will take off into self-oscillation with advances of the Feedback knob, though at that size it's not as easy to grab as an original. A Level knob sets input gain with unity at about 11 o'clock – beyond that, it can add some grit to your sound.

The original DMM's secret sauce was the modulation and it's dialled in here with separate Rate and Depth knobs that give you plenty to play with. With a delay range from 30ms to 550ms, the pedal covers you from reverb-like ambience through slapback, and rhythmic repeats to longer echoes.

Pint-Sized Tremolo

Maybe surprisingly, the Nano version of the Pulsar actually adds a knob over its larger version with adjustable volume, which, of course, is useful for counteracting any of the perceived volume drop that a tremolo effect can exhibit – and in this case it also has enough on tap to kick a useful boost down the line. There's a mono input to the pedal, but you get the choice of standard mono tremolo use or a stereo output for auto-panning. We have standard Depth and Rate knobs here, both with a wide range, and a toggle-switched choice of triangle or harder-edged square wave modes. In addition, a Shape knob can further adjust the shape of the chosen waveform.

> The Nano DMM's repeats are pitched to mesh organically with your guitar tone

With the triangle wave, this offers the chance to move away from the absolutely symmetrical shape in the centre-detente position for the more lopsided rising or falling sawtooth shapes. With the square wave, you get adjustment from narrow to wide pulse width. There's plenty here to make this a practical purchase for the price, although tremolo pedals have moved on, with some players actively seeking harmonic tremolo and tap tempo.

Downsized Envelope Filter

The Q-Tron has quite a pedigree, the original 1996 EHX version being designed by Mike Beigel, the designer of the lauded Mu-Tron III, and being pretty much regarded as its successor at that time. That basic DNA lives on in the Nano version.

Although it lacks the effects loop and the extended parameter control of the current Q-Tron Plus, this smaller version still offers the essence of the envelope-controlled filter sound. This is all about modulating your guitar's tone via playing dynamics – the loudness of the signal forming a volume envelope that sweeps the cut-off, or centre frequency of a filter creating wah effects or the sound of a synth filter-sweep. Here, the filter sweeps to a higher frequency then descends (the Q-Tron Plus has a switch that allows you to change the sweep to the opposite direction).

There are three selectable frequency ranges emphasising different parts of the spectrum, and the sensitivity to your playing is set by the Drive knob, which really starts to have an effect in normal dynamic playing beyond 12 o'clock where you can dial in the wider, more prominent filter sweeps – you'll find a sweet spot that matches your own picking strengths to the required sound. The Q knob takes care of further refinement of the sweep, adjusting the filter's bandwidth. Turn this clockwise for intensity and a more resonant sweep.

Overall, the pedal provides control over a wide palette of autowah and quacky filter sounds.

Miniature Metaller

You can get a total of eight different Muffs in Nano-sized enclosures, but only three of them get the Nano prefix. Billed as being "built for the player who demands nothing less than hard-hitting distortion and an



The Gate LED lights when the internal gate mutes the output signal. The Gate knob sets the threshold at which the gate kicks in

THE RIVALS

It's considerably more expensive than EHX's offering, but we like J Rockett's Clockwork (£399) take on the DMM. For a similarly compact-sized envelope filter to the Nano Q-Tron, there's the Carl Martin Ottawa (£133) with the requisite High, Band and Low Pass filters. The Fender Pour Over (£139) is larger but appears to have more functionality. While there's any amount of tremolo pedals around, not too many have a stereo output – one of those that does is the Seymour Duncan Shape Shifter (£262), which also sports a useful tap tempo footswitch. For Metal Muff alternatives, try the MXR M116 Fullbore Metal Distortion (£129) or the Empress Effects Heavy Menace distortion (£239).

intense, aggressive sound", the Nano Metal Muff features three-band EQ alongside the standard Volume and Gain (Distortion) knobs. It also features a noise gate with a variable threshold, which can be very effective in cutting out any hiss and hum if you set it just right.

At its mildest, with Distortion at minimum and the output volume cranked up, the pedal is capable of a raunchy overdrive, but it goes way beyond that to full-on cranked-to-the-max distortion. Now, that could be true of many distortion pedals, but it's the three-band EQ that's main deal here – each knob covers a huge range, so you can really sculpt the sound, maybe tweaking the midrange with a scoop or some cocked-wah resonance, or going further into some extreme tone-wrangling. It's black and says Metal on the box, but it's way more than that.

Verdict

It's undoubtedly a fine idea to channel much larger EHX pedals into this smaller format as many players are looking to make the most of pedalboard space and few compromises have had to be made in doing so. This is an ideal way to get a DMM onto any 'board and the other three, although arguably more niche, do solid work at reasonable prices.



EHX NANO DELUXE MEMORY MAN

PRICE: £185
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Analogue delay
FEATURES: True or Buffered bypass, modulation, optional trails, 30 to 550ms delay time
CONTROLS: Blend, Feedback, Delay, Level, Rate, Depth, internal Trails switch, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: Supplied 9V DC adaptor 150mA
DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 111 (d) x 50mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**



EHX NANO PULSAR

PRICE: £99
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Tremolo pedal
FEATURES: Buffered bypass, stereo operation
CONTROLS: Volume, Depth, Shape, Rate, Shape switch (Triangle/Square), Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard outputs (Mono/L, R)
POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 30mA
DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 111 (d) x 50mm (h)

8/10



EHX NANO Q-TRON

PRICE: £98
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Envelope filter
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Volume, Drive, Q, Mode (LP/BP/HP), Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 10mA
DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 111 (d) x 50mm (h)

8/10



EHX NANO METAL MUFF

PRICE: £79
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Fuzz/distortion pedal
FEATURES: Buffered bypass, noise gate
CONTROLS: Volume, Gate, Distortion, Treble, Mid, Bass, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 24mA
DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 111 (d) x 50mm (h)

8/10

PROS Compact size; solid build; reasonable prices; viable substitutes for the larger EHX versions

CONS Small knobs on Nano Deluxe Memory Man

BLUEPRINT

SPIRIT OF '62

The pickups Gibson made when their fabled PAF humbuckers transitioned into the 'Patent Number' era can be uniquely spectacular, says Stuart Robson of Sunbear Pickups. That's why he decided to make a set that imitated their rich, crisp tone perfectly…

Words Jamie Dickson

Stuart Robson of Sunbear Pickups takes a forensic yet passionate approach to recreating the vintage tones and his pickups are used by top makers, such as Ivison Guitars

Stuart Robson of Sunbear Pickups is a man who loves to talk tone. So it was no surprise that, during a casual conversation with the UK-based maker, the subject of the best-sounding humbuckers we'd ever heard came up. I nominated a spectacular set I'd played on an early 60s ES-335 at Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath.

"What year was the 335?" asked Stuart, somewhat intrigued.

"1961," I replied.

"Ah..." he said – and thereby hung a tale.

It transpired Stuart had come to believe the pickups made right at the end of the fabled PAF humbucker's production run (just as it transitioned into the so-called 'Patent Number' humbucker that was its successor) had something really special about them – a kind of warm but biting tone that was just a tad crisper and more incisive than many of the PAFs that went before.

By around mid-to-late 1961, Stuart explained, when the single-cut Les Paul was already being replaced by the SG-shape Les Paul, Gibson's humbuckers were in an interesting place. On the one hand, they were becoming more standardised, as the company moved to using the then-new Meteor winding machines in a more systematic way. On the other hand, they still had a fair few ready-wound coils from 1960 (and perhaps even earlier) that still needed to be used up. And that led to some very unusual combinations of old and new spec in the humbuckers of that transitional time.

Stuart also revealed that he was in the process of developing a set of Sunbear humbuckers that captured their magic. So what is it about pickups from that transitional period that can be amazing? We settled in for a deep dive into pickup-winding history...

How did you come to take an interest in late-period PAF tone?

"When I first got into making pickups, I was all about trying to replicate the early PAFs from around 1957 – they are hard to get right because of the coil tension on them. As you'll probably know, the very first coil winders they used were the same ones they used for the P-90s virtually all the way through and they wobbled like absolute crazy. And so you effectively had a scatter-wound coil.

"Regardless of what anyone says it was messy and very loose... and when you examine the resulting pickups, you can push into the coil and it flexes like crazy. Replicating those is annoying but it's worth doing. However, I had this hunch, just from personal experience that the very *last* PAFs [from around four years later] are special. Whether it's the ones that still had the PAF sticker or had the first 'Patent Number' stickers on them. Either way, these very last ones made with short Alnico V magnets, with the relatively even coils, have something about them.

When you made the decision to imitate that late-PAF sound, what did you use as your template?

"I came into possession of a set of 1962 'Patent Number' humbuckers with [legacy] PAF specs. So during that period, you often ended up in a situation where the

"When I first got into making pickups, I was all about trying to replicate the early PAFs from around 1957"



This superb Ivison Hurricane '59, as seen in issue 498, features Stuart's take on the late-50s PAF, a set he calls the '59 SB-PAF. But he says that pickups made as the PAF transitioned into the Patent Number model can be revelatory, too



build of a 'Patent Number' humbucker was consistent [with the earlier PAF-decalled humbuckers] in all ways apart from the sticker on the bottom.

"Also, during the period of mid-to-late 1961 through 1962, you get loads of guitars that were fitted with a PAF in one position and the Patent Number in the other. You also get guitars with Patent Numbers in both positions or PAFs in both positions... you also get Patent Number humbuckers where, when you take the covers off, you discover one of the coils was wound using poly wire, which starts to come in around mid-to-late '62, while the other coil was wound with plain enamel wire like a PAF.

"It's all a bit of a mess – and until you take the covers off of a set of 'Patent Numbers' from that era you don't know what you're going to find under them. You could have a set that are PAFs in every respect apart from one detail. Or you could have ones which are entirely [built to] the early Patent Number pre-T-top spec.

"With the set I acquired, I knew what they were because the covers had already been taken off them – although the original covers came with them. They came from a reliable source in terms of being a genuine set and, obviously, I could ascertain that myself when I got hold of them. My plan, in getting them, was that I wanted to take detailed specs from what would have been a mid-to-late 1960 PAF recipe."

How does that recipe differ from earlier PAFs, exactly?

"The earlier PAFs vary more, although you can say there are some broad consistencies in spec from '57 to '58, which then transition into some slightly different things during '59 and early 1960. By the time you get to mid-to-late 1960, things are relatively standardised. So when I got the 1962 set, I knew what to expect to a degree. But the idea wasn't necessarily to keep this particular set or to make a replica of them. By no means are *all* PAFs and Patent Numbers great-sounding pickups. A lot of them *are* really lovely sounding. But not every set is something you'd want to make a specific replica of.

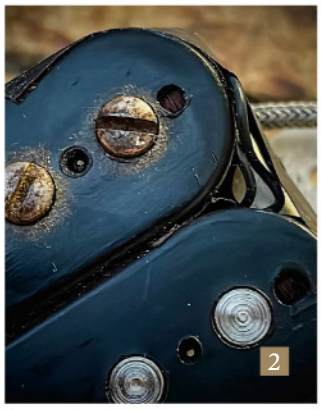
"So, anyway, I got them, took all the information off of them: inductance, capacitance, approximations on the tension of the individual coils, the coil shapes, all that information... the offset between the two coils on each of the pickups, all this stuff. Mainly for my own records, so I could refer back to it. And you know, I think you need to do these things if you're going to put replicas out there, or make things that are designed to recreate the old pickups in some way. You kind of need to have done some of it, I think.

1. This 1961 ES-335 from Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars, Bath, inspired discussion about 1960s buckers

2. Detail of well-worn coils from a set of 1962 pickups that Stuart bought

3. Stuart went to great pains to imitate the original pickup covers

4. While the decal may indicate the pickups are Patent Number models, the internal spec can be a holdover from earlier PAFs







"And so I did all that. And then I put them into one of my guitars and plugged it in and was stunned by how good-sounding the set was. I've been lucky enough to play a lot of sets of PAFs over time and it's not the first set I've had. But they were just a stunning-sounding set. And yet the neck pickup is curious – in the early days [of the PAF], resistance levels varied a lot. But by the time Gibson moved on to using the Meteor winding machines around 1962, they tended to fall [reliably] between 7.3k-7.8k. And they basically stay consistent throughout that. But the neck pickup of this particular '62 set was 6.8k. Which is low – and it was untouched: no solder changes, nothing. So it came out of the factory as 6.8k. My feeling is that one or both of the coils is *not* off the Meteor winding machine. So I think it's probably an earlier coil twinned with a later coil... or it's just an earlier PAF, effectively – probably an early 1960 PAF but with the later sticker on it. So you still have the short Alnico 5 magnet and the magnet still reads as it should do. But the actual wind is slightly unusual and the offset between the coils is slightly unusual as well."

What was it that you liked about that pickup, sonically?

"It's just one of the most beautiful-sounding neck pickups I've ever tried of any style. It has this kind of thickness to it and it's sweet, but it's also very clear. It's just such a lovely recipe. And so when I was listening to the set and playing them in a couple of different guitars, I just knew I had to replicate the set. It was such a nice-sounding combination and it had some uniqueness to it because of that neck pickup.

"The bridge pickup is very much a classic late-1960 PAF pickup. It's slightly the Tele-on-steroids thing, but it has a slight extra kind of mid-range grunt about it. It's very classic – it's what I would expect from a good-sounding pickup from that period. The neck up, though, is quite unique and the combination of the two of them is just fantastic"

How did you set about replicating that unusual combination of qualities?

"Obviously, I had all the detailed specs I could get without actually stripping down the coils and counting the turns per layer, which of course I wasn't going to do on functioning pickups of that period [laughs]. But I have, in my records, stripdowns from similar pickups, recording their turns-per-layer counts and so on. So I know what I'm generally working with, the kind of coil-build and the right tension for them.

> "It's just one of the most beautiful-sounding neck pickups I've ever tried of any style"

"So I tried a few different things based on what I could see externally and what I could read [with electronic metering devices] and slowly honed in on what it was that was making that pickup sound like it does. Almost every set I made in an attempt to create a replica sounded really nice in their own right. But getting the specific nuances of that set was something I definitely wanted to do. And so, after a good number of prototypes, they've come out nicely."



5. Stuart's Nik Huber Orca sounded stellar when fitted with the 1962-spec humbuckers

6. Early Patent Number humbuckers may not be quite as sought-after as PAFs but they can sound absolutely stellar

7. Coils awaiting transformation into finished pickups

8. Stuart's working on an updated 'staple' pickup next...







What sort of detail did you pay attention to in particular?
"Among other things, I weigh the covers so the ones fitted to each [replica set] are the same weight, within a gram, as the originals. Basically, I've tried to make them as close as possible to what I have available. So I've gone with all of the correct stuff I normally do – I used what we expect to be the right steel grades and carbon content on all the parts, as well as the wind styles, the turn-per-layer counts, the coil tension, the offset between the coils – everything really, to try and get them to be as dead-on as possible. To the point where I could probably sell the other set and not lose sleep over it [laughs]. I don't particularly *want* to sell the originals – and I won't do unless I have to at some point. But at this point, they're pretty bang-on, so I'm happy to release those into the world at this stage."

"They have this specific upper mid-range bite, which is savage but not harsh…"

What are you calling the new set you've created to imitate those 1962 PAF-spec Patent Number pickups?
"They will be the very imaginatively named "62 SB PAF". Because all my other PAF-style pickups are named by whatever the year designation is and then 'SB PAF'."

How would you summarise the sound of good pickups from that transitional period and what do you think is the most important design element behind it?
"It's that short Alnico 5 magnet that does something, I'd love to tell you exactly what it is. All I know is that when I've gone through the vintage ones, and taken all the specs and the Gauss readings and everything off those magnets, if I match all that and put one of those magnets into a pickup that has largely the same style spec, they have this specific upper mid-range bite, which is savage but not harsh... It's not in a frequency range that makes you kind of wince when you hit it – we all talk about the '57, '58, '59 and 1960 PAFs as being the thing. But there's something in those very late ones, the second half of '60 through into '61... there's something about them which is their own thing. And that's something I would like to talk more about and, and do more with. I don't think it's something I knew as much about as I should have, and I don't think it's something many of us guitar players really talk about, you know?" G

www.sunbearpickups.com



NOTHING BUT THIEVES
THEIR "RETRO-FUTURISTIC" NEW SOUND!



COMFORTABLY NUMB
PINK FLOYD'S MASTERPIECE TABBED IN FULL

TOTAL Guitar

PLAY BETTER NOW!

PLUS!
THE KILLERS
MR BRIGHTSIDE
GRETA VAN FLEET
THE FALLING SKY

99 WAYS TO BETTER
Tone

- Get more from your FX
- Easy guitar mods
- Amp set-up tips

ICONS OF TONE LESSON
Play like Hendrix
Brian May
Peter Green
& more!

EMPIRE STATE BASTARD

BLUES SOLO BASICS

TOM DELONGE & STEVE LACY STRATS

REVIEWED
GRETSCH G5420T
140TH ANNIVERSARY HOLLOWBODY STUNNER!

REVIEWED
STUDIO JTM ST20H
MARSHALL'S VINTAGE-INSPIRED ALL-VALVE HEAD

ON SALE NOW

GET THE NEW ISSUE FROM WWW.MAGAZINESDIRECT.COM

Longtermers

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



Yamaha Revstar II RSS20

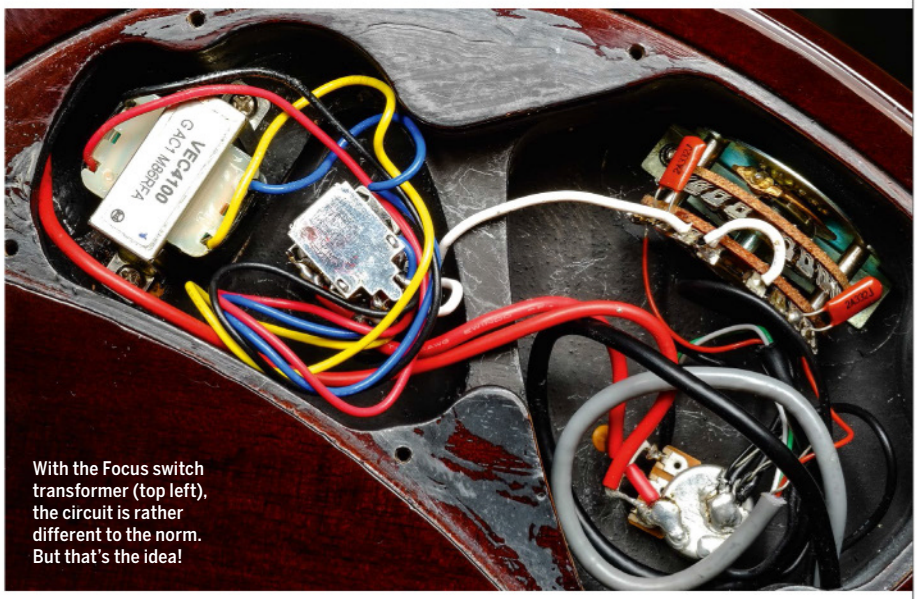
with Dave Burrluck

Writer
DAVE BURRLUCK
Guitarist, Gear Reviews Editor



This month, our reviews editor learns to love the one he's with and embrace his inner Yamaha-ness!

You can't help thinking that guitar design is going backwards. It seems that if an instrument isn't chasing a tone and style from yesteryear, a classic artist or a classic recording, well, don't bother. Yamaha can certainly be accused of jumping on that bandwagon. Its huge-selling Pacifica guitars, for example, are far from original: that was the idea for their creation in the first place. But Revstar was always about being a little different – the design and, to a certain extent, the craft perhaps fall more in line with the company's history of innovation than those Pacificas. Yet I'll put my hands up and say that after having this superbly made and far-from-expensive house guest for the past few months, I've been sat a little on the fence. Is it simply *too* different? And then something changed.



With the Focus switch transformer (top left), the circuit is rather different to the norm. But that's the idea!

Watching Fatoumata Diawara live on *Later... With Jools Holland*, her guitarist, Jurandir Dã Silva, is playing a Revstar II in its distinctive Sunset Burst finish. It's probably a Japanese-made RSP20 Professional, but that really isn't a million miles away from my lowlier RSS20 Standard. Laced with wah, his sound not only suits the African groove – the song is *Nsera* from the album *London Ko* if you want to check it out – but I'm beginning to wonder what my problem is. He sounds great and it's a startling performance.

> "I've had this superbly made and far-from-expensive house guest for the past few months. But is it simply too different?"

If you're into new and trending guitarists you'll be aware of the genius of Matteo Mancuso (who featured in last issue) and he's another Revstar user of that RSP20. Okay, his style is a little different to mine (ha!), but c'mon, I'm beginning to think the only 'problem' with my RSS20 is me.

It's easy to pick up a guitar and strum through a few sounds and conclude it's not for you. It's much harder to explore an instrument and find new-to-you sounds. Not everything has to sound (or look) like the Les Paul, Strat and Tele you already own, does it? The other side of the coin is that the familiarity of those designs can be very comforting: we feel (and look) at home, and the knobs and switches all do what they've done a thousand times before.

But so much thought and time has gone into this guitar: its chambered-for-tone body design, its graphite-reinforced neck. Yamaha didn't have to do any of this. Even the simple treble bleed on the volume control, for example, means that pulling back the volume, the sound remains clear but slightly thinned. While that's hardly new, it feels and sounds very much a part of the really quite complex circuit at play here. If I'm honest, it's with the volume pulled back a little that I'm finding some real sweet-spot voices, especially with a little tone roll-off.

The Focus switch brings a *very* unusual passive boost that rounds the highs and lightly boosts the lows and mids. It's a feature I've never encountered on an electric guitar before. But instead of thinking that because it's unusual and challenging, therefore it must be rubbish, I could simply take the view that it's another new tool to play with. Where could it take me? Again, with that volume pulled back for its clearer voice, adding the Focus switch just contributes some thickness and body for higher-position lines and parts.

It's the same with those slightly out-of-phase almost single-coil-y voices in positions 2 and 4 on the five-way switch (don't forget the guitar is fully humbucking: no noise). They don't sound like a Strat, so they must be rubbish. But why do I end up using them to track parts and add texture on a few recordings, then? Because actually they work, especially with some basic modulations, fuzz and tremolo.

There's nothing cheap about any aspect of the guitar, either. As supplied, it is really well set up, plays superbly, is very stable in terms of tuning, and no aspect of the design gets in the way. I really have to conclude that, for the creative recording musician, this is quite the musical tool.

Okay, the bright Swift Blue finish with those heavily contrasting Café Racer-inspired stripes does flag up that you're not playing a relic from the 60s, and the other five colour choices do little to downplay this 'I'm different' guitar. But that doesn't alter the fact that this reboot of the Revstar actually moves it into a more unique territory, a beacon of individuality in a market that's flooded with seen-it-all-before designs. G

Reviewed *485* ***Price*** *£649 (inc gigbag)* ***On Test Since*** *March 2023* ***Studio Session*** *At home, yes* ***Gigged*** *Not yet* ***Mods*** *Not yet* ***uk.yamaha.com***

JESSE DAYTON

Jesse reveals his love for Fender Super Reverb amps and a nostalgic yearning for 1980s Ibanez Artist guitars…

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

"It was a red 1968 Fender Mustang with the racing stripes across it. I had to mow yards in my neighbourhood where I lived and my dad said if I got enough money, he would match it. I had a pretty cool dad. So I got that Fender Mustang with the whammy bar and I pretended it was a Stratocaster. Before that I had two acoustic Silvertones that I bought at garage sales."

What was the last guitar you bought, and why?

"I bought a guitar yesterday! It was in Northampton, Massachusetts, at a local guitar store. It's an Alvarez acoustic from the 70s and it reminded me of my brother's guitar that I used to play while he was throwing papers to pay for it. I would go into his room and play, working out little basslines to *Tush* by ZZ Top or whatever because I didn't know chords. I mean, I've got a lot of guitars, but this one was the exact guitar my brother had, so I bought it yesterday."



Jesse's hollowbody King guitar is a one-off that was built for him by Blast Cult's Jason Burns, and features a Bigsby and TV Jones pickups

PHOTO BY DANIEL SANDA

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

"Well, I found a 1959 6120 Gretsch with the original Western leather and the branded 'G' on it. I bought it for $650 and that was in the 90s. That was a long time ago and now the guitar's worth a lot; it's incredibly expensive.

"But the most expensive guitar I own right now is one made by luthier Wayne Henderson. I'm told that Eric Clapton owns one and Ricky Skaggs, and some really serious players. I got that through a friend of mine who was very wealthy and loved my playing, so they helped me get it. It's got kind of an ornate inlay on it and it sounds unbelievable. I mean, every time I take it to the studio people won't stop playing it. It's almost like when you're holding this guitar it's beyond vibration. It's like the instrument is actually breathing, the top is so resonant."

> "My Wayne Henderson guitar is beyond vibration. It's like the instrument is actually breathing"

What's the strongest case of buyer's remorse you've ever had after buying gear?

"When I was a kid I bought a Hondo guitar that was terrible – no big surprise. But then I bought a Marshall combo amp that had the head inside of it. And it was terrible. It just sounded like a fly farting, you know what I mean? It was buzz-city. And so I immediately got rid of it. I then saved my money and got a black-panel [Fender] Super Reverb. I now collect those. I have a lot of amps – I have more amps than I have guitars, actually."

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

"Yes, I have. It happened during a divorce. When you get a divorce and you don't have any kids and you're a musician, then you just call your agent and say, 'Hey, book me forever… I want to leave, I gotta go work. I gotta go play.' But before I could take off I had these huge legal bills to pay for and it was either I give up part of my publishing or I pay this money. So I ended up selling that Gretsch I told you about. And I also sold a '59 Triumph Thunderbird, which was the exact same motorcycle that Marlon Brando rode in *The Wild One*…



PHOTO BY BACKSTAGE FLASH

"But, you know, at the end of the day it's just stuff and I got to keep all my songs. I'm not bitter about any of it. Things happen."

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"Well, there are two ways to think about it. There's obviously resale value. I know a lot of people who buy guitars who don't necessarily play; they want them in their portfolio and they hang on walls. But I don't want to say, 'Hey, you should buy this because of the investment and resale value…' You should buy what feels good to you – like when you sit down and you play the instrument. If you're struggling, or maybe it doesn't feel right or aesthetically it doesn't look like your thing, don't buy it – walk away. Don't let anyone talk you into buying something that's not you. I think the [best] advice is to buy the guitar *you* want, not what the sales guy wants you to have or what the resale value is."

When was the last time you stopped to stare in a guitar shop window and what were you looking at?

"It was yesterday and it's so weird. I saw this 80s Ibanez guitar, and a lot of these guitars don't have any real monetary value, but they have sentimental value. I think the reason why people love music is because they usually don't get past the first stuff they got turned onto, and I remember seeing this guitar when I was a kid. I think Skunk Baxter was playing one and I think Rick Derringer had one at one point. I like all those guys because God ain't making them any more. The younger set can call it 'dad rock' or 'classic rock' or whatever, but it's never gonna happen again. It was an Ibanez Artist – kinda like a Les Paul but with a double cutaway. And I looked at it and was like, 'Yeah, remember those?'"

If you had 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?

"Man, I don't know. That's hard to say because you're only as good as your amplifier. So I would say if you give me a black-panel Fender [amp] and a cheap Silvertone, I could do pretty good damage with that. But if you gave me a really nice Fender [guitar] and a cheap Silvertone amp… I mean, you could still get some cool stuff, but it would be a one-trick pony, wouldn't it? It would be like either you couldn't hear it or it would be the Hound Dog Taylor thing, the whole show. So I would say I would go with a cheaper guitar and a great amp."

If you could only use humbuckers or single coils for the rest of your career, which would you choose and why?

"It's hard to say because I really love soapbar pickups. I mean, there's all kinds of different pickups that I love besides those two, but I would have to say I'm more of a single-coil guy. I mean, I'm a Telecaster fanatic. And I think Leo Fender reinvented the universe when he made the Telecaster because it's just so simple and perfect. Yeah, I'm a single-coil guy." **[DM]**



Jesse Dayton and Samantha Fish tour Ireland and the UK from 19 to 30 October
www.jessedayton.com
www.samanthafish.com

JESSE'S GO-TO RIG

"We're on tour right now with Buddy Guy and, with the rig I'm using, I went real simple. I'm using these Tweed Fender Bassman reissues – two of those – and then I'm using a pretty basic pedalboard with MXR pedals, an analogue delay and the 70s Phaser [MXR 70s script Phase 90]. I use it sparingly just on little parts and then I have an MXR Tremolo and an MXR Booster; it's not a distortion pedal, it just boosts my signal with the natural distortion that I get out of the Bassmans and works perfectly. I like my distortion not to be super-crunchy, you know, I'm not a heavy metal guy. I like stuff where it's just breaking up and it's really warm à la Hendrix or Billy Gibbons. I play my King guitar, which is a one-of-a-kind that a friend of mine, Jason Burns, in London built for me. He owns this company called Blast Cult, but this is the very first one that he ever built. It's a hollowbody guitar with TV Jones pickups and a Bigsby."

Jesse takes to the stage with Samantha Fish on these shores once more this autumn in support of their album collaboration, *Death Wish Blues*

The MOD SQUAD

SCREW FIX

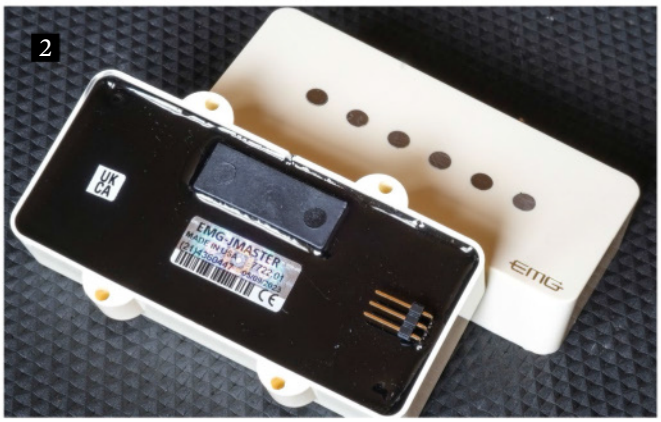
Modernist pickup maker turns its attention to the wild and wacky Fender Jazzmaster. Dave Burrluck gets his screwdriver out

When a press release dropped into our inbox announcing a new EMG pickup, we weren't expecting the brand's first foray into the world of the offset Fender Jazzmaster. Known for its modern active pickup designs – which the company has been making since 1976 – EMG almost seems a mismatch for the funky Jazzmaster, doesn't it? On the other hand, with the offset enjoying a huge revival, you might well ask, what took 'em so long?

There are actually two new releases. First, there's the EMG JMaster pickup set, which as usual includes a solderless wiring kit with a master volume and master tone, and costs £199 in black and £219 in ivory or white. Then there's the JMaster Pickguard System, including those pickups and also a full replacement for the Jazzmaster's scratchplate to which the new electronics are mounted. It retains the side-mounted 'rhythm circuit' controls but changes their function to include EMG's long-running EXG Guitar Expander, which simultaneously boosts the low and high frequencies, and the SPC 'Strat Presence Control' (aka the fat control mid-boost) or a 12dB clean boost. This is obviously more of an investment: the tortoiseshell 'plate with ivory JMaster pickups, for example, costs £359, while the black 'plate with black pickups and the white 'plate with white pickups are both £343 [pics 1, 2, 3 & 4].

The actual JMaster pickups follow EMG's relatively new Retro Active design and, says EMG, "feature Alnico V rods and wide stacked coils for a rich and balanced single coil tone... [with] a preamp design that gives the player a vintage feel and response with the added benefits of an active preamp".



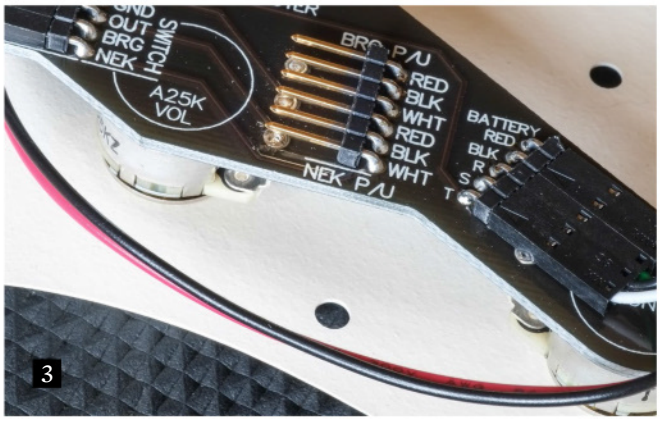


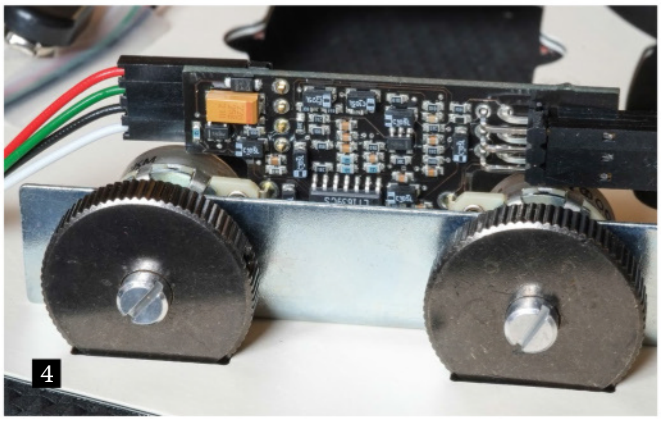
1. Designed for vintage-style Jazzmasters, the JMaster Pickguard System is an easy fit

2. The JMaster pickups are also available without the pickguard and come in three colours

3. The main circuit board is very neat and all the connections are solderless

4. The rhythm circuit's roller controls are retained but give us very different functions





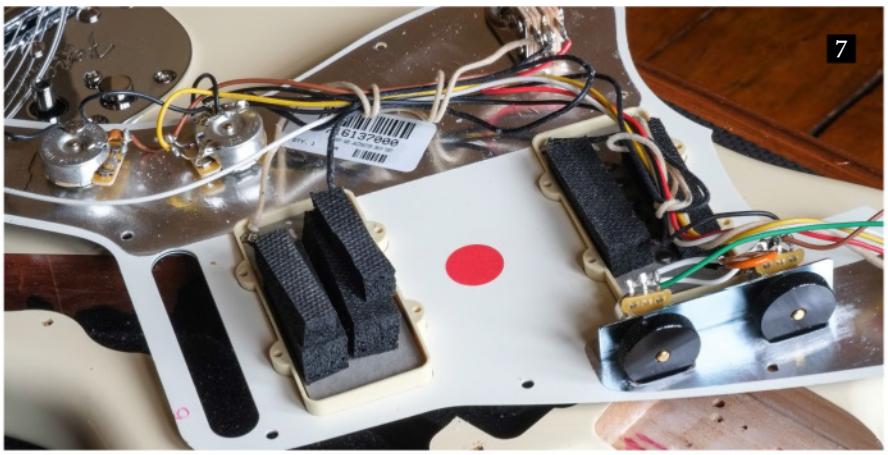
PHOTOS BY DAVE BURRLUCK



This EMG system keeps the vintage aesthetic intact. And, yes, the set includes a switch tip to match the pickup colour







5. Armed with a screwdriver and having capo'd the strings at the 1st fret, we unscrew the neck – that way we save a set of new strings

6. Off with the Fender pickguard...

7. Leo Fender's modular system means if you want to restore the guitar back to its original condition, it's easily done

PHOTOS BY DAVE BURRLUCK

While the new pickups will drop into any offset that already has Jazzmaster pickups, the JMaster Pickguard System is designed for pretty much vintage-style Jazzmasters only. With that in mind, we ordered up a Fender Vintera 60s Jazzmaster. This could be fun!

No Solder Zone

The most vivid example of Fender's modular approach to guitar making, the Jazzmaster's separate elements – neck, body, scratchplate (with loaded electronics), pickups, bridge and vibrato – can all be assembled and disassembled with a couple of cross-head screwdrivers [pics 5, 6 & 7]. Yes, in assembly you'd solder a ground wire from a pot casing on the scratchplate to the bridge or vibrato; in disassembly you can just cut this wire close to the pot casing it's soldered to. For the EMG makeover, you don't need that ground wire.

The Pickguard System is typically well packaged, and with the original scratchplate removed it's a simple job to get it working. You simply plug the supplied push-on leads onto the back of each pickup then to the main control plate and connect a nine-volt block battery to power the active circuitry. That's it. EMG sensibly suggests you plug in to an amp and test the functions using a small screwdriver to just tap on the pickup poles [pics 8 & 9].

In reality, you'll need to borrow the rubber cushions under the original pickups and use them here (a bit of a shame EMG didn't provide a couple of new cushions) and you'll need to wrap the nine-volt battery in a piece of foam, then find a place for it; I placed it to the side of the small pickup toggle switch. You also need to make sure all the leads fit in the cavities, too, which can be a little fiddly. And when rescrewing the scratchplate in place, start with the four screws on the extreme points of the 'plate – don't screw them fully down – then partially screw in the rest. When everything's lining up (and it's worth just plugging in again and checking everything is still working), you can screw down each screw, string up and go.

While it's a very easy install, the exception is that battery, which in these rechargeable times seems rather old-tech compared with the carefully created circuit boards and solderless connections. EMG quotes a long battery life of 400 hours, but just remember you'll have to remove the strings and bridge (which, admittedly, just lifts out) and those 13 scratchplate screws for a simple battery replacement.

Sounds

As with any pickup install, you need to set pickup heights, and EMG doesn't give us any specific guidance there. The pickups, says EMG, are identical (they're not bridge- or neck-position specific) and use Alnico V rods, so, presumably, they don't want to be too close to the strings. As any vintage-style Jazzmaster owner will attest, there's actually quite a difference in the tonality because of their respective placement: the neck can sound nicely plummy, the bridge is a much brighter, thinner contrast. Certainly, listening to the Fender Vintera with its original electronics, that was the case, and without a little taming the bridge pickup was excessively bright for my tastes. The four-screw mounting of each pickup lets you tilt the pickups in both axes, but it's hard to do that in playing position. You're best off laying the guitar flat, tweaking and then play-testing.

So, although it looks like we have the standard rhythm circuit, we don't. "Both the EXG and SPC/Boost controls are engaged when turned towards the bridge and bypassed when turned fully toward the neck," says EMG. "All controls affect the master signal, and are applied to whichever pickups are selected by the three-position toggle." And with the rhythm circuit switch pushed towards the neck, we voice the mid-boost SPC; with it pushed away from the neck, that switches from a mid-boost to a clean-boost.

If you're new to the world of active pickups such as these EMGs, there's a quite unnerving experience when you plug in: absolute silence. Although Jazzmaster pickups are typically wound so they're hum-cancelling with both on, the individual units can pick up relatively loud hum, more like a P-90 than a standard single coil. Not here. Until you hit a string, you honestly wonder if your guitar is working.



8

MOD SPEC

PRODUCT: EMG JMaster Pickguard System
PRICE: £359, as reviewed; the standalone JMaster pickups start at £199
SKILL LEVEL: Easy, reversible fit, no soldering necessary
www.emgpickups.com

PROS & CONS

PROS All the advantages of active pickups, such as no noise and buffered output; vintage-style voicing; SPC, EXG and clean boost enhance versatility

CONS You need to find space for the battery; it's designed for vintage-style Jazzmasters only

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

Also, with their buffered output, you're not troubled by cable capacitance.

With the rhythm circuit roller controls in their full-on forward bypass positions, the voicing of the JMasters is pretty impressive, capturing more of a vintage voice than a boosted or enhanced sound. That said, the high-end at the bridge is subtly sweetened, although it does sound thinner than the fuller voice we hear from the neck pickup. These two extremes combine beautifully with both pickups on, just like a good Jazzmaster should.

But pulling in the extra tone-shapers, things go up a level or two. The SPC is the perfect partner to fill out the bridge voicing;



9

> "The voicing of the JMasters is pretty impressive, capturing more of a vintage voice than a boosted or enhanced sound"

it's not overdone but thickens things up in pleasing fashion. The EXG effectively does the opposite by boosting the lows and highs simultaneously, which makes the both-on combination, or indeed the neck pickup, sound magnified and quite magnificent – there's studio-quality jangle. The clean boost can't be voiced with the SPC (it's either/or), but it not only provides a bit of a solo boost, it works really well just to raise the output level when recording, something that this system excels at.

Final Thoughts

A theme we're seeing more and more of across the pickup industry is diversity. Not too long ago you could buy any pickup you wanted so long as it was in one of the four main footprints: Strat and Tele, humbucker and P-90. That's certainly not the case now, and these EMG JMaster pickups are the first retrofit active pickups for the Jazzmaster that we're aware of. They come with pretty much vintage-style voicing, too, but with all the usual no-noise advantages of active pickups. The tone-shaping extras on the Pickup System version (available separately) work perfectly to enhance the JMasters, subtly or quite considerably. You do need a battery, but that seems a small compromise when the sounds are as impressive, and as practical, as these. G

8. With the EMG pickups wired in, it's best to test the system before you screw it all down

9. Aside from those discreet gold EMG logos, no-one will know you've gone active

CHECK-UP TIME

If your guitar has a mysterious problem, don't be afraid to get it looked at by a pro



If you've covered all bases at home and are still having issues with your electrics, take the guitar for a thorough check and setup

Q From time to time I've played guitar in my bedroom, and prefer the Gibson scale length with light strings. For some years I've lusted after a Les Paul, but I prefer the look of Kluson-style machineheads ('snot coloured', as they were called in *International Musician And Recording World* in my youth). Your reviews of the Epiphone 'Inspired by Gibson' convinced me that the cost of one of these would be justifiable, but that I needed to get out to try it in person.

In the end, I got to a local-ish shop where I could park. They'd had an Inspired by Gibson 1959 Les Paul, but that had gone by the time I got there, so I tried a 50s and a 60s. To my surprise, I was blown away by the sound of the neck pickup on the 50s (ProBucker 1) and much preferred it to the sound of the 60s, so I've gone for the 50s and am trying to get to grips with it.

I've restrung it with Ernie Ball 0.008s, and adjusted the pickups so that each seems balanced across all strings, and individually they have a similar volume when on full (although the neck offers a lot more treble). But two things seem odd...

First, with both pickups on full, the volume is a bit less than with either alone, so I mostly turn the neck down a little. Some of what I've read implied that might be a phase issue, so I checked the wiring colours and both have the same colours either side of their connectors, so no obvious reversal.

Second, when I tried it in the shop, I noticed that going from sixth to fifth string there seemed to be a slightly odd change in tone. Now that I've restrung them and checked the intonation, this still annoys me: if I play root/5 or root/6 shuffle on the sixth and fifth strings, or indeed 5/root everything is fine. But when I move up a 1st position minor pentatonic, the fifth string sounds a lot bassier than the sixth string, almost as if the pitch was lower (it isn't). Any suggestions for this, please?

Ken Moffat

A Hi Ken, glad you're enjoying your Epiphone, but I'm a bit flummoxed by your problems, at least your description. First off, you say you're hearing *more* treble response from your *neck* pickup. That's unusual! Then you say you get less volume with both pickups on. Again, while it's a different voice (not least that in the middle position on your three-way, the two pickups are combined in parallel) it shouldn't be noticeably quieter and it shouldn't get louder if you turn *down* the neck pickup volume. Then there's that unusual tonality you describe on the low E and A strings. Hmm.

I've got a feeling that the pickups, when combined, are out of phase. For example, when they are and you switch to the middle both-on position (with both volumes full up) there's typically a much thinner and trebly sound. But if you back off one volume control, some fullness returns, creating a more usable Peter Green-like sound. Although you've checked the wiring, it could simply be that one pickup has a flipped magnet (a fault in manufacturing, perhaps?) or is, despite your visual check, wired incorrectly.

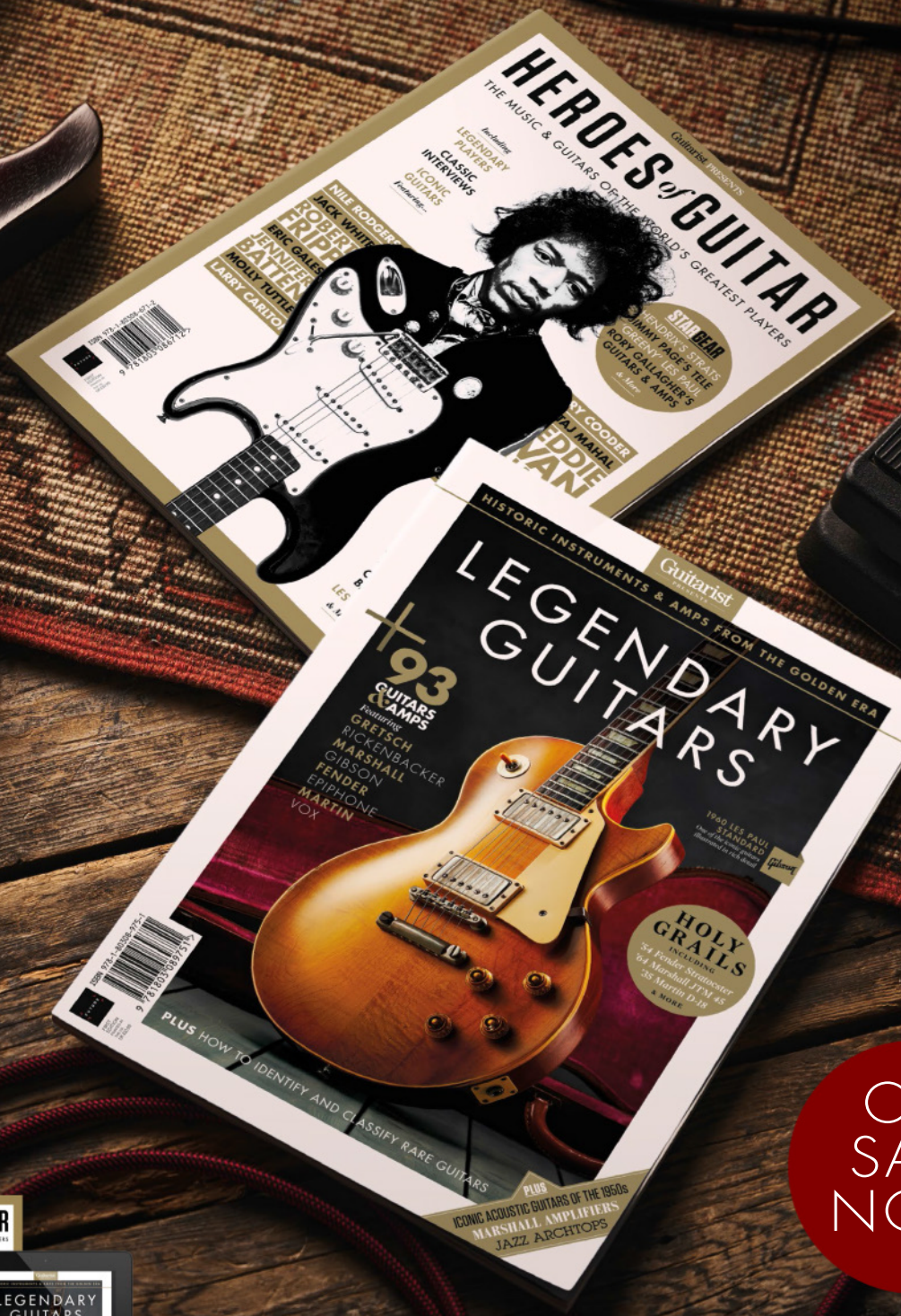
Personally, I'd advise you to get another opinion on this mystery. Does one of your mates have a Les Paul that you could compare yours with, for instance? Obviously, it's advisable to nip back to the shop and ask if someone could check over your guitar and then ask if they could set it up. It won't cost much, but then you'll be sure it's not a fault or something you've done that's causing you the problems you describe. Very best of luck!

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.

Guitarist PRESENTS

DEEPEN YOUR GUITAR KNOWLEDGE

With our reference-grade bookazines that assemble the best of our classic features and interviews in beautiful standalone editions



ON SALE NOW



AVAILABLE TO ORDER ONLINE IN PRINT OR DIGITAL EDITIONS AT
www.magazinesdirect.com/guides-and-specials/categories/music/
OR FIND THEM TODAY AT WHSMITHS (UK) AND BARNES & NOBLE (US)



Huw Price's **Nitty Gritty**

Find out how the physical properties of cables can interact with your guitar's circuitry

Speaker & Instrument Cables

Cable manufacturers often take their lead from the hi-fi industry when it comes to marketing. Terms such as oxygen-free, skin effect, directionality and dielectric biasing are bandied about and, while there may be a scientific basis for some of these claims, the idea is to make customers think there's always something better out there.

Not all cables are created equal, but factors that affect their sonic characteristics can usually be measured and quantified. As musicians, we are primarily concerned with instrument and speaker cables. So, what's the difference?

Speaker Cable

Cables used to connect amplifiers to speakers are very different from the cables used to connect instruments to amplifiers or pedals to pedals. Speaker cable is by far the simplest, and the two key requirements are adequate power handling and low resistance. The object is to transfer all the amp's power to the speaker without wasting any as heat.

Hi-fi enthusiasts make all sorts of claims about speaker cable, and if you're listening to a halfway decent system, you will almost certainly hear a difference if you change from cheap bell wire to just about any commercial speaker cable. Perhaps you'll notice extra clarity, tighter bass or crisper stereo imaging. Or maybe you won't.

Either way, guitar amplifiers and speakers are not high-fidelity devices and the amp's circuitry and the speaker together limit high- and low-frequency response. They also operate in mono, so stereo imaging isn't a consideration. Also bear in mind that hi-fi speakers may be several metres away from the amplifier, but for guitar purposes the cable length (and resistance) will be far shorter.

Consider the type of speaker wire used in vintage amplifiers. Vox used something akin to bell wire and 1960s Fenders had the same cloth-covered wire they used to hook up the amplifier circuitry. In Tweeds, you often find the same brown plastic insulated wire that was used for the two-prong mains plugs.

If fancy speaker wire makes such a noticeable difference over a 12-inch run, why hasn't it become commonplace to retrofit vintage amps with more expensive speaker cable? And why isn't there a raft of guitar speaker cable shoot-out demos on YouTube? The answer is that any differences, if they even exist, are so miniscule that most of us can't hear them. Granted, you'll sometimes see fancier speaker cable in boutique guitar combos, but we suspect that has more to do with marketing psychology than audio performance. Speaker cable is usually sold by the metre, so it doesn't cost much to experiment. Try comparing some with regular stranded copper wire from a mains cable while you're at it. Just saying...



Speaker cables are simpler than instrument cable but can handle more power

If you're in doubt as to whether a cable is intended for speakers or instruments, don't use it for speakers

For single speakers you'll need two lengths of wire: one for the positive and one for the negative. If you're hooking up multiple speakers in parallel, take care to connect positive to positive and negative to negative to keep them all in phase.

At one end, the wires have to be soldered to a jack plug to connect to the amplifier, and using super chunky hi-fi-style wire will make that very difficult. For separate cabs, a jack plug is required at both ends, but in combos the speaker ends will need to be soldered to spade connectors or directly onto the speaker tags. The latter is preferable for reliability.

Speaker wires usually run parallel to one another, or they may be twisted together. The wires may also be enclosed within a layer of plastic insulation, which can make speaker and instrument cables appear identical. If you're in doubt as to whether a cable is intended for speakers or instruments, don't use it for speakers. We'll explain why later.


CARL MARTIN
Whammy
DigiTech
SPARK
tc electronic
INSTRUMENT
INSTRUMENT



High-end instrument cables, such as these examples by Mogami and Providence will exhibit minimal handling noise

Instrument Cable

Instrument cable is coaxial, which means there's an insulated signal carrying centre wire enclosed within an outer layer of braided wire. It's very similar to the braided pickup leads and hookup wires used in vintage Gibson guitars, but instrument cable also has insulation protecting the braided layer.

The braided layer is used to shield the signal wire from noise sources such as computer monitors, radio transmissions, fluorescent light interference and mains hum. The idea is to optimise signal-to-noise ratio; the positive signal wire is soldered to the tip connector of a jack plug and the negative braided wire is connected to the sleeve.

Even though it's shielded, coaxial instrument cable can still be susceptible to noise, and the longer a cable is, the greater potential it has for picking up noise. Static charge can also build up when the braided layer rubs against the insulation and results in crackling noises when the cable is moved or handled.

Coaxial instrument cable is susceptible to noise: the longer a cable is, the greater the potential for noise

To prevent this, any high-quality instrument cable should have an electrostatic shield that kills the crackle by discharging static to ground. If you're allowed to audition a cable in a shop, plug it into an amp and try bending it by hand and slapping it on the floor to check if it's noisy. If it is, don't buy it because the problem will become worse.

In electrical terms, the signal level generated by a passive pickup is tiny, so the signal carrying wire in an instrument cable doesn't need to be that substantial. In comparison, the output level generated by a guitar amplifier is huge and speaker wires must be able to handle the power.

If you inadvertently use an instrument cable to connect your amp and speaker, the conductor may heat up and present the amp with a higher impedance. More powerful amps may even cause the plastic insulation to melt, and if the wires short out, damage to the amplifier can be considerable.

Misdirection

Some high-end instrument cables are described as 'directional', but that doesn't mean the electrons only flow in one direction. Instead, one end should always connect to the guitar and the other to the amp. Directional cables are made with dual-conductor microphone cable, rather than single-core coax cable.

Let's say the conductors are coloured black and white. At the amp end, the white connects to the jack's tip and the black wire is twisted together with the shield and soldered to the jack's sleeve, aka ground. At the guitar end, only the white and black wires are connected to the jack and the shield is cut away so it 'floats'.

'Oriented' may be a more accurate term than directional, and some claim these cables are great for tone and provide superior noise rejection. Pete Cornish cables are supposedly made this way and are very highly regarded. Directional cables are sometimes described as 'semi-balanced', which is really just a meaningless marketing term.

Wiry Tone

Instrument cable can have a strong influence on guitar tone and the primary cause is cable capacitance. If you place two electrical conductors in close proximity and separate them with a non-conductive material, you have the makings of a capacitor. Considering the way that instrument cables are constructed, with an insulating layer separating the signal wire and braid, a coaxial cable is essentially a tubular capacitor. Using any instrument cable is tantamount to placing a capacitor between the hot connection of your pickup and ground and that results in treble roll-off.

Instrument cable capacitance is typically rated between 50pF and 150pF per metre, which equates to the bright capacitor values used in some amplifiers. Cable capacitance is proportional to length, so four metres of 50pF per metre cable will be closer to 200pF.

As capacitance increases, the treble roll-off encroaches further down into the guitar's frequency response. Consequently, longer cables will make your guitar tone darker. But is that necessarily a bad thing?

In hi-fi terms, the 'perfect' cable would transfer 100 per cent of the signal without any change in frequency response and no added noise. In other words, sonic transparency. As we mentioned earlier, guitars and amps are not hi-fi devices and some players prefer to use longer cables, but the reason isn't entirely attributable to treble roll-off.

Pickups, potentiometers, tone capacitors and cables combine to make guitar circuits resistive, inductive and capacitive. Rather than a simple loss of treble above a

Instrument cable can have a strong influence on guitar tone and the primary cause is cable capacitance



Low-capacitance cable can enhance the clarity and detail of your tone, whereas high capacitance can help smooth the tones of brighter-sounding guitars

certain frequency, the result is a resonance peak around that roll-off frequency. The frequency range at which the peak occurs, combined with the width and intensity of the peak, has a big impact on the resulting guitar tone.

Guitar electronics expert Bill Lawrence noted that using a 300pF cable with a Stratocaster results in a 6kHz resonance peak and sparkling highs. The curly cables that Jimi Hendrix liked to use measured closer to 2400pF, which subsequently shifts the resonance frequency closer to 2kHz. Bump the volume up a bit and that gives you a midrange boost.

Most modern high-end instrument cable is designed for low capacitance and unrestricted treble response, which we hear as clarity and detail. If that's your preference, check out the manufacturer's specs and buy low capacitance cable. On the other hand, when you're shooting for specific vintage tones, then low capacitance cable may undermine your efforts.

Want to experiment? Try soldering a bunch of capacitors onto a rotary switch, connect it across the positive and negative tags of your output socket and listen to the tone changing. Or consider soldering a Neutrik NP2RX-Timbre plug at one end.

Naturally bright guitars may sound better to you with higher capacitance cable. Conversely, low-capacitance cable may improve the clarity and definition of guitars with darker-sounding humbuckers. Try using a capacitive cable to refine overdrive and distortion tones, and low capacitance when you need sparkle and chime. Don't focus exclusively on the treble response because the midrange tone is arguably more important. As ever, it's really about mixing and matching gear to achieve specific results and choosing the right cable for the job is something else you can factor in.

www.huwpriceguitar.com

Multiple Choice

Even players who have used many different cabs in the past can find the amount of options a little intimidating. Zilla Cabs' Paul Gough lends a hand

Choosing the right speaker cabinet for a new amp can be hard, and the same goes when upgrading cabs. A lot of us have done what you'd hope is the sensible thing and chosen the manufacturer's recommendation – the one that comes with the amp – but this isn't always the safest bet. By now, you've probably noticed my belief that there are no rights or wrongs in music, just opinions, and however well intentioned or well informed, the amp may have been intended to be used in a different way to how you had planned. Sadly, there are also a few situations in which the cab is the result of a couple of well-known speakers chucked in a box with little thought. As a cab maker, I like to chat through key points with a customer, to narrow down the best individual solution. Here, I aim to bring together some of the topics we've discussed previously, to help you find the necessary and most relevant information when buying a new cab.

Let's start by discussing *when* you're going to want a new cab. I have customers now who have bought, and kept, more than a dozen cabs! Assuming you're not as bad as that, I'll start with the obvious stuff. The three main times you'll be looking at a new cab are: when moving to a head from a combo; when you want to add to a combo but without changing the existing amp; and when there is a change in circumstance, such as reducing weight without compromising too much on the original sound. I would call the last part functionality, and I think that's a good place to start.

Function Over Form

The function of a cab is going to change a little for everyone. I mean, it helps you get loud, but other than that, the key features of the cab that help solve a problem for one person is going to differ between people. Ask yourself: what is the main objective in getting a new cab?

Common points here are to reduce weight, but within this there are components that are more important to different people. A bad back unfortunately comes up a lot; let's face it, none of us are getting any younger. In this case, a 4x12 is probably out of the question. If you just want to shave a few kilos off, changing the speakers to ones with a neo magnet (much lighter) could be a good shout. But if you need to achieve more than that, reducing the cab size and number of speakers could be the answer. However, when doing this, going as small as possible isn't always your best bet...

Sometimes, moving from a larger cab (say, a medium sized 2x12) with standard weighted speakers, to a large 1x12 with a neo speaker is enough. This could mean a 15kg 1x12, rather than 25kg 2x12, a considerable saving in weight but also an acceptable compromise in fullness and impact of sound. Expanding this further, moving to a small 1x10, saving a further 6kg, can be a step too far for many players, losing a lot of the desirable features of the original sound.

> "A vertical cab gives you a good spread of sound, is easier to lift and is lighter than the alternatives"



A matching 212 cabinet looks good with PRS's HDRX head – but a different cab might open up new tonal possibilities

Maybe you just want something easier to transport. This is usually achieved by a bit of weight saving and a bit of overall size reduction. In this case, choosing a vertical cab can be a good shout. But the first thing to consider is how wide is your amp? And will it fit on top? This can determine whether a vertical cab is a viable option for you. In fact, if you're in the market for a new amp, it's worth considering whether a vertical cab could be the right choice for your rig; choosing a smaller amp, and therefore the option of a vertical cab, can give you a good spread of sound, is easier to lift, and is also lighter than the alternatives.

There are plenty more points that come under functionality, which I'll delve into next issue, where we can look at the technical stuff, which is nowhere near as scary as you might think! G



A multi-speaker closed-back cab is a classic pairing for a Marshall head – but practical factors such as weight matter, too



Rod Brakes' Classic Gear

As Epiphone moves to Japan the reintroduced Les Paul inherits mini humbuckers

Gibson Les Paul Deluxe

Les Paul's initial tenure as a Gibson signature artist lasted approximately a decade. Having first lent his name to the firm's 1952 single-cutaway debut solidbody Goldtop, the Les Paul brand was dropped in 1963 when the entire pointed double-cutaway line was redesignated SG.

Throughout the 60s, single-cutaway Les Pauls were seen in the hands of many a guitar hero, including Keith Richards, Jeff Beck and Eric Clapton. Consequently, these old-style instruments became highly sought after. With a renewed enthusiasm, Les reacquainted himself with Gibson, telling the company's owners CMI, "The kids own rock 'n' roll, and it's just getting started." Subsequently, with the guitarist back on board, the Les Paul brand was officially reinstated with the release of the dual pickup/maple top Custom and Standard models in 1968.

While the black Custom sported humbuckers, the gold Standard was equipped with P-90s. This Goldtop reissue is a relatively scarce guitar as its single-coil pickups were superseded by mini humbuckers the following year. Renamed the Les Paul Deluxe, it made great use of the same pickup design common to Epiphone guitars built during the 60s, before production relocated to Japan in 1970. Mounted in surrounds made using modified P-90 covers, these smaller 'buckers give the Les Paul Deluxe a brighter tone, which is often described as sounding somewhere between a single coil and a regular-sized humbucker.

Appearing in the 1970 *Gibson Guitars: Les Paul Models* catalogue, the Deluxe was listed alongside the Custom and Jumbo Flat-Top as a "high impedance" instrument in order to help differentiate it from the newly introduced "low impedance" (pickup) Personal and Professional solidbodies. "This Les Paul model is 'deluxe' in every way. Fine performance and outstanding styling," reads the entry. "Gold finished carved maple top with laminated mahogany back and neck. Two powerful chrome-plated humbucking pickups... Three-piece laminated mahogany neck with adjustable truss rod. Graceful single cutaway design."

Pete Townshend is probably the best-known proponent of the Les Paul Deluxe as he used them with the Who throughout 1970s and beyond. Thin Lizzy's Scott Gorham, too, famously played the Deluxe, although he later stated, "It was all to do with price, because we just didn't have enough money at that point for the Les Paul Standard. I got as much out of that as I possibly could for my talent but as soon as we started to make money I was onto bigger and better things."

> It was the best-selling Les Paul model throughout the early 70s, with more than 30,000 shipped

Sales proved phenomenally good after it appeared on Gibson price lists in 1969. Indeed, it was the best-selling Les Paul model throughout the early 70s by some way, with more than 30,000 shipped between 1970 and 1974 (by comparison, less than 26,000 Les Paul Customs left the Gibson factory in the same period).

However, come 1975, the Deluxe's popularity waned considerably and it was eclipsed by the Custom in the latter part of the decade. It was eventually discontinued in 1985. Right now, Gibson is offering the Les Paul 70s Deluxe in 70s Cherry Sunburst, Dark Wine Red and Gold Top finishes.



4

With less ferrous metal, reduced windings and a narrower aperture than Gibson's full-size PAF 'bucker, the mini version has a brighter, thinner sound

The Evolution of the Les Paul Deluxe

1952
Les Paul Model introduced; single cutaway; dual P-90s; gold finish (SG-style late 1960)

Early 60s
Mini humbucker designed (appears on Epiphone models)

1968
Single-cutaway design reintroduced (Les Paul Custom and Standard models)

1969
Les Paul Deluxe appears on Gibson price lists

1970
Les Paul Deluxe shipped; dual mini humbuckers; 'pancake' body; 3-piece mahogany neck; gold finish

1971
Cherry Sunburst, Cherry and Walnut finishes

1972
Tobacco Sunburst finish (concurrent with Cherry Sunburst)

1975
3-piece maple neck; Wine Red, Natural and sparkle finishes

1977
Solid mahogany body (with maple cap)

1985
Discontinued



1973 Gibson Les Paul Deluxe

1. SERIAL NUMBER
Six digits stamped on rear of headstock

2. HEADSTOCK
Mother-of-pearl Gibson logo; "Les Paul Model" silkscreen logo; "Made in USA" stamped on rear; black finish

3. PLASTICS
"Deluxe" embossed b/w 'bell' truss-rod cover; white keystone tuner buttons; white switch ring (labelled "rhythm" and "treble"); white switch tip; single-layer white pickguard; two white pickup surrounds; six nylon saddles; four gold 'reflector' knobs; single-layer jack plate

4. HARDWARE
Six Kluson Deluxe tuners; two strap buttons; chrome-plated: two pickup covers, pickguard bracket; Tune-o-matic bridge and stop tailpiece

5. PICKUPS & ELECTRONICS
Two mini humbuckers; four pots (two volume, two tone); two tone capacitors; three-way selector switch; side-mounted jack

6. BODY
Single cutaway; three-piece 'pancake' mahogany/maple/mahogany; single-bound arched maple top with gold finish

7. NECK
Three-piece mahogany; volute; 24¾-inch scale length; 16th fret body join; single-bound rosewood fretboard with trapezoid inlays; 22 frets

***Guitarist* would like to thank World Guitars for showing us this incredible example**

PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS



David Davidson's Vintage Icons

Is this slab-body guitar an experimental model that never made it into production?

1960 Gibson SG Special Prototype



A slab body with pointed horns render this guitar a missing link between Venetian- and Florentine-cutaway SG Specials

"This is a Gibson SG Special-style prototype guitar from 1960, and it doesn't say 'Les Paul' on the headstock. Les Paul's relationship with Gibson deteriorated for a period of time and his contract eventually expired. [First shipped with rounded double-cutaways in early 1959 after transitioning from a single-cutaway design, the Les Paul Special was rebranded SG Special in late 1959 before changing to pointed double-cutaways in 1961.] With dual P-90s, dot inlays, three-a-side tuners, and so on, it's clearly based on the SG Special; the only difference is – and it's a major one – this guitar does not feature body contours.

"When I got this guitar years ago, there were a number of things running through my head. I mean, it's a really interesting piece. Was it a mistake? Was it an employee's guitar? Was it a prototype for a guitar that Gibson hadn't yet made? By the time this guitar was built they had already made the prototype for the Les Paul SG that had all the bevels, so they knew how to do it. And that really made me consider – could it be a prototype for a model Gibson never actually put into production?

"I was talking with a friend over at Gibson about it – just a casual conversation – and I asked them, 'What do you think about this slab-body SG?' and the subject came up that maybe Gibson was just trying to make a cheaper model. Think about the early Fender Mustang without body contours [1964 to 1969]. Having a slab body would take away one or two steps in the manufacturing process, which should, in theory, reduce the cost. Could it have been an idea for a standalone model that was slightly cheaper than the SG Special? It brings up a great debate: what were they really trying to do here? It's so unusual.

> "It's a really interesting piece. Was it a mistake? Was it a prototype?"

"All that extra mahogany they left on the guitar makes it sound great! In fact, it has similar sonic properties to a Goldtop. It's thicker, heavier and it really does sound like one. I have a 50-watt 'Plexi' I play through a [Marshall model] 1936 2x12 speaker cab, and if you close your eyes, you think you're hearing a Goldtop – like a '54 wraparound one. It sounds chunky. It's not as thin and waiflike as an SG Special. Sometimes an SG Special can sound a bit like that, which is why a lot of people prefer playing the SG Juniors. It's just like comparing the earlier Les Paul Specials and Les Paul Juniors; most people, including myself, tend to like the single-pickup guitars better. But because this prototype guitar sounds so much like a Goldtop, it's more appealing to me than a regular production model SG Special.

"Gibson has a record of this guitar, but they don't have any records saying it was supposed to be a prototype or that it was supposed to be a different model. Gibson certainly made cheaper, simplified versions of the SG Special years down the line, but my feeling is this 1960 guitar shows they investigated making a cheaper SG Special without a bevelled body very early on. In the end, they may have figured it was cheaper for them to just make one kind of body, rather than two. That's my take. But, like I mentioned, my friend at Gibson's feeling was that it could have been a standalone model. Having said all that, there's nothing solid to back those theories.

"It's not just that this guitar is the only non-contoured SG Special I've seen; I haven't even heard of another like it. I've asked around, but everyone says, 'That's the only one I'm aware of.' I wish I had another one in black because Kirk Hammett would certainly buy it from me. It would be just fantastic looking in black. That would've been cool because then I would have had a black SG Junior, Special, Standard and Custom. That would be a good photograph!

"I always said that one day I'll find myself a black SG Special. I've had a black Les Paul Special from '57, but I sold it a long time ago. I bought it back in the 90s along with a cherry one and later put them in the Songbirds Guitar Museum (Gibson made a small run of cherry Les Paul Specials in '57). A friend of mine saw both of those guitars in my store one day and said, 'I just have to have them.' I told him they're going to be a fortune because I can't replace them, especially the black one. But he picked at me for a few hours until I gave him an obscene price. He said, 'That's ridiculous!' and I told him, 'Okay, I'll keep them.' Then he goes, 'But I'll pay ridiculous!'" **[RB]**

Vintage guitar veteran David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York
www.wellstrungguitars.com / info@wellstrungguitars.com / 001 (516) 221-0563



David Davidson has come across countless SG Specials but has never seen or heard of one like this before

PHOTOS BY PAIGE DAVIDSON

Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks



Crosspicking Blues

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Lewis Pequeño Bastardo & Vox AC15 C1
Difficulty ★★★★☆ | 15 mins per example

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN in a situation where an idea didn't feel as easy to play as it was to dream up? Most of us have – and the barrier is generally technique. This doesn't have to mean rippling neo-classical arpeggios, it can happen in the blues or any other genre, for that matter. However, sometimes it's hard to know how to go about solving issues such as this without feeling condemned to a punishing practice schedule akin to 'technique bootcamp'.

One genre where advanced picking is put to more melodic use is bluegrass, which heavily features licks and arpeggios across the strings, often played with a technique called crosspicking. I've played some examples in this style over a 12-bar backing this month. If you look at Example 4 you'll see that this sequence is alternate-picked, even though that doesn't initially seem the most intuitive way to tackle it.

Many players would think of this in groups of three: two downstrokes followed by an upstroke. This isn't 'wrong', but try it and you'll become fatigued much more quickly. It's also more difficult to seamlessly integrate alternate picked lines. Which brings me to another point: working on this technique will improve your picking in all areas, including single-note lines. It optimises your picking-hand technique in a way that practising single-note lines exclusively doesn't.

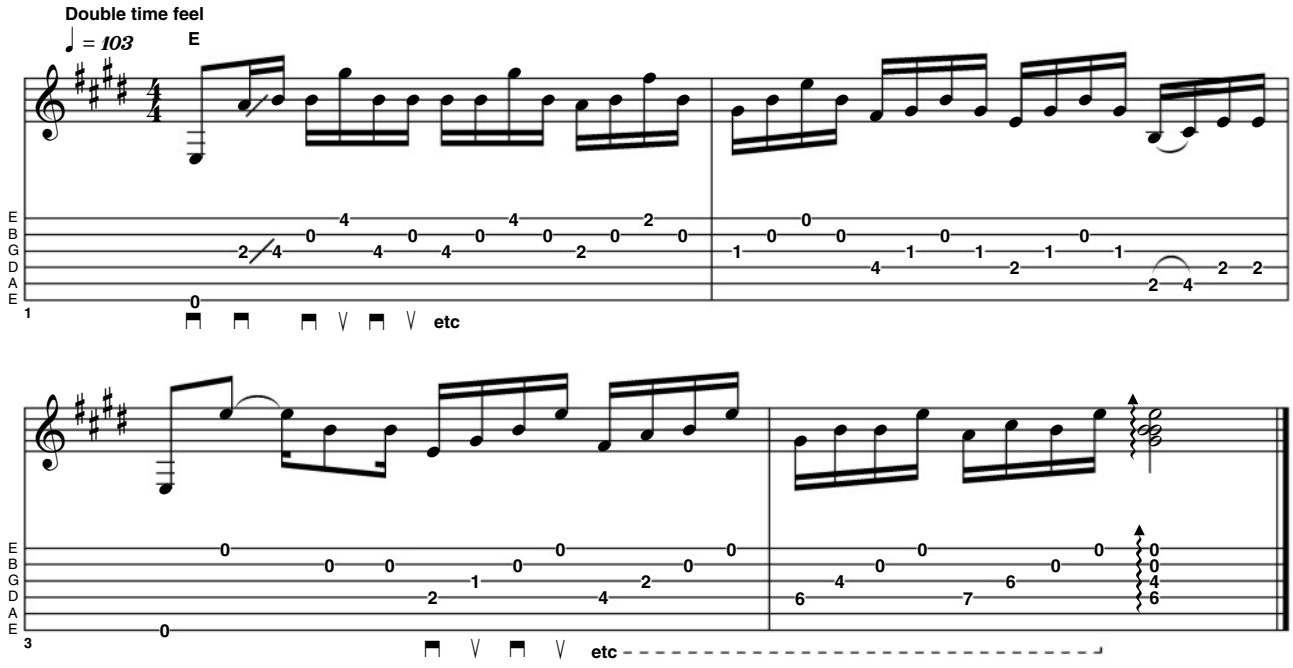
One final tip: hold the pick at an angle to the strings. Most of us angle the pick diagonally somewhat, rather than hitting the string at 180 degrees, but I also mean tilt the pick so that the point slants slightly upwards (towards the ceiling) or downwards (towards the floor), whichever feels most comfortable – or maybe even a mixture of both! This helps avoid the pick becoming trapped between the strings as you crosspick. Hope you enjoy and see you next time!



Richard Barrett's album, *Colours*, (complete with backing tracks), is available now from iTunes and Amazon

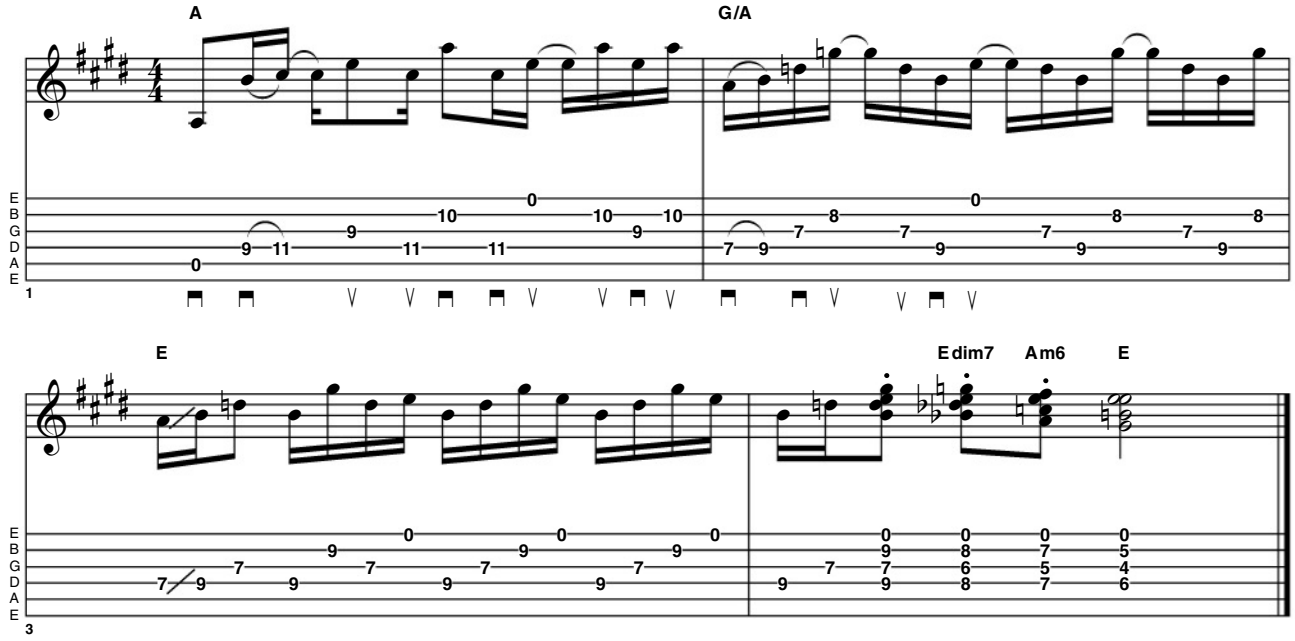
Example 1

WE'VE ACTUALLY STARTED with one of the trickier lines. Alternate picking patterns such as this can go 'against the grain' at first, but do persevere because it will save so much strain on your picking arm/hand. The pick strokes are marked here to set you on the right path, as they are in the George Harrison style arpeggios in bars 3 and 4. Try this at speed, then apply this motion to any slow practice you undertake, otherwise you may be rehearsing a movement that can't be duplicated at speed.



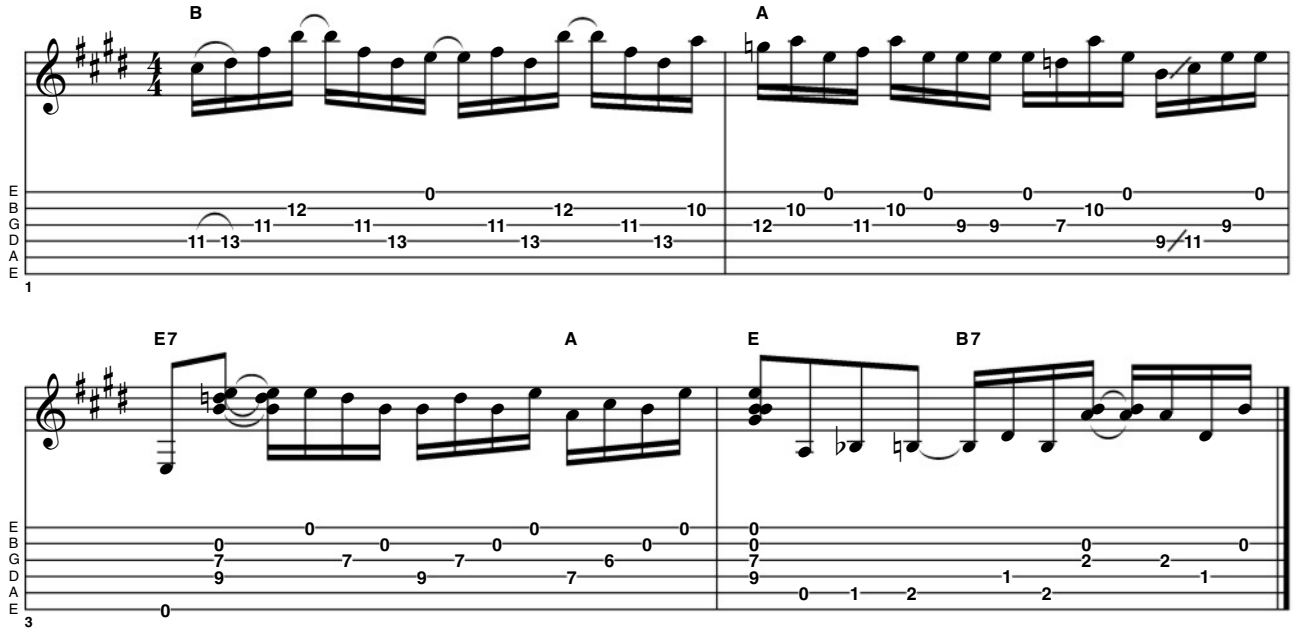
Example 2

PRESUMING A SEMIQUAVER alternate-picking pattern (starting with a downstroke) is key, but this doesn't always mean picking every note. Check bars 1 and 2 to see the held/tied notes. There are also a couple of hammer-ons and a slide that are obviously not picked. In these situations, resume the alternate picking – as if you had been picking every semiquaver! This is simpler to do than it is to explain, so check the transcription and/or video for some hints.



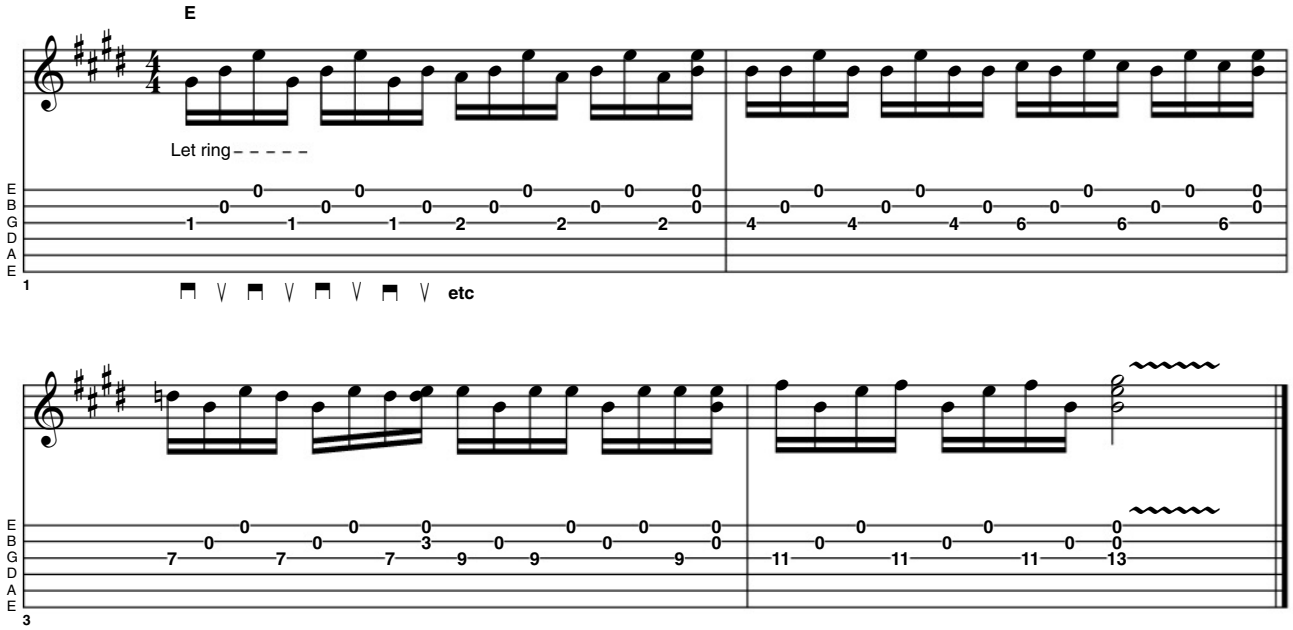
Example 3

UNASHAMEDLY 'BORROWING' FROM STEVE HOWE here, keep the advice from Example 2 in mind. Some of the notes are tied/not picked, so resume from where you would be if you had picked them to avoid reversing the pattern and getting tangled up. Bar 2 features some tricky fretting-hand shifts, so watching the video may be helpful. At times like this, it's good to have your picking-hand mechanics as automatic and relaxed as possible.



Example 4

MORE OF AN EXERCISE THAN A LICK, this is nonetheless still a melodic pattern. Played with alternating down- and upstrokes, this type of crosspicking is known in bluegrass circles as a 'forward roll'. 'Pickslanting', a technique where you slant the pick slightly towards or away from you, helps avoid getting the tip of the pick trapped between the strings. As with Example 1, try this at speed before practising slowly to make sure your technique isn't holding you back.



Hear It Here

BRAD PAISLEY
PLAY



As the title suggests, this album features Brad demonstrating how and why his reputation as a masterful player has spread far and wide. He uses a dizzying variety of techniques, but cross- and alternate picking feature heavily among these. There's plenty of electric and acoustic wizardry to be heard throughout the album, but start at the beginning with *Huckleberry Jam*, then check out *Departure* and *Playing With Fire*. Honourable mention should also go to the Eric Johnson vibe in *Cliffs Of Rock City*!

TONY RICE
CHURCH STREET BLUES



An acoustic player rather than electric, Tony nevertheless shows himself here in this record from 1983 to be a master of crosspicking and integrating melodic lines and chord shapes. Even if you only listen to this from a technical standpoint, the playing is sheer craftsmanship – and these skills can translate to acoustic or electric blues. Start with the title track, but be sure to check out his single-note soloing on *Cattle In The Cane* and *Jerusalem Ridge*, which features some nice twists on the minor pentatonic.

DOC WATSON
DOC WATSON



Released way back in 1964, Doc Watson was tearing into cross- and alternate picking way ahead of the curve. Again, we're focusing on an acoustic player, but these techniques are completely transferable to (and, in many cases, easier on) the electric. Check out *Nashville Blues* to hear integrated chords and melody, then *Black Mountain Rag* for some single-note soloing. Finally, hear his complex accompaniment to *Tom Dooley*, with the addition of some harmonica worthy of Bob Dylan himself.

Guitarist

OFFICIAL APPAREL STORE



PREMIUM GARMENTS FOR PICKERS

ONLY £20

Guitarist ESTABLISHED 1984

Wear your passion for six-strings with pride, with our new line of Guitarist-branded premium cotton tees – available in a range of cool colours and classic designs

https://bit.ly/guitarist-merch

Guitarist

Nextmonth



PHOTO BY CHRISTIE GOODWIN

JOE BONAMASSA

We visit 'Nerdville' as Joe picks out some of the jewels from his extensive collection

SETH BACCUS

Looking at a brand-new design from one of the UK's finest guitar builders

JOHN SCOFIELD

The jazz guitar legend talks about his new double CD, *Uncle John's Band*

Next issue on sale 13 October 2023



SUBSCRIBE TO OUR DIGITAL EDITION AND SAVE!

Want instant access to *Guitarist*?

Go digital from just £2.62 an issue!

www.magazinesdirect.com/GUI

TRIPTYCH

THE POWER OF THREE

Pushing the boundaries of vintage Strat tones into uncharted territories of super heavy fuzz-drenched riffing



"For me, the perfect Strat tone has been an ongoing journey for the last few years, and I'm happy to say that the journey has ended with the Triptych single coils"

RABEA MASSAAD

BEA



bareknucklepickups.co.uk

Bare Knuckle

Jackson®

SCOTT IAN

X SERIES SIGNATURE KING V™ KVX



©2023 JCMI. Jackson® is a trademark of Jackson/Charvel Manufacturing, Inc. All rights reserved.

Guitarist PRESENTS

HISTORIC ELECTRICS FROM THE GOLDEN ERA

ICONIC GUITARS



BERNIE MARSDEN'S VINTAGE COLLECTION

A TRIBUTE

1961 Fender TELECASTER
Custom Sunburst

+

PETER GREEN

Rarities from his personal collection

MARK AGNESI

On Gibson's official vintage guitar store

CUSTOM FENDERS

A one-off factory custom 1963 Strat and more!

RARE ELECTRICS

Featuring
Kay K161 'Jimmy Reed'
'64 Gibson Firebird III
& '50 Gibson ES-5
& More

PLUS
GIBSON'S ICONIC EDS-1275 DOUBLENECK
AMPEG 'PLEXI' ELECTRIC
'57 LES PAUL JR

ER-2

BRINGING THE "UNI" VIBES



WWW.THORPYFX.COM

Guitarist
PRESENTS

ICONIC GUITARS

A CELEBRATION OF HISTORIC & RARE GUITARS FROM THE GOLDEN ERA



Welcome to the second volume of *Guitarist*'s *Iconic Guitars* series of mini-magazines. When we learned that Whitesnake hero Bernie Marsden was selling gems from his lifelong collection of guitars, we took the chance to document those beautiful instruments and talk to Bernie himself about them for this publication. Little did we know that, tragically, it was to be the last time we were to speak with him. He passed away unexpectedly only days after the feature was completed. Now, as the world of guitar mourns one of its best-loved heroes, we've taken the decision to present this celebration of Bernie's passion for guitars as it was written – made with his participation and full approval and containing what are now all-too poignant insights into his lifelong passion for these guitars.

It is, we hope, fitting that this supplement also examines guitars that belonged to a hero and friend of Bernie's, Peter Green. It's hard not to imagine that, somewhere above, they're jamming together now in company with all the other greats who went before. At such moments we realise that instruments themselves, as lovely as they are, are just tools for expressing the music within us and – as the saying has it – you can't take them with you when you go. They can be, however, an enduring reminder of absent friends. Accordingly, we'd like to respectfully dedicate this publication to Bernie's memory, with a deep sense of gratitude for his friendship, wise advice, and the generous access to his guitars that he granted so many people over the years.



Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

The beautiful original vintage guitars in this publication were originally shot for *Guitarist* magazine by kind permission of the following organisations and individuals who specialise in and collect fine vintage instruments. *Guitarist* would like to acknowledge and thank:
ATB Guitars of Cheltenham (www.atbguitars.com)
Bernie Marsden (https://berniemarsden.com)
Bonhams of London (www.bonhams.com)
Gardiner Houlgate of Corsham, Wiltshire (www.gardinerhoulgate.co.uk)
Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars of Bath (www.vintageandrareguitars.com)
World Guitars of Stonehouse, Gloucestershire (www.worldguitars.co.uk)



CONTENTS

04 THE BERNIE MARSDEN COLLECTION
We examine some of the Whitesnake legend's finest vintage electrics at ATB Guitars in Cheltenham

14 LETTING GO
Bernie Marsden's last interview, talking about the guitars he loved

16 1950s KAY K161 THINTWIN
A cool semi-hollow cat with a connection to two iconic bluesmen

18 c.1967 MARTIN GT-75 MOTH
What happened when the acoustic pioneer answered the call for electrics

20 1969 GIBSON L-5C
The cutaway evolution of Lloyd Loar's iconic jazzbox

22 1964 GIBSON FIREBIRD III
Another treasure from the Bernie Marsden collection

24 1957 GIBSON LES PAUL JUNIOR
The Student became the master with Gibson's stripped-back rocker

26 1963 FENDER STRATOCASTER
A rare metallic finish adorns this immaculate mid-60s example

28 1970/'71 AMPEG DAN ARMSTRONG
Keith Richards gave the 'See-Through' Plexi model the step up it needed

30 GIBSON CERTIFIED VINTAGE
The Nashville giant's new curated programme gives vintage guitars an unprecedented lifetime warranty



SHINE ON

Before he passed away, Whitesnake hero Bernie Marsden put some of his lifelong collection of guitars up for sale. In this feature, written just days before Bernie tragically left us, we joined Mike Long of ATB Guitars to take a closer look

WORDS **Jamie Dickson** PHOTOGRAPHY **Phil Barker**

Bernie Marsden was one of Britain's best-loved rock and blues guitarists, known not just for his role in penning huge Whitesnake hits such as *Here I Go Again* but also because of his enduring love for vintage guitars. Bernie's touring took him all round the world and that provided the springboard for his many decades of guitar collecting, which saw him acquire a bevy of beautiful, rare and classic electrics, which he used across his prolific career.

So when news went out that Bernie was putting key guitars from his collection up for sale, it unsurprisingly caused quite a stir. Mike Long of ATB Guitars in Cheltenham had the honour of being appointed the agent for what are arguably the most interesting guitars from Bernie's collection. News that Bernie's infamously raw and exciting 1959 Les Paul (aka The Beast) was to head up the sale proved short-lived, however. The Beast was initially among the guitars offered for sale at ATB, but, perhaps understandably, after a bit of soul-searching Bernie withdrew it saying simply that he had "some constructive conversations with my family and they feel it should stay with me..."

Even without the presence of The Beast, the collection that is now with ATB is seriously impressive – with that fascinating prospect in mind, we joined Mike Long, founder of ATB Guitars, to explore some of the treasures of Bernie Marsden's years of guitar-hunting. *Editor's note*: we only learned of Bernie's death two days before going to press, so the following interview – conducted before his passing – refers to him in the present tense. We took the decision to respectfully publish it as is, in tribute to Bernie's lifelong love of guitar collecting.

Bernie collected quite a few archtops and thinlines, but this ES-5 is one of the most beautiful. Tell us about it.

"Yeah, this is a beauty – a 1950 Gibson ES-5 in remarkable condition. It really is quite stunning. Nice, really big, thick neck... it's got three P-90s with the original old curved covers, which were only used in the late 40s and early 50s. It's got really nice tall, amber, clear Gibson knobs that were used in the very early 50s. The tailpiece is probably a replacement at some point, I'd say – a lot of them did tend to break – but at least it's

PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS



Bernie's touring took him all round the world and that provided the springboard for his many decades of guitar collecting

Bernie Marsden's 1961 Custom Telecaster saw use during projects with Robert Plant and has great playability and looks

period correct. Original frets and gorgeous condition with a brown Lifton case. There's a little bit of wear on the neck, but it's not too drastic.

"Bernie had completely forgotten he had this. He called us up about two weeks after we'd taken the initial lots. And then he said, 'Oh, I've looked in one of my old storage spaces today and I found another four guitars. And this is one of them.'

"I think ES-5s attract quite a wide variety of players. I mean, obviously, this is [the model] T-Bone Walker played, which is why Bernie bought it. It was something he'd been looking for for some time as he's a T-Bone Walker fan. So, I mean, it can be used in blues, country... Chet Atkins had one, in fact. We had one of the ones that Chet Atkins had, which he wasn't very well known for using, but he definitely used one in his recordings. Steve Howe from Yes also used one to great effect on *Roundabout*, I believe... things like that. It's a bit of a strange guitar. And the people who play it would often surprise you with their diversity. So I don't think you can classify it and say it's 'just a blues guitar' or 'it's just a jazz guitar' or anything like that. I think it lends itself to different forms of music quite well."

It looks in pristine condition – how often do you find them like this?

"Not very often at all. Most of the ones we see are in pretty bad shape. So it's very rare to come across one in this sort of condition."

Some people call all ES-5s 'Switchmasters', but that's not quite right...

"No. This is one of the early ones. This one has three pots, which are basically three volume controls, plus a master tone. Then [in 1955] they switched to a different layout whereby they had six controls; they basically had volume and tone for each pickup with a big four-way selector switch on the [cutaway horn]. That selected pickup 1, pickup 2, pickup 3 and then the last position is all three pickups, which sounds glorious. Those were termed Switchmasters. Then in 1957, they switched over from P-90s to humbuckers. And they continued that through to the early 60s."

Speaking of P-90s, there's an early Les Paul Goldtop from 1952 in Bernie's collection, too.

"Yep, first-year Goldtop. Again, in really nice condition, all-original, that one – I think the jack socket washer ring has been replaced."

1. The decal beneath the 'spaghetti'-style Fender logo indicates that this is the Custom variant of the early 60s Telecaster

2. The most common finish seen on Custom Telecasters of the period is sunburst, as on this 1961 example. The more vibrant custom colours saw greater use later in the 60s

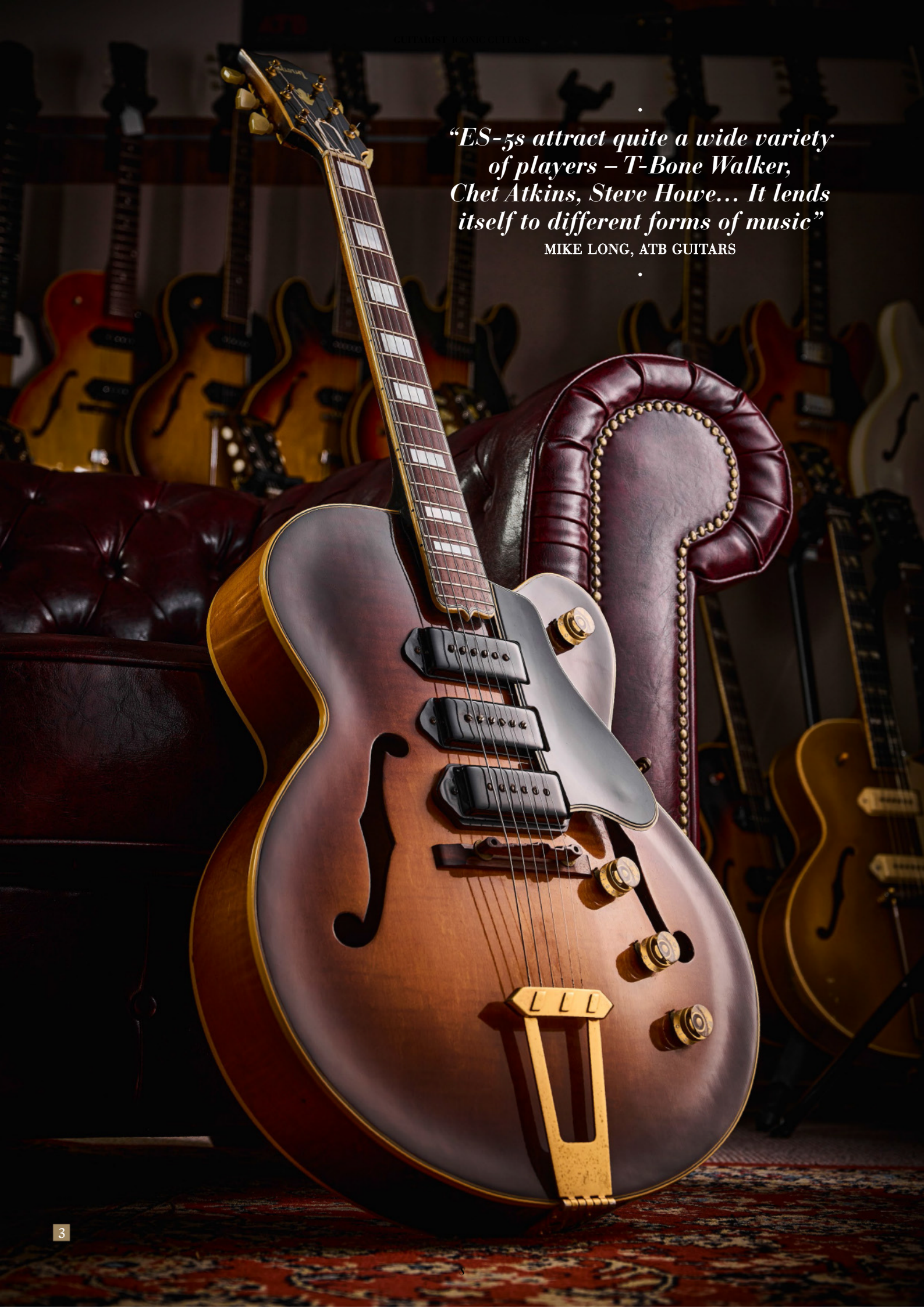
1





"The 1961 Custom Telecaster was one of Bernie's favourite guitars to take out and play whenever he was asked to"

MIKE LONG, ATB GUITARS



"ES-5s attract quite a wide variety of players – T-Bone Walker, Chet Atkins, Steve Howe… It lends itself to different forms of music"

MIKE LONG, ATB GUITARS

Would you say that a fair proportion of original 1952 Les Pauls ended up being 'converted' to the spec of later Les Pauls?
"Yeah, which is a shame, really. There's nothing wrong with the original design once you get used to it. There's a good few players out there who get on with that wrap-under bridge. And nowadays, if you don't like it, you can get a MojoAxe [compensated top-wrap tailpiece] and have a normal experience. So there's no excuse to rip them apart and change them. But a few years ago, that wasn't so much the case; MojoAxe didn't exist. And if you really *had* to do your palm muting, then that was the only thing you could do."

If you look closely, you can see a signature inscribed on the scratchplate.
"Yeah, this has got an interesting story. It was bought by Bernie from Jim Singleton, who owns Jim's Guitars [in Pennsylvania]. Jim was at a concert with Danny Gatton seeing Les Paul and he brought this guitar, which had just come into his store, along to the concert. After the gig, he went up to Les Paul and asked him if he wouldn't mind signing the pickguard, but neither of them had a pen. So Les Paul produced this screw from one of his cases and said, 'I'll sign it with a screw.' That's exactly what he did on the pickguard. You see Les Paul's signature there, which was made by a screw or nail or something. He said to Jim and Danny, who were there witnessing this, that 'If you ever come across a Les Paul signature, and it looks really rough like that, that's how you know it's genuine. That's how I sign it.' Included with the guitar is a letter of provenance from Jim Singleton stating all this."

It looks very clean for its age...
"Yeah, it's in great condition. I'd say it's probably March or April '52; it's got the binding on it. No serial number and it's still got the tall knobs, so mid-'52."

These 1952 models used to be regarded as way less desirable than later Les Pauls. Has that changed in recent years?
"There's been a massive increase in desirability. I mean, we were selling these for



4



5

3. This 1950 ES-5 comes with P-90s with rounded covers, a feature associated with earlier variants of the model

4. The ES-5's elegant headstock has a 'crown' inlay and edge binding, adding a touch of class

5. The relatively simple control layout of this early ES-5 was upgraded and made more complex in later versions of the model, most famously in the Switchmaster variant

£10,000 to £15,000 only four or five years ago. We're now selling them for 25 to 30 grand. Massively increased. One of the star performers of the last five years."

Tell us about the 1961 Custom Telecaster.
"I don't know how long he's had this. But he certainly has used it a lot – he's pictured playing it with various people, including Robert Plant. It was obviously one of his favourite guitars to take out and play whenever he was asked to.

"There was a humbucker rout inside at the neck pickup. Somebody had Andy Summers'd it and put a humbucker in it, then changed their mind and put the original pickup back in. The wiring's modified to post-'67 configuration, which means that the neck doesn't sound like a damp pillow. But Bernie certainly enjoyed this guitar a lot. We've got lots of pictures of him on stage with it, so it's obviously been one of his favourites."

The Tele has a beautiful sunburst, but custom colours were just coming in around this time, too. Do you see many Custom Teles in other finishes?
"In the early 60s, they didn't make very many custom-colour Tele Customs. They started appearing in [greater numbers] later on in the 60s; from around '64 to '65 you started to see Lake Placid Blue, Candy Apple Red, Inca Silver and Firemist Gold appear. In fact, I've yet to see one from this era – 1960 to '61 – custom coloured; they've all been sunburst among the guitars we've come across."

Tell us about the glorious EDS-1275 from Bernie's collection. How scarce are original 60s examples?
"Well, there were only three of these made in 1966 – and this is one of the three. In fact, I know this guitar extremely well. I was exhibiting at a guitar show in Leeds about 13 years ago and in walked a guy carrying a massive great aluminium flight case. His name was Alan Silson and he played in the Bradford band Smokie, who did *Living Next Door To Alice*.

"In this massive aluminium flight case was this guitar, which is a 1966 Gibson twin-neck, which he was looking to sell. So I had a good look at it – I'd never seen one before, so I even had to look in the vintage guitar price guide to see how much I should offer. I offered him the market value at the time and he said, 'Okay, I'll think about it.' Then he walked the guitar around to every other

6. This first-year-of-issue Les Paul was already pretty special – but the scratched-on signature of the man himself puts it in another league

7. The 1952 Goldtop's often-derided wrap-under bridge and tailpiece is actually fairly easy to adjust to when playing

6





"There's been a massive increase in the desirability of '52 models. One of the star performers of the last five years"

MIKE LONG, ATB GUITARS



"There were only three of these EDS-1275 models made in 1966 – and this is one of the three"

MIKE LONG, ATB GUITARS

dealer there and eventually came back to me and said, 'Okay, you can have it.' So I paid him the money for it and while I was doing that he was telling me the story that he bought his guitar directly from Martin Barre from Jethro Tull. He said that he thought that Martin used this at the 1970 Isle of Wight Festival.

"Now, I relayed this to Bernie – and Bernie knows Martin, so he contacted Martin who said, 'I can't remember' [laughs]. So he's neither confirmed nor denied this. But he knew that he did have a Gibson twin-neck at that point. So that's basically it. Once I had it, I brought it back to Cheltenham. I can't remember how Bernie heard about it, actually. I think we were in contact about something else and he was always asking me, 'Has anything come in?' so I just mentioned this. He was onto it straight away, so we met in a hotel room in Wales somewhere and he bought it."

What was behind Bernie's keen interest in it, do you think?

"He'd always had a twin-neck. In fact, he played one in Whitesnake for quite some time. Apart from using one in Whitesnake, I believe he was a big fan of Family as well and they used a twin-neck for their big hit *Burlesque*. He'd always wanted one of these Gibson twin-necks. This is one of the last of the 60s examples, where the 12-string headstock was twice the length of the six-string. When they relaunched these back in the early 70s, the headstock shrunk quite drastically."

How different does this sound to an SG Standard of a similar age?

"It does sound very different. It's hard to describe. I mean, I haven't plugged it in for 13 years! But I remember when I did plug it in, I thought, 'This is surprisingly different to what I was expecting.' It feels more resonant, more powerful – it's difficult to describe it, really. But it's different from just playing a normal SG. When you've got the switch in the middle and you've got both necks [outputting signal], when you play one, you can hear the 12-string sympathetically resonating. That's quite an eerie sound. Page used to use that quite a lot." G

www.atbguitars.com/bernie-marsden-collection



9



10

8. This stunning 1966 doubleneck evokes Jimmy Page's renditions of *Stairway To Heaven* perfectly and remains highly sought after

9. The elongated 12-string headstock was shortened in later doublenecks

10. With the central selector in the middle, both necks are active, lending the guitar vibrant overtones when played



LETTING GO

Just days before his unexpected death, we spoke with Bernie Marsden for what was, sadly, to be the final time. In this poignant interview, he told us the personal story behind the guitars he chose to put up for sale – and the one that, at the last, he could not

WORDS **Jamie Dickson** PHOTOGRAPHY **Olly Curtis & Phil Barker**

Vintage guitars are obviously an incredibly important part of your life and you built your collection over several decades. Why sell them now?
"Well, I've got to the stage where I've known for probably 20 years or more that these are all going to be sold at some point. You get to reach 60 and then suddenly you're 65 and then you're 70 and then you're more... and you think, 'It's about time these went.' I don't want to leave them posthumously for my family to deal with. That may sound a bit morbid, but when you look at [lots for sale in guitar auction catalogues] it's always: 'from the estate of so and so...' and it's sad. So this way [by selling my collection now, through a store] I can see how they do and maybe who's bought them. So it's that.

"And when I took some of those guitars out of their cases, I hadn't seen them in 30 years. So you think, 'Well, if you haven't seen a guitar in 30 years, you don't really need them.' I certainly didn't play them all – I very rarely played the Goldtop. Which is a shame because it is a great guitar."

People tend to get put off by wrap-under bridges, but we found that the Goldtop was really playable...
"I think people get it into their head that 'you can't play this'. They're perfectly fine, you just have to get on with it. 'Oh, you can't palm-mute'... Well, then, don't buy that guitar."

Moving on to the 1961 Custom Telecaster, that guitar was a bit of a workhorse for you, we understand.
"Yeah, I played it quite a bit, especially in the studio, and I used it with Robert Plant and a few other people. It was [one of those guitars where you] just fling it in the car when you go to the gig kind of thing – I didn't know it was quite as collectible as it was because you had the green [scratch]plate and all the other business on it. I bought it in America, I think, and it was the best Telecaster in the shop. I said, 'Why are you selling this?' and the guy said, 'That's exactly what I'm thinking.' So that was that: I bought it and put it in my suitcase with the neck off – and then took the empty [guitar case] back full of LPs!"



1

The incredible Gibson 1950 ES-5, built a decade earlier than the Tele, is no less stunning.
"Isn't that great?"

Mike Long of ATB said you'd originally bought it because T-Bone Walker used to play one. Is that correct?
"Well, it was, really. I mean, I listened to a lot of T-Bone Walker when I was a kid, and to suddenly have one of those guitars in your arms was really special. He was the guy who Chuck Berry listened to and, you know, he was the guy that was doing stuff. Especially when you see those films where he's playing the guitar horizontally. It was like, 'How is he doing this?' *And* he was a great player. He was one of the first guys who hooked onto the 'dun-da-dun-da' [imitates a loping riff over a shuffle] thing. I mean, Chuck did it, but he got it from a guy in Louis Jordan's band. I've got a feeling that's maybe where T-Bone got it from as well because those recordings are all earlier. Great player."

It's obviously not an inexpensive guitar, but compared with a 'Burst, the level of craftsmanship and heritage embodied by that ES-5 makes it seem good value.
"That's why I started to buy all those guitars 20 years ago – because I thought they were so underpriced. I thought, 'They're gonna make constant money per month,' and that's really how it's turned out. Better than any bank account, that's for sure. I did use it in the studio, which I was pleased about – and there's not many of them."

We enjoyed checking out your 1966 Gibson EDS-1275 – Mike Long of ATB said you had a bit of a thing for doublenecks.
"Well, the first doubleneck that I had was an Ibanez [Artist 2640]. That was in the 70s when I was with Babe Ruth because one of the great hippy tracks of Babe Ruth was [originally recorded on] a 12-string. I said, 'Well, I don't want to buy a [dedicated] 12-string, so I'll get a twin-neck.' And it was actually cheaper than a straight 12-string at the time. You couldn't get many 12-strings in the 70s, they were all very expensive.

"So I ended up getting that doubleneck and pretending I was Jimmy Page for a year. After that, I got the deal with Gibson and that's when they gave me the Whitesnake one. But, yeah, I've always had a bit of a fascination for doublenecks. That's why those two are in the sale now – that Ibanez is a thing of beauty."

"The outcry once [the sale of The Beast] went public was incredible… The relief when I withdrew it was remarkable"

We'd be remiss if we didn't ask about your most famous guitar in the collection, the 1959 Les Paul Standard better known as The Beast. It was briefly part of the sale, but then it was withdrawn. Why did you make that decision?
"Mike asked me if it was for sale and I said to him, 'Well, it's been for sale ever since I bought it.' All guitars are for sale, really. But the outcry once it went public was incredible. I had a word with my girls here, the family, and they just said, 'Dad, we think this guitar is so much part of you and your career. And do you need the money?' And I just thought, 'Well, not really…' So why sell it? I thought that was pretty good advice. So I said, 'Well, I'm selling it because I'm selling the other guitars,' and they all said, 'That's no reason to sell this one.' So I withdrew it and the relief was remarkable." G

https://berniemarsden.com


2

1. Bernie photographed with The Beast in 2017 at *Guitarist*'s studios

2. While a very valuable part of Bernie's collection, this 1952 Goldtop rarely saw any playtime, "which is a shame", said Bernie, "because it's a great guitar"

1950s KAY K161 THINTWIN

WORDS **Jamie Dickson** PHOTOGRAPHY **Phil Barker**

Were it not for its indelible association with the loping shuffles of bluesman Jimmy Reed, Kay's K161 ThinTwin electric might have faded into history. But we'd venture to say that even without Reed's endorsement, its low-key cool would earn it fans. In fact, the ThinTwin was one of Kay's longest-running instruments in serial production, being manufactured from 1952 to 1959.

The model name derives from its pair of slender blade-style pickups. The guitar itself isn't particularly svelte as semi-hollows of the 50s go, measuring around 70mm in depth. Styling details varied across its production span, but the most iconic version featured a tortoiseshell cellulose pickguard and many have attractively figured maple tops and sides. But while the K161 may have been launched at the same time as Gibson's more upmarket Les Paul Model solidbody – which it broadly resembles – Kay's ThinTwin was a very different beast tonally, the modest output of the pickups ensuring that plenty of the acoustic character of the hollow body is present in the guitar's amplified tone, which can be heard on Jimmy Reed's recordings.

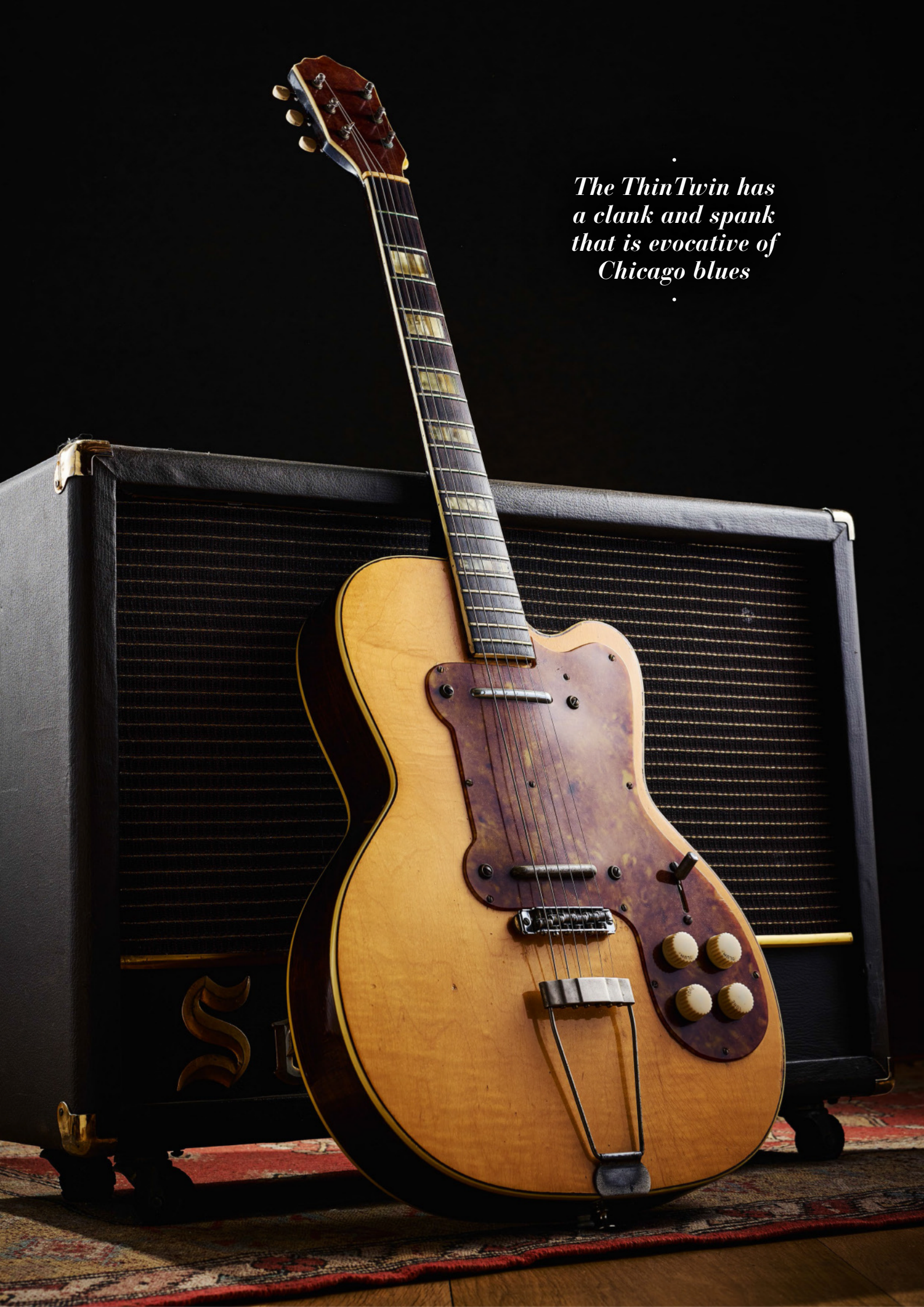
While it wouldn't win any awards for searing sustain, the ThinTwin has a clank and spank to its sound that is tremendously evocative of Chicago Blues – and it's easy to see why the late British blues hero Peter Green chose to add this guitar to his collection. It was included in the recent 'Man Of The World' auction of Peter's guitars at Bonhams, from 16 to 28 June 2023, and went under the hammer for £3,250. Despite this being rather more than K161s normally fetch, its connection to two iconic bluesmen more than justifies the uptick, we think.

1. The bound headstock with its gently scalloped crown lends a touch of class to what was an inexpensive guitar, especially when compared with Gibson's hollowbodies

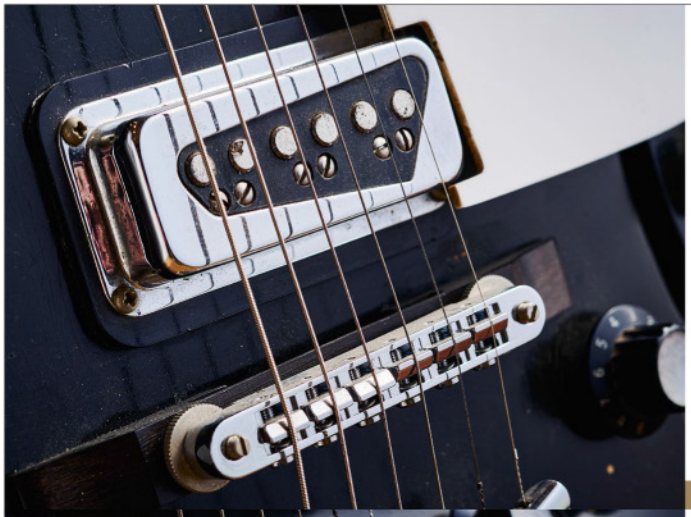
2. The ThinTwin's quartet of tone and volume controls apes that of its contemporary, the Gibson Les Paul Model

3. The model's distinctive slimline pickups, from which the guitar's name derives, were blade-like in their design, hence the slender covers





The ThinTwin has a clank and spank that is evocative of Chicago blues



1



2



3

c.1967 MARTIN GT-75 MOTH

WORDS **Jamie Dickson**
PHOTOGRAPHY **Phil Barker**

This unusual (and somewhat obscure) 60s electric may not be an iconic guitar per se, but it does represent a bold experiment that an iconic guitar maker, Martin, took a gamble on as the 60s pop revolution took off. Launched the same year Bob Dylan infamously 'betrayed' the Newport Folk Festival audience by going electric, the writing already appeared to be on the wall for guitar makers who had no electrics to offer, as rock 'n' roll got louder and janglier. While there was no shortage of artists continuing to use classic Martin Dreadnoughts in '65, the Nazareth, Pennsylvania company clearly felt it needed to move with the changing times and its answer was the GT-75 Moth semi-hollow electric.

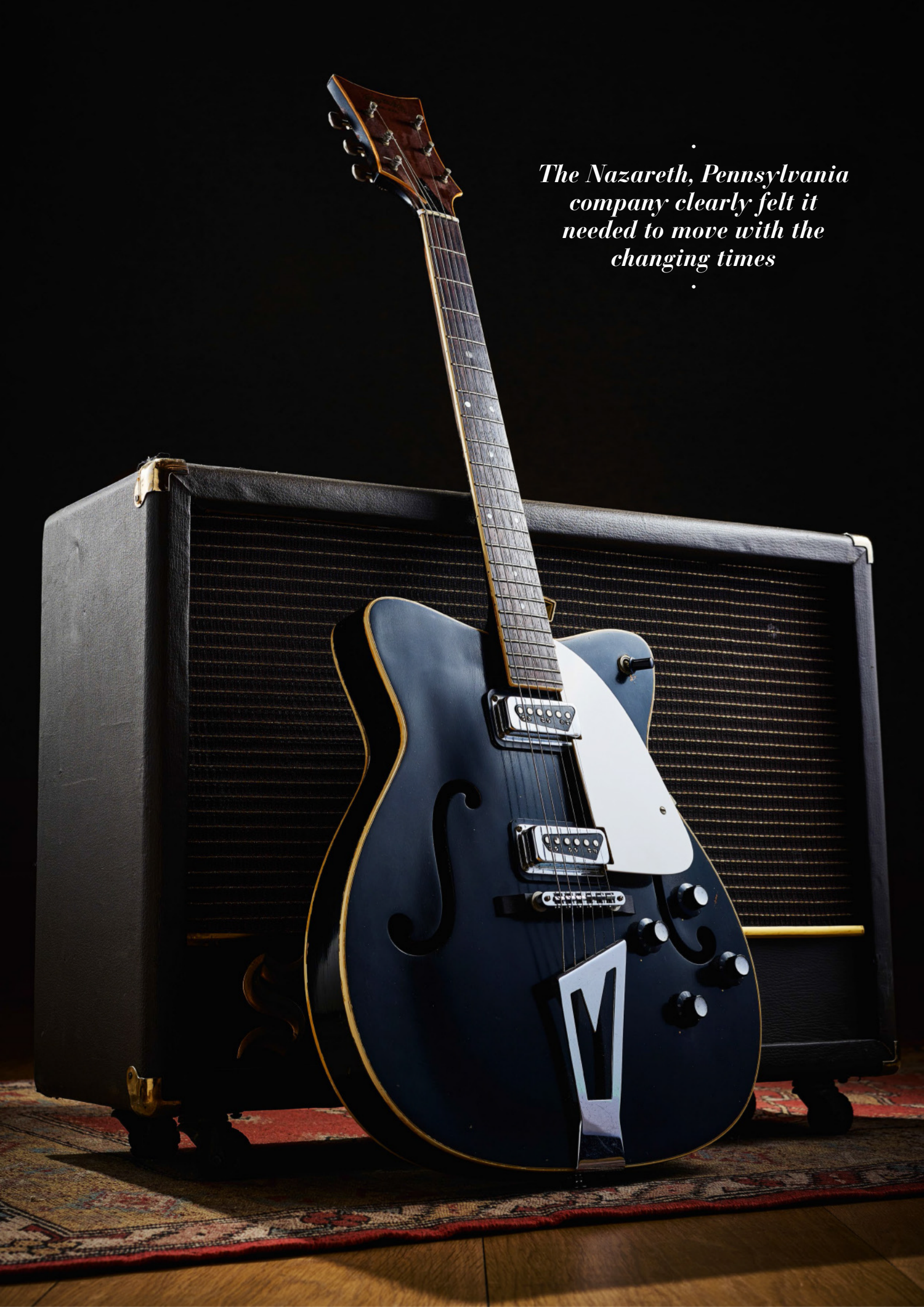
Equipped with a pair of DeArmond model 2000 pickups, the GT-75 had a 22-fret neck with a slim profile and a Brazilian mahogany fretboard. It's tempting to think that the guitar must have been a dud to have slipped off the radar so comprehensively over time, but Terry Carleton of *Guitar Player* magazine inspected a surviving vintage example for his 'Whack Jobs' column on cult-following guitars and was surprised by how effective it was as a design. "I was expecting to give it a lacklustre review and brusquely toss it into the proverbial pile of unsuccessful builds from the 1960s guitar boom. Boy howdy, was I wrong! This axe is just plain off-the-hook awesome," he enthused, citing the GT-75's "complex and chimey sound" as its most engaging quality.

High praise, indeed. But sadly there were few takers for the GT-75 and production ceased after a scant two years in 1967. This vibey example of the ill-fated Moth belonged to British blues icon Peter Green and sold for £3,200 at the June 2023 'Man Of The World' auction of his guitars at Bonhams, London.

1. The GT-75's Martin DeArmond pair of model 2000 pickups delivered tonal clarity and complexity

2. The GT-75's styling could best be described today as 'retro-futuristic', from the bold scoop of the headstock to the stark angles of the chromed tailpiece

3. A quartet of controls governed tone and volume. Reviewer Terry Carleton said of the guitar's sound with both pickups selected: "It's money – loud, full and just a little bit phasey"



The Nazareth, Pennsylvania company clearly felt it needed to move with the changing times

1969 GIBSON L-5C

WORDS **Huw Price** PHOTOGRAPHY **Phil Barker**

Starting out in 1923 with a 16-inch wide body, the L-5 was Gibson's flagship archtop until the Super 400 debuted in 1935. With a carved spruce top and maple back, and an adjustable truss rod, it retailed for $304.50 with a Gibson 515 case. It was the brainchild of musician and acoustic engineer Lloyd Loar. Although the L-5 was, in part, a continuation of Orville Gibson's design concepts, Loar's knowledge of mandolin and viola manufacturing led him to tap-tuning the tops, backs and parallel braces so that all the component parts worked together. The L-5 proved so popular, Loar effectively created the blueprint for the acoustic jazzbox.

Block inlays replaced dots in 1929 and kerfed braces replaced the carved solid spruce braces. Responding to competition from Epiphone, Gibson increased the body width to 17 inches in '34, reverted to solid bracing with an 'X' pattern, widened the headstock, and introduced five-ply binding. Bound f-holes appeared in '36; the hingeless tailpiece appeared in '39 as the bracing pattern reverted to parallel. The model designation was changed to L-5P (Premier), until a new Venetian cutaway body became standard in '48. The new L-5C was also the first of its kind to feature an ebony 'board.

This 1969 example is thought to have been a retirement gift for Gibson's top travelling sales rep. Neal Penner worked with many jazz age greats over three decades, so a high-end archtop was an appropriate send-off.

Unique features include an engraved truss rod cover, outer case jacket bearing Penner's name, and extra 'board inlay beyond the final fret. The solid fiddleback maple back, sides and neck are highly figured, but Gibson often reserved premium timbers for archtops. G

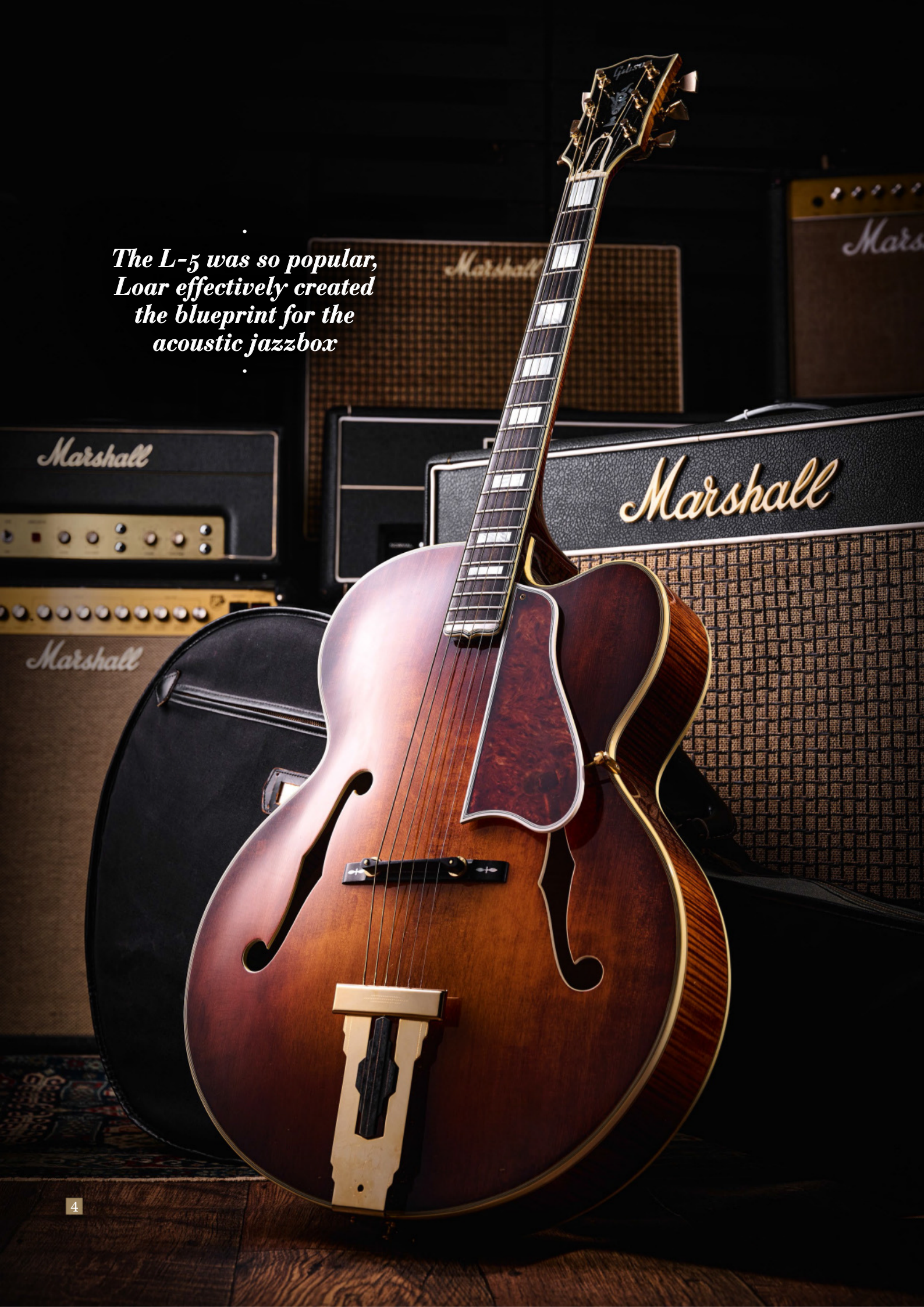
1. The L-5's iconic tailpiece features an Allen wrench hole for string-tension adjustment

2. The headstock features five-ply binding and an abstract deconstruction of the classic inlaid 'flowerpot' motif

3. Carved from extremely figured maple, the laminated neck has an elongated headstock 'stinger'

4. Made in 1969 as a retirement gift for sales representative Neal Penner, this L-5C features an early style Cremona Brown sunburst finish





The L-5 was so popular, Loar effectively created the blueprint for the acoustic jazzbox



1



2



3

1964 GIBSON FIREBIRD III

WORDS **Huw Price**
PHOTOGRAPHY **Phil Barker**

Gibson Firebirds are possibly the most confusing of all the classic guitars from the vintage era. First, you have to get your head around the reverse/non-reverse thing, and then learn the numbering system.

The reverse Firebird was manufactured from 1963 to mid-1965 with model numbers I, III, V and VII. The Firebird I had one pickup, two knobs, an unbound fretboard with dot markers and a wraptail bridge. The III had a second pickup, with a bound fretboard, two extra control knobs, a selector switch and a spring vibrato. Like the Firebird I, all the hardware was nickel plated. The V got a Deluxe vibrato with a lyre and leaf cover, a tune-o-matic bridge and trapezoid inlays, while the VII was akin to a Les Paul Custom, with three pickups, an ebony fretboard with block inlays and gold-plated parts.

Non-reverse Firebirds were made between 1965 and '69, and there was even a 12-string version, but we'll save all that for another day as the guitar featured here is a reverse Firebird III from 1964.

Reverse Firebirds are notorious for suffering headstock breaks. Whether that's down to the lack of volute, the sheer weight of the banjo tuners or the poorly designed case is up for debate, but this example has somehow survived unscathed. It's peculiar because the laminated mahogany/walnut neck should be stronger than a regular one-piece mahogany neck. The Firebird also had a 'through-neck' construction with mahogany 'wings' glued on to create the body shape.

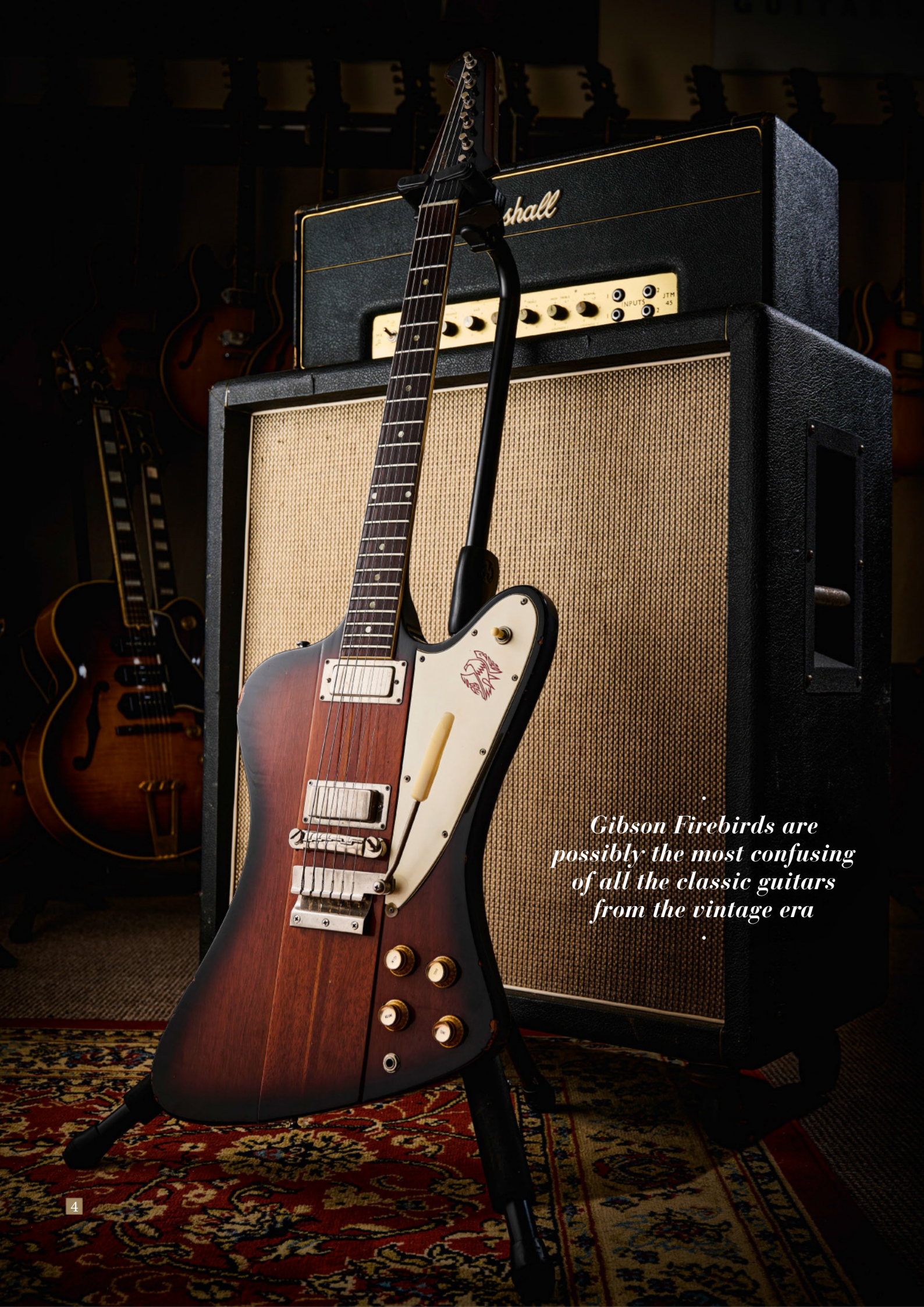
The mini-humbuckers are renowned for their gutsy, bright and clear tone, which some compare to Strat pickups. This example, from Bernie Marsden's collection, has clearly been played, but it remains in great condition and is currently for sale at ATB Guitars.

1. Some players ignore the vibrato, preferring to anchor strings through the wraptail bridge with its 'lightning bolt' wound G compensation

2. The iconic Firebird pickguard motif is placed next to the three-way selector switch

3. The controls are arranged differently to most two-pickup Gibson models and a right angle jack plug is preferable for easy access

4. In an effort to compete with Fender, Gibson enlisted car designer Ray Dietrich to create the Firebird



Gibson Firebirds are possibly the most confusing of all the classic guitars from the vintage era

1957 GIBSON LES PAUL JUNIOR

WORDS **Huw Price** PHOTOGRAPHY **Phil Barker**

Most major manufacturers offer a range of guitars today, from high-end models with superior woods and pickups, to budget bangers, often made overseas with lower-grade timbers and indifferent electronics. Things were different in the 50s. Gibson was trying to reconcile its status as a traditional archtop maker with hot competition from Fender and increasing demand from would-be rockers. Rather than compromise quality, Gibson's responded by streamlining the manufacturing process.

Introduced in 1954, the single-pickup Les Paul Junior can be seen as Gibson's riposte to the Fender Esquire, especially so when you consider the TV Model with its black pickguard. Comparing the Junior, and the dual-pickup Special, to a mid-50s Goldtop, they're effectively simplified versions. Gibson dispensed with the arched maple top, trapezoid inlays and binding; the mahogany bodies, Brazilian rosewood 'boards, neck profiles, hardware and electronics were otherwise identical. Consequently, Gibson's 'student' models were actually pro-grade instruments – many consider the Junior and Special to be superior to the more upmarket offerings. Without the dampening effect of a maple cap, they tend to be lighter and harmonically livelier, and the Junior's absence of neck pickup allows for a massive tenon to couple the neck to the body, which may optimise resonance, sustain and stability.

Minor changes occurred between '54 and '58, as Gibson lengthened bridge bushings, Centralab potentiometers replaced IRCs, and the bridge pickup edged closer to the neck. This immaculate example from World Guitars is from the final year of the single-cut, with double-cut bodies arriving in '58.

1. Three-on-a-plate Kluson tuners were standard issue, with pre-1956 versions having 'no-line' casings and brass posts

2. By 1957 Juniors had longer post bushings and a larger gap between the bridge and pickup to prevent bridges tipping forward

3. Gibson left the fretboards unbound and used celluloid dot markers, but still used Brazilian rosewood

4. By setting an amp bright and overdriven and using the controls, a Junior's range of clean and dirty tones may surprise you





Gibson's 'student' models were actually professional-grade instruments



1


2



3



4

1963 FENDER STRATOCASTER

WORDS **Huw Price**
PHOTOGRAPHY **Phil Barker**

Some believe 1957 to be the year when 1950s maple-'board Strats reached the pinnacle of their development, and the same may be said for 1963 and the rosewood-'board models. All pre-CBS Stratocasters are collectible, especially when the guitar in question is in near mint original condition.

Even so, Fender was producing Stratocasters in significant numbers during 1963 and they're not especially rare. Factory custom colours do command a premium and this guitar's metal flake finish must be one of the rarest. It features on page 31 of *Norman's Rare Guitars: 30 Years Of Buying, Selling And Collecting* by David Swartz (Alfred Music), where the colour is described as Blue Metallic Flake.

Norman Harris purchased this guitar from the original owner's son, and the late John English, a master builder and founder member of the Fender Custom Shop, later confirmed the paintwork's originality. Fender bought the paint from a company called Metalflake Corporation, and since the company remains in business, this 'Royal Blue' is still available to buy.

Fender did contract out some metallic finishes to auto body shops with specialist spray equipment, but it seems this one was done in-house. Several dings reveal a darker base coat around the edges, which suggests the metallic finish was applied over a sunburst.

But most remarkable of all, with its pristine hardwear, unworn frets and factory fresh fretboard and marker dots, this guitar provides a rare opportunity to experience how a brand-new Stratocaster would have played and sounded 60 years ago. It's loud, bright, clear, dynamic and full of life. By any measure an outstanding Stratocaster, but playing a guitar such as this back in 1963 must have been truly mindblowing.

1. Chips around the edge of the body suggest there's a sunburst lying beneath this rare Royal Blue Metallic finish

2. The celluloid nitrate pickguard and all the plastic parts remain in pristine condition with little evidence of playwear

3. The three-number headstock decal is correct for late 1963 and looks factory fresh

4. The maintenance booklet and all the factory tags remain with the guitar, along with a sticker identifying the serial number and body colour



This guitar provides a rare opportunity to experience how a brand-new Strat would have sounded 60 years ago

1970/'71 AMPEG DAN ARMSTRONG

WORDS **Dave Burrluck** PHOTOGRAPHY **Olly Curtis**

The first prototypes of this very different electric guitar were made in 1969 for USA amplifier company Ampeg by Dan Armstrong, who had already made quite a name for himself both as a player and repairer by the time he opened his own repair shop in New York in 1965. With its clear acrylic solid body – named Lucite, Plexiglas and Perspex – it soon earned the 'See-Through' nickname, which was apparently trademarked by Ampeg. Its brief production lasted from late 1969 to '71, when, after a disagreement with Ampeg, Dan Armstrong relocated to the UK.

Its futuristic plastic body housed some tricky passive electronics, too, and could be fitted with various interchangeable pickups – Rock Treble, Rock Bass, Country Treble, Country Bass, Jazz Treble and Jazz Bass – designed in collaboration with Bill Lawrence.

It may well have become a footnote in guitar history had Ampeg not got one into the hands of Keith Richards in October 1969 while The Stones prepared for their '69 US 'comeback' tour. Aside from featuring on *Get Yer Ya-Ya's Out!* (and picturing on the original album cover), it was the 'See-Through' that hung around Richards' neck while the horrors of Altamont unfolded: the concert that ended the swinging 60s dream.

While you get a great idea of the guitar's gnarly tone on the film of The Stones at the Marquee in 1971, before they headed off to the south of France (that's another story!), the 'See-Through' guitar, and its bass version, has had plenty of rockstar outings from the likes of Ronnie Wood in the early Faces days, to Bill Wyman, Geezer Butler, Phil Lynott, Joe Perry, Tom Petty, Tom Verlaine and Dave Grohl. Iconic? We'd say so.

1. The interchangeable, slide-out pickups were a unique design feature. The bridge is clearly inspired by Danelectro; the one-piece saddle is Brazilian rosewood

2. The back-angled headstock is faced with Formica, also seen on the scratchplate. The guitar features a maple neck, Brazilian rosewood 'board and ivory nut

3. While the wiring is said to have changed during the prototype period, position 1 of the three-way toggle switch sees the volume control bypassed. Position 3 is a preset tone roll-off, and in the middle position things work as expected





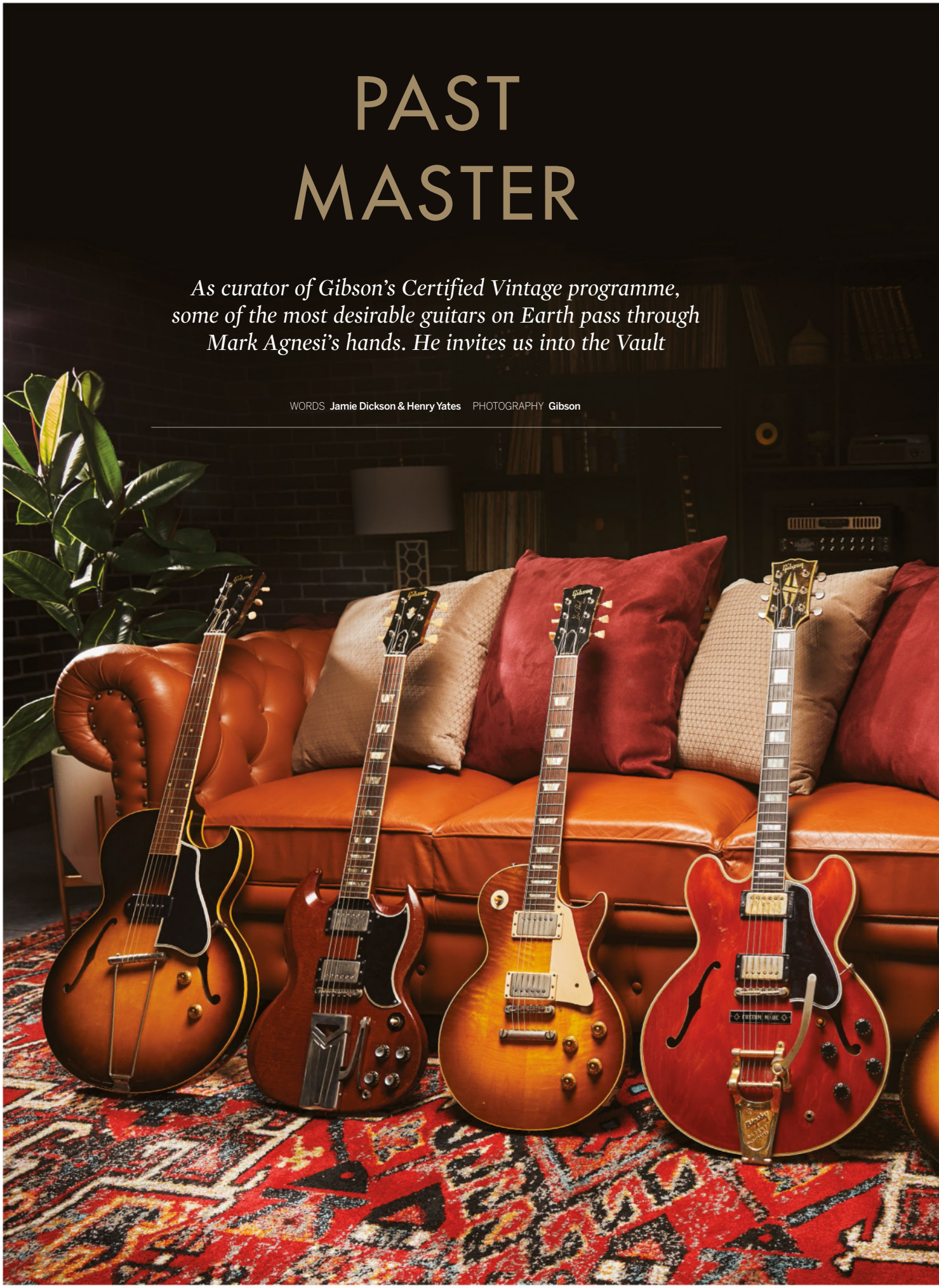
4. While not the first 24-fret guitar, the long unsupported quarter-sawn maple neck is virtually the same thickness at the 1st and 12th frets with a scale length that measures 622mm (24.5 inches). At 4.4kg (9.68lb), it's hardly lightweight, either

It may well have become a footnote in guitar history had Ampeg not got one into the hands of Keith Richards

PAST MASTER

As curator of Gibson's Certified Vintage programme, some of the most desirable guitars on Earth pass through Mark Agnesi's hands. He invites us into the Vault

WORDS **Jamie Dickson & Henry Yates** PHOTOGRAPHY **Gibson**



For some vintage collectors, it's all about the thrill of the hunt: the classified ad, the six-hour drive, the pop of latches and discovery of the grail. But for those less inclined to scour the globe and bet the farm on what may (or may not) be a mint-condition '59 'Burst, the new Gibson Certified Vintage programme is a revelation.

Since February, the company has been busy batch-releasing a run of rare leftfield, historic and celebrity-owned models, sold via Nashville's Gibson Garage and backed by the unprecedented safety net of a Gibson lifetime warranty. We ask director of brand experience, Mark Agnesi, what it takes to make the cut.

How did the Certified Vintage programme come about?

"We get contacted every day by people wanting us to verify the authenticity of guitars. And it's something we just don't have the capacity to do. So with this programme, there's this opportunity for us to enter the marketplace as a truly 'authenticated by Gibson' channel, to take the guesswork out of the vintage-buying experience. And because we are Gibson, we're the only people that can put a new lifetime warranty with the guitar. So we can not only verify it but stand behind it – which is the first time in the history of the vintage business that you can confidently buy a guitar knowing it's warrantied by the original manufacturer."

What can you tell us about the selection criteria for these instruments?

"Obviously, we have the Vault at the Gibson Garage. Some of those guitars have been sitting there for two years now. People have seen them. And this is a chance to put them back out in the market, go buy some new guitars to stock the Vault, so we always have a flow of cool things. I have a room full of guitars that I have pulled from buildings throughout Nashville, guitars that have just been stocked away for the last 40 years. I've got new-old stock from the 70s and 80s, stuff with plastic still on the pickguard. Original prototypes of stuff people have never seen, that never necessarily went into production.

"There's the real major vintage stuff that we would have on display at the Garage. Then there's also the celebrity-owned stuff, like we have Kirk Hammett's 'Sunny' 'Burst for sale. Some of the guitars in the Certified Vintage programme are stuff that has been purchased by Gibson to help better our Custom Shop Historic programme. Y'know, we're always picking up guitars to send to Tom Murphy, so he can photograph wear patterns and so on, so we can continue to tell better stories through the Murphy Lab. Also, if there's a specific year we're trying to get more dialled in on – like, what was the specific font on the poker chip of 1954? – then sometimes we'll go out and buy one, just so we have an original example we can 3D scan, so we can dial in those real 'nerd' details that much closer, y'know?"

For those who don't know, can you explain how you offer these guitars through the Certified Vintage programme?

"We like to do it in drops of five guitars, and I curate those to make sure there's something for everyone. I like to always have one major blue-chip collectible piece. So in the first drop we had our '59 'Burst from the Vault. In the second drop we had our '58 Les Paul Custom Black Beauty. In this drop we did last week, we had a 1957 Goldtop Les Paul Standard [pictured on page 34], one of those major collector-grade guitars.

Every instrument in the programme is carefully scrutinised by Mark Agnesi and his team



PHOTO BY AUSTIN NELSON COURTESY OF GIBSON

"And then, I like to curate the rest of that drop around different price points. I like to always have something under $10,000, which I know is still a lot of money, but in terms of vintage and collectible guitars, that would be your entry-level point. I like to have something in that $10,000 to $25,000 range and then hopefully something around $20,000 to $50,000. There's a lot of cool stuff that lives in that price range."

What would you point to as a great value all-original Gibson from that mid-60s into early 70s period?

"First off, the acoustic guitars, I think, are the best value. That really is your best bang for the buck in vintage guitars, finding good-condition original flat-tops. The electric guitars, they have so much more value, for whatever reason. There's 1940s Banner-era acoustics that fall in that $10,000-and-less bracket. We're talking golden-era Gibson acoustics. Whereas a really clean late-60s ES-335 – but not necessarily right in that prime, wide-nut, stoptail era – might be more than that.

"Vintage acoustics present their own challenges. Do they need to have the neck reset? Are they going to need internal bracing? How have they been stored in terms of humidity? But if you find nice examples, they're [great value for money].

"In terms of electrics, prices have gone nuts, but Juniors are great value. To be able to get a 50s Gibson – whether it's a single-cut, double-cut or even the SG Juniors from the early 60s – I think that's a killer entry point into vintage guitars if you're in the electric side of things. But everything is coming up. It's crazy. I was in the vintage business less than five years ago, and I look at prices now and it's like, 'Whoa, I was selling those guitars for this... and now it's that!' It's shocking to me, being four years removed, how prices went throughout the whole pandemic."

Was there any trepidation putting Gibson's name to these guitars and vouching for their provenance?

"We're doing this in very calculated, very small batches. Everything goes through our repair and restoration department for thorough inspections, everything goes through my eyes and [vice president of product] Mat Koehler's eyes. If there's questions, we don't go there. We're not trying to do volume here like we're a store. This is just something cool we can offer customers that gives them that extra peace of mind. If we were really trying to compete in the vintage world, doing hundreds of guitars a month, yeah, stuff might fall through the cracks. The way we have it set as a curated experience, we're very confident in putting our name behind everything that we're selling. And we back that up with the full lifetime warranty as well. We are willing to put our name on the line for that."

Some of the guitars have been examined with a view to improving the authenticity of Gibson's reissues. Has the process given you new ideas that potentially have a wider application within Gibson and the new guitars that come out?

"Definitely with ageing. I mean, most of these instruments are obviously things we've

"This is an opportunity for us to take the guesswork out of the vintage-buying experience"



1. This 1981 Futura prototype is the only headless guitar Gibson has ever produced, but it was rejected by the Nashville marketing team

2. The guitar features gold-plated hardware and body-mounted Deluxe tuners



All Certified Vintage guitars are sold via the Gibson Garage in Nashville, Tennessee, which is also home to the company's Vault

"Some of those guitars have been sitting in the Vault for two years – this is a chance to put them back out in the market"

been doing since the 90s in the Historic Reissue range. But when we have a specific guitar that becomes very identifiable in our possession, the chance of doing exact recreations of that instrument obviously come up. And there's a lot of amazing guitars that are either Gibson-owned or owned by the Gibson family, whether it's something Cesar [Gueikian, president and CEO] owns or Mat Koehler owns or something I own myself, that are recognisable name guitars – and having them that close to us, we can really go in-depth and recreate those instruments, scratch-for-scratch, neck profiles, top carve to top carve. With 3D scanning, we're not making them 'close', we're making clones at that point.

"So just being able to buy some of these guitars definitely has led to some very specific things. I don't know if it's really pushed anything forward in terms of new models, but in terms of creating replicas of stuff, having the guitar constantly in your possession obviously helps."

Could the Certified Vintage programme potentially roll out to include Epiphone and other brands?

"I'm actually working on it now. Epiphone's 150th anniversary is this year and I'm gonna do an entire drop of five major collectible Epiphone guitars. I see this going into Kramer and Mesa/Boogie, y'know, if we have some amazing Mark I come up that can be authenticated. Primarily, it's gonna be Gibson, but if we

"We're doing this in very calculated, very small batches. If there's questions, we don't go there"

unearth some incredible Dennis Kline-painted Kramer from the 80s, the world needs to have a chance at that, too."

What's your favourite guitar from the programme to date?

"My favourite from a storytelling standpoint was the 1981 Futura prototype [pictured on page 32]. Those guitars are so polarising: it was originally a headless design, but marketing hated it and told the designers to put a headstock on it. Then it went on to not do well in the marketplace and got discontinued. When I opened that case and it's serial number 0001 and stamped 'Prototype', it's like, 'This is that guitar.'

"But I think my favourite we've sold was that '57 Goldtop. That was one of the first guitars I bought for the Vault in the planning stage of the Gibson Garage – and I played it a lot. That was my lunch break: go down, let myself into the Vault, spend 15 minutes with that guitar. That one kinda hurt to see go. But we've got other cool stuff to come, believe me." G

www.gibson.com/en-GB/Certified-Vintage



3. This Les Paul Standard Goldtop is from 1957, the year that the model's P-90 single coils were replaced by PAF humbuckers. Note one of two refilled holes shown below between the gold top-hat knobs, evidence of a past mod that added two phase switches. It is now returned to stock

4. Gibson notes that this original model features heavy lacquer checking plus forearm and neck wear that shows it has lived a well-played life. The guitar has received a pro refret by Nashville's Glaser Instruments, as well as a replacement set of tuning pegs

I am music

I live through your moments
Your first shake of the rattle
Your recorder lesson
Your match day anthem
Your queueing anticipation
Your hands in the air
Your main stage mayhem
Your favourite movie scene
Your first dance
Your last night of the proms
Your family singalong
Your swan song.

Musicians' Union

If you care about the future of music, join us as a supporter for free.

→ theMU.org

LOUDPEDAL

60-Watt amplifier



ACTUAL SIZE*

Laney

FIND OUT MORE

WWW.LANEYAMPS.COM

*PRINTING TOLERANCES COULD MARGINALLY DISTORT IMAGE, PLEASE SEE WEBSITE FOR PRECISE DIMENSIONS