

Guitarist

Issue 518

DECEMBER 2024

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Simple Pleasures



Maybe it's coincidence, but two very different guitarists – both on top of their game in their own spheres – said to me recently that restrictions can be a more powerful spur to creativity than endless choice. Both conversations were sparked by their experience of playing single-pickup guitars, and while most of the electric guitar industry seems intent on giving players as much tonal variation as possible from ever-more complicated pickup configurations and wiring options, single-pickup electrics not only endure but thrive.

I think there's a lot of truth in the notion that one really inspiring tone is better than 10 mediocre ones when it comes to getting the musical juices flowing. After all, acoustic guitars only have one core voice, but musicians seem to muddle along pretty well with vintage D-28s and the like!

On the electric side of things, the Gibson Les Paul Junior, which celebrates its 70th birthday this year (see feature, page 54) exemplifies the 'do one thing really well' approach, with its single pickup and workmanlike appointments. Yet it's easy to forget that, in the 60s and 70s era of loud valve-powered backline, simple tone and volume controls governing a grunty P-90 were powerful tools in the hands of great guitarists such as Leslie West.

From the example they set we may say that there is a different way of looking at versatility other than the kind offered by switches, buttons and circuitry. We may say that if we are inspired by one incredible, intoxicatingly exciting sound, it's likely we can find – using our technique and simple controls – further light and shade within that sound that we can explore forever. Enjoy the issue and see you next time.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights



George Benson

He's a titan of jazz guitar who crossed over into pop chart success without losing his kudos for pure jazz. We meet him on **p72**



Myles Kennedy

The Alter Bridge frontman has delivered one of the most stonking rock guitar albums of the year with his latest. He tells all on **p36**



Adam 'Nolly' Getgood

The Bristol-based producer and progressive rock/metal guitarist tells us about developing an evolved version of the venerable PAF on **p106**



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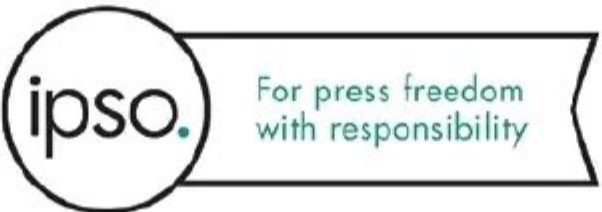
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Contents

COVER FEATURE



54

REGULARS

- 030 Gas Supply
- 032 Fretbuzz
- 034 New Music
- 036 Tones Behind The Tracks
- 040 Opinion
- 044 Substitute
- 046 Feedback
- 104 Subscribe
- 112 Longtermers
- 114 Bought & Sold
- 116 The Mod Squad
- 120 Nitty Gritty
- 124 Vintage Icons
- 130 Next Month

FEATURES

- 048 Marcus King
- 054 70 Years Of The Gibson Les Paul Junior
- 072 George Benson
- 106 Blueprint: Bare Knuckle PolyPaf

NEW GEAR

- 008 **Gretsch** Electromatic Pristine Ltd Jet Single-Cut with Bigsby
- 014 **Laney** LFSUPER60-112 Combo
- 018 **Gibson** Victory Figured Top
- 022 **Bare Knuckle** Nomads Set
- 024 **Neural DSP** Nano Cortex
- 026 **Beetronics** Tuna Fuzz
- 028 **Newman** Honeycomb Junior GT-40 Guitar-X 'Ultimate Billy' Edition
- 078 **Powers Electric** A-Type
- 092 **Yamaha** TAG3 C TransAcoustic
- 100 **TC Electronic** AmpWorx Series

TECHNIQUES

- 126 Blues Headlines with Richard Barrett

FEATURE

48



Guitarist

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92



REVIEW

PHOTOS BYOLLY CURTIS

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FIRST PLAY



**GRETSCH ELECTROMATIC
PRISTINE LTD JET SINGLE-
CUT WITH BIGSBY**
£699

WHAT IS IT? 2024 limited and
pimped version of Gretsch's
single-cut Jet in a trio of smart
colours and with gold hardware

Jazzy Jet

Always the ‘Les Paul’ of the Gretsch line since it first appeared back in the 50s, the Jet gets a snazzy Electromatic makeover. Style over substance? Let’s plug in...

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker

There’s always been a show-off element to Gretsch guitars and this new Pristine Jet is no exception. It comes in two blue metallics as well our rather classy top-edge bound White Gold, which looks like a 50s Cadillac cream. Look closely, however, or under different lighting, and you’ll see fine gold-coloured metal flakes that tie in perfectly with the gold-plated hardware. Made in China, it tops the current Jet line-up in the Electromatic range and is the only one with that gold-hardware, and the only non-signature in the Electromatic range that doesn’t have an easy-to-forget model number.

It’s also the only Jet with FT-5E Filter’Trons, which were added to the arsenal in 2022, it seems with the introduction of the Electromatic Classic Hollow Body models. Gretsch describes them as having “huge full-bodied punch, classic chime and enhanced presence, clarity and note definition”. So, while they don’t feature on any other Electromatic Jets, they do appear on guitars such as the large single-cut G5420T and the double-cut G5422T. Perhaps they’re







1. Adding to the Jet's classic style is the all gold-plated hardware, including the Bigsby B50 and tune-o-matic-style bridge, which needed a little TLC to nail the tuning stability

2. There's nothing wrong with the tuners here and the nut is well cut, with the exception of a troublesome D-string groove

included here to provide a little more classic Filter'Tron vibe over the more contemporary-sounding Black Top Broad'Trons seen on the majority of the Electromatic Jet models.

In Gretsch terminology, the Jet falls into the 'Solid Body' category, although the body here – a four-piece spread of mahogany topped with a solid carved maple top – is quite heavily chambered, as Gretsch states, with the back cut out to leave a centre section that stops just

thumbnail inlays, and good fretting from a pretty big wire on the 305mm (12-inch) radius face. Typically, Gretsch quotes the scale length as 625mm (24.6 inches), which is more like the shorter Gibson scale than the true 629mm (24.75-inch) scale used by Epiphone, for example.

As ever, we get all the funky Gretsch hardware such as those distinct control knobs and strap buttons, although the un-logo'd tuners are more generic. Overall, and by design, it's quite a looker.

4. There's some tidy work to the fretting on the laurel fingerboard, and those Neo-Classic thumbnail inlays are another Gretsch archetype

Look closely and you'll see fine gold-coloured metal flakes that tie in perfectly with the gold-plated hardware

3. This is the only Electromatic Jet model to feature these FT-5E Filter'Trons. And they sound as good as they look!

behind the licensed Bigsby B50. The body measures 340mm (13.4 inches) wide and 453mm (17.8 inches) long, and overall it's pretty Les Paul-like, with a depth of 60mm in the centre of the body and 48mm at the rim. The neck is three-piece with a heel stack and headstock splice augmenting the main one-piece shaft, while the light brown fingerboard is laurel with tidy single-ply binding, those Neo-Classic



UNDER THE HOOD

What's going on with all these controls?

Gretsch has certainly used a wide variety of controls and switches over its decades of guitar making, but the most common, from today's perspective at least, is what the brand calls the 'Tone Pot' circuit. This is used right across the Electromatic range, with the exception of the baritone and bass models.

Each pickup is connected to its own volume control then to the three-way toggle switch pickup selector before passing to the master volume and master tone. As we've seen with recent Electromatics, the unlogo'd pots are all 500k with linear (B) tapers, the master tone having a log or audio taper (A). The small green mylar tone capacitor is rated at .022 μ F. There's also a treble bleed circuit on the master volume that uses a 250kohm resistor wired in series with a .0068 μ F capacitor, a higher value than most circuits of this type.

Typically, the pickups are made by Booheung, the giant Korean pickup maker, but the only ID is that 'BHK' sticker; there's no individual pickup type indicated and scant information. The DCRs are typically low: 4.63k at the bridge and 4.33k at the neck – a little higher than the Black Top Filter'Trons but not as high as the Black Top Broad'Trons we tested on a pair of double-cut Jets back in issue 494.



The main cavity holds the individual pickup volumes and the master tone. Perfectly tidy stuff



The sticker tells us who makes the pickups and whether they're bridge or neck – but not the actual pickup model

4



Feel & Sounds

At 3.7kg (8.14lb), our Jet feels more solidbody than hollowbody, but it's a good weight for the style, and with a slightly broader Les Paul-styled body it's considerably less bulky than those classic Gretsch hollowbodies. Gretsch still calls the neck profile a 'thin U', which is a bit off-putting, as we've mentioned before, because it's actually a rather good palmful. A 'full C' might be a better description as it's not overly thin at all; it has a width of 43.9mm at the nut (with string spacing of 34mm) and a depth of 21.4mm at the 1st fret and 22.5mm by the 11th before it flows into the pretty classic, if slightly flat-faced, heel. Like a Les Paul, the single cutaway and that heel don't exactly make it a top-fret shredder, but with such a retro-aimed guitar that's of little consequence. Mind you, the fretwire is quite chunky, albeit not overly high (approximately 2.7mm wide by 1mm high), but it's well installed and very nicely polished.

The setup is good overall, but the tune-o-matic-style bridge in front of the Bigsby can cause some tuning snags. As you bend, the vibrato arm down by the bridge rocks slightly forwards, and to get



The heavily chambered back here is four-piece mahogany and the top is solid maple. It's tidy craft with no plywood in sight!



GRETSCH ELECTROMATIC PRISTINE LTD JET SINGLE-CUT WITH BIGSBY

PRICE: £699

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Single-cutaway chambered body electric

BODY: Chambered mahogany with maple top

NECK: Mahogany, 'thin U' profile, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 625mm (24.6")

NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic/43.9mm

FINGERBOARD: Laurel, pearloid Neo-Classic thumbnail inlays, 320mm (12.5") radius

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo

HARDWARE: Adjusto-Matic-style bridge, Bigsby B50 vibrato, enclosed tuners – gold-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Gretsch FT-5E Filter'Tron humbuckers with cream inserts, 3-way toggle pickup selector, master volume, individual pickup voles, master tone control

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.7/8.14

OPTIONS: No

RANGE OPTIONS: The Electromatic single-cut Jet range starts with the G5230T (£649) with Black top Filter'Trons, Bigsby and chrome hardware. The other Pristine model, also available in this White Gold finish, is the double-cut with centre block with gold hardware at £899 featuring P-90E single coils with cream inserts

LEFT-HANDERS: Not this model

FINISH: White Gold (as reviewed), Mako, Petrol – gloss polyurethane

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01342 331700

www.gretschguitars.com

8/10

PROS Classy looks; tidy build; strong classic 'Tron voices; good weight, feel and playability

CONS Needed some saddle and nut fettling to maximise tuning stability; no gigbag

things stable we needed a little saddle-notch filing and some lube. There was also a slightly tight D string nut groove that needed some similar minor fettling.

With all the controls full up there's little to dislike about the sounds we hear and quite a lot to applaud. There are three quite distinct Filter'Tron flavours, all well-balanced from the off. And with a simple clean amp, reverb and slapback, you can't blame the guitar if your rockabilly licks

There are three quite distinct Filter'Tron flavours, all well-balanced from the off

don't sound authentic. Add a little grit and, again, we have no complaints. It's a little more polite than our reference TV Jones Classic-equipped PRS S2 Semi-Hollow, although that's easily compensated for with a bit more level and a slight treble lift from our test amps.

The actual controls aren't as responsive as you might expect. The pickup volume tapers feel a bit slow, as does the tone, and while the same can be said for the master volume, it's that control that gets the most use since it's out of the way of the Bigsby and retains the bite as you pull it back. That said, keeping the master volume up full and just pulling back the pickup volumes does round the high-end subtly, which is handy with gainier amp voices.

Verdict

Here's a great-looking guitar that's just a few minor tweaks away from being as good as its style suggests. Should we have to do that with a new guitar? Well, perhaps that's a discussion for another day. In our experience, expecting any relatively low-end guitar to arrive out of its box perfectly set up to your tastes and tour-ready is a big ask. Conversely, some minor fettling (DIY or pro) can quickly transform the mediocre into special. And aside from being a looker, this guitar's construction and those FT-5E Filter'Tron humbuckers really are special. Welcome to the new Jet age. **G**



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FIRST PLAY



LANEY LFSUPER60-112
£349

WHAT IS IT? Solid-state, dual-channel 1x12 combo with boost, reverb and chorus/tremolo

Super Sonic

Can this Lionheart Foundry combo from Laney win the solid-state wars?

Words Martin Smith **Photography** Phil Barker

One of the UK's leading legacy amp brands, Laney has been synonymous with Black Sabbath's Tony Iommi during his era-spanning reign. Not content trading simply on its heritage, however, Laney continues to evolve its amplifier line with the Lionheart range of powerful yet dynamic valve amps, which were initially released for the company's 40th anniversary in 2007. These models became firm favourites for elite players including John 5 and Glenn Hughes. Now, the Foundry Series seeks to distil the responsive tone of the valve models into a solid-state combo format. As cork-sniffing valve enthusiasts, we're looking forward to testing the website's claim: "We've made it feel like you're playing a tube amp."

To bring innovation to its lineage, Laney launched a research and development branch, and since 2019 the Black Country Customs team has been devising innovative products such as The Difference Engine delay pedal and its LoudPedal 'board-







Two foot-switchable channels are augmented by boost, Secret Path reverb and Spiral Array chorus/tremolo



A purpose-designed HH Acoustics H1260 driver allows clean reproduction of the amp's full 60 watts

format amps. Here, our Super60 on review has been designed and engineered in the UK and constructed in China.

This attractive yet subdued-looking amp, in its blue, fawn and silver livery, nods towards a mid-century Supro aesthetic but with an extra depth to the cabinet, which we're hoping will be tonally beneficial due to the open-back design. It's surprisingly light, weighing in at 11.5kg (25.4lb), so you'll be able to get it up the rehearsal room stairs without breaking a sweat.

The silver faceplate houses the retro mini chickenhead controls. A single input sits alongside the first source of fun: the footswitchable boost. This can push either channel into an additional level of gain, effectively giving you four channels for the price of two. Channel 1, the clean channel, comprises a single volume and Bright switch, whereas the lead channel (Channel 2) has gain and level controls, and a Bright/Off/Dark toggle. The master tone section features bass, middle and treble,

plus a master tone control to quickly steer the amp's 'bass to treble' ratio to match different guitars and playing venues.

The effects stage has reverb, taken from the design of Laney's Secret Path pedal, and a chorus from the Spiral Array, as used by Andy Timmons no less. Channel, boost, reverb and mod effects can all be switched via the rear sockets, although no footswitch is included. Alongside are the wattage sector switch (which toggles between the full 60 watts and a bedroom-friendly one watt) and a speaker-muting headphone mini-jack for full stealth mode. There's also an external audio in jack for the busker with backing tracks, and, impressively, an IR-based speaker emulated XLR output for recording with 1x12 or 4x12 emulation options.

Sounds

Using a Telecaster Deluxe plugged into the clean channel, tone controls in mid/neutral position, we're greeted by an impressive full-bodied presentation. As promised, the amp responds with a valve-like touch responsiveness that inspires further playing and, by applying the boost, takes us into the pushed-Fender amp realm where bluesy licks begin to feel effortless. With 60 watts on tap, we can bring the clean sounds up loud enough to hold their own against even a heavy hitting drummer.

Switching to the lead channel, taking over where the clean channel's gain topped out, the tonality of this channel is immediately appealing. Its contoured,



Impulse response emulating DI XLR and headphone outputs provide 1x12 and 4x12 options, effects loop and Aux in



Master treble, middle and bass controls are joined by individual channel Bright switches and a master tone knob



LANEY LIONHEART FOUNDRY SERIES LFSUPER60-112 COMBO

PRICE: £349

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: All solid-state

VALVES: N/A

OUTPUT: Switchable 60W/1W

DIMENSIONS: 448 (h) x 260 (d) x 485mm (w)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 11.5/25.4

CABINET: Composite wood construction

LOUDSPEAKER: HH Acoustics HH1260 12-inch

CHANNELS: 2

CONTROLS: Boost w/ on/off switch, Ch1 Clean Volume w/ Bright switch, Ch1/Ch2 toggle switch, Lead Gain, Lead Volume, Bright/Dark switch, Bass, Middle, Treble, Tone, Reverb, Tremolo/Chorus switch, Effects Rate and Depth

FOOTSWITCH: Not supplied

ADDITIONAL FEATURES:

Footswitchable boost, effects loop, IR-recording output, reverb, chorus/tremolo. Headphone out. Aux in

RANGE OPTIONS: The simplified LF60-112 is £279; the vertical LFSuper60-212 is £429

Laney Amplification

0121 508 6666

smooth overdrive reminds us of Orange amps yet with possibly more gain available. Any honky upper-mids seemed attenuated to a degree, lessening the squawk and quack that can plague Stratocaster-style guitars. And moving to a Cutler Custom S-style, the amp easily turned in a convincing Van Halen 'brown' sound, a feat many would assume out of range for an affordable solid-state combo such as this.

For once, time allows us to put this amp through its paces at a gig and it was a rare pleasure for this writer to walk through a venue with all his gear in-hand and not be breathless upon reaching the stage. The amp held its own all night against drums, bass, vocals – and four horn players! One thing to note, in comparison to the 70s Fender Twin previously used for this gig, the Super60 has quite a large and open low-end. In positive terms, that can help the guitar hold its own, and by dialling back the bass control and flicking on the Bright switch, it regained some snap for a funkier R&B sound.

Visiting the effects department, that Secret Path pedal-derived reverb imparts a pleasant but neutral ambience that we enjoyed with the clean channel – neither obviously too 'springy' nor 'roomy' in nature. The tremolo throbbed pleasingly with a richness of modulation evoking vintage valve-modulated designs. In Chorus mode, subtle depth settings could nail *Message In A Bottle*-like chorus, moving through to chewier flange sounds at higher depth levels.

By applying the boost, we're into the pushed-Fender amp realm where bluesy licks begin to feel effortless

With regard to the extended size of this cabinet – which houses the specially designed HH Acoustics H1260 driver – as expected, the added size did indeed translate into a noticeably larger sound stage than many single 12-inch combos can muster. The speaker stayed true and unfatigued at all volume levels, punching out detailed yet robust clean and overdriven tones alike.

Verdict

Here's an amp that we thoroughly enjoyed using. Its ability to speak with a valve-like voice at stage levels in a package that's liftable with one hand is something many of us could only have dreamed of in our younger days. The flawless integration of the effects and speaker emulation is a testament to Black Country Customs' efforts, too. While the amp itself won't reach valve-like temperatures, it certainly warms our hearts to know that in the future we'll still be able to sound great on a gig without a monster valve amp pumping out behind us. **G**



PROS Valve-like tone with plenty of volume; well-integrated boost and effect functions; light and portable; great value for money

CONS A matching footswitch would have been very welcome

FIRST PLAY



GIBSON VICTORY FIGURED TOP

£2,199

WHAT IS IT? Subtle but classy reworking of a cult 80s model originally from Gibson's legendary Kalamazoo headquarters

Second Time Lucky

It hardly set the world alight on its first release, but tasteful upgrades may yet see the new Victory models receive the recognition they deserve

Words Neville Marten **Photography** Olly Curtis

It's tough for brands like Gibson and Fender, who hit bullseye with models such as the Les Paul, ES-335, Stratocaster and Telecaster, to bring something new to the table. Witness Fender's Coronado and Starcaster semis, which had neither the operational brilliance of the ES-335 nor the 'cool kitsch' of Gretsch's offerings. Then we had Gibson's late-70s missteps with the RD, Marauder and more. But many of these past failures have seen something of a resurgence, usually when picked up by some cool new player or by a guitar builder who twists old designs into something fresh.

Yet, however hard Gibson tried to promote the original Victory models, they were dropped after less than three years. Perhaps the world just wasn't ready yet. But look at PRS's recently revamped Vela, with its offset styling and chamfered edges, and you'll see that the Victory's style is alive, well and very much in vogue.

The very last design to come out of Gibson's 225 Parsons Street, Kalamazoo home as the combined effort of designer Chuck Burge and pickup guru Tim Shaw, 1981's Victory MVII was intended to take on Fender's country mainstay the Telecaster, while the three-pickup Victory MVX offered a Strat-alike option. It originally came with an all-maple construction – unlike today's, which uses the company's more traditional





Clever switching allows coil-splitting, as well as selection of either the outer or inner coils of the 80s Tribute humbuckers



mahogany on the base model and adds an AA maple cap on the Figured Top version, as here. It has to be said that the grain on ours isn't amazing, and the two halves aren't very well matched, but we did spot some spectacular lookers online. Nevertheless, it's still rather tasty in this Smokehouse Burst, gloss nitro finish.

The 1981 Victory retained Gibson's traditional set neck but aped the Tele's

The finely honed neck allows whatever chops you have to flow effortlessly

control layout, albeit with a coil-split to elicit some spankier tones from its twin humbuckers. Rather than retaining the early Victory's vaguely Firebird-ish headstock, the new guitar has Gibson's Concorde-nosed Explorer peghead, with six-a-side Grover Mini Rotomatic tuners.

Other tweaks include refined body contours, a deep neck heel carve, improved weight and balance, a shift from Gibson's 639mm (24.75 inches) to a more Fender-like 648mm (25.5-inch) scale length, and pickups mounted directly into the body, unlike the previous model's, which sat within the pickguard itself. We like the

white binding and acrylic dot markers mounted along the fingerboard's top edge, with double dots at the 12th and 24th frets, since the instrument now boasts a full two octaves' worth of medium jumbo wires which are well fitted and finished. Perhaps to enhance its rockier vibe, the 'board also features a compound radius that flattens out from 254mm (10 inches) to 406mm (16 inches) to make fretting out a thing of the past.

Typical Gibson hardware abounds, with tune-o-matic bridge and stud tailpiece, as well as a nicely cut Graph Tech nut, five-ply black and white pickguard, and aluminium strap buttons.

The electronics played an important role in what Gibson hoped would be the original Victory MVII's success. Here, too, we find a plethora of humbucking and single-coil tones, all accessed by a simple control and switching setup. Like the earlier version, its twin open-topped humbuckers (these 80s Tribute pickups are said to evoke the fat, powerful sounds of the era) are controlled by master volume and tone pots. Both offer a pull-switch facility, and while pulling up the volume pot splits both pickups' coils, the tone knob selects either inner or outer coils when in split mode. However, a smooth, tapered knob is about the worst shape to pull up in the heat of the moment, especially with sweaty fingers holding a pick. So we'd replace these with something grippier.

Overall, it's a good-looking, solidly built and well-finished guitar that doesn't scream '40-year-old throwback' but is very much an instrument of today.

Feel & Sounds

With its sleeker, more slender body, just 38mm in depth, and SlimTaper neck, the Victory beckons you to pick it up and play it. All two octaves on each string are accessible by the digitally adventurous, although a tone bend at the 24th fret is something of an achievement. It's an easy guitar to become friends with, too; it doesn't fight back, instead the finely honed neck allows whatever chops you have to flow effortlessly. We did keep wanting to reach for a non-existent whammy bar, though (the original Victory MVX had one), so perhaps this could be something for further down the line.

A Boss Katana-50 Gen 3 50-watt combo was our test rig here, as at its heart it's a simple and great-sounding amp. Using the Katana's clean and lead settings revealed just how versatile the new Victory is. With no push-pulls engaged we discover a typical solidbody Gibson voice, but whether it's the 80s Tribute pickups (voiced for rhythm and lead positions), the mahogany/maple build or indeed both, there's a harder edge here than you'd find on, say, an SG. But this suits the guitar's more aggressive stance and comes into its own when dialling in the gain, when



This deeply sculpted neck heel carve allows total access to the guitar's two-octave ebony fingerboard

things become smooth, sustaining and vocally articulate.

Coil-split mode does not take us straight to Fender world. These aren't Strat or Tele tones, they're much more 'Gibson-lite', again due to the guitar's construction and the fact that a Fender single coil is a totally different animal from half of a Gibson humbucker. Things do become sweeter, though, and whether clean or dirty there's a ton of versatility here before we even encounter push-pull number two. Essentially, with this pot in its usual resting place the outer (white) coils sound, but when pulled it flips to the inner two. The tones aren't markedly different, but with both pickups together we get an almost 'piezo acoustic' tone, the bridge becomes a tad more nasal,



While the push-pull pots offer a plethora of excellent single-coil and humbucking tones, this knob shape is about the worst for grabbing in the heat of the moment

and the neck offers the least noticeable change. It certainly covers a lot more sonic ground than its almost Jackson Dinky looks might suggest.

Verdict

Put Les Pauls and SGs to the back of your mind. The Victory Figured Top pretends to be neither of these Gibson stalwarts but ploughs its own furrow in this comprehensively upgraded guise. Company boss Cesar Gueikian had hinted at the model's re-emergence on Instagram, and even by playing one on stage. Gueikian clearly sees merit in giving the Victory a second crack of the whip, and we feel the improvements wrought in its styling, build and switching options send it close to the top of the leaderboard in this hotly contested quarter.

Notwithstanding our model's unremarkable maple cap, the Victory Figured Top is a handsome and versatile instrument that deserves its second chance. Truth is, there's almost nothing of the original left. And while this reviewer can't pretend to have been the old Victory's biggest fan, Gibson has definitely won him over with this latest and much-improved incarnation of the model.

At around two grand (and a couple of hundred less for the uncapped, satin-finished base model) it's fairly priced, too, but we can't wait to see what the almost inevitable Epiphone version brings. **G**



GIBSON VICTORY FIGURED TOP

PRICE: £2,199 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Double-cutaway, solidbody electric

BODY: Mahogany with 2-piece AA figured maple top

NECK: Mahogany, SlimTaper profile

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech /43mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound ebony, acrylic dot markers, compound 254-406mm (10-16") radius

FRETS: 24, medium jumbo

HARDWARE: Gibson 'Nashville' tune-o-matic bridge and aluminium stud bar tailpiece, 6-in-a-line Grover Mini Rotomatic tuners; chrome plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.56mm

ELECTRICS: Gibson 80s Tribute neck and bridge humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume with push/pull coil-split, master tone with push/pull for inner/outer coil selection

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3/6.61

OPTIONS: N/A

RANGE OPTIONS: The base-model Victory (£1,749) is all-mahogany with solid Dark Green, Dark Walnut or Gold Mist satin finishes; Victory Figured Top Exclusive (£2,199, online only) in Translucent Ebony Burst

LEFT-HANDERS: N/A

FINISH: Smokehouse Burst (as reviewed), Red Wine Burst, Iguana Burst

Gibson

00800 4442 7661

www.gibson.com

8/10

PROS Refined contours, improved switching and pepped-up looks; a plethora of great sounds from a simple control setup; a great neck; it's fairly priced

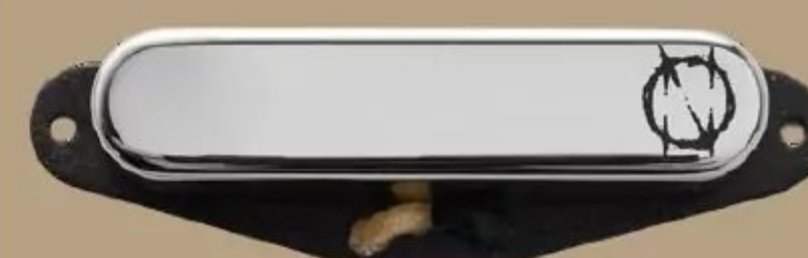
CONS Gibson could have spent more time matching the figured cap's two halves; the guitar definitely needs gripper push-pull knobs

Moving On

The third collaboration between Bare Knuckle and Rabea Massaad might be the best yet. If you play a T-style, you need to hear these

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis

FIRST PLAY



**BARE KNUCKLE
NOMADS SET**
From £261.60

.....
WHAT IS IT? The latest Rabea Massaad signature single-coil pickup set, this time for T-styles



1. As with any Bare Knuckle pickup, there are numerous custom options. The bridge can be aged, while the neck pickup can be ordered in over 20 finish options with either a full or partial cover. There are also options for RW/RP and the four-way mod, and you can buy them as a set or individually

Pickups for Telecasters come in numerous sonic shades, and to that end Bare Knuckle already makes quite a few. In fact, adding this new set, the company has 11 different flavours, including the historic Blackguard sets; the Flat '50s have been powering this writer's Tele for the past few years.

"I wanted to create something more controlled and powerful that would cater to my heavier sounds just as much as the ambient and cleaner side of what I do," states Rabea. Like his Triptych set for S-style guitars, the Nomads use a different magnet blend.

"In order to make them synergistic with the Triptych set, I decided on a similar approach," says Bare Knuckle founder, Tim Mills. "I opted for Alnico III magnets in the bridge coil and Alnico V in the neck. Alnico III has the lowest pull of any of the Alnicos used in guitar pickups and this, paired with a relatively hot wind of 43 AWG plain enamel wire, allows for the high-end to really breathe and for plenty of extension in the bottom-end. It puts all of the dynamic headroom at the player's control, either by rolling back the volume or digging in more with the pick to push the signal harder."

Both pickups are well crafted, and the bridge uses what looks like a traditional copper-plated steel baseplate. Tim tells us it's actually "a much thicker 1950-style baseplate that would have been zinc-plated, but we decided copper-plating would be a nice touch to change things up. The thicker steel alters the inductance of the coil, delivering more solid high-end response with plenty of weight behind each note. More of every frequency – but most players particularly feel it in the high-end where it removes any hint of spikiness and really fattens up single-note lead work."

The neck pickup plays with the recipe, too. "It features a taller coil than normal," says Tim, "and slightly narrower-diameter magnetic poles – though our vintage-correct full drop Tele neck covers, which are made from pure nickel silver with our own tooling, still fit! The taller coil allows me to use a hotter wind than I would usually go for while sticking with a 43AWG plain enamel wire, which maintains the balance with the bridge, and the narrower-diameter

magnets keep the bottom-end under control with plenty of snap in the upper mids and highs."

Sounds

One thing that impressed us about the Triptych set was the apparent balance between positions – and that's evident here. These pickups are designed to play well for traditional Tele-like tones and also under much higher gains. Starting clean and loud, the bridge isn't ferociously bright, but it's certainly a Tele with gnarly honk, very present depth and clear highs without that eyebrow-raising treble many of us will have experienced. At the neck, it's more Strat-y to our ears, with well-tuned clarity, depth and percussive bounce. For funk or jangle fans, the mix is deliciously widescreen, combining depth and sparkle; it's extremely musical. It's little surprise that these Nomads record really well.

Edging up the gain you begin to notice how well that bridge pickup especially responds to pick attack and dynamics, while the neck puts on a Texas bluesman's hat. Running through a variety of dirt pedals, the Nomads lap them up.

Unlike on so many Teles we've wrestled with over the years, our right hand isn't constantly riding the tone control to pull back the sharp highs, and we're not wishing for more clarity at the neck. Balance is the keyword: a T-style voice for sure, full of rootsy character but without the sharp 'n' dark bits.

Verdict

If there were a *MasterChef* for pickup makers, Tim Mills would have won it countless times over the past 21 years. On the one hand, these Nomads are just another set of pickups for a Telecaster, but those decades of listening – not least to players such as Rabea – have not only satisfied the artist but created a recipe that has all the taste of this classic plank with a very seasoned, musical flavour. Is this just another take on a Broadcaster set? "Kind of," concludes Tim, "but I've introduced enough changes to bring it forward to the 21st century and turn what was already a sledgehammer pickup into a dynamic battering ram." Anyone with a troublesome Tele, whatever style you play in, needs to hear these. **G**



BARE KNUCKLE NOMADS SET

PRICE: From £261.60 (£276.60 as reviewed)

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Carefully curated T-style signature set designed for Rabea Massaad

MOUNTING TYPE: Standard

POLEPIECE SPACING/STYLE: 55mm/flush pole (bridge); covered (neck)

HOOKE-UP WIRE: Vintage-style push-back cloth-covered single conductor

MAGNET TYPE: Alnico III (bridge), Alnico V (neck)

COIL WIRE/WIND: 43 AWG plain enamel/scatter-wound

POTTING: Yes

DCR (kohms): 10.4 (bridge); 7.2 (neck)

OPTIONS: Nomads etch on neck pickup cover (as reviewed) adds £15. Plenty of cover options; RW/RW and four-way mod

Bare Knuckle Pickups

01326 341313

www.bareknucklepickups.co.uk



10/10

PROS Beautifully detailed craft; very balanced outputs; good dynamic range; 'no spike' zone at bridge; enhanced clarity at neck

CONS Not that we can hear or see

Grey Matter

Neural DSP heads further into the hardware market with a one-stop shop for your amp-sim and drive needs

Words Stuart Williams Photography Olly Curtis

FIRST PLAY



NEURAL DSP
NANO CORTEX
£499

WHAT IS IT? New entry-level amp, cab and effects simulator for guitar and bass, with Neural DSP's Capture capability



1. As well as the 25 factory Captures, you can create your own amp, cab and drive-pedal Captures. Deeper editing is done via the Cortex Cloud app
2. There's no screen, so navigation is indicated by the multiple LEDs
3. Some of our favourite features are somewhat unsung, such as the polyphonic Transpose pitch-shifter and the footswitch encoders

Neural DSP's Quad Cortex has taken the world of guitar processing by storm since it arrived in 2020 with a do-it-all approach to solutions for every part of our rigs: amp and cab emulation, effects processing, direct box, IR-loader, audio interface and more. It's now a front runner alongside the likes of the Kemper Profiler, Line 6 Helix and multiple offerings from Fractal in the race to convenient, portable and controllable tone.

Now, Neural has unleashed its next brainwave, the Nano Cortex, with compact dimensions and a number of features found in its older sibling. And while it ships with a USB-C cable (which can power it from a computer or battery pack), a dedicated power supply is an additional purchase.

In Use

The first thing to understand about the Nano Cortex is its architecture. Everything hinges around what the Neural lexicon calls 'Captures'. Inside, you can store up to 256 Captures – that is, digital snapshots of an amp, cab or drive pedal. There are 25 amp Captures onboard, produced in exactly the same way as those of the Quad Cortex. Meanwhile, the IR-loading part of the Nano offers 300 pre-installed impulse responses, with five mic selections placed in six different positions each. If that's not enough, hooking up the Nano to the free Cortex Cloud app gives you access to an ever-growing database of official and user-generated Captures: 25,000 and counting at the time of writing! Plus, there's the facility to create your own amp and pedal Captures, too.

The Nano's signal chain is fixed per preset, comprising seven 'blocks', which make up your saved preset and start with Neural's Adaptive Gate to remove unwanted noise. Next is the Transpose pitch-shifter, which can drop or raise the pitch of your guitar polyphonically, as well as offering a blend control to create harmonised lines. The third and fourth blocks are for Neural Captures and cab-simulating IRs, and these two blocks are the only ones whose purposes can be changed. From here, we move into post-amp blocks, pre-determined as Modulation (based on a Boss DC-2w), Delay (BBD analogue-style echo) and Reverb (Mind Hall Reverb based on a Lexicon 224).

There's not enough space to list all of what the Nano Cortex can do, but we can tell you, perhaps unsurprisingly, that it sounds brilliant. Digital amps and overdrives can often be saddled with a veneer of synthetic plastic sheen – not here. The clean and break-up sounds all have that 'real' feeling: dynamic response, biting attack and a gritty presence that we often miss with digital modellers. The same goes for the higher-gain sounds, which offer huge amounts of distortion on tap without the super-compressed whoosh and bombast of a multi-effects unit. Talking of effects, while the selection is limited, it's very high quality with rich, lush-sounding effects that are likely to serve your main requirements.

The Capture function is a lot of fun, too. It's easy to rig up to a pedal, and with a few tweaks to the Capture input's gain settings, there's really not a lot to do other than a couple of button presses. A few minutes later, the Nano spits out an identical clone of whatever you've just fed into it, and before long you'll be considering what else you can digitally half-inch.

Nevertheless, it's important to realise that these are static snapshots, not out-and-out modelling; the Nano Cortex will capture your amp/pedal in whatever state the controls are presented to it. If you want different tonalities or gain settings that are true to the behaviour of your specific gear (not best-guess generic gain/EQ controls), you'll need to create a new Capture at those settings. But that's not about to ruin our fun!

Verdict

There's plenty to consider here. It's a little tricky to get your head into the series of button presses required for navigation in normal use, and without the screen we loved so much on the Quad Cortex you'll need to wirelessly tether to the Cortex App for deeper/greater visual control. But this is a complex little box, so some learning curve is to be expected. Likewise, the lack of effects-ibility could leave some users wanting more. If that's you, then the Quad Cortex or Line 6 HX Stomp are worth a look. However, if you want to integrate top-notch amp sounds, digital Captures and a whole lot more into a portable, hands-on pedalboard, this is going to top your list. **G**



NEURAL DSP NANO CORTEX

PRICE: £499

ORIGIN: Finland

TYPE: Amp/cab/effects simulator

FEATURES: Amp, cab and drive pedal Captures, Capture creation, pre/post FX, audio interface

CONTROLS: Gain, bass, mid, treble, amount, output level, 2x footswitch/encoders, headphone volume

CONNECTIONS: Input, L/R output, ground-lift, expression pedal/MIDI socket, headphones, power socket

POWER: USB-C-powered or PSU (not included)

DIMENSIONS: 144 x 103 x 620mm

Neural DSP

support@neuraldsp.com

www.neuraldsp.com



9/10

PROS Top-class digital amp, cab and overdrive recreations; Capture functionality is straightforward and effective; Cortex Cloud app offers a huge amount of tonal variations in an instant

CONS Some users will miss the screen; the signal chain is fixed, as is the slightly bare-bones effects section; no dedicated power supply included

FIRST PLAY



BEETRONICS TUNA FUZZ
£85

.....
WHAT IS IT? A three-transistor fuzz box built into a tuna can with just a single volume knob



Canned Heat

Beetronics eschews its ornate pedal casings and gets back to basics with a fuzz built into a tuna can. Seriously!

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

- 1. The base of the pedal is a clear plastic lid that is essential for structural integrity. You can remove it to reveal the underside of the circuit board
- 2. All you get on the top surface is a single footswitch and an LED that lights up red when the pedal is active
- 3. The Volume knob has an orange stripe to show you where you're at. If you go much beyond the median position you won't see it from above, but you know you'll be loud!
- 4. In keeping with the pedal's aesthetics, it comes in the sort of packaging in which some of us may have bought Stars Wars figures a long time ago in a toy shop far, far away...

Beetronics is known for quirky fuzz pedals with elaborately designed and brightly coloured casings, but the brand's latest release is about as far from that design aesthetic as you can get. What we have here is a fuzz pedal built into a tuna can. And while it's fair to say that this particular can has never been host to fishy comestibles (it's 100 per cent vegan) and is solidly and elegantly put together, it's still a tin can... so what's the story?

Well, in the early days Beetronics' founder, Filipe Pampuri, started building fuzz pedals using tuna cans, a few of which were still hanging around in the warehouse sparking the idea of releasing the design as an official product. The result is the Tuna Fuzz, which Beetronics wanted to be accessible to as many people as possible. To that end, the idea was that the pedal could only be purchased direct from Beetronics for \$99. However, a deal has been struck so that it can be bought from UK retailers for £85, too.

Beetronics says that this is a simple, powerful fuzz pedal with lots of output and attitude, and that's a pretty accurate description. Fuzz pedals don't get much simpler than this! You get a fixed amount of fuzz here with a Volume knob to set the output of the pedal, which has its unity gain point before you're halfway through its travel so there's plenty there for a significant boost to hit the front-end of your amp alongside the fuzz.

The lack of any gain or tone control is no detriment as the amount of fuzz and its timbre sounds exactly right to our ears. It's full-on, thick and gnarly, with a good balance of frequencies – a crispy top-end presence, tight bass, and do we detect a slight scoop in the mids? With really good string clarity and everything cleaning up tidily with guitar volume, rolling back to clean through some practical crunchy drive tones, this is a nicely dialled-in fuzz that many players could find a use for.

Verdict
The Tuna Fuzz is by far the most affordable pedal that Beetronics has made, and with no skimping on sound quality, it offers the best opportunity to sample the brand. Yes, it's a quirky design, but it's a tasty fuzz that's worth making a tuna-can-shaped space on your pedalboard for. **G**



BEETRONICS TUNA FUZZ

PRICE: £85
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Fuzz pedal
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Stinker (master volume), Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 10 mA
DIMENSIONS: 100 (including knob) (w) x 85 (d) x 50mm (h)

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



PROS A cute concept that's well executed; affordable; good volume knob clean-up; nicely balanced fuzz tone

CONS The plastic base fits firmly, but there may be an issue over time if it's Velcro'd to your 'board



THE RIVALS

Looking at single-knob fuzzes to be had at a reasonable price point, there's the Fredric Effects Demon Fuzz (£125) based on the 70s Electro-Harmonix Muff Fuzz with a Volume knob and a choice of germanium or silicon clipping diodes. Incidentally, EHX's most minimal fuzz pedal is the Satisfaction Fuzz (£55), although that features two knobs. The Mythos Golden Fleece (£129, right) has a single More knob controlling the output of the circuit, which is said to blend fuzz, distortion, and overdrive. Five Cats Pedals' One Knob Fuzz (£50) is available in five different fuzz flavours.



PHOTO: MYTHOSPEDALS.COM



the Wishlist

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

Newman Honeycomb Junior GT-40 Guitar-X 'Ultimate Billy' Edition £3,999

Cream T Custom Shop WEB www.creamtcustomshop.com WORDS Dave Burrluck PHOTOGRAPHY Olly Curtis

Earlier this year we introduced the Newman 5 String, a cracking version of a guitar that was designed in the late 70s by the late luthier and Stones tech Ted Newman Jones III to originally cater for the five-string needs of Keith Richards. It marked the first joint venture between the US company Newman Guitars, headed by Jeff Smith, and the UK's Cream T Custom Shop, who makes the guitars in limited runs here in the UK.

If that 5 String was firmly rooted in the past, then this latest UK Newman brings the story bang up to date with an emulation of the USA Newman guitar that Billy F Gibbons has been touring with. The Big G, of course, already has ties with Cream T, who created his Whiskerbucker humbuckers and other pickups, and he also had some design input into the first Cream T guitar design, the Aurora.

It might have one string more and one pickup less than that 5 String, but this new addition also uses honeycomb chambering – developed by US luthier John Bolin who's made many guitars for BFG – to the already lightweight obeche slab body. It's capped with a thin maple top under the cream-bound Baby Blue opaque gloss finish, the only colour currently

offered. Another difference from the 5 String is that the 629mm (24.75-inch) 24-fret maple bolt-on neck here is chambered and then reinforced with a pair of carbon rods. The fingerboard is bound maple with abalone dots and a gloss finish, while the Newman-designed string-through bridge changes to a Music City wraparound.

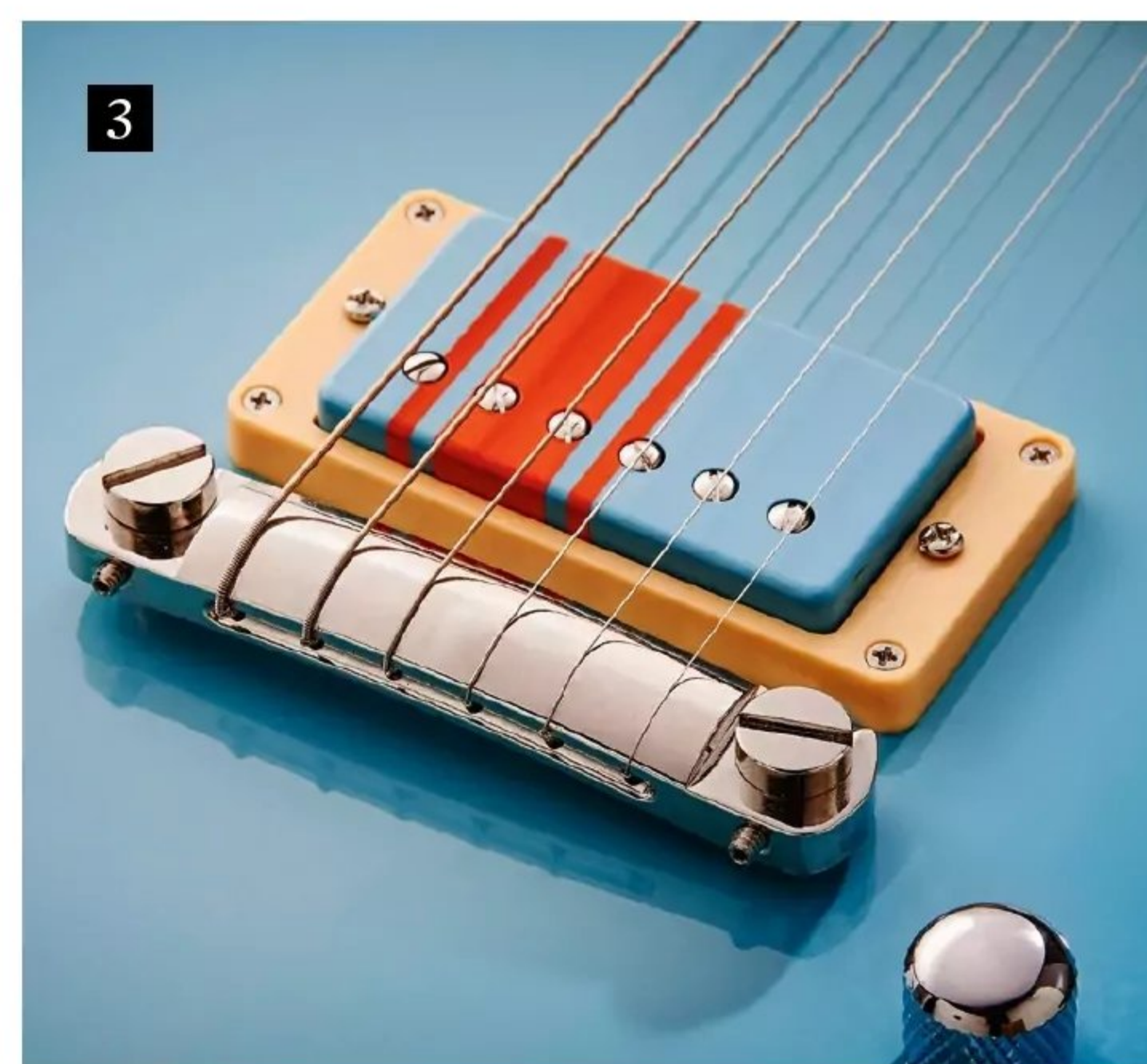
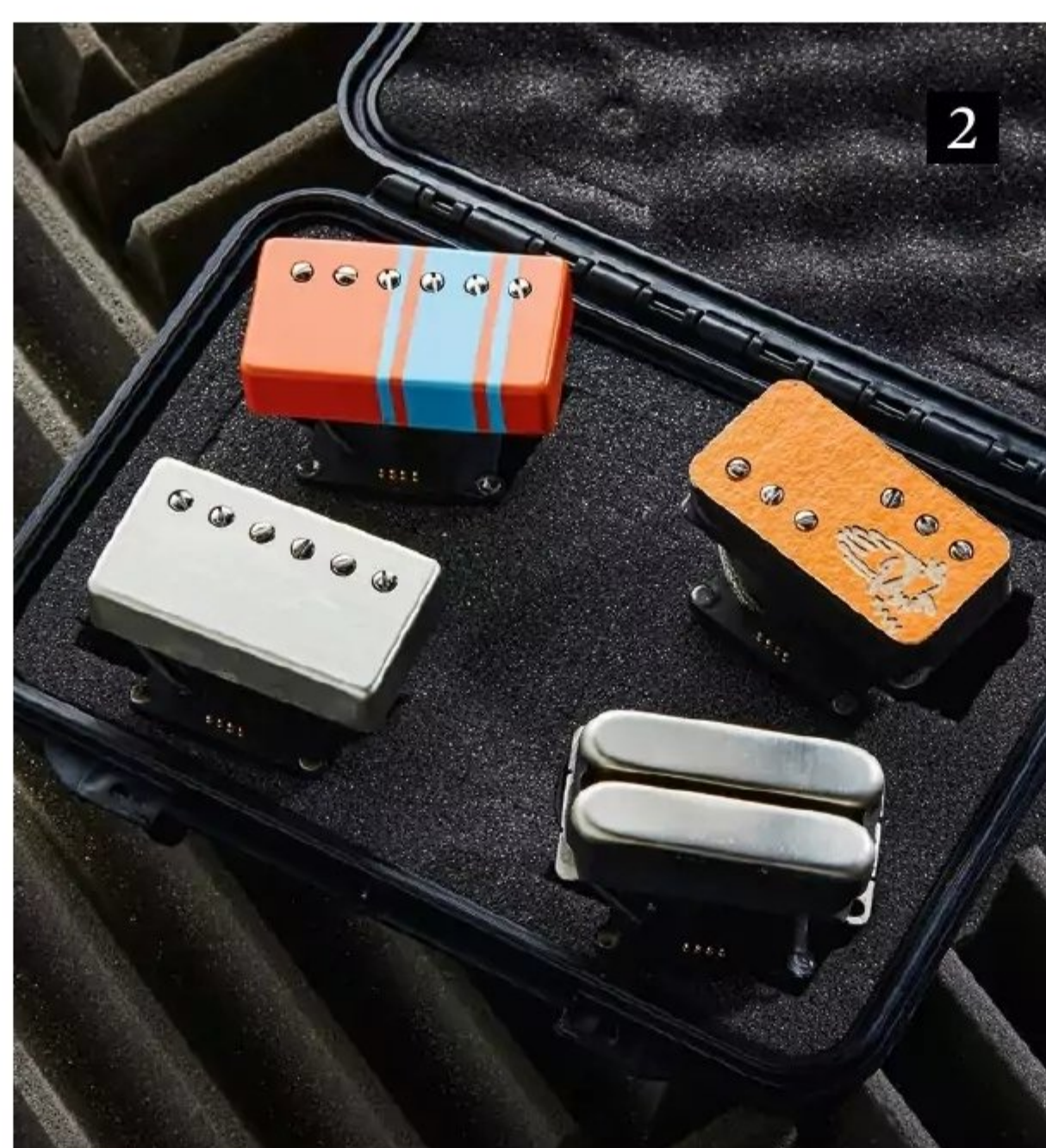
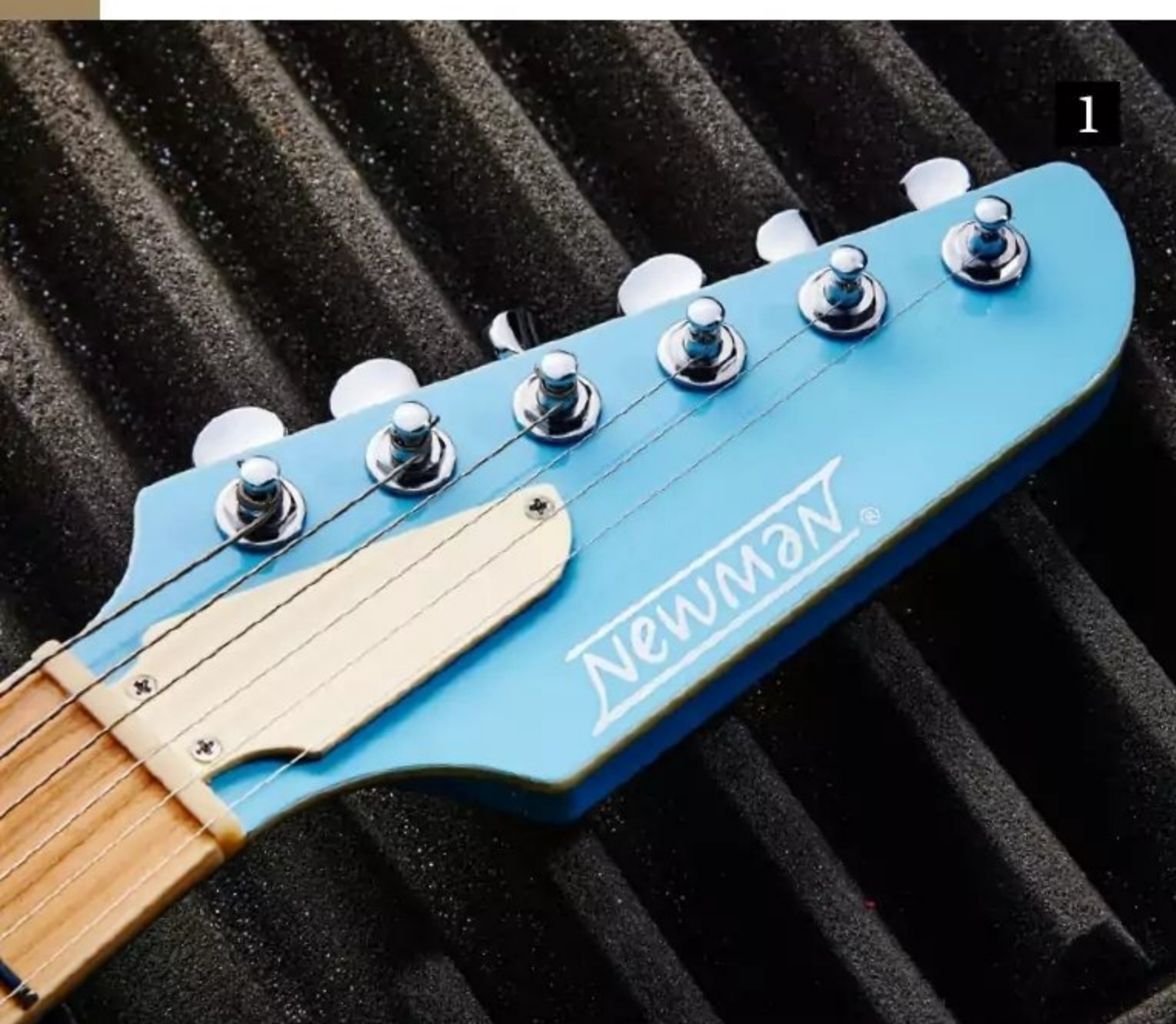
What doesn't change is the unique outline that Ted created, and in this chambered style it's very light in weight at 2.62kg (5.74lb) but hangs beautifully on a strap. "It's the old rockers' guitar," quips Cream T owner, Tim Loble. "You can wear it all night!"

As we've seen with previous UK-made Cream T and Newman guitars, the craft is first-class and that includes the simple pull-out/push-in Guitar-X pickup swapping system. And with five pickups in the pack (all coil-splittable, except the Original Banger), there's plenty to listen to, not least two flavours of the Whiskerbucker contrasted by the subtly more Fender-style taste of that Banger & Mash. Of course, you can buy any Cream T and other brand humbucker-sized pickups with the Guitar-X mounting, or simply buy the mounting frames and solder them on yourself.

A brave new world for pickup tinkerers and a superb guitar to play the host. If it's good enough for BFG... **G**

1. Like the body shape, the Newman headstock is directly based on Ted Newman's original late-70s design. It's a six-in-a-line style but back-angled, and uses the ambigram Newman logo

2. Thanks to the unique Guitar-X pickup swapping you can instantly revoice the Junior-style guitar. In the bundle you get the default Whiskerbucker (with a Baby Blue cover and Tangerine stripes, shown on the guitar), a new-design Overwound Whiskerbucker (Tangerine cover with Baby Blue Stripes), and mainstays of the range, the Original Banger (Tangerine with BFG Logo), BFG Banger and the Banger & Mash (both with aged nickel covers) originally designed for Keith Richards

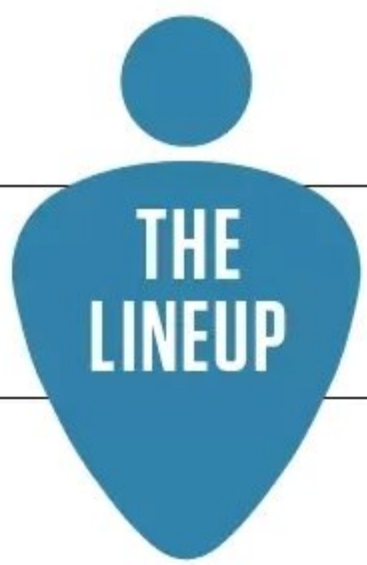


3. This Music City wrapover (or wraparound) bridge is yet another take on an improved Les Paul Junior one-piece bridge. Designed by Joe Glaser with input from dozens of Nashville studio guitar players, it's made from a "custom alloy for improved sustain", while the top shaping is compensated to provide more accurate intonation

4. The second UK-made Newman guitar, and the first six-string, is based on the US Newman guitars that ZZ Top have been playing and also the ones Billy F Gibbons and Austin Hanks used exclusively for their 2023 European tour. Newman (in the USA) made a number of guitars, all with the Baby Blue and Orange livery, and for that solo tour Billy and Austin's guitars also featured the Little Thunder pickup, which produces additional octave-down output

5. Named the Honeycomb Junior GT-40, the guitar is also available in fixed-pickup format with a Cream T Whiskerbucker (£3,299, or at £3,499 with orange racing stripes). The pickup-swapping Guitar-X versions start at £3,499 with two pickups included: a Whiskerbucker and the Overwound Whiskerbucker. Our 'Ultimate Billy' edition you see here comes with five pickups, which, of course, can be instantly swapped in and out, and a tasty matching blue strap with orange stripes!





Gas Supply

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

Gibson Les Paul Studio £1,599

CONTACT **Gibson** PHONE 00800 44427661 WEB www.gibson.com

JARGON CRUNCHING

Ultra Modern weight relief

Gibson's Ultra Modern weight relief comprises a series of wedge-shaped holes carved out of the body to remove mass. In addition to this, Gibson places a V-shaped cut behind the stopbar, resulting in reduced weight without losing the essence of the guitar's tonal design.

Ahh, this takes me back - my mate had a Wine Red one!

Indeed, the Gibson Les Paul Studio has been treading the line between affordability and Gibson USA prestige for 40 years, and now it's back (though it never really went away) for 2024 with some big changes across the board.

Still no binding on the body, I see...

Well, no, but this is the Les Paul Studio and it costs around £1,000 less than the current Gibson Les Paul Standard, so we'll concede that cost savings have to come from somewhere. Which brings us to the first new introduction: the bound fingerboard. It's rosewood, with a 304.8mm (12-inch) radius, trapezoid inlays and Gibson has outlined it with single-ply cream plastic to bring it closer to the Standard's visuals. That's attached to a mahogany neck, cut to a SlimTaper profile to make things speedy and modern feeling.

Yeah, but you try wearing that thing around your neck for a whole gig!

Gibson is helping us out there, too. The Les Paul has, at times, been known for its heft. But here the company has

applied its Ultra Modern weight relief processes, which involves the boffs in Nashville applying some number-crunching to remove the weight while keeping the tone. Gibson says that this calculated chiselling maintains the Les Paul's characteristic sound without veering into ES-territory. We've got our hands on one, and it weighs in at 3.71kg (8.16lb).

Interesting, but the pickups in a Studio are always a compromise, aren't they?

Well, you've just found another loophole. Someone at Gibson HQ thought it would be a good idea to equip the LP Studio with Burstbuckers Pros, and we're hoping that they don't twig. As you know, these are a more aggressive Alnico V-equipped take on Gibson's classic Burstbucker. What's more, they're now wired to independent coil-split circuits, engaged by pulling the volume control for each pickup.

A grand less than a Standard, you say? Are they mahogany-only bodies or something?

Nope! That weight-relieved mahogany body is topped with maple. As you're no doubt aware, the Les Paul

FEATURES

In keeping with the Les Paul Studio ethos, the 2024 model delivers all of the tonal features we want in a Les Paul, minus some of the visual bling. But Gibson has taken a few cues from the Standard to bring it a bit closer

ULTRA MODERN WEIGHT RELIEF

Your back need not fear, thanks to the significantly weight-relieved body. Gibson ensures us that it has kept the tone intact and sealed it in with a maple top



BURSTBUCKER PRO

The electronics have had a tweak, too, with a pair of Burstbucker Pro Alnico V pickups. They're wired to the regular two-volume/two-tone controls, with the addition of coil-splits on each volume control for added versatility



Studio introduced the concept that 'studio' players could do without the AAA showiness of a more expensive Les Paul. So while the Studio features the maple that is part of a Les Paul's overall tone, it's a less flash example.

What about the hardware?

Obviously, you'll find a Tune-O-Matic bridge here, and in keeping those crucial pounds off the guitar's overall weight, Gibson has opted with an aluminium bridge and stoptail. At the other end, a set of Deluxe tuners that are equipped with Keystone buttons take care of the string tension.

So, bound fingerboard, lighter weight, decent pickups and coil-splits. I bet the colours are limited...

There are four finishes, but we wouldn't say they're limited. In the 'burst department, we've got Blueberry Burst and the classic Cherry Sunburst. If you'd prefer a single colour, there's the goes-with-anything Ebony or, just like your mate's old Studio, Wine Red. All finishes are nitrocellulose lacquer, and the Les Paul Studio is priced at £1,599 and comes in a soft-shell bag. **[SW]**

The Les Paul Studio is back (though it never really went away) for 2024 with some big changes



FINISHES

Wine Red is a Studio classic, as is Cherry Sunburst. These are joined by Ebony and Blueberry Burst, which looks every bit as delicious as it sounds. Of course, these are nitro lacquer, too

ALSO OUT NOW...

BOSS GX-10 £354

The latest addition to the Boss GX line-up of processors comes in the form of the GX-10, a new affordable multi-effects and amp modelling unit. Loaded with the same DSP engine as the flagship GX-100, plus 32 AIRD-powered amp and cab emulations and the ability to load impulse responses, the GX-10 unit is aimed at anyone looking for an all-round solution for practising, recording and performing live. It features a colour touchscreen display with drag-and-drop navigation of your signal chain, and when paired with the Boss BT-Dual Bluetooth adaptor can be controlled wirelessly using Boss's FS-1-WL and EV-1-WL footswitches. It'll be available by the time you read this.

www.boss.info

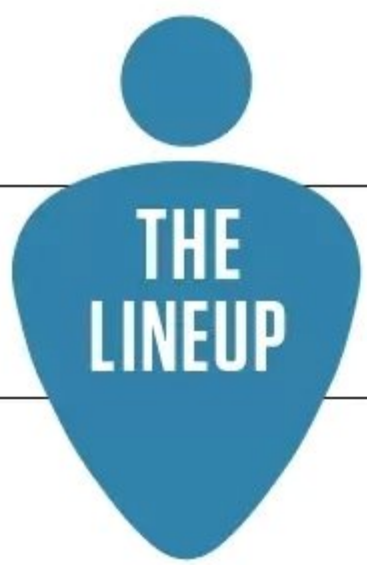


CREAM T CUSTOM SHOP ASTRA £2,499

The new Astra from Cream T's Custom Shop looks to ape the vintage tones of a Fender Esquire, while maintaining the versatility of a modern guitar. First, the neck-position humbucker is a swappable 'Dumbucker' – a dummy pickup that alleviates the additional string-pull. Next is the mini-toggle, which flicks between vintage and modern modes, and unlocks one of two three-way blade selectors. In Vintage mode, we get a tone control bypass in position 1, reintroduced in position 2, and rolled-off in position 3. Next, with the toggle set to Modern, we can hot-swap the neck pickup using the Guitar-X system, and the controls revert to 'standard'. Tune in next month when we'll be taking a closer look at the Astra in a full review.

www.creamtcustomshop.com



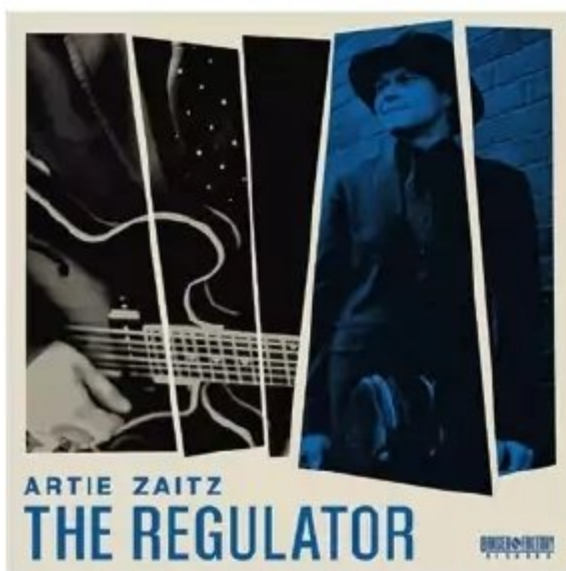


Fretbuzz

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: Artie Zaitz

Album: *The Regulator* (Banger Factory Records)



Artie Zaitz gets in the groove on *The Regulator*, his debut as a bandleader. www.bangerfactoryrecords.com

Artie favours having his whole band in the same room when recording. "The closer you are to the musicians, the more you can pick up," he says,

Artie Zaitz is a jazz guitarist and Hammond organ player from London who is already a mainstay on the jazz scene at the age of 30. With his father, Jake Zaitz, himself an established blues guitarist, Artie was exposed to blues and jazz music from an early age, and became influenced by the mid-60s soul jazz organ/guitar trios associated with the New York Chitlin circuit. Artie's debut album as bandleader, *The Regulator*, is a six-track affair that celebrates the analogue sounds of that 60s style, along with added percussion.

Friend & Foe

Artie's smooth, articulate playing on *The Regulator* and his other projects demonstrates how much respect he has for his six-string. "The guitar is my main instrument," he says. "I'm the most fluent and fluid on it, I would say. My father is a guitarist and he took it upon himself to teach me a lot of blues and some jazz. I got really into it by osmosis. The guitar is so worldwide and has so many avenues to explore. It can sing and it cuts through all genres. It's a beautiful thing and can be your best friend one day and your rival the next, so it keeps you on your toes. I've geeked out about it for a long time, through tones and all the different things you can get into. It's never ending, really."

Electric Shock

When Artie talks about the players who have influenced his playing and music over the years, names such as BB King, T-Bone Walker, Grant Green and John Scofield are mentioned. "I'm primarily an electric guitarist," he says, "a single-note player, although I love playing chords. [The electric] has that tone and projection. I consider the amplifier as a second instrument, too, because you have to match them well for an ideal situation. When you get one that really works for you and can sing, then it's quite a beautiful thing. I also love the unpredictability of playing an electric guitar; that can be fun."

In The Studio

Artie explains his guitar and amp setup: "The main axe I use for jazz is a 1960 Gibson ES-330," he says. "But I also use a Fender Telecaster that I got when I was 14 and that's my main one for anything, really. I've put flat-wounds on it now, so I can use it for jazz, too. It's a '62 Japanese reissue, which has really good woods; they make the best reissue guitars."

"I borrowed an amp when we were recording the album," he adds, "a 1957 Fender Tweed Deluxe, and I used the studio's Fender spring tank for reverb. But what I use mostly is a Fender Excelsior, which are these limited-edition reissue amps and they're great. Just 13 watts, 15-inch speaker – it's got a lot of power. I use that or a Fender Princeton Reverb, generally."

Live Action

Artie is a self-confessed stickler for sound, so it was important to him to record *The Regulator* in as live a setting as possible. "Yeah, all in the same room, too, which is starting to become less common," he says. "For me, it's the best way to really feel the band in the moment, like a live situation. The closer you are to the musicians, the more you can pick up. When you start separating things, it's just never going to be the same. It feels more organic." And the mistakes? "I do love mistakes," he smiles. "You come to admire them, and mistakes are prevalent in so much of the music we love. It just shows that we're human. If the vibe is great, that's what you go for." **[GK]**

Standout track: *The Regulator*

For fans of: John Scofield, BB King, Grant Green, Wes Montgomery



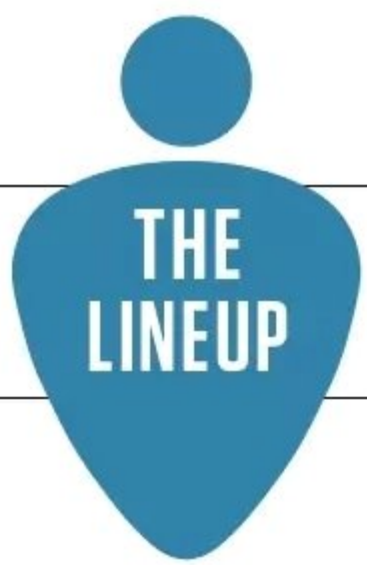
PHOTO BY GEORGE NELSON

“[The guitar] can be your best friend one day and your rival the next, so it keeps you on your toes”

DO THE CONGA

Artie assembled his band from the pick of London's jazz scene players

When it came to making his album, Artie was keen to give the traditional organ-trio albums a twist, and brought together a band comprising Ross Stanley on Hammond C3, Steve Brown on drums and David Pattman on conga (Cuban drum). “I wanted to capture the sound of that band at that time,” he says, “but I also tried to keep the spirit of soul-jazz organ combos. That combo is all encompassing: you can play funk, jazz, blues, soul tunes, Latin, especially with the conga. And I love the conga, it takes it up a notch for me and takes it past that regular organ trio. It brought a new dimension to the sound.”



Albums

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

A celebratory collection of five decades in music

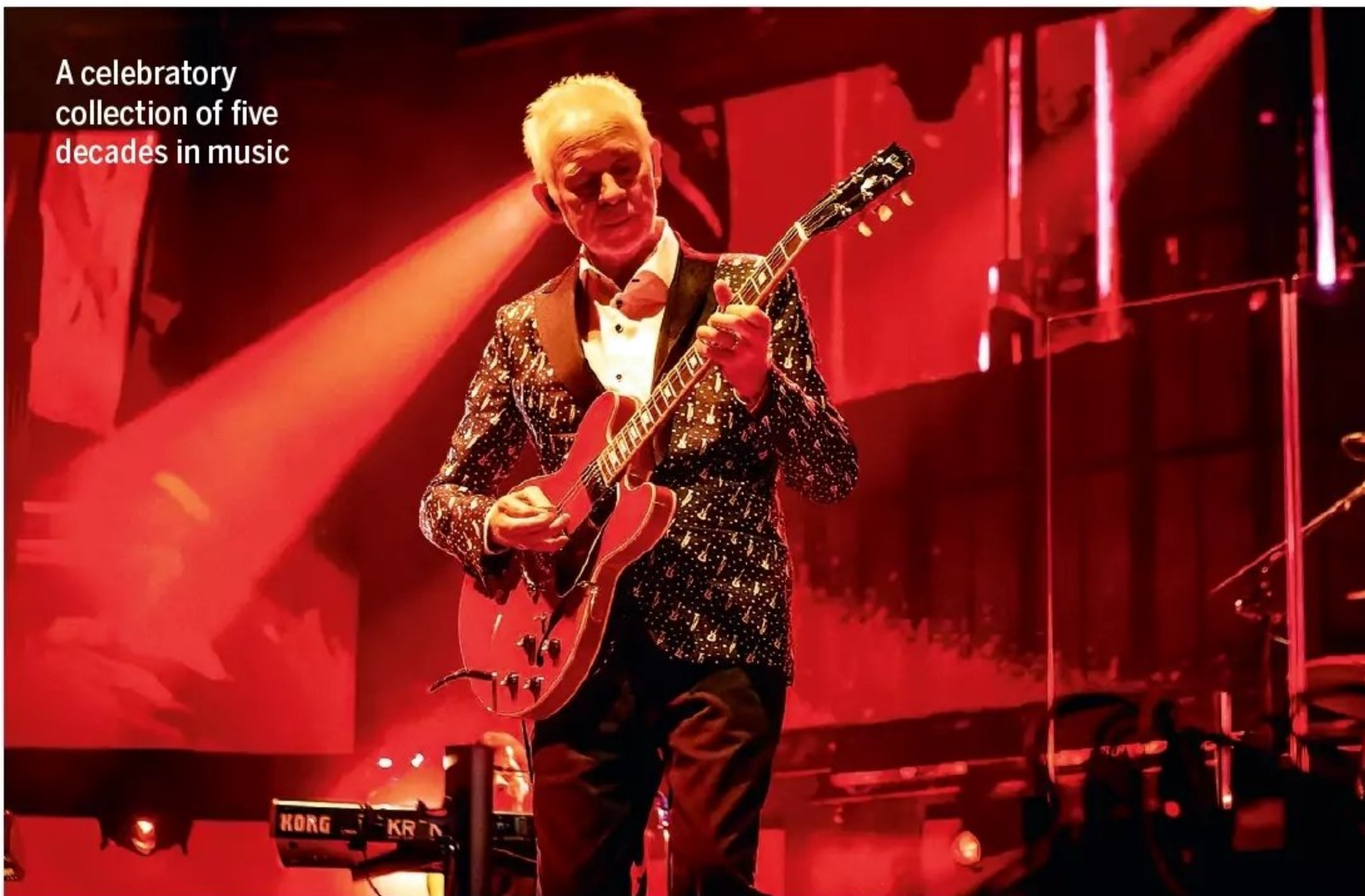
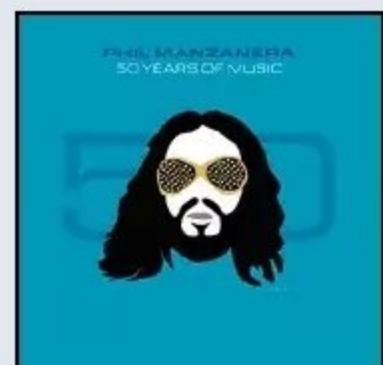


PHOTO BY CHARLIE TARGETT-ADAMS

Phil Manzanera

50 Years Of Music

UML (available now)



Roxy Music's guitarist delights and intrigues on this comprehensive, eclectic retrospective of his solo work

Few guitarists have the knack for hooks that Phil Manzanera has, as evidenced by irresistibly danceable Roxy Music hits such as *Love Is The Drug*. But the many solo albums

Manzanera has recorded over the past 50 years, with luminaries ranging from Brian Eno to David Gilmour, reveal a more playful, eclectic and intriguing musician than one might guess even from the art-house pop and hymns to upper-crust hedonism that form Roxy Music's catalogue.

If that sounds interesting, you'll enjoy this 11-disc, five-decade survey of Manzanera's musical wanderlust. Comprising remastered versions of Manzanera's 10 solo albums, plus a bonus disc of previously unreleased material entitled *Rare Two* (with Pink Floyd connections), there is plenty to get your teeth into here.

Proceedings kick off with 1975's *Diamond Head*, featuring contributions from Robert Wyatt and Brian Eno. An art-rock ambience still pervades opening track *Frontera*, but, crucially, illuminated by tropic sunshine and Cuban influences from Manzanera's early childhood – while *Miss Shapiro* has that classic, esoteric Eno magic. Moving on, via 1977's engrossing *Listen Now* to 1978's *K-Scope*, we find a more fusion-like vibe in the title track, whose restless guitar riff was notably sampled by Jay-Z and Kanye West in the track *No Church In The Wild*. Meanwhile, 1982's *Primitive Guitars* explores Manzanera's early love of Latin guitar music, while – skipping forward – 2004's enigmatic *6PM* features long-time friend and collaborator David Gilmour. All in all, this absorbing collection is much like the man himself – likeable, imaginative and joyously eclectic. **[JD]**

Standout track: *Frontera*

For fans of: Roxy Music, Pink Floyd, Brian Eno, Robert Wyatt

Mary Spender

Super. Sexy. Heartbreak.

Self-released (available now)



A break-up album with rare soul and a surgeon's eye for heart problems

There's a good chance you know Mary Spender from her popular YouTube channel on guitar culture, but first and foremost she was, and is, a gifted songwriter. Fair warning: if break-up albums aren't your thing, her debut studio album probably ain't for you – for the rest of us, however, *Super. Sexy. Heartbreak.* is an intense, beautiful and all-too-sharply observed journey through an intimate landscape of loss. We've never heard Mary sing so well as on these songs of yearning and self-recrimination; her voice glints like a sombre gem, scattering light on the bleaker corners of the heart. The songs offer an unflinching x-ray image of a break-up – every camera angle of a delaminating relationship is offered up with tenderness, while the melancholy chime of emotional truth shimmers through standout songs such as *You Can Have Chicago* and *I Blame Myself*. The guitar work has a graceful economy that suits the material and, though the album may be monothematic, it's hard to look away. **[JD]**

Standout track: *You Can Have Chicago*

For fans of: Lianne La Havas, Joni Mitchell, John Mayer

Eric Clapton

Meanwhile

Bushbranch/Surfdog (available now digitally)



Ol' Slowhand takes a mellow turn

Travel back in time to the mid-1960s when John Mayall's Bluesbreakers' 'Beano' album became a religious experience for every aspiring blues guitarist and you would never believe that the same player was behind the fretboard for *Meanwhile*. Gone are the snarling, loud-as-heck Les Paul Standard outings, replaced instead by acoustic guitars and gentle Strat tones. Saying that, this is one heck of an album. Basically a compilation of EC's recent singles, plus six new tracks, you'd never know that this album wasn't put together with the sole intent of releasing it as a single disc. Here we find Eric's duet with Jeff Beck on *Moon River*, *The Rebels* with Van Morrison and *Always On My Mind* with Bradley Walker among the collaborative tracks; there's even Eric's take on trad folk with *Sam Hall*. For the time being, it's a digital release, but never fear, CDs and vinyl will follow in January '25. **[DM]**

Standout track: *One Woman*

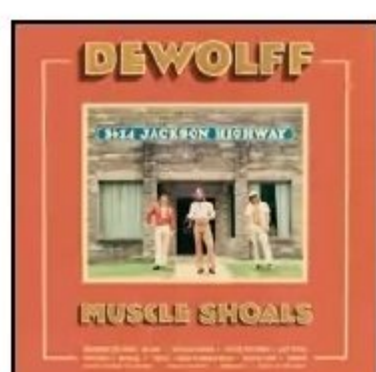
For fans of: Derek And The Dominos, Delaney & Bonnie



DeWolff

Muscle Shoals

Mascot (release date: 6 December)



C'mon, join the 1960s fuzz guitar party!

When we spoke to DeWolff's guitarist Pablo van de Poel towards the end of 2024, he told us, in confidence, that the band's next album was going to be

recorded in the USA at the legendary Fame and Muscle Shoals Sound Studios, both part of the beating heart of the 60s soul sound. If you think about it, with DeWolff's commitment to retro pop-rock, there isn't a studio on earth that would be more appropriate. The music of Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett and Etta James, among others, once bounced off those hallowed walls and Pablo and fellow DeWolffs, Luka Pablo van de Poel and Robin Piso, have clearly tuned in and, erm, fuzzed out. *Muscle Shoals* is a joyous album from start to finish, with tracks such as *Truce* and *Natural Woman* brimming over with Pablo's distinctive guitar tone. Strong songwriting combined with great production encourages repeated listenings. Watch out for a UK tour next April. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Truce*

For fans of: Al Green, Sam Cooke

Lee Ritenour & Dave Grusin

Brasil

Candid Records (available now)



Jazz stars pay a visit to South America

For many decades, Lee Ritenour and Dave Grusin have been strong friends and work colleagues. Be it via film soundtracks by Grusin or album collaborations such as

Harlequin, their professional relationship has been one of the strongest in LA. With their shared appreciation of South American music, it's great to hear them return to the stylings of this richly rhythmic and harmonious music once again. Recorded in São Paulo, the five vocal tracks and four instrumentals are lushly recorded and feature wonderful playing throughout. Lee's precise and articulate technique married with his lyrical phrasing not only made him an A-list studio guitarist during the 70s and 80s but also an innovative solo artist, too. Here, he plays nylon and electric guitars with great taste from the opening *Cravo e Canela* through to *Stone Flower*, his warm and articulate jazz tone richly to the foreground. As for his virtuosity, the lead phrasing and twisty turns of *Boca De Siri* are very enjoyable. Exquisite! **[JS]**

Standout track: *Catavento*

For fans of: Larry Carlton, Robben Ford



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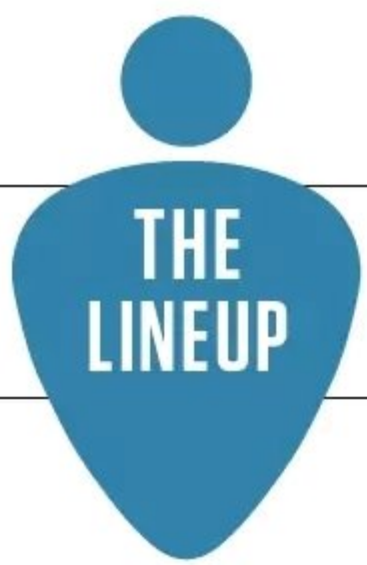
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Tones Behind The Tracks

Myles Kennedy, one half of Alter Bridge's guitar firepower, releases his third solo album, fuelled by a box-fresh PRS signature model

Artist: Myles Kennedy

Album: *The Art Of Letting Go* (Napalm Records)



The Art Of Letting Go was recorded with long-time producer Michael 'Elvis' Baskette and the guitars are front and centre

Around autumn last year Myles Kennedy took time out from his regular gig as lead vocalist and guitarist with stadium rockers Alter Bridge. However, this was no holiday, neither was it to revisit his side project with Slash. His aim was to record his third solo album – and this time he set his sights on recording a riff-heavy, no-holds-barred rocker. When we reviewed *The Art Of Letting Go* in the last issue, it earned itself a *Guitarist Choice* badge and so when we had the chance to settle down with the man himself and ask a few pointed questions, we leapt at the chance...

What was your goal for this album?

"Well, I knew I didn't want to make another acoustic record, which was great six years ago and it fulfilled a long-standing urge. But with this one I wanted to get back to making something that was informed by the power of the riff, you know? But using blues scales, pentatonic scales and what-not as a vocabulary so that I didn't go too far into metal territory, which is something that Alter Bridge tends to lean on more. I wanted to make a rock 'n' roll record – a lot of loud guitars – and just do what I guess I'm known for. And it was good to get back and start swimming in that stream again."

"I wanted to get back to the power of the riff, you know? But using blues and pentatonic scales so I didn't go too far into metal territory"

The album has the force and precision of contemporary rock but still the gutsy, instinctive feel of classic rock. How have you blended those elements so seamlessly?

"It's a delicate dance. I was raised on classic rock, so that's always going to be in my DNA. But at the same time I still want to be contemporary. I don't want to just regurgitate something that's already been done better than I'm ever going to be able to do it. I want to try to take it and kind of put my own spin on it and bring it into this era. And there are a number of ways to do that, but one of the big components is the sound and that's where I feel like 'Elvis', [aka] Michael Baskette, the producer, is very helpful. He understands; he has that same goal. He loves all the classic stuff and he loves those sonic hallmarks, but he also wants to bring it into the present."

Myles Kennedy leaned into the groove with his latest record – a move away from the heaviness of Alter Bridge and towards a contemporary rock 'n' roll sound

In what way does your solo work stand apart from your work with Alter Bridge?

"I mean, especially that this is more of a hard rock record, the lines were blurred a little more. With the ballad *Eternal Lullaby*... I actually brought that to Alter Bridge a few years ago. And what happened is we just had so many ballads. There's only a finite amount of spots for ballads in that context, so we didn't use it. I wanted to make sure it saw the light of day, so I felt like it was appropriate on this record."

"But that's a great question, because it's like when you're using a similar formula, then where does it go? And a lot of it, for me, boils down to knowing the language I'm speaking, musically. Alter Bridge is more detuned, heavy chugging and the rhythms are different, the rhythms are straighter. Some of this stuff swings. I think that's another big part of it; it's got a pocket and a groove that we just don't explore with Alter Bridge."

There's an amazing solo on the track *Say What You Will*. How did you record that?

"What I want to do most of the time on records [is] improvise, but I hurt my hand. I always forget what it's called, it involves my ulnar nerve. It's a long story. So I wanted to make sure when I went in to record these solos, I kind of had a roadmap. I would improvise a few days before and then just piece together the parts I liked. No different from what I would do in the studio, but I basically have a rough sketch of what I'm going to do, so I don't have to wear my hand down as much. And, if I remember correctly, we just knocked it out, just did a few takes and put it together, and we were off to the races."

There's also an interesting octave fuzz on the intro. What effect were you using there?

"Yeah, that's the secret sauce, right there. But I'm going to tell you the secret sauce because everyone should have one of these pedals. It's called [a Mythos] Argo and I found it at Chicago Music Exchange. I went in there and I was like, 'I need a really good fuzz...' And so they had this pedal there, the Argo pedal. I've been asked that question by other guitar players, it's such a great pedal. Get the Argo pedal, kids!"

What were your go-to guitars and amps for this record?

"My go-to were my signature [PRS] guitars, fresh out of the box. I had a few in boxes and I took them out, strung

"I was raised on classic rock, so that's always going to be in my DNA. But at the same time I still want to be contemporary. I want to put my own spin on it and bring it into this era"

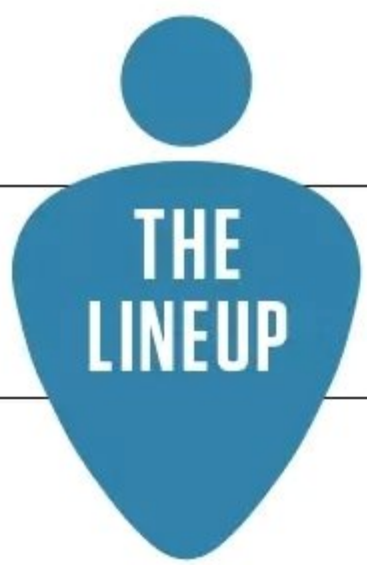


PHOTO BY CHUCK BRUECKMANN

them up and that was it. Most of the record was done on this one black signature guitar, and it didn't have a scratch on it when we took it out of the box, but by the time we finished the record, [it had] plenty of dings.

"I [also] had a green one that was kind of a prototype, which I used on some of the altered tunings. But other than that it's that black signature guitar, straight into my Diezel Paul amp. On the second solo record I had all this vintage gear: my '58 Fender Deluxe and my '58 335, and the wonderful thing that you get from vintage gear is that mojo. But with this, I just kept it simple and used basically what I'm going to use live."

So you're quite a physical player, if the guitar ended up with loads of dings?

"I don't like brand-new guitars. I don't like it when they're all shiny. I'll see a new guitar and I'm like, 'That's gonna look good after I drag it across the driveway.'"

"I don't like brand-new guitars; when they're all shiny. I'll see a new guitar and I'm like, 'That's gonna look good after I drag it across the driveway...'"

You spoke earlier about using drop tunings. How low did you go?

"I think the lowest I allowed myself to go was C on two tracks. I used it on a song called *Miss You When You're Gone*. It was CGCGC and then the top string was a D. There's a song called *Dead To Rights* and that's basically open G tuning, but you tune the thickest string down to C, which is kind of interesting. So when you have that open G tuning, you think that that string should be a D, but when you tune it to a C it creates a whole different set of inspiration."

Are you a prolific, rapid writer or do you tend to take a long time to write songs?

"It really depends on the track. Sometimes the universe will just drop something into your lap. I'm pretty prolific at starting things. Like, if you said, 'I want you to sit down this afternoon and I want you to put together three songs,' I'd probably be able to do that. But the problem is, I have an editing system that I like to use in terms of distance. So if I come up with something, I like to get away from it. I don't want to finish it on the spot because I want to make sure that all the parts are up to par with the other parts. So it's like, 'Oh, that's a great

Myles' signature PRS joined him in the studio – and it gives him all the tones he needs, from recording to the live stage

verse.' And then you get to the chorus, and it's like, 'You can do better. You should search for a different chorus.' So that's where the time comes in. I need to step away."

You're going to take this album on tour shortly. What will your live rig look like?

"The same as what was in the studio. It will be the Argo pedal and I have a [J Rockett] Chicken Soup [overdrive] pedal and a handful other little accoutrements. But that Diezel Paul amp into the Diezel 2x12 cabinet with the [Celestion] Creambacks, my PRS signature guitars and that's it. Pretty simple."

Are you looking forward to touring the new album?

"I count the days, yeah. I mean, once this press run is over, I'm going to be at home, just woodshedding and every day running the songs over and over. Because we're going out as a three-piece, that's a lot of pressure, in a good way. And I like that. I like the challenge. But it means I'm gonna have to get all these songs to where they're just second nature. I'm just gonna rehearse and rehearse and rehearse."

You're singing as well, so there's nowhere to hide...

"No, there's nowhere to hide! And I'm cursing myself with some of the songs because I wrote the riffs a certain way, thinking, 'Oh, it's just going to be a guitar riff here.' But then we got in the studio and I listened back to the playback and I was like, 'That needs a vocal part right here.' And then you're like, 'I'll figure it out...' Now I'm cursing myself: 'Why didn't you just sing the guitar riff or something? But no, you had to do something different. Damn you, Kennedy!'" **[DM]**



Watch the full interview in our exclusive video! <http://bit.ly/guitaristextra>



Myles Kennedy's new album, *The Art of Letting Go*, is available now on Napalm Records

www.myleskennedy.com

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Tales Of The Unexpected

This month **Neville Marten** shares his take on string gauges, why he's not buying another vintage Strat, and bids farewell to a 30-year-old mag...

The prologue to this article is a sort of epilogue to my column from a couple of issues ago, where I shared my not falling for the 'heavy strings are always best' theory. And while I still adhere to the ethos that if you don't have the power in your hands for heavy strings you won't be able to get them 'working', so stick to a lighter gauge and your tone will be better for it... there are caveats, which I'll now explain.

"Back in the 90s when we did 65-date tours, I'd often start with nines on my Strat, but by the end I'd be up to 10.5, or even 11 on a Gibson"

The caveat in my case is I'd strung my 1996 Taylor Jumbo Custom with 11s after having a new pickup fitted. It was perfect, sang beautifully and played like butter. Then I was asked to do a session for Marty Wilde who'd presented the guitar to me as a gift, so naturally I wanted to use it for him. This necessitated a whole load of practising, repetition, capo changes and so on.

Guess what? As my rather unpractised acoustic hands gained strength, those 11s began to feel a bit spongy. So I upped them to 12s and carried on.

I wanted to be able to play the track straight through with no mistakes, and so worked diligently on the piece for days. Then, the day before the session... you know what's coming... I went up to 13s. The thing is, by this time my wrist, finger and forearm muscles were stronger than they'd been in ages, so 13s felt easy now and sounded great. No better than the 11s; they just felt 'right' for what I had to play.

Then I recalled that back in the 90s when we did three-month 65-date tours, I'd often start with nines on my Strat, but by the end I'd be up to 10.5, or even 11 on a Gibson. What I'm saying here is that my own soapbox edict is just as malleable as that of the 'heavy is the only way' brigade.

Vision On

The great broadcaster Terry Wogan used to say that with age there's a new niggle, ache or pain to add to one's list of ailments on an almost daily basis. And on that note I recently discovered that I needed a minor eye operation that could halt a worsening situation were it done sooner. I'll need the other one sorted in the New Year, too. I'd never complain about our NHS as they've been brilliant to me and my family over the years, but I couldn't wait this time so have had to go private.

Why do I tell you this? Certainly not for sympathy – well, perhaps not until GAS-ers read the following paragraph. You see, I've recently been toying with the idea of getting another pre-CBS Strat for my dotage, either seeing if my old Lake Placid Blue one could be coaxed from its present owner, or perhaps finding a nice refinish, as my mate Aynsley Lister has recently done. It would involve trading something and finding a considerable wad of dosh to chuck in over the top. Trouble is, half of that particular wad has gone to the hospital, and when I get the other peeper done any thoughts of a lovely vintage Strat will have gone totally out of the window. Hopefully I'll be able to see my lovely Custom Shop ones more clearly, though!

On a different note it would be remiss of me not to mention the closure of our sister magazine *Guitar Techniques*, a title that I launched as an offshoot of *Guitarist* an astonishing 30 years ago. Guitar tuition has moved largely online with people using YouTube, Patreon, TrueFire, Ultimate Guitar and the like to get their learning fix. But for the most niche of niche magazines to have held out for three successful decades is testament to the great contributors who kept it at the top of its game for so long. Luckily, current GT editor Jason Sidwell is taking his expertise online to our own platform at GuitarWorld.com, so please check it out over the coming months. And in the meantime, if you love your guitar mags, look after them! See you next month. **G**

NEV'S GAS OF THE MONTH

Three-Tone Heaven

What? 1962 Fender Stratocaster (partial refinish), Three-Colour Sunburst
Where seen? ATB Guitars, Cheltenham **Price?** £22,495

Here's the kind of guitar I'd have searched for had my moment under the scalpel not happened. It's more than I would have spent, though – and, as so often is the case, has a few 'issues'. Vintage guitars undergo many ravages over the years and, while this example has the good bits in place, the neck has been lacquered over and the original decal changed. For some, the decal is a no-no, while for others a refret is the killer, non-original pickguard, electrics, or body routing simply no way. For me, a good body refinish and refret are fine, but the other issues would possibly put me off – unless it's a monster guitar underneath and then all bets are off. One thing's for certain, this one won't hang around!



VICTORY



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Carbon Cycle

Seeking to overcome certain compromises, **Alex Bishop** studies neck reinforcement and dives into the fancy world of carbon fibre

If one were to break down the Herculean task of building a guitar into its constituent parts, the component most intimidating to the novice builder would likely be the neck. Carve any part of it too wide or too narrow and the instrument will not sit right in the hand or feel comfortable to play. No matter how good that guitar sounds, if the frets are in the wrong place it will never make the grade.

On top of that, even if you can craft the perfect guitar neck, there is still a lot of unpredictability leading up to the moment when the strings go on for the first time. The tension in a set of strings will pull forwards on the headstock and ultimately bow the neck into a slight arch. This subtle adjustment of the geometry of the setup will raise the action and likely require attention – if not at first, it likely will in time.

“The dependence on a truss rod means that an instrument can be rendered unplayable should any part of that mechanism break”

Enter the humble truss rod. This brilliantly simple innovation was introduced into guitar making back in the 1920s and was designed to counteract the arching of the neck caused by string tension. However, the dependence on a truss rod in many modern guitars means that an instrument can be rendered unplayable should any part of that mechanism break.

The amount of flexibility in the neck is determined by numerous factors. You’re likely to find timbers being used by guitar makers who are all looking for something different. Luthiers who prize lightweight necks for a better balanced guitar may opt for a traditional softwood such as Spanish cedar. Yet on a steel-stringed instrument this will dramatically give in to the pull of the strings.

Alex took to a modern method of construction by incorporating a carbon fibre tube into the neck of a commissioned guitar

Elsewhere, other makers are looking for the best possible tonal impact. A dense hardwood for the neck, for instance, not only makes for a very attractive instrument but also helps to reflect vibrations from the bridge and keep as much sound-producing activity in the body as possible. However, it’s also important to consider the fact that the added weight of such necks tends to sit uncomfortably heavy in the hand.

A third variable is the profile. A more shouldered profile leaves more wood on the neck, which results in greater stiffness. A wider or thicker profile has the same effect to a greater extent – and yet all of this impedes playability.

Best Of Both

You can’t get anything for free, and therefore any attempts to improve on balance, tone or playability tend to compromise on at least one of the other two factors. But does this have to be the case? A number of trailblazing independent luthiers out there use carbon fibre to reinforce the neck. This innovation allows for the possibility of a lightweight modern neck profile without compromising on stiffness or tone.

One of my customers invited me to get in on the trend by incorporating something similar into the neck of my latest commission. I’m a big fan of top-end Canadian luthiers Dion James of Dion Guitars and Leila Sidi of TunaTone Instruments, so I had to have a go at their carbon fibre C-tube design. A deep half pipe of carbon fibre approximately 3mm thick is set into the neck, filled in with a hardwood, and then capped with a truss rod running down the middle. Such an arrangement dramatically reduces the requirement to ever need to use the truss rod, although this is left in place as a sort of insurance policy.

However, hand-making such a complex arrangement was going to be a difficult task. After a bit of a cursory Google searching and a long chat with one of my guitar-making students (who, rather helpfully, happened to be an aerospace engineer), I could see that it wasn’t going to be too difficult provided I could accurately make the ‘male’ and ‘female’ hardwood parts of the neck that would sandwich the carbon fibre layers. Offsetting these by the required 3mm was made mercifully possible on my new router table, along with a pair of carefully selected cutters.

Now my new high performance neck is ready for carving into shape, and I should be able to carve it fearlessly into the exact profile I want. Watch this space, but I think I’ve finally landed in the modern era of guitar making... **G**

Alex runs guitar making and repair courses at Bristol Guitar Making School www.guitarmakingschool.co.uk



PHOTO BY RICK SMEE

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What's In A Name?

Richard Barrett helps you decipher the meanings behind chord names, from major to minor, plus extended and altered chords

In theory, the name of a chord should describe its content, especially if it differs from the Root-3rd-5th of a standard major chord. In guitar circles, describing a chord as 'G' without any other information would usually mean a G major chord. Once we get into minor chords (with a ♭3) and 5 chords – often called powerchords and which don't have a 3rd at all – it's necessary to include these extra details to make sure everyone is on the same page (sometimes literally!).

Just as 'G' is often slang for G major, other terms that refer to extended and/or altered chords have developed over time. C7, for instance, means a C major chord with a ♭7th (B♭). C9 (see Example 3) contains the ♭7th plus the 9th (D), so there's more going on than many may suspect. Cadd9 (see Example 4) on the other hand simply adds the 9th to an existing C major (or minor) chord. I've included a few more commonly misunderstood chords in the examples. **G**

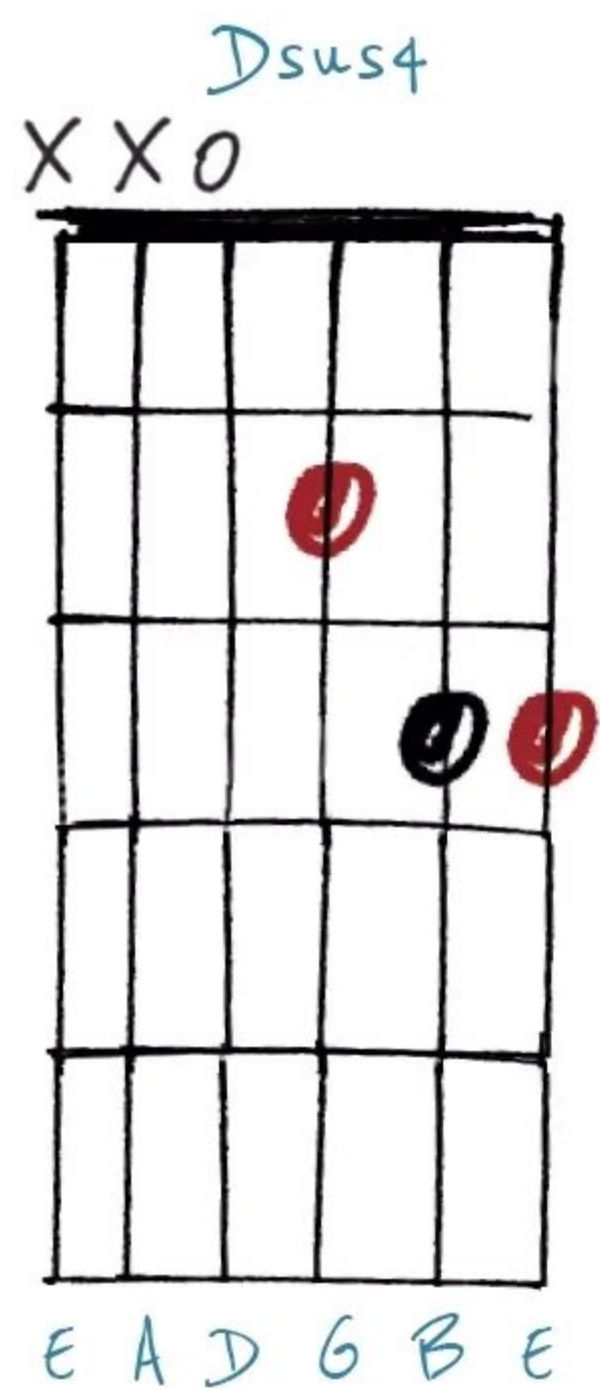


PHOTO BY JEFFREY MAYER/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

The Who's Pete Townshend made very effective use of suspended chords in tracks such as *Pinball Wizard*

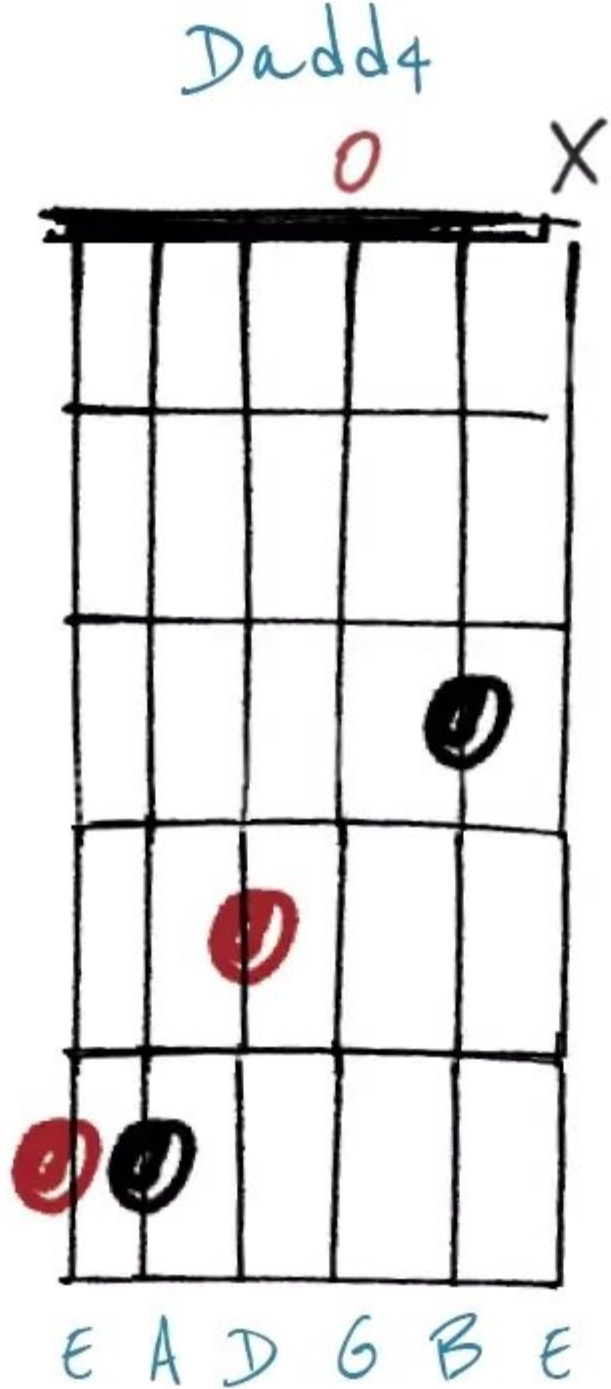
Example 1

Dsus4 is an abbreviated way of saying D suspended 4th. The 4th in this case is G, the 4th of the D major scale. The G replaces the 3rd (F#), meaning sus chords are neither major nor minor; it's all about which chord you resolve to afterwards (that's where the 'suspended' part comes from). Resolving to D major sounds a bit like The Who, while resolving to D minor sounds a bit like Bach.



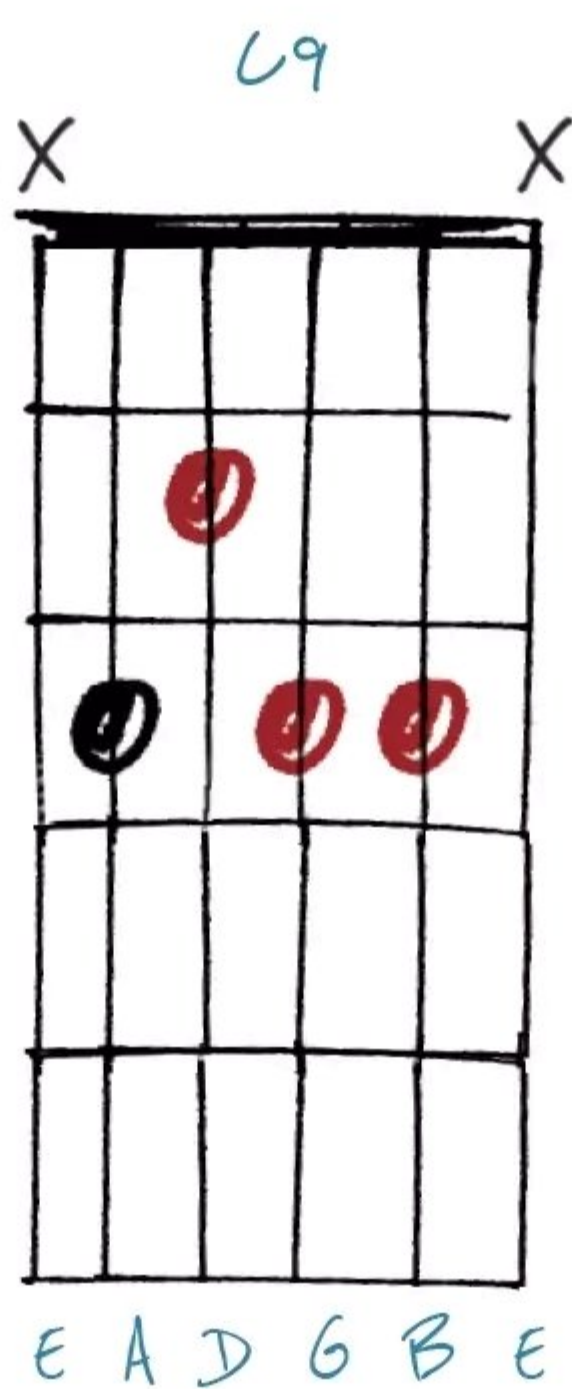
Example 2

Here's another D chord containing the 4th (G). This time, the 3rd (F#) is also retained, giving us what is called a Dadd4. This is a major chord, but it retains a certain suspended quality by containing the 3rd and 4th a semitone apart. If you can stretch to making the F# an F natural on the 3rd fret of the fourth string, you'll have Dm(add4).



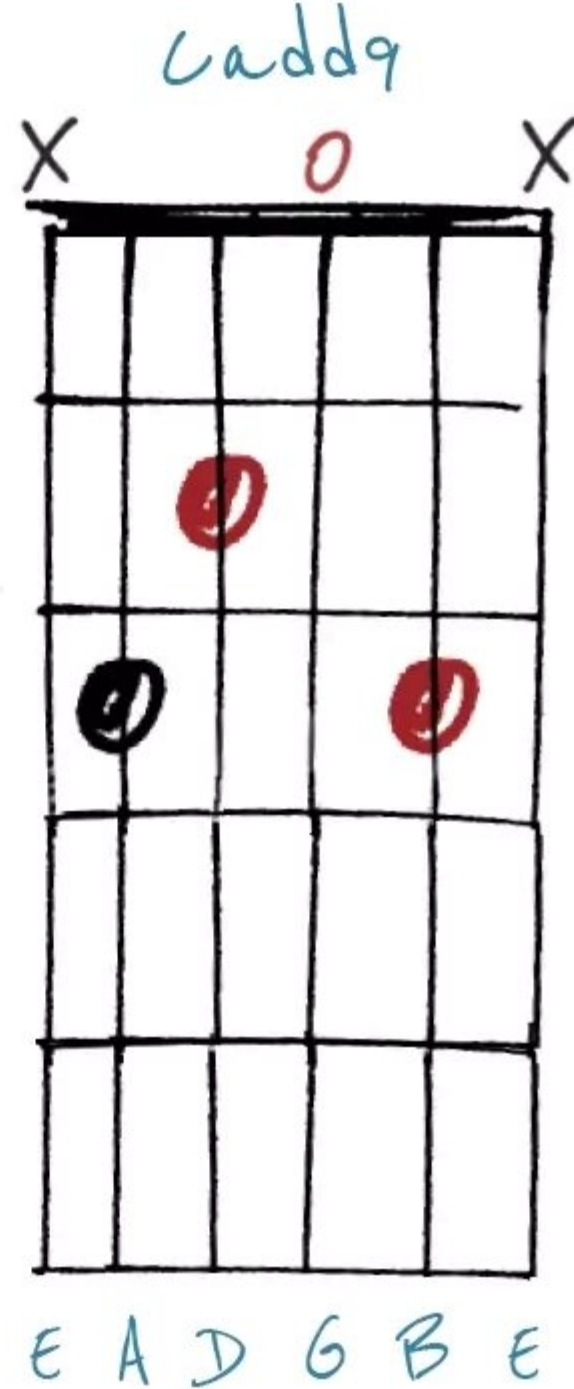
Example 3

When we extend a chord beyond the 7th, we start adding the names/numbers from a second octave of the major scale. The 9th (D) is nine notes above the original root when we play a two-octave C major scale. This, plus the inclusion of the ♭7 (B♭), is why this chord is called C9, instead of Cadd9.



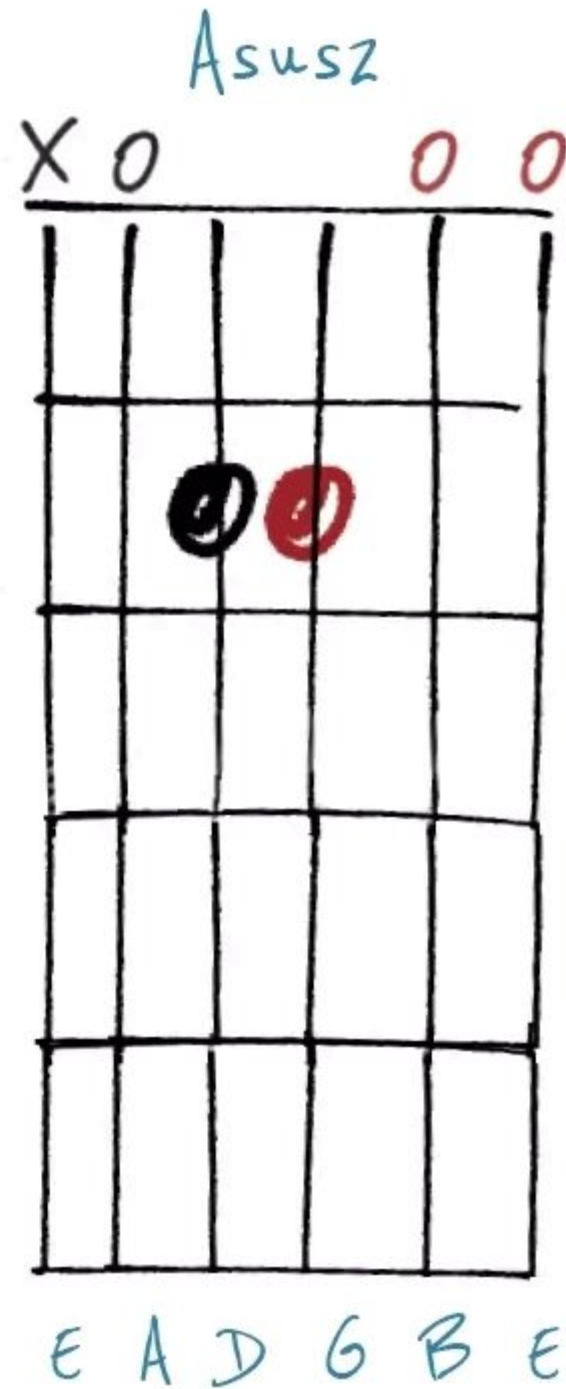
Example 4

Further to Example 3, here is a Cadd9 in the same position. There is no ♭7th, just the Root-3rd-5th (C-E-G) plus the 9th (D) added on top. On an instrument such as the guitar where chords don't always oblige by appearing in scale order, there can sometimes be confusion about what is a 2nd and what is a 9th (both D in this key!). I'll attempt to clarify in Example 5...



Example 5

This Asus2 chord features the 2nd (B), a full nine notes above the root (A) on the open fifth string – but as the 2nd replaces the 3rd (C#), here the octave becomes irrelevant. This is similar to the triad (E-A-C#) that forms the A major chord at the 2nd fret of the fourth, third and second strings (in that order). Like sus4, sus2 is neither major nor minor. Try mixing this with Asus4, A major and A minor.



239

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WHO SAYS
WAITING ON THE WORLD TO CHANGE
LOVE ON THE WEEKEND
I GUESS I JUST FEEL LIKE
DAUGHTERS
BELIEF
NEW LIGHT
HARTBREAK WARFARE
OF MY HEART
ME AWAY
GOOD
T

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Feedback

Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor.

Drop us a line at guitarist@futurenet.com

STAR LETTER

ROCKING UP



I'm 11 and I have been playing guitar for a few years now. In issue 505 you reviewed the Shergold Telstar. I asked my mum and grandma for it and I got it for my birthday. Since then it has been my go-to guitar. My two great uncles play guitar and I now love playing guitar!

I own three guitars: a Shergold Telstar, a Fender Classic 4T and a Valencia. I have grown to love Oasis and AC/DC. Their music seems to make its way into my head.

My favourite thing to do with guitar is to go into town and busk. I play all the 60s to 90s songs and the public enjoys them. When I go busking I use a Blackstar amp, which you reviewed in issue 507. Soon I hope to be able to play at concerts on a stage.

I have made a couple of my own songs using computer software (BandLab). All the songs have included me singing and playing guitar and sometimes I have included a bit of piano in it, as I play piano as well.

Declan Wells

Well done for getting started in guitar, Declan – sounds like you're flying already. Great to hear you're busking, and if you like that you'll definitely enjoy playing to a crowded room through a good sound system, so we urge you to take that step up whenever you can. A piece of advice from ones who have been there: if in the next few years you find a guitar that you really love, don't be tempted – if you're ever bored or a bit skint – to sell it. Many of us have regretted selling beloved early guitars for decades after! Sounds like you've got some great kit already, but a good pair of headphones can't harm so we're pleased to award you this month's Star Letter prize.



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

A QUESTION OF BALANCE

Following up on Neville's 'String Theory' article in issue 516, I would very much agree that it should be your fingers that tell you what string gauges work best for you. Larry Carlton would also agree: "... I use D'Addario 0.010 to 0.052. When Dave Rouse was my tech, I told him I wanted to do a blind test of strings. I said, 'String my guitars with whatever you like, and make a note of the show – and I'll respond by making notes.' We did that for 10 days, and the D'Addario 0.010 to 0.052 set felt best and stayed in tune better for me..." (*Guitarist*, July 2014).

Personally, I'm okay with nines, but even when set up well I wasn't always happy with the feel, so I used Larry's method and found that I preferred my E, B, G strings to be 0.009, 0.012, 0.015, rather than the traditional 0.009, 0.011, 0.016. I then discovered that D'Addario (and others) make Balanced Tension sets of 0.009, 0.011, 0.015, 0.022, 0.030, 0.040 gauges and realised I was not alone. I now use the above gauges on all my electrics, irrespective of scale length. I found it easy enough to swap gauges and compare, but, of course, the guitar has to be set up for the gauges and I found there were always a few important tweaks required, another good reason to learn how to set up your own instruments!

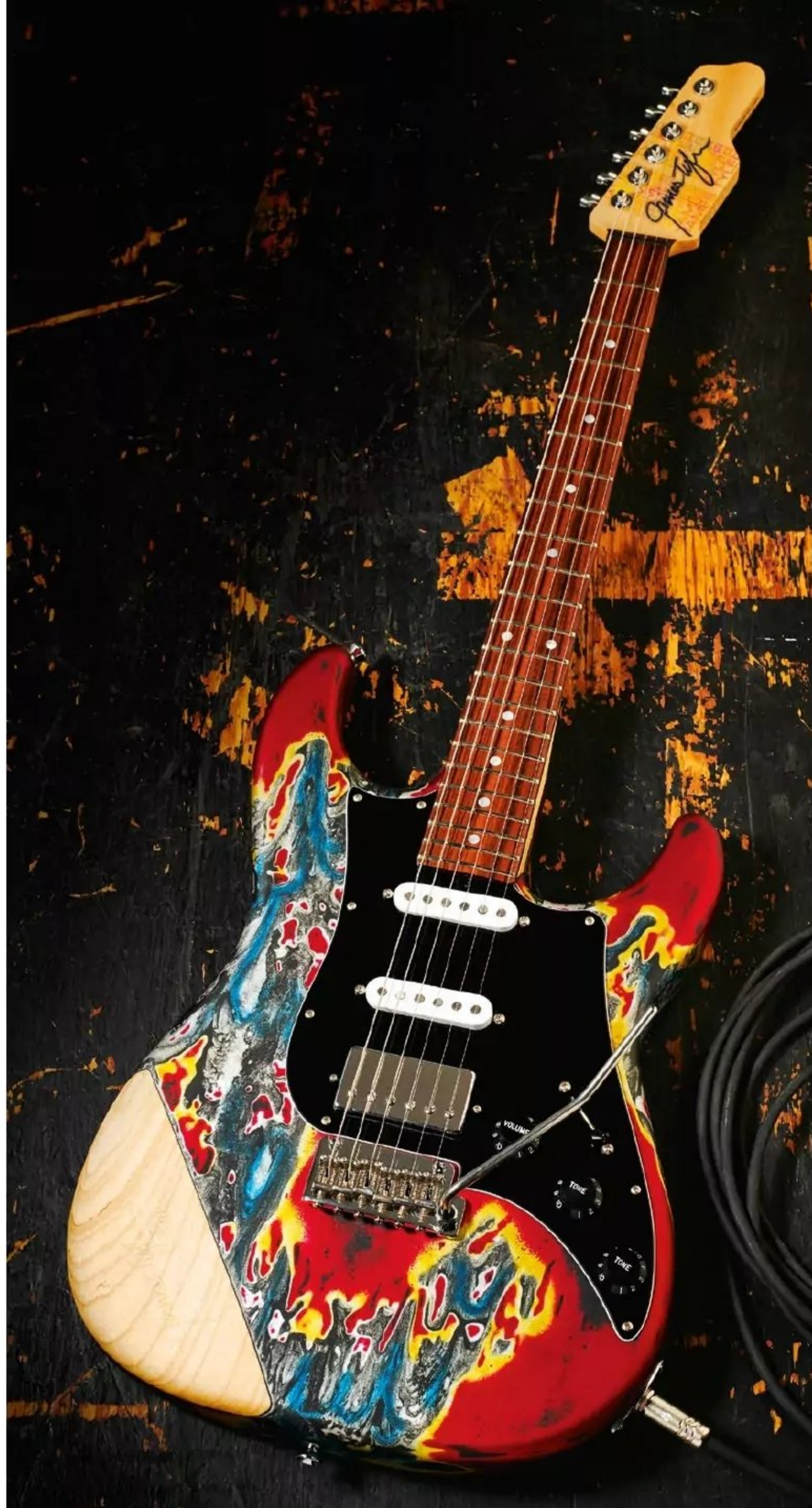
There is definitely a good article to be written about string gauges. I did a bit of digging around and where some of the myths come from is very interesting. One thing I couldn't pin down is where the classic nine-gauge of 0.009, 0.011, 0.016, 0.024, 0.032, 0.042 came from. The earliest reference I found was to Ernie Ball Super Slinkys.

John Duffin

Thanks for sharing your journey into personalising your string gauges, John. We've said it before, but strings are one of the cheapest, easiest and – pound for pound – most effective ways to get more performance from your guitar or fine-tune its tone and playability. Yes, premium sets can be relatively pricey these days as compared with a decade or two ago, but they're still way less of an outlay than new pickups, wiring looms and the like. We'd urge all readers to experiment a bit more in this area and remember that each guitar you own may have a different optimal solution when it comes to strings.

JAMESTYLER

If I may, I'd like to pay my own brief tribute to a man whose influence and impact on the guitar industry is, in my opinion, often overlooked. Personally, I've always struggled to find a Strat-style guitar that



suited me. I've purchased many over the years from standard lines to custom shop and boutique, but none have ever stuck. A few months ago I had another go at finding 'my' Strat, and GuitarGuitar in Birmingham very kindly got in a selection for me to try: a few from Fender's Custom Shop, two Suhrs, and at the very last minute I asked them to add a Tyler into the mix. I'd always hated the headstock, but I just thought I'd give one a go. I'm sure you can tell where this is going: the Tyler was the clear winner.

A few weeks ago, just hours before his death was announced, I ordered my second Tyler, and I have plans for a third once a couple of others have shifted on eBay. In an industry that has a tendency to rest on its past laurels, James Tyler was unafraid to innovate. His neck and fretboard carves are outstanding, his pickups and mid-boost circuits are brilliant, and that's before we get onto his incredible finishes – Alien Guano anyone?

Any man who could design and launch that headstock was clearly unafraid to stand apart. James Tyler was among many other things, the luthier who managed to build a Strat I could fall in love with, and like many others the world over I mourn his passing.

Matt Baker

Thanks, Matt, your tribute to luthier James Tyler, who died on 29 August at the age of 72, is richly deserved. Even to make the attempt to be different is difficult in the guitar-making world, let alone nailing it with such finesse and individuality. His passing leaves the guitar world the poorer, but those of us, such as yourself, who are fortunate enough to own one of his guitars, have the best possible means to remind themselves how skilful and original his craft was.



STREET SAVVY

With *Guitarist* readers increasingly hitting the high street with their guitars, they might want to check out my handy busker box. There is room for two sets of strings in the bottom tray and all sorts of essentials in the top. They also come with a little cup, but I used the space where it goes for a tuner. It is sold as a children's sandwich box [it seems to be the Sistema Bento Lunch To Go for those wondering – Ed] and, handily for buskers, you get them on the high street in WHSmith's Back To School section.

Richard Patrick

Thanks, Richard. That's given us inspiration for the next busking session – very handy indeed! Have any other readers repurposed household items into gigging or studio accessories? Send your suggestions in and we'll print the best.

FULL HOUSE

I have a full collection of *Guitarist* magazines from issue 1 up to now, but am moving to a smaller premises. I'd love to let someone else have my collection; I'm based in East Yorkshire and would only ask for a small fee. Please do let me know if any of your readers are interested.

Mary Wilson

Best of luck with the move, Mary. Fellow readers and collectors, do get in touch if you're local to East Yorkshire and fancy giving this rare full collection of *Guitarist* magazines a new home and we'll connect you with Mary.

Above left: The guitar world lost a veteran innovator earlier this year when James Tyler, the maker behind iconic guitars such as this, passed away

Above: A humble lunchbox becomes a catch-all for your busking essentials

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



Marcus King

The Americana-loving singer-songwriter digs into the ties between the ebb and flow of his emotional state and the safe space inherent in the well-worn fretboard of his beloved Big Red

Words Andrew Daly

The modern guitar scene is brimming with pyrotechnics based on speed, agility and clicks via social media. Regardless of how you see it, it's the way of things. Marcus King, however, bypasses all of that in favour of a straight-up vibe check. "Other people might have a larger vocabulary, and they're going to speak more eloquently," he tells *Guitarist*. "I have the vocabulary that I have. I have a Southern accent, and it's the same on the guitar. I adapted the guitar to do the talking for me when I was too shy. The basic root of my playing is to try not to think about it but allow myself to just express things wholly."

King has been keen on self-expression lately. His record *Mood Swings* (which dropped in April 2024 and was produced by Rick Rubin) exposed the 28-year-old Greenville, South Carolina native's unladen emotion throughout with brushstrokes of well-timed guitar. For some, laying one's soul bare would be intimidating, but not for King, who used his guitar – aka his 'safe space' – to fill in the blanks.

"You go through life and you pick up things," he says. "You spend a lot of time around people you admire and, through osmosis, that starts to show

in how you speak and tell stories. It's the same for playing guitar; it's all very organic."

Elsewhere, King piloted his Curfew Foundation, which provides a space for musicians struggling with mental health challenges, and the Marcus King Family Reunion, a festival based on good times, good food and good music.

He's battled demons, knowing that the struggle will be never-ending, but King's talent and down-to-earth personality win, no matter what he does. "I'm trying to create art," he says. "This last record pushed me to create something for myself. It's the *Field Of Dreams* mentality, where if you build it, they will come."

And according to King, there is more to come beyond *Mood Swings*. "You've got to be honest and true to yourself," he adds. "The only thing I can guarantee to my listeners is that anything I put out will be something I really believe in. And I'm believing in what I'm working on with my band in the studio right now. We have a new record that we're putting out in the first quarter of next year [2025]. It's the most excited I've been about a new record since I can remember, truly."

1. Marcus King on his go-to Gibson ES-345: “Big Red was my grandfather’s guitar. It’s like a little piece of home, and it lets me get back whenever I need to”

PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS

Mood Swings has been a new adventure for you. What brought you to this point?

“It started from a conversation I had with Rick Rubin. He and I talked about mental health as it relates to the creative process. Basically, that reshaped my thoughts on [the subject] and helped me view what I thought was holding me back.”

How did this view present itself?

“I reshaped it all and looked at my mental health as a writing partner. In many ways, the record concept started to take shape around one song, *Bipolar Love*. Without the usage of metaphor, it just spoke directly about the challenges I go through as they relate to my relationships and how they’re tumultuous because I wasn’t concentrating on my mental health.”

Have these mental health challenges held you back during your career?

“In a way, my most consistent muse – because sometimes muses come and go – is mental health. Mental health, or lack thereof, has always remained. I’ve been working on improving it in positive ways, and getting through it with my art has always been the positive way to do that.”

So how would you describe your process as a guitarist and musician now?

“It’s rooted in a form of transcendentalism, which is rooted in a fundamental understanding of the neck and the notes. It’s an intimate understanding and familiarity with the instrument and trying to understand it to the best of my capability. It’s how every note on the neck relates to one another and how I can express myself fully on the instrument – sometimes better than I can with words.”

Would the guitar have been a safe space for you?

“Absolutely. Guitar has always been there. It’s the most consistent companion I’ve had.”

What did life look like for you growing up? Do you have musicians in the family?

“My dad was a player. Still is. My grandfather, too. My grandfather – and other folks from that generation – were sometimes bitter and angry because life’s a bitch. You work hard your whole life and things still tend to fall apart. It’s hard to have control over everything.”

Does that contribute to why you now use the guitar as a safe space?

“I saw music, or playing music, as an expression. Even the saltiest fuckers that I’d see at the family scenes would have a smile on their faces when they were playing. Subconsciously, I was drawn to it as a form of escapism. I was really lonely as a kid; I spent a lot of time alone and the guitar always made me happy. It was my best pal.”

Did that lead you to look at the instrument or the fretboard differently than you might have otherwise?

“I started seeing it as a roadmap. All these places are intertwined, with roundabouts and paths that lead to the same thing. The fretboard is connected. There are 12 notes and I try to be less overwhelmed by it and not let it be so intimidating.”

“I was drawn to [the guitar] as a form of escapism. I spent a lot of time alone as a kid, and the guitar made me happy. It was my best pal”

How do you find a balance between self-expression and technical knowledge?

“The more I’ve grown as a person, the more I’ve found it relates to my playing and my ability to express myself on the instrument. The less I hold back emotionally or in my personal life, the less I hold back musically. It’s a language, or a dialect, that I speak.

“With English, you’ll run into a guy who learned a new word, and he fits it into every fucking sentence. It’s like, ‘That’s cool, but you might be overusing it, or you don’t understand.’ It’s the same way when I get a new idea on guitar.”

The record itself has a different vibe and expanded musical language. Does that have to do with the fact that it’s an emotional release, too?

“Big time. This is the platform I feel most comfortable expressing myself in. It’s basically about dealing with



emotional disorders, mental bullshit in a relationship, and trying to open yourself up enough to deal with it and learning how to live with it.”

Why did you need to dial back the guitars to get that release?

“We wanted what remained on the record to be structurally integral to songs. Like with *Fuck My Life Up Again*, we wanted it to be a garnish more than anything else as far as guitars. The guitar is a form of expression, and sometimes guitar immediately subcategories you into rock or blues, and I wanted this music to live in a space without boundaries. I wanted the guitar to be a means of expression, rather than the primary pillar.”

People tend to classify you as strictly a guitarist, but you're stretching out far beyond that now.

“There's a lot more. I'm comfortable with not giving a shit what people classify me as. I don't mean to be arrogant; I classify myself as a musician and a lover of all Americana. I love literature and mid-century architecture – I love all things Americana. That's where I write from.

“I love the music birthed here on the soil of the States, and I go back even further to Appalachia fiddle – which was a big part of my upbringing – but that came from Ireland. I'm a fan of all that came before me, and I want my music to be a direct expression that correlates with how I speak and carry myself. I want people to hear it and say, ‘Oh, that's Marcus talking over there.’”

On the gear side, you launched your signature Orange amp, the MK Ultra, a few years back. What's kept you coming back to Orange?

“I'm a big fan of aesthetics. The look of Orange amplifiers, you know, I was really into that – it's a really hip look. And when I started to work with them, I was really honest, saying, ‘There's too many options.’ I went, ‘I go and sit in somewhere, and if it's an Orange Rockerverb, I don't know what the fuck to do.’ I'm not an engineer, and it's all hieroglyphics... I don't know what the hell's going on.”

“[So for my signature amp], I was like, ‘I don't want any of that shit.’ They took my criticism well, so I said, ‘I want three knobs and something between a Fender Super Reverb and a 50-watt Marshall Plexi.’ That's what they did. It's basically a British amplifier with American technology and tubes, and it's hand-wired in the USA. I couldn't be prouder of that amplifier. It's really what I am.”

You're seldom seen without your Gibson ES-345. Is that the guitar that means the most to you?

“Oh, yeah. Big Red was my grandfather's guitar. My dad gave it to me when I was 18. He gave it to me to take on the road, and just as Dorothy [from *The Wizard Of Oz*] has her ruby red slippers, I have my red Gibson guitar. It's like a little piece of home, and it lets me get back there whenever I need to.”

Do you find it just as easy to express yourself on non-vintage instruments?

“I've got some new guitars in the arsenal. When I'm flying overseas and I gotta check the guitars, I need to bring new guitars just in case they get busted up. But

“I'm comfortable with not giving a shit what people classify me as. I don't mean to be arrogant; I classify myself as a musician and a lover of all Americana”



2. The Orange MK Ultra is Marcus's signature amp: “It's basically a British amplifier with American technology and tubes. I couldn't be prouder of it”

3. With his Curfew Foundation, Marcus stands as an advocate for mental health awareness in the music community. He says: "It's about spreading the word that it's tough out there and that you're not alone"

PHOTO BY VOLLY CURTIS

the expression, really, I feel like if you gave me a set of spoons and that's all I had to express myself, for a true artist, it doesn't matter what the medium or canvas is. But I like quality instruments."

When you look at today's guitar scene, which often relies on social media and farming for clicks, do you get a sense that things are headed in a healthy direction?

"You don't want the soul to be detached from things because you'll just have gratuitous shredding. But there's hope for the future; it's just a matter of putting less focus on things and letting the guitar speak for itself. That's my approach.

"I just love the guitar so much. I want to bring the guitar into the zeitgeist. I want people to accept it and understand it. If you go over people's heads, like really outside of the fringe, or if you're on the fringe and trying to coerce people to reach out to you, they'll be less inclined to do so. I want to take the guitar with me, bring it into the state of music now and make it something everybody can enjoy."

What's the key to making that happen?

"I look at it like people can go out and make really incredible pieces of art, like a movie that's a hit with everybody, but it's really just an artistic masterpiece – and that's really neat. But it kind of affected everyone... I want to handle the guitar the same way. I want to get everybody onboard without excluding anybody."

Is that and your openness about mental health why you've become involved with so much outreach lately?

"Yeah, I want to create as much outreach and advocacy as possible. I also want to spread as much musical awareness about mental health in the music community – and the arts community overall. It's about spreading the word that it's tough out there and that you're not alone when it comes to the emotions that you're feeling."

For a long time, there was a huge stigma regarding mental health in the music community.

"I'm trying to take the stigma off it, like destigmatising the idea that it's okay not to be okay. That's where it's at. That's the basic idea of the Curfew Foundation and the [Marcus King] Family Reunion. I want people from all walks of life to come together and share a meal, music and sunshine. It's about bringing people together. That's the truth of it."

"I just love the guitar so much. I want to bring it into the state of music now and make it something everybody can enjoy"

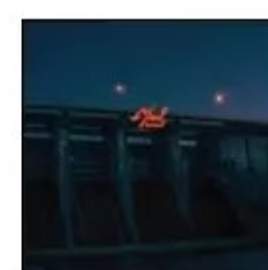
What advice would you give to someone in your line of work who is suffering?

"Don't be afraid to let them think you're crazy. Artists are supposed to be a little bit crazy, right? Just take it in. I found a lot of peace through embracing the crazy side. When I have days like yesterday when I was in Milwaukee and just having a rough day, where I didn't get enough sleep, and it just amplifies and overstimulates my senses and I have a bad mental health day, I put myself in time out and take a nap.

"There's good days and bad days. Depression is something that I feel and it never really goes away. I'm just in remission. So I'd tell people not to be surprised when it comes back around – and it will come back around when you least expect it. That's the fucked-up truth about it. It wants to try to remind you that you can never be happy – but you can *be*. You just gotta stay after it. Man, it's a lifelong battle."

Who is Marcus King now and who do you think you'll be this time next year?

"Man, I'll just be the truest version of myself. That's all I can ever hope to be. I just want people to see the most honest and vulnerable version of myself. You'll always get that." 



Marcus King's latest album, *Mood Swings*, is out now via Snakefarm Records

www.marcuskingofficial.com



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JUNIOR GENIUS

Its big brother, the Les Paul Standard, may have the stronger legend, but pound-for-pound the single-pickup Les Paul Junior, which celebrates its 70th anniversary this year, was and is one of the hardest-working, richest-sounding electric guitars in the world

Words Jamie Dickson Photography Adam Gasson

It couldn't be any simpler – yet, in truth, it couldn't be any better. The Les Paul Junior, which was launched in the same year as Fender's Stratocaster, was in some ways the antithesis of Fender's svelte three-pickup rocketship. Made for lowly students, not cutting-edge professional artists, it had but a single pickup in the old-fashioned 'dog-ear' shape, while its slab body was functional,

rather than futuristic, and its glued-in neck evoked an earlier era of lutherie. Yet, somehow, it always was more than the sparse sum of its parts.

In the right hands, its simplicity became a kind of purity – putting so little between the player and nuanced self-expression. Its surprisingly punchy pickup was well suited to the burgeoning age of rock 'n' roll, too, with enough clout to make a Tweed amp weep

and wail when you turned up the wick. Even its modest price meant that musicians on the way up, such as Mountain's Leslie West, could afford it – and that means that when they began to define the sound of rock, they did so with Gibson's most basic and yet most enduringly capable electric.

Jason Davidson, director of product development, joins us to unpick the surprisingly complex tale of Gibson's simplest guitar.

“They’re beautifully – if simply – made from the same materials as higher-end instruments, play and sound great, and have a unique swagger that suits rock ’n’ roll”

BOB WOOTTON

This 1955 sunburst single-cut Junior belongs to Guitarist contributor Bob Wootton and is a magnificent early example of the model



What marked the start of the Les Paul Junior story? Who was instrumental in getting it designed and brought to production?

“That’s golden-era McCarty. When the original Les Paul model launched in 1952, there was always a plan to also bring about the Les Paul Custom, the fancier model, which debuted in 1954 – along with the Les Paul Junior. There’s actually not a lot of history in the archives detailing the origin story of the Les Paul Junior, but it’s pretty reasonable to assume that Gibson had always followed a good/better/best hierarchy in the product line. But with the [launch of the] Les Paul they didn’t really have that, initially. So they started building that structure in 1954 with the introduction of the Custom at the top, the Les Paul regular – as they would call it – and then the Les Paul Junior in 1954. And then the next year they launched the Special to fit in between.”

To what degree was Les Paul involved with the Junior as opposed to the flagship Les Paul Model?

“I don’t think I’ve ever read any story of his input on that guitar. He would have had to sign off on it. It would have been part of his contract deal at the time, and I’m sure he was very excited to have



another signature model added to the stable. We just don’t have that storytelling piece to add to it.”

Les was primarily a jazz guitarist – so why did Gibson decide to go with the bridge pickup on the Junior as opposed to a neck pickup, which you saw on student model Gretsches and so on. Was it an attempt to compete with the twangier sound of Fender?

“That may have had something to do with it. With the Les Paul, the first model, you had the

1. The Les Paul Junior before it acquired its reputation as the monkey wrench of guitars for blues and rock. Pictured with the lesser-known matching Les Paul Junior combo, it had a Brazilian rosewood fingerboard mounting 22 nickel-silver frets and was offered “complete with leather, padded strap”

“It’s pretty reasonable to assume that Gibson had always followed a good/better/best hierarchy in the product line” **JASON DAVIDSON**

options. I assume they probably did experiment with pickup placement and it ended up closer to the bridge for the brighter tone. Possibly, it may have just been the players that tested the guitar that really preferred that position – and, actually, it’s hard to make the neck position brighter, whereas it’s easier to make the bridge position a little darker. Les himself may have preferred it on that guitar with the single P-90.

“It was aimed as a budget conscious, entry-level model, so perhaps there was also some thought put into the [needs of the] student market as well – just a brighter, louder tone. And I don’t know if you’ve seen some of the Custom Shop guitars that we’ve made, but we have made Les Paul Juniors with pickups in the neck position and it looks odd. So maybe it was an aesthetic thing as well. Maybe it just looked better to have the pickup at the bridge.”

Given that the Junior was, by 1959, a very popular student model, how did it relate to the yet more affordable Melody Maker line that launched in that year?

“I believe it was seen as a different entity altogether. I don’t know if that was something to do with Les’s contract, or it was just an easier build. They saw the success with the Les Paul Junior and how many units they could

DREAM TEAM

Guitarist’s vintage guitar maven and Historic Hardware author Bob Wootton gives his view on the historic guitars he assembled for this cover’s photoshoot

“The two yellow double-cuts and sunburst single-cut here are from my collection. The others belong to player/collector friends. Between them, they cover most of the bases of golden-age slab-bodied Gibsons. Note that Gibson had also acquired Epiphone in ’57 and started making Epiphones alongside Gibsons soon afterwards.

“First introduced in ’54, most Les Paul Juniors have mahogany bodies and necks with rosewood fingerboards and P-90 single-coil pickups. They were entry to intermediate-level instruments, typically aimed at younger players. Despite this, they have become some of the most celebrated and desired guitars of all. Why? Well, they’re beautifully – if simply – made from the same materials as higher-end instruments, they’re very high quality, play and sound great, and have a unique swagger that suits rock ‘n’ roll. The McCarty wraparound stop bar/bridge further adds to the acoustic

ring the best examples have, though higher-note intonation can be tricky. They’re very comfortable, not least because they’re quite light. And the controls offer a surprising spread of great sounds.

“All have dot fret markers and gold Gibson headstock decals, except the fancier Specials, which [have] inlaid pearloid. Neck profiles evolved along with all Gibsons – usually quite chunky until 1960, when Gibson slimmed things down, likely in response to player demand. The SG shape had replaced the Les Paul by early ’61 but continued to carry its headstock silkscreen ID into ’62. Curiously, the Special was the first model to lose it by ’60. Generally, earlier pickups have a ‘bark’ to them, [they] smooth out by ’56, and then become slightly louder and ‘shoutier’ towards ’60. The thinner body of the SG emphasises this further. The Coronet was the Epiphone equivalent of the Junior and was discontinued in ’70.”

“Juniors were being assembled in the same area where L5s and Les Paul Standards were produced – the same craftspeople, working on the same line” JASON DAVIDSON

This stunning double-cut Junior from 1960 is another gem from Bob Wootton's collection. Jason Davidson from Gibson speculates that the move to a double-cut format was driven by advice from sales teams at Gibson. A new selling point was always being sought



2

Les Paul TV Model

Designed to emphasize the latest in modern appearance with beautiful Lined Mahogany finish and incorporating unusual quality, features and performance at a popular price. Its easy, low playing action, slender neck, and clear sustaining tone make it a favorite with students and advanced players.

Graceful cutaway design • slender mahogany neck with adjustable Truss Rod construction • rosewood fingerboard with pearl dot inlays. Powerful magnetic pickup with Alnico Magnets and individually adjustable polepieces to balance each string, located near bridge for clarity of tonal response • separate tone and volume control • bright nickel plated metal parts, quality machine heads • new metal combination bridge and tailpiece, adjustable horizontally and vertically • padded leather strap included.

SPECIFICATIONS

12¾" wide, 17¼" long, 1¾" thick, 24¾" scale, 22 frets

Les Paul TV — Lined mahogany finish
No. 535 Case — Faultless construction, plush lined
No. 115 Case — Durabilt construction

Les Paul Junior Guitar

The trim, neat appearance, easy playing action, and unusual brilliant tone of the Les Paul Jr Guitar, together with its unbelievable low, popular price, have made it Gibson's best selling electric solid body instrument. Gibson quality throughout, coupled with top performance, have earned for it tremendous popularity with students and advanced players alike. Golden Sunburst finish on top with dark brown mahogany color on back, rim and neck.

Graceful cutaway design • slender mahogany neck with adjustable Truss Rod construction • rosewood fingerboard with pearl dot inlays. Powerful magnetic pickup with Alnico Magnets and individually adjustable polepieces to balance each string, located near bridge for clarity of tonal response • separate tone and volume controls • bright nickel plated metal parts, quality machine heads • new metal combination bridge and tailpiece, adjustable horizontally and vertically • padded leather strap included.

SPECIFICATIONS

12¾" wide, 17¼" long, 1¾" thick, 24¾" scale, 22 frets

Les Paul Jr. — Sunburst finish
No. 115 Case — Durabilt construction



HISTORIC IMAGES COURTESY OF GIBSON

2. The TV Model, as the TV Yellow finish Junior was called, certainly stands out in black and white images, lending credence to the idea that it was intended to ‘pop’ on television screens of the era. But if so, why apply it to a student model not top-of-the-line Standards that pros might use? Also, natural finish TV Model guitars were made, lending weight to the idea the model simply aped the trendy look of a TV cabinet, a wondrous new thing in 1950s homes

sell, and maybe they did think, ‘We could sell even more if we go with this even easier to build, cheaper model.’”

For many people, TV Yellow is the ultimate Les Paul Junior finish. Tell us about the inception of that look...

“Well, I believe they actually did make some in ’54. It wasn’t catalogued, but they did make some and, funnily, some of those ‘TV Yellow’ models were actually natural mahogany, and not the yellow colour. The background, the stories that I’ve

“The neck playability factor is enormous, which means the guitar is responsive to any style of playing” STEVE HOWE

3. Leslie West (right) pictured in June 1971 with bassist Felix Pappalardi, who gave Leslie the first Junior he ever used in Mountain

always heard, was so that the guitar would show up better on black-and-white television. Then there’s also the theory that a lot of television cabinets back then had that same finish. So there are different opinions on that. But, unfortunately, there’s no surviving documentation written out telling us the full history,

GIANTS OF THE JUNIOR

LESLIE WEST

The most influential Junior player who ever lived, the late great Leslie West, told *Guitarist* – in this excerpt from a 1993 interview – how he used one to become king of the Mountain and narrowly missed out on using it to record on The Who’s most famous tracks...

“I turned Mick Ralphs onto Les Paul Juniors and we used to go through Texas in the 70s when we were touring and we hit every pawn shop there was. Actually, Felix [Pappalardi] gave me the first Junior that I used in Mountain. It was basically a hunk of wood with a pickup on it, the cheapest guitar that Gibson ever made. But it was all I needed. It had one pickup, a tone control and a volume control, and years later when Van Halen came out, basically all he used was one pickup; the only thing is they eliminated the tone control. Well, I happen to like using the tone control with the treble rolled off because Clapton used to have this tone called ‘woman’ tone, the same tone he used in the solo on *Sunshine Of Your Love*. It’s actually my favourite tone: very warm, not metallic, and no matter how loud you play with that tone it just never hurts.

“The Les Paul Junior was my primary guitar, although my first guitar was a Stratocaster. I bought it with the money I got for my bar mitzvah. I remember going to Manny’s Music and buying a ’58 Strat. A few years later when The Vagrants started, they all had new instruments and my Strat was already about six years old and all beat up, and so like an idiot I traded it in. I’d love to have that guitar now, man... When I started Mountain with Felix I used an SG Junior and the thing would never stay in tune. So he had this old beat-up Junior and he said, ‘Try this thing,’ and I never gave it back. In the end I gave it to Pete Townshend. I played on *Won’t Get Fooled Again*, *Baby Don’t You Do It* and *Behind Blue Eyes* when they did *Who’s Next*. They came over to the States and they were at the Record Plant in New York. Kit Lambert called me up and said, ‘Pete wants to record an album, but he doesn’t want to overdub; he wants you to play lead.’ So we went down and we did it.

“But when they got back I think they thought that it didn’t really work because I was playing lead. But I’ve got a tape of it, and when I finished the sessions I gave Pete my Junior and an old Tweed Fender Champ and he wrote me a really beautiful letter. I’d love to be able to release one of those cuts one day. I had the greatest time seeing how they recorded because that was a unique group, I’ve got to tell you.”



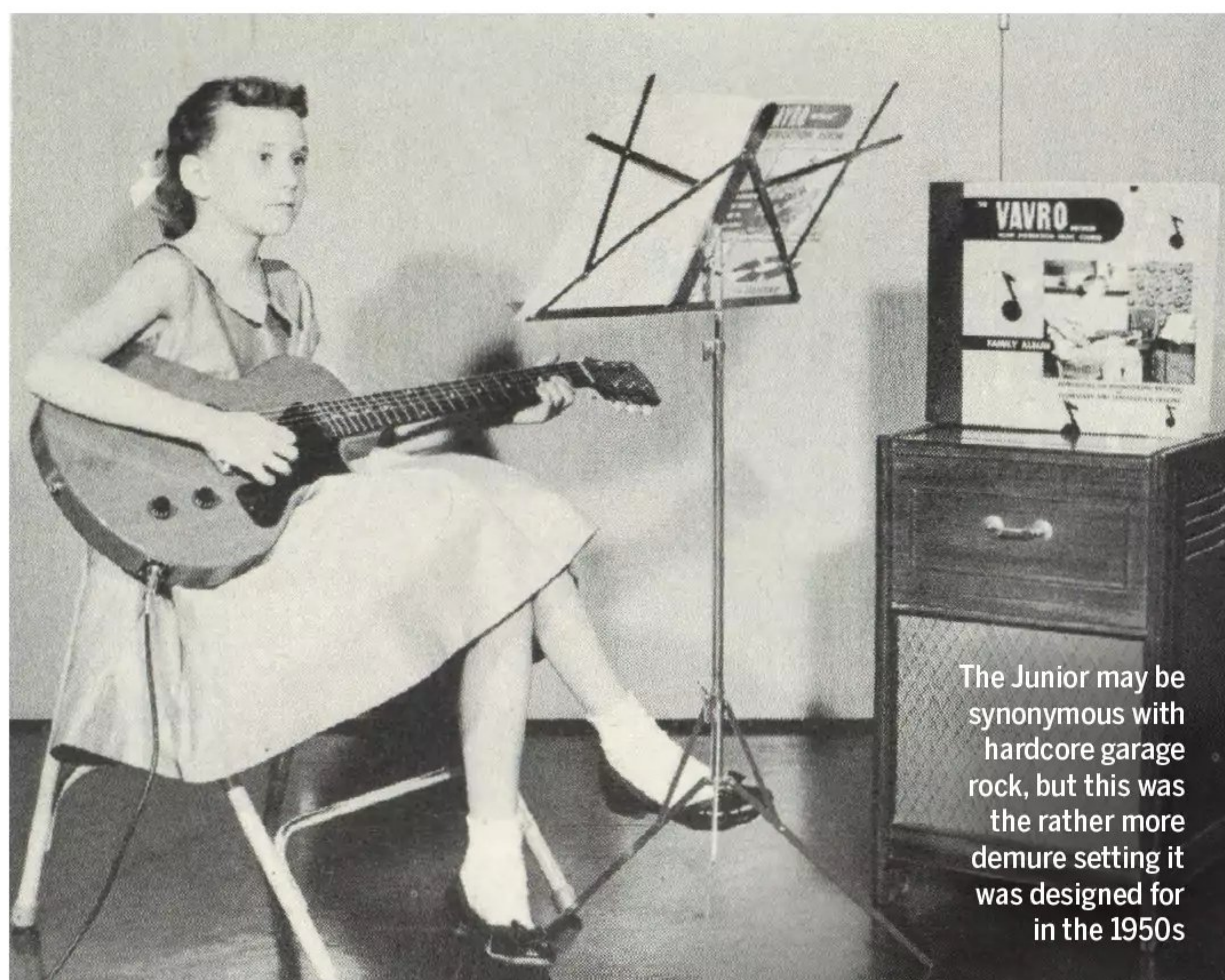
PHOTO BY DON PAULSEN/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

“My first Junior was basically a hunk of wood with a pickup on it, the cheapest guitar that Gibson ever made. But it was all I needed” **LESLIE WEST**

The classic TV Model single-cut remains one of the most sought-after models in the Junior lineage, inspiring many reissues over the years. This stunning original 1957 example is the real McCoy, though, and belongs to collector Laurie Wisefield who very kindly loaned it to us for this cover feature



HISTORIC IMAGES COURTESY OF GIBSON



“Funnily, some of those ‘TV Yellow’ models were actually natural mahogany, and not the yellow colour” JASON DAVIDSON

although both theories make sense. I think the TV Yellow finish became a catalogue option in '56, but as mentioned there are examples of 1954 models. In fact, there are even examples of maple-body Juniors; the specification was always mahogany, but there are examples of maple-bodied.”

Were the Juniors made on the same lines as the Standards? How was that organised?

“The same lines. We have some documentation that shows Juniors being assembled in the same area where L5s are produced, Les Paul Standards are produced – it was the same craftspeople, working on the same line.”

So if you were buying a Junior, then, they have the same constructional foundation as L5s, '59 Standards and the like?

“Yeah. I think that’s what people eventually discovered, that these were not entry-level, basic guitars as they may seem on the exterior. They are the same premium woods we were using back then, Brazilian rosewood fingerboards. I believe the first catalogue entry actually called that out – the Brazilian rosewood fingerboard, the same P-90 pickup and so on that we were using on other

guitars. The tone was there. The playability was there, the one-piece neck.”

Why do you think the Junior got the older dog-ear P-90 design, rather than the soapbars used on the Specials and, initially, on the Les Paul Model itself? It’s an iconic part of the look of the Junior but oddly out of step with the other Les Pauls with P-90s.

“I think it’s that good/better/best hierarchy again – when the Special came out it had soapbars, as you say. The Special was closer to the Goldtop, with the Tune-O-Matic bridge, for example. You don’t get that on the Junior, but you get it on the Special, eventually. You don’t get it on the Special right away, but you get it on the Special within a few years.”

We mentioned rare Juniors. Because it was a student guitar, it’s hard to imagine many were ordered in custom colours. But were they ever ordered?

“Yeah. We’ve seen a few, including some black examples. I don’t know if those were custom colour orders as such or if those were just produced and shipped out to dealers as a special run. But you don’t see very much of it, no.”

GIANTS OF THE JUNIOR

STEVE HOWE

The adaptability of the single-pickup Junior was never vindicated more fully than when prog legend Steve Howe used it on the celebrated Yes album *Tales From Topographic Oceans*. Here, Steve dives into a full explanation

“I’ll start by clarifying that Side One *The Revealing...* was played pretty much entirely on an ES-345, recorded in stereo with two Sho-Bud volume pedals. Most of the rest of *Topographic* was recorded playing the Les Paul Junior. To start with, it was and still is one of the most comfortable guitars to play – everything makes sense and lines up to make a perfectionistic instrument with bags of feel and accessibility. The sound is full of character and power, whether clean or with added toys. With the Big Muff, volume pedal, delays, phasing, Leslie cabinets, different amps and so on – this guitar rings, whatever you put it through.

“The neck playability factor is enormous, too – nothing like a LP Custom, which I find difficult – which means the guitar is responsive to any style of playing. One pickup appears limited yet in practice isn’t. The guitar is set up mostly with max volume and tone, but the muted setting of ‘full off’ on the tone control appears a couple of times. Like a Fender Broadcaster or Esquire, a Gibson Les Paul Junior has the same ‘stripped-back simplicity’, but it somehow covers a lot more ground. It’s also quite a beauty to behold – unlike the SG models. My 1955 Gibson Les Paul Junior is on the sleeve of my new album, *Guitarscape*, amid the countryside...”



Steve Howe praises the Les Paul Junior for its character and power

PHOTO BY JOSEPH BRANSTON

“It was and still is one of the most comfortable guitars to play – a perfectionistic instrument with bags of feel and accessibility”

STEVE HOWE

This vintage Les Paul Special from 1960 exemplifies the expanding hierarchy of buying options that Gibson wanted to offer consumers – more fully featured than a Junior but not as opulent as a 'Burst or a Les Paul Custom



What's your feeling about the introduction of the double-cutaway Junior in 1958? Again, it wasn't in step with the look of the Les Paul Standard, which was new that year and seemed to take the Junior even further from the root design. Did market forces prompt that or some other priority?

"It probably was market forces. It was just playability. Maybe they saw a decline in sales and were ready to introduce something new. Gibson was always looking to evolve the line. You see it, especially during that period; it was ever-changing. If something worked, stick with it for a year or two but keep evolving it, keep trying to push the envelope. I think that was just another example of that. I'm glad they did. That was a cool idea."

When we think about the PAF, we know that you can look at a dozen PAFs and find a dozen different methodologies. Was it quite so varied with the P-90s? Or not so much?

"Yeah. You can see changes in the P-90s, and sometimes it may have just been due to production issues or supply chain issues, different magnets were used. So you'll see Alnico IIIs, Alnico Vs, sometimes I'm sure a different number of windings under or over. It was the same type of thing. Same machines."

Despite its now-iconic status, the Junior hasn't been in continuous production...

"No, it wasn't in continuous production. I mean, it had the rename to the SG Junior, so you couldn't call it Les Paul in the 60s. So there was the whole SG era, and then even the SG Junior was dropped. And then what we had was the SG-1, the SG-100, those single-pickup models. We had the Firebird I back then, too. So you had other single-pickup models, and even budget-friendly models throughout the 70s but not the Les Paul Junior. There

"Gibson was always looking to evolve the line. I think [the double-cut Junior] was another example of that" **JASON DAVIDSON**



4. The advent of the SG Junior marked an almost clean break from the single-cut and double-cut Les Paul Juniors that preceded it, but retained the apparently deathless dog-ear P-90 and was all the better for it. This beautiful 1962 Les Paul SG Junior was kindly loaned to us for this feature by Connor Flys

was probably room for it, but it just didn't make the cut for some reason. Even when the Les Paul Standard and the Custom relaunched in the late 60s, the Junior wasn't there for that. In fact, I don't believe it came back out until the mid-80s, and it ran for a few years. I believe we even dropped it in the early 90s for a little while, and it came back around 2000."

There were some pretty unusual attempts to reimagine the Junior as a shred-rock machine in that period...

"Yeah, there were things like the double-cutaway Les Paul Junior [DC Pro] with a Steinberger [KB-X] Trem. You see oddballs like that. And [in more recent times] there were odd names that we would come up with, like the 'Junior Special'. We still talk about that to this day, the Junior Special!"

Among modern-day consumers of Custom Shop Junior reissues, do you find a customer tends to be either a single-cut person or a double-cut person? We know you can't mention numbers, but is there any kind of relative difference in interest in them?

"I think single-cut is still king. It's the look more than anything. There is the argument for the double-cutaway, the greater access to the upper register, and some people like that look, too. You have some players that will use both. But yeah, I think the single-cut is king."

If you were going to spec up a Les Paul Junior for yourself, what's your dream Les Paul Junior?

"I would do a late-50s single-cut. Just the standard '57 reissue that we make. As light weight as possible. That's perfect for me. Perfect." **G**

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THE DOG'S EARS

A lightweight mahogany body and a wraptail bridge virtually guarantees great tone – and the P-90 pickup is an electrifying addition

Words Huw Price Photography Adam Gasson

Until 1957, the P-90 was Gibson's premium pickup, fitted to artist-endorsed jazz boxes and 'student model' solidbodies alike. Even those who couldn't afford carved tops, fancy inlays or binding, weren't expected to compromise on their tone. And when it came to Juniors, from the earliest single-cut 1954 models to the last of the SG Juniors, one thing remained constant: the pickup was always a P-90 under a plastic cover with pointed ends that inspired the nickname 'dog ear'. This style of P-90 carried over from Gibson's archtops.

With nothing to screw into besides the top, the baseplates needed an extension at each end that was bent into an 'L' shape. This allowed the magnets and bobbin to sit inside the body, well out of the way of the strings. For the Junior, Gibson routed a rectangular cavity into the body, and the pickup was effectively sandwiched between the body and cover with a fixing screw at each end. Some suggest this direct coupling is a key component of P-90 tone.

SOAP OPERATICS

The Les Paul Goldtop was Gibson's first solidbody and there was insufficient clearance for a dog-ear P-90 in the neck position. The design was altered for P-90s to drop into a rectangular cavity, a new cover was created, and the two fixing screws passed through the bobbins. The cream cover resembled a bar of soap – hence the 'soap bar' nickname – and for the pickups to fit the cavity Gibson needed a baseplate without the mounting extensions. This entailed a modification. Gibson simply snipped the ends off 'dog-ear' baseplates and ground off any rough bits. We examined sets of P-90s from 1952,

'53 and '55 and this was apparent on all three. Given the simplicity of the solution, it's surprising how few P-90 replicas feature vintage-correct baseplates.

Gibson seemed to use whatever magnets its supplier sent, but most P-90s had Alnico III magnets until around 1957, when Gibson began transitioning to Alnico V. This explains why the P-90s fitted to late single-cut, double-cut and SG Juniors tend to sound brighter, hotter and more aggressive. Or so we thought...

Some sources mention it, but it's not widely known that during '52 and '53 some P-90s had oversized magnets

This writer was recently working on a 1952 Goldtop and noticed that both P-90s seemed slightly closer to the strings than usual. The guitar's tone was fuller and barkier than most 50s Goldtops, and it was decided that lowering the pickup heights might benefit the tone. It turned out there were no shims; instead, rough-looking oversized magnets with crudely snapped ends. The immediate conclusion was that the magnets had been swapped, but we soon discovered otherwise.

Some sources mention it, but it's not widely known that during '52

1. Some vintage P-90s contained oversized magnets and the tone they yielded was a fair bit hotter than on other, more conventional examples of the P-90

and '53 some P-90s had oversized magnets. Bars were cut halfway through and snapped to get two bars that were nominally 2 1/2 inches long and 1/2-inch wide. The crucial difference, however, was that they were 3/16-inch thick, rather than 1/8-inch. That's why the pickup appeared to be set higher than usual.

The gauss meter readings were 400 to 500, which is pretty much what we'd expect from Alnico III – which should be called 'Alni III' because there's no cobalt in the alloy. In addition to increasing the magnetic potential, the thicker magnets contain more iron and that bumps up inductance.

Mario Milan and James Finnerty mention these magnets in their book *The Gibson "P.A.F." Humbucking Pickup* and even suggest that the thickness sometimes reached 1/4-inch. They also recount that some found their way into PAF humbuckers.

If Gibson was still using up stock of thicker magnets as late as 1957, it's likely that some Juniors and Specials would have been equipped with thick-magnet P-90s, too. If you happen to own an early Junior and have found it hotter and fatter than most, take a look at the magnets next time you're changing strings and you might discover the reason.

VINTAGE CHECKLIST

If you want your Junior, Special or Goldtop to sound convincingly old-school, the coils should be wound with plain enamel wire and they must be unpotted. Ideally, the DC resistance will be somewhere between 7k and 8k, and the inductance should read between 6.5 and 7.2 Henrys. Alnico III and V magnets are the best starting point for pre- and post-1957 tones respectively, but all grades of Alnico are fair game. **G**



PHOTO BY HUW PRICE

If Gibson was still using up stock as late as 1957, it's likely that some Juniors and Specials would have been equipped with thick-magnet P-90s, too

The familiar dog-ear P-90 was a go-to pickup for Gibson from its inception in the mid-1940s onwards, and it survived the late-50s transition to humbuckers – but it isn't wasn't without twists to its long story. This 1960 Cherry double-cut Junior was kindly loaned to us by Graham Monk



HOT COALS

They may be among Rory Gallagher's lesser-known electrics, but this brace of Les Paul Juniors are unquestionably among the finest-sounding he owned

Words Jamie Dickson Photography Olly Curtis

When Irish blues-rock icon Rory Gallagher's guitar collection went under the hammer at Bonhams of London on 17 October, all eyes were on the fate of his celebrated '61 Strat – which sold for £889,400 including premium and, happily, is to return to Ireland to be exhibited at the National Museum of Ireland after being bought by Live Nation Gaiety Ltd.

However, while the spotlight fell squarely on the Strat there were other guitars Rory used to blistering effect that deserve more attention. In the days before the auction, *Guitarist* was lucky enough to play two of the best: Rory's two Gibson Les Paul Juniors – built in 1958 and 1959 respectively but separated by different body styles and, in the case of the single-cut Junior, a series of tour-focused mods.

DYNAMIC DUO

The 1959 single-cut is notable for having what appears to be a gold Leo Quan Badass bridge (or a variation on that theme). Steve Clarke, who prepared the guitar for auction at Bonhams, had this to say of it: "Those particular bridges, mid-70s or something, were a nice replacement. They tilted forward a little bit, but they gave you the intonation that Junior-type guitars needed more – especially with the gauge of strings that were coming in. What I noticed with the Badass bridge is that when you thread a string through the front of the bridge and it comes out the back, it goes over the back lip of the Badass bridge before it makes contact with the saddles and, because of that, it's almost like a tune-o-matic bridge and tailpiece all combined. There is a difference in the tone compared with just

the simple wrapover, which resonates more in your body; I could actually noticeably feel that difference between it and the 1959 double-cut. They're both completely different. They sound and behave differently because of these slight differences. And, of course, the double-cut will sound different for starters because it's [made with] less wood."

While preparing the Juniors for sale, Steve was able to take precise measurements of their relative weights, reporting that the 1958 single-cut weighed 3.5kg (7.76lb), while the 1958 double-cut weighed in, as anticipated,

1. Rory's modded 1958 Les Paul Junior was one of the later examples of the single-cut variant. Steve Clarke, who prepared the guitar for auction for Bonhams, says its mods lend it a unique voice

a half-kilo lighter at a very comfortable 3kg (6.74lb).

Steve adds: "Both the '58 and '59 have the original pots and wiring. The Sprague bumble bee caps are the paper-in-oil type with the small tube at one end."

When *Guitarist* gave both to Barrie Cadogan – whose stellar playing has lit a fire under the music of Little Barrie, The The,

"[The Leo Quan Badass bridge] tilted forward a little bit, giving you the intonation that Junior-type guitars needed" STEVE CLARKE



Primal Scream and others over the years – to try out, we observed that the double-cut had a lovely woody expressive voice whereas the single-cut had terrific punch and a soul-searing voice that worked perfectly for slide (see video link, right). The latter should be unsurprising given Rory's virtuosic touch with slide guitar.

FINAL CUT

Rory's nephew Daniel Gallagher explains that one of Rory's Juniors was used on the superb tracks *Kid Gloves* and *Walkin' Wounded* from Rory's final album, *Fresh Evidence*, though, alas, no record remains of which of the two Juniors made the cut. Given both their historic connection to Rory and their intrinsic tonefulness as instruments, it's unsurprising that these classic late-50s Juniors fetched final prices of £21,760 for the '58 single-cut and £19,200 for the '59 double-cut. **G**

***Guitarist* would like to thank the Gallagher family and Bonhams of London for their generous help in producing this feature www.bonhams.com**

*The double-cut had a lovely
woody expressive voice
whereas the single-cut had
a soul-searing voice that
worked perfectly for slide*

Rory Gallagher's 1959
double-cut Junior is
the nearest to original
specification of the
pair and has a tangibly
different character

**VIDEO
EXCLUSIVE!**

Watch Barrie Cadogan of
Little Barrie and The The demo
Rory's two Juniors and his
modded Melody Makers here
www.bit.ly/guitaristextra





70 YEARS OF THE LES PAUL JUNIOR

THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT

As the Les Paul Junior becomes a senior, here are six current models that remind us why this guitar is one of Gibson's best-loved designs of all time

Words Stuart Williams



EPIPHONE LES PAUL JUNIOR £469

If you've got vintage tastes on a garage-rock budget, look no further than the Epiphone Les Paul Junior: mahogany body, 50s neck profile, Epiphone P90 Pro pickup and CTS pots all come as standard. You'll need to be open to your finish options, as it's offered in a choice of Tobacco Sunburst or bust, but we'll take that. It's a great entry into the Junior platform, giving you a solid point to mod from to boot.

www.epiphone.com



**EPIPHONE JARED JAMES NICHOLS
'BLUES POWER' LES PAUL CUSTOM £999**

"That's not a Junior!" Correct. But Jared James Nichols' stripped-back single-pickup signature serves up something a little more fancy, with a bound body, block inlays and the Split-Diamond on the headstock face. The pickup is Jared's signature Seymour Duncan Silencer P90B, and the guitar also comes in a 'Gold Glory' version if Pelham Blue doesn't float your boat.

www.epiphone.com



**GIBSON CUSTOM 1958 LES PAUL JUNIOR
DOUBLE CUT REISSUE £3,799**

Breaking from the single-cut tradition, this double-cut offers an alternative take on the single-pickup format with a Custom Dogear P90. Gibson claims to have "revived the original recipe" from the 50s, with a slab mahogany body, tortoiseshell (celluloid) scratchplate and, of course, the TV Yellow finish (also available in Cherry). It's also available as a single-cut for the same price.

www.gibson.com



**EPIPHONE BILLIE JOE ARMSTRONG
LES PAUL JUNIOR £529**

The Green Day frontman has done more than most to keep the Les Paul Junior current in the past 20 years. While his signature model shares many of its specs with the production version below, it comes in a refreshing Classic White finish without screaming "American Idiot". You'll pay a little extra, but the case is also upgraded to a hardshell with leopard print interior. Grr...

www.epiphone.com



GIBSON USA LES PAUL JUNIOR £1,499

The USA workhorse tier delivers a great reissue of the Les Paul Junior at more realistic pricing. The mahogany neck features a 50s Vintage neck profile, while the Gibson Dogear P90 is hand-wired to the controls (which use an Orange Drop capacitor for the tone control). We've pictured it in the Ebony finish here with a tort'-finished scratchplate, but you can also get it in an iconic Vintage Tobacco Burst.

www.gibson.com



**GIBSON CUSTOM SELECT 1957 LES PAUL JUNIOR
MURPHY LAB ULTRA LIGHT AGED £4,499**

Custom Select is Gibson's small-batch line of Custom-level guitars. This Junior is decked out in a TV White finish, the mahogany grain highlighted with brown filler. The neck features a chunky 50s D-shape profile for retro heft, while the electronics are tip-top, with a Custom P90 pickup, CTS pots and paper-in-oil capacitors. A fine choice and something a little different.

www.gibson.com



A

AUDEN

Auden Neo series

A lightweight range of all solid guitars with a minimal open pore finish giving great volume and huge tonal range. Powered by the SuperNatural AS.

Models: Colton Dreadnought (pictured), Chester 000, Bowman OM, and Emily Rose Parlour.

audenguitars.com +44 1933 391234





70 YEARS OF THE LES PAUL JUNIOR

LEAD SINGLES

The Les Paul Junior's 'one is all you need' approach is still on trend today.
Here are six guitars that are keeping the format well and truly alive

Words Stuart Williams



PHOTO BY WILDWIRE GUITARS IN SELBY

PJD CAREY APPRENTICE STANDARD £899

PJD's Apprentice series sees a selection of its models lose even more off their already affordable price tags. So far, the company has given the Apprentice treatment to the single-cut Carey and offset St John, which share many of the same materials and design: lightweight obeche body, maple neck, rosewood fingerboards and nitro open-pore finishes. There's a PJD Wadfather humbucker in the driving seat, and at this price, we're saying "You're hired!"

www.pjdguitars.com



FENDER BRAD PAISLEY ESQUIRE £1,439

Before the Junior, there was the Esquire. This single-pickup precursor to the Tele gave us the blueprint for one of the most popular guitars ever. Incredibly, Fender doesn't currently have a non-CS production version, but this Brad Paisley model gets the job done. As well as the '64 Tele bridge pickup, it's got a trick up its sleeve with a Seymour Duncan Brad Paisley Secret Agent under the scratchplate. Cheating for this line-up? Possibly, but we'll allow it!

www.fender.com



PATRICK JAMES EGGLE MACON JUNIOR £3,195

The Macon Junior is somehow retro and contemporary-looking at the same time. Patrick's single-pickup offering goes with the double-cut format and ticks all the boxes: mahogany body, 50s neck carve, rosewood 'board, wraparound bridge and a custom-wound P-90. It looks the part, too, with aged nitro finishes in Grained Blonde, Grained Black, TV Yellow and Cherry. If you want to add custom options or upgrades, you can do so via the website.

www.eggle.co.uk



GORDON SMITH GS1 £999

We can't talk about single-pickup guitars without mentioning the revered GS1, and you can snag this UK-made beaut with plenty of customisable options – from shape (single- or double-cut) and body depth, to wood type, finish style and wiring – all done via drop-down menus on its website. You get a GSG humbucker as standard, but you can select that when ordering, too (plus £40 for a GSGP90). Head to the website to start configuring.

www.gordonsmithguitars.com



EASTMAN SB55/V £1,659

Eastman has gained a strong reputation for delivering vintage-style feel from import guitars at lower prices, which is continued with the SB55/V that pays homage to the Les Paul Junior in Antique Sunburst. It's an all-okoume affair and comes fitted with an ebony 'board and Jescar fretwire, with a dual-action truss rod and Bakelite scratchplate. And if you're only going to have one pickup, why not make it a Lollar? Here we get a 50s-spec dog-ear P-90.

www.eastmanguitars.com



SETH BACCUS NAUTILUS JUNIOR £3,899

We love the Nautilus for many reasons, starting with the body shape, which departs from the same old single-cut, adding a touch of RD/Rickenbacker with the horn. Elsewhere, the Nautilus Junior pairs an obeche body with a mahogany or Spanish cedar neck, and rosewood or ebony 'board (Seth's wood choices are determined by availability). There are similar options when it comes to pickups, with Bare Knuckle and Mojo both on the menu.

www.sethbaccus.com

COMPACT SIZE,
MONUMENTAL TONE.

IRONHEART
- F O U N D R Y -



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G E O R G E B E N S O N

Now into his seventh decade as a recording artist, the all-time jazz great shows little sign of slowing down. Adamant that he's "still learning", George Benson is now set to share his skills first-hand, alongside a host of A-listers and friends, in an immersive music experience

Words Andrew Daly

At 81 years of age, George Benson remains razor sharp on guitar – and in conversation. So sharp, in fact, that he's embarking on a new and exciting journey: Breezin' With The Stars, an immersive music event happening in Arizona in January. It's set to be jam-packed with workshops, performance, storytelling and expertise accumulated over a lifetime. And he'll share this new platform with the likes of Steve Lukather, John Scofield, Tommy Emmanuel and many more.

"One of the big things is learning and obtaining knowledge," Benson tells *Guitarist*. "But also, imparting that knowledge. I practise a lot. I live with the guitar; I don't call it practice. I can't pass by a guitar without picking it up."

Given the fact he's more than 40 albums deep, Benson's passion for six-strings remains astounding. One would think boredom or redundancy would factor in, but no, it's just the opposite: "I have guitars all over my house," he says with a laugh. "I have them

in strategic places, and every time I see that handle sticking up, I grab it, sit down and learn something."

Benson's tendency to perpetually pal around with his guitar has led to a genre-traversing career like no other. Simply put, when you hear him play, you damn well know it's George Benson. "People say, 'Hey, man, what's the new formula you're doing?'" he tells us. "I'd play something and come across a new invention, and I say, 'Oh, that's just something I'm working on.' But people would say, 'Man, whatever you're working on, you've got it mastered and it's nobody else but you.'"

Benson remains humble and harbours ever-lasting appreciation for his lot in life. He loves to pass on whatever he can, which is what Breezin' With The Stars is all about. "Later in life, when people asked me about the guitar, I'd tell them, 'I'm still learning.' If I learn something, I'll give it to someone, but right now, I'm still learning. But I always tell people, 'Don't ever doubt you can do it. Keep doing what you do and keep a good attitude and use that knowledge.'"

“I started experimenting and the results were amazing. The more I stretched out, the more attention I got and the people heard what I was trying to say”

You’ve never done something quite like Breezin’ With The Stars before. Why now?

“No, I have never done anything like this. I thought about it many years ago, but it’s quite a different thing for me. But I liked the idea. Most of the guitar players who are going to be with us have never been in the same place at the same time. It’s something new, they’re all my friends, are great players, and it’s going to be very special.”

What are your greatest hopes for the event?

“I know what gets players to where they feel something about the instrument. Knowledge is key; the Bible says it’s the key to everything. The more knowledge you have about what you’re doing, the better off you are. You can pick any style of music. What I always tell my friends is, ‘Just keep your ears open and you’ll learn something.’”

Why is it important to pass your knowledge on?

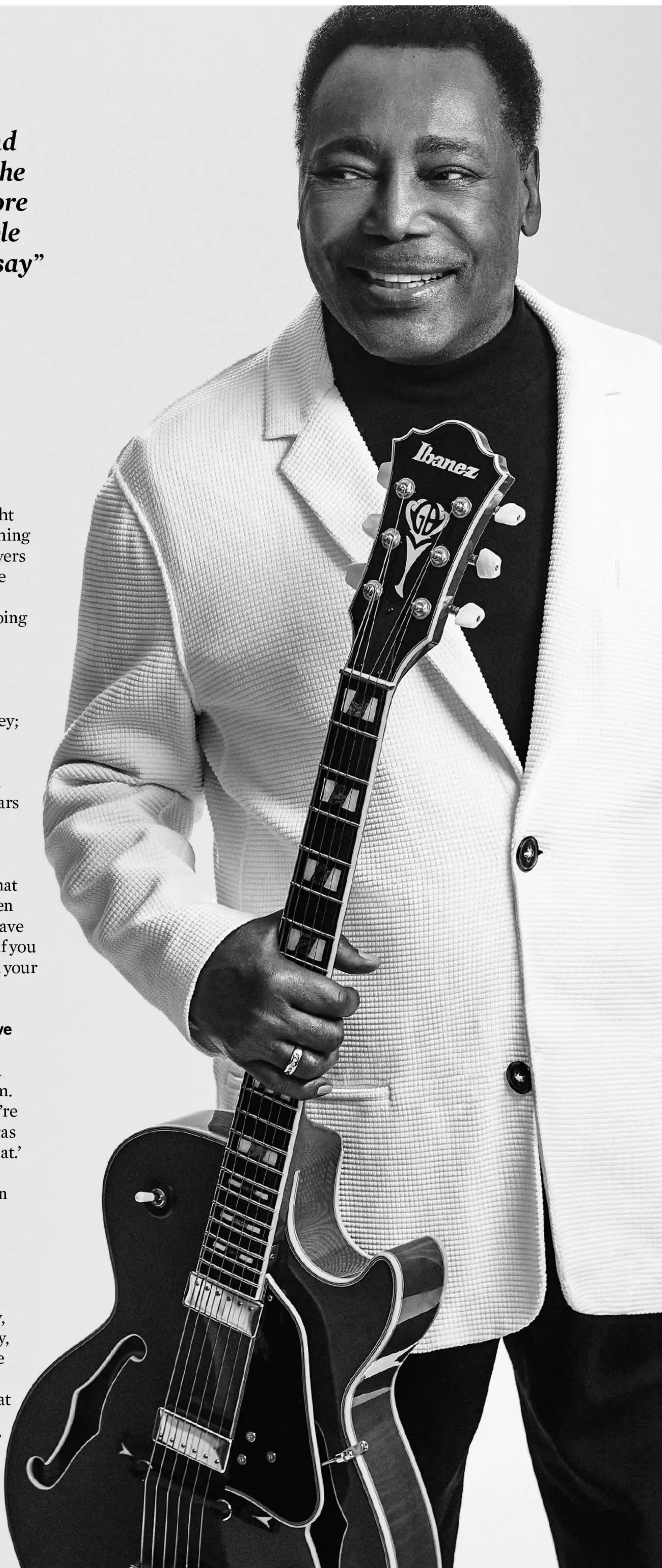
“Because I realised [others] didn’t understand what was in front of them. I didn’t understand that when I was coming up; I didn’t understand and didn’t have the room that they have now. Back in those days, if you were a rock guitar player, that’s what you were all your life. You could not come out of that like now.”

You’re a big part of that with how fearlessly you’ve traversed the genres.

“My managers and the people who were involved in my career didn’t believe what I was telling them. I said, ‘I can’t play that music.’ They said, ‘No, you’re just jealous.’ I said, ‘No, no, I played that when I was 12 years old, but the world doesn’t want to hear that.’ They kept telling me, ‘You’re going to be this kind of guy.’ They were shaping my career before I even had a career.”

For you, what has been the key to living outside the box as a musician?

“Later, when I started hearing people such as Glen Campbell coming out and Wes Montgomery, and they crossed over, I noticed and thought, ‘Hey, I can stretch out.’ I started experimenting and the results were amazing. The more I stretched out, the more attention I got and the people heard what I was trying to say. I realised that the world was an open place and that you could place your bets.”



A good example is 1976's *Breezin'*, which topped jazz, R&B and pop charts simultaneously.

"I have to give credit to the people who challenged me all those years, saying, 'You're not a blues singer, you're not this type of guitar player, and you can only go so far.' When I started opening up, I said, 'Oh, man, I've got room to breathe here; let me show them what I can do.'"

"I knew it was going to be the biggest record I ever had. We recorded in a place I had not recorded before, in a studio in Los Angeles, California. In fact, it was in Hollywood, at the Capitol Studios, where Nat King Cole made all those fabulous records."

"I have to give credit to the people who challenged me... when I started opening up, I said, 'Let me show them what I can do'"

What was the key from a guitar perspective?

"Tommy LiPuma, a great producer, gave me all the room I needed to breathe. Every time I mentioned something, he took it seriously. That was different. He never suggested we do anything except play the guitar and play anything the way I wanted to play it."

"Tommy was used to selling records, so when he spoke, I listened to everything. But he heard me play and said, 'Yeah, hey, okay, let's record that.' But one thing he insisted on, which was present in my other recordings, was I had a hard time playing in tune; I didn't bother tuning up well. He stopped me in the middle of the rehearsal and said, 'George, tune up

again.' I didn't realise the value of that until the album came out; I sounded in tune. That might have been one of the things that made the album what it is."

How did the success of *Breezin'* impact the way you approached the guitar?

"First, no-one could tell me what it was about that record that made it so big [laughs]. Everybody was trying to figure it out. But two elements made it special. One was I had never played a Polytone [Taurus IV] amp, so I had that. But I had this new guitar I'd just purchased, a [Gibson] Johnny Smith."

"I had just purchased it from one of the bravest guys I'd ever met. His girlfriend sent him to her old boyfriend's house to get the guitar she had just bought for him before they broke up. He went over there and knocked on the guy's door. I'd call that brave [laughs]. The guy came to the door and said, 'No, man, not my guitar!' He said, 'Yep, you've got to give it up.' The guy gave him the guitar and he came by my house because he didn't play guitar and said, 'Man, I've got a guitar here, and somebody said you might be interested.' I said, 'Let me see it.' It was an old Johnny Smith guitar."

"It wasn't old... as a matter of fact, it was a brand-new Johnny Smith guitar. I knew what it was worth, but I made him an offer of about half of what it was really worth [laughs]. He said, 'Man, can't you give me more than that?' I said, 'Okay, I'll add another \$50.' He said, 'Well, that's more than the other guys, you got it.' I took the guitar, put it in the closet and just before I went out to do the new album for Warner Brothers [*Breezin'*] –

BREEZIN' WITH THE STARS

Two fans and guitar masters in their own right get set to join George Benson for this immersive experience in 2025



CORY WONG

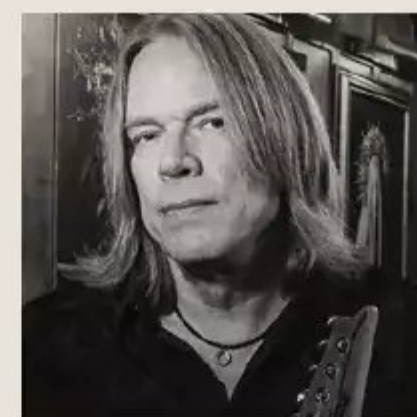
"I met George after he interviewed with me on my podcast [*Wong Notes*] a few years ago. I got to know him a bit. We emailed and texted a little since, and when George announced he was doing a camp, I said,

'Whoa, I gotta be there. I wanna hang out with George and learn from him. Can I be a part of it?'

"The thing about George Benson's playing is that if he were just a pop guitar player, he would be a legend. If he were just a pop singer, he would be a legend. If he were just a pop songwriter, he'd be a legend. Then you can take all the exact things and apply them to jazz. It's rare, and maybe has never been done otherwise, where somebody has No 1 albums in both the jazz and pop worlds."

"This cat is arguably one of the greatest guitar players ever to exist and an incredible singer and songwriter. There's incredible depth to his artistry. The main thing is he has pop and jazz sensibilities. He has all the knowledge of jazz harmony and lines but does it within the context of R&B and funk grooves – and he applies this incredible depth of guitar playing. That's something I'm always going for."

"I just wanna dive a little deeper into understanding his thought process behind his artistry, and how he balances in his head playing jazz versus pop and R&B music, and if it's the same to him as far as approach. I hope to walk away with conceptual knowledge and understanding of what he does. I don't need him to show me lines; I wanna hear about his concept." [AD]



ANDY TIMMONS

"The Ibanez folks were brainstorming about who to invite to the camp, and I'm a big fan of George, so they decided to ask me to come along. It's a lifelong dream. I've met George a couple of times; he really

has informed a lot of what I play. Being a part of this is incredible, though a little intimidating because of the cast of characters involved!"

"There was always just something extra about George's playing. There's a seemingly endless flow of unique ideas where you can recognise certain vocabulary, and it's put together incredibly. There's a certain vibe about George's playing that I've always loved. It's really in the moment and has such seat-of-your-pants inventiveness, with great blues and cool chromatic ideas. He is one of the few who managed to straddle the pop and jazz worlds and do so in a beautiful way. He's just the whole package. There's such true improvisation, and sometimes you're hearing the next note that's about to happen before you play it – George is so great at that."

"This will be complete immersion. The pure entertainment of being around an amazing player and the education is amazing. I get so much out of that; it'll last a lifetime. I always tell people, 'See the greats while you can.' Anytime my heroes get anywhere near me, I try to absorb what I can. A player like George gives you that drive and so much inspiration." [AD]

The *Breezin'* With The Stars extravaganza will take place in Phoenix, Arizona, from 3 to 6 January 2025. For more information, visit <https://breezinwiththestars.com>

because I'd just signed a contract – I said, 'I think that new guitar might be something I can play.' I took it with me and that's what people were hearing. So it was the Johnny Smith guitar and the Polytone amplifier."

Does the phrase 'tone is in the hands' ring true for you?

"Yeah, that part is true. Your feel for the instrument and the way you approach it is big time. Those are the subtle idiosyncrasies people pick up when they hear you play notes. They pretty much know who it is instantly because there's nobody that does that. They'll say, 'That's got to be George Benson,' or 'That's got to be Wes Montgomery.'"

Was Wes Montgomery your biggest influence?

"No, but I love what I learned by hanging out with him: 'Not to be jealous of the next man. Learn something from the next man. You don't have to steal all his licks, but that's a good start.' By hanging out with him and learning his personality and what kind of man he was, he hated talking about other guitar players, what they were capable of, what they could not do, and things like that."

Is that the biggest lesson you learned from Wes?

"He hated doing that kind of thing, so I didn't practise that, either. You don't know what the next man is

1. George's four-day Breezin' With Stars event will take place in January 2025 and will feature performances, jam sessions and more

"Your feel for the instrument and the way you approach it is big time..."

gonna do tomorrow. This is what he's doing now, but tomorrow, he could be a whole different guy within a whole different genre. I learned what I could and became friends with the greatest guitar players in the world. That's how I learned to play, by listening to what was going on, not trying to outplay."

How did that particular perspective lead you to view the fretboard?

"The guitar is a temperate instrument. You can depend on that. If you hit a certain fret at a certain distance, you'll get a certain sound. Some people know how to fool with that and get some incredible sounds, but it is a half-step instrument. It's half-steps all in and half-steps all the way back.

"We know what it is, and I'm amazed at what you can get out of 12 notes. If you master the 12-note system and put it in your head, your head will figure out a lot of it. Our brains are magnificent and can do a lot more than we imagine. Sometimes, I just let my brain go, and when I hear a song, my brain takes me to places I've never been before. Given that our brains are not programmed but flexible, you don't have to doubt you can do something; just go ahead and do it."

What keeps you inspired after all these years?

"I never really thought about it. People tell me how old I am every now and then; they'll say, 'George, you've reached this age...' I'll say, 'What age are you talking about?' When I was in my 50s, they'd say that, and again in my 60s. I'd say, 'You mean I'm that old? That's terrible!' [laughs]

"That's the way it goes and, man, I don't pay no attention. I just do it. The good thing is that my life has always been on an upward scale and moved in an upward position. Sometimes, it's been very, very, very slow, and then sped up, and the medium. But that's pretty much how it goes."

Have you ever had a period where you needed to put the guitar down?

"Everybody I know has given me the same story: 'I can't think of anything else to play.' I always say, 'Keep playing; you will.' But if you doubt it, listen to what others are playing, and you might think, 'Oh, I never would have thought of playing it like that.'

"Music is a school. It's a worldwide school. When you hang around other musicians, you're going to get a lot to think about"

"That's why we need each other, brother. We pass ideas on to each other. Music is a school. It's a worldwide school. It's not just one building you walk into: everybody we meet, even people who are not musicians, impacts what we do and how we think. But when you hang around other musicians, you're going to get a lot to think about."

You mentioned your Johnny Smith guitar, but you've been a loyal Ibanez player for a long time.

"When I first picked up an Ibanez guitar, I learned how well made they were. I used to have traditional guitars and a lot of them would fall apart in my hands.

2. Throughout his career George Benson hasn't let the boundaries of genres hold him back: "Sometimes, I just let my brain go," he tells us, "and when I hear a song, my brain takes me to places I've never been before"

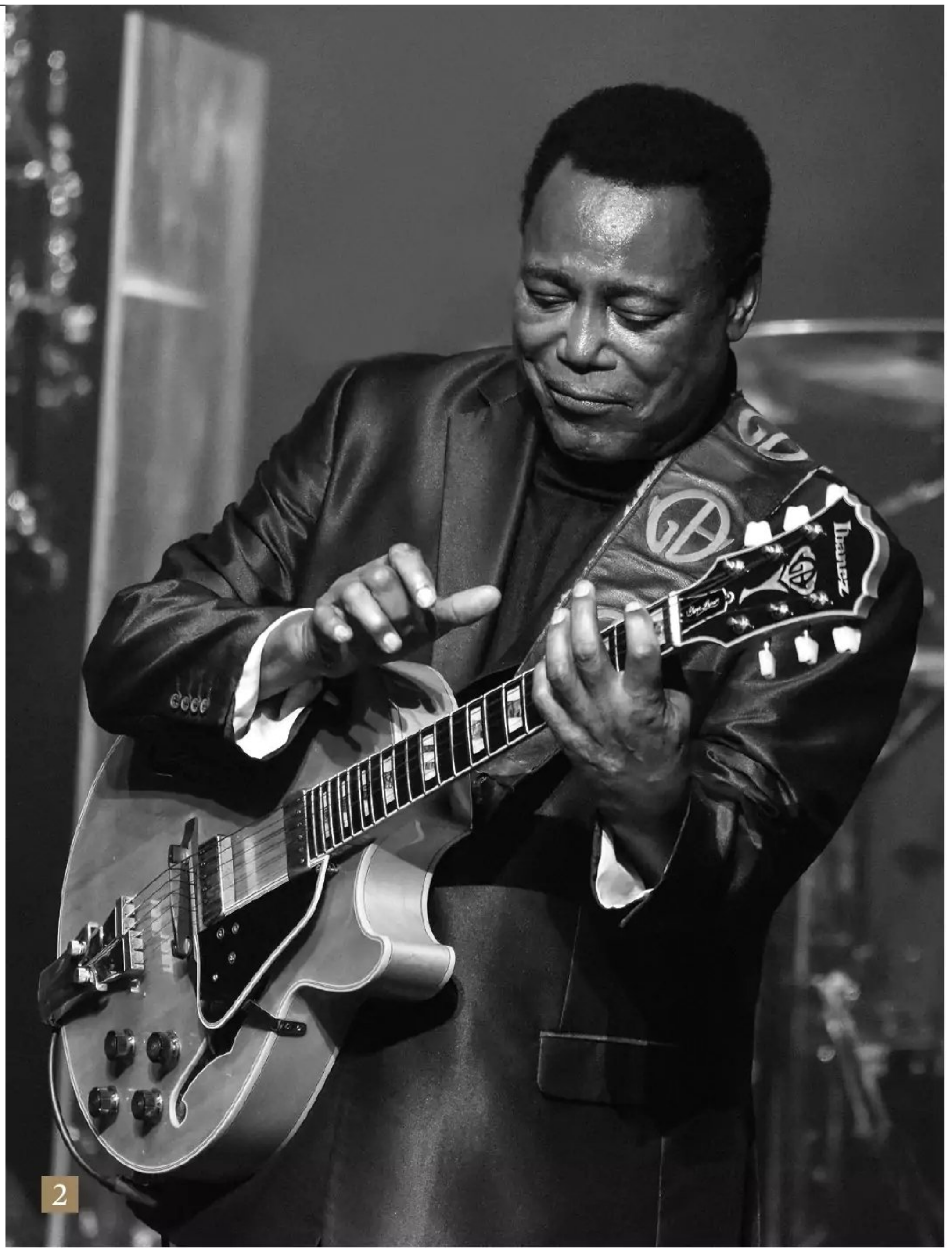


PHOTO BY JOHN KEEBLE/GETTY IMAGES

Every week, I'd be in a music shop in whatever city I was in, and I had to get my guitar repaired and buy parts for it. But not Ibanez. They built them so you could drop them onto the floor, pick them up and play. I needed that because, sometimes, I would drop the guitar onto the floor and I couldn't pick it up; I'd have to redo it and fix whatever I broke."

You were a big part of taking Ibanez to the next level; that must be gratifying.

"I remember recording the album *Weekend In LA*, and these Japanese gentlemen came to my dressing room. They knocked on the door, and I said, 'Come on in.' They came in and said, 'We're from Ibanez...' I said, 'Oh, I just played your guitar. You make wonderful instruments, but you have nothing original.' They said, 'That's why we're here. Do you have any ideas?' I said, 'Oh, yeah...' I told them about my ideas...

"About a year later, when I was playing a concert in Japan, they took me to a theatre. While on stage, they were taking pictures of me with the new guitars in my hands. Can you imagine a little kid, George Benson, ever thinking he would have a guitar named after him? As a kid, I couldn't even think that far ahead or about anything that prestigious. But there I was, with a guitar that had my name on it. It was the beginning of a new career, and I've been with Ibanez ever since. It's wonderful." **G**



George's latest album, *Dreams Do Come True: When George Benson Meets Robert Farnon*, is available now via Warner Records
www.georgebenson.com



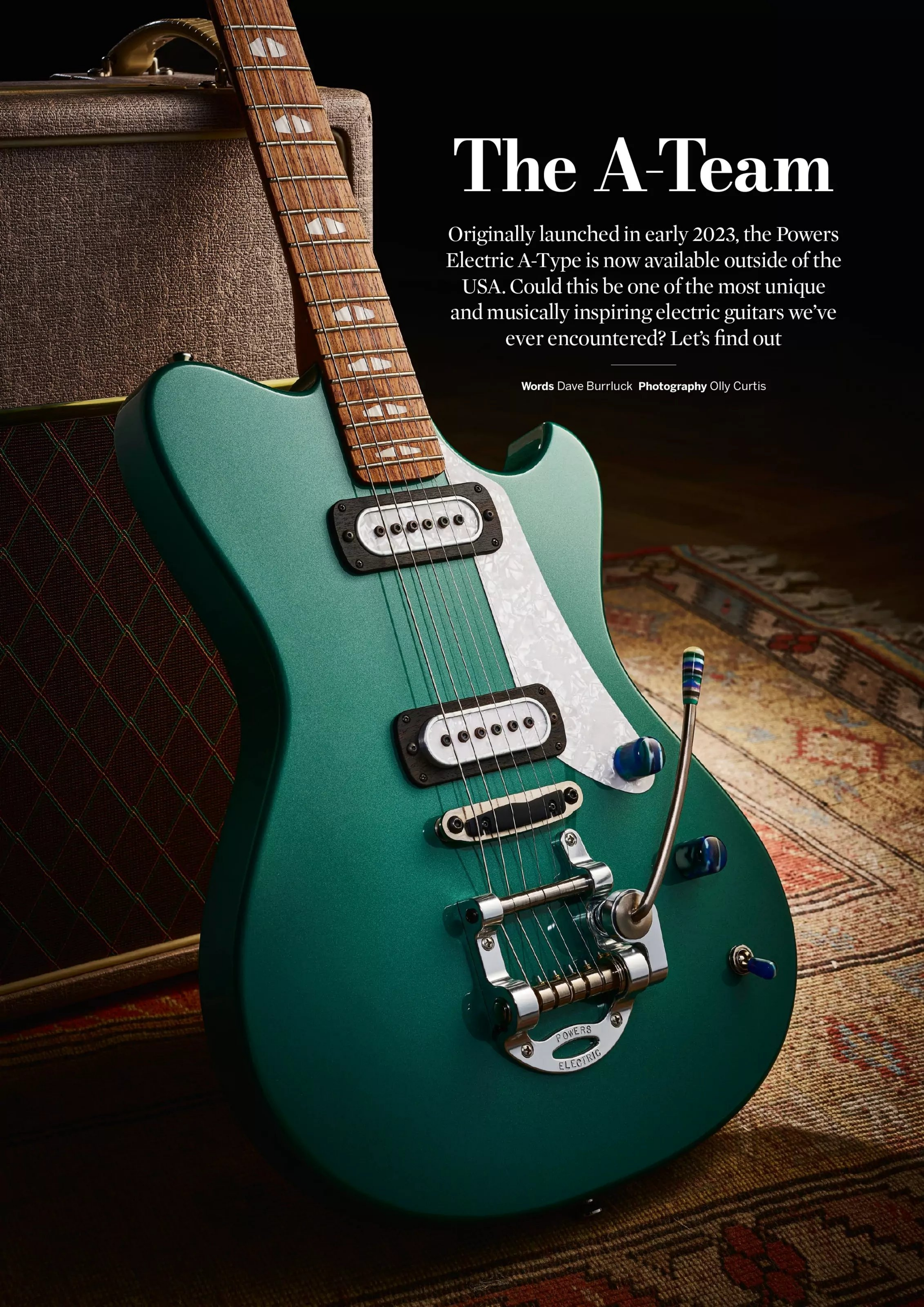
LTD2024

Celebrating the 2024 leap year, the LTD2024 is a stellar limited edition electro-acoustic guitar combining the majesty of the cosmos with world-class craftsmanship.

The LTD2024 features intricate inlays of the solar system on its fingerboard, with a special emphasis on Earth's unique orbit, and a sun motif at the 12th fret. Highly sought after, LTD models are hand-crafted in small quantities with unique features that will never be produced again.

Takamine

www.takamine.co.uk



The A-Team

Originally launched in early 2023, the Powers Electric A-Type is now available outside of the USA. Could this be one of the most unique and musically inspiring electric guitars we've ever encountered? Let's find out

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis



POWERS ELECTRIC A-TYPE £3,899

CONTACT **Powers Electric** WEB www.powerselectricguitars.com

What You Need To Know

1 Is this Andy Powers of Taylor fame?

Yes. Call it a solo project if you like, but, as Andy tells us, he's a life-long guitar nut and conceived the idea for the A-Type as a bit of fun in his home workshop before small-batch production began at Taylor's manufacturing HQ in El Cajon, where pretty much every part you see is made.

2 Seems like a lot of money for a retro-looking solidbody.

Except it's actually a sealed hollowbody – and, as we explain, its design and construction are pretty much unique. The pickups and hardware (with the exception of the tuners) are also designed and made in-house.

3 Looks like there's a bit of Paul Bigsby influence in there?

The hot-rodged Camtail vibrato is certainly based around the classic Bigsby design; those pickups share some DNA, too. But, as Andy says: "It was very much like creating the electric guitar I wanted to own when I was 13, but it never existed, so in a way I went back and built the guitar I would have wanted to have."

1. The Camtail vibrato, clearly based on a Bigsby, hot-roads that old design with its camshaft string roller (note the different diameters of the shaft). It also employs a zero-point stop, which allows down-bending when engaged but stops any pull-up. Another nice detail is the hand-stamped brand name

You might think that Taylor Guitars' master guitar designer, Andy Powers, would struggle to find the time to kick off a solo record. But Powers Electric is exactly that. Taylor, of course, did come out with an electric guitar line back in 2008, but these instruments didn't really engage the market, while guitars like the still-available thinline T5 certainly mix up the acoustic and electric worlds. But as the name suggests, the Powers Electric A-Type is quite simply a good ol' electric guitar, not an electric/acoustic hybrid.

Except 'just another electric guitar' is exactly what the A-Type isn't. It's a very bold, different design. It's not based on or inspired by any obvious vintage classic: not a Strat, Tele, Les Paul, ES-335 or any other we can think of. There's quite a retro style to the outline design, though,

something that wouldn't have looked out of place in a Supro or National catalogue from the 60s. But while we discuss the origin of the species with Andy in the feature that follows this review, what exactly do we have here?

The A-Type is based around a 632mm (24.875-inch) scale length, the same that's used on Taylor's Grand Concert and Grand Symphony, and just 3mm shorter than PRS's 'halfway' 635mm (25-inch) scale. The body overall is a little longer and wider than those solidbody classics but relatively small when we consider the typical hollowbody world. At 343mm (13.5 inches) wide and 459mm (18 inches) from the base to the top horn, the A-Type's body is a bigger proposition than the good ol' Telecaster, which is closer to 322mm (12.7 inches) wide and 400mm (15.75 inches) long.





The bridge pickup is wound slightly hotter than the neck and sits in front of the unique bridge design. It's all locked together by the two jam-nuts that sit under the hard-steel baseplate and use a compensated one-piece Delrin saddle

The A-Type does fall into the on-trend lightweight category, but that's because it's a true hollowbody design, and removing the nicely finished aluminium backplate you can peer inside. The back and sides are cut from urban ash (a reclaimed wood that Taylor premiered) with a thin maple top, approximately 4.5mm in thickness, which is braced with two chunky bars in a V shape from the horns, narrowing to either side of the bridge and running the full length to the base. While there's some added thin wood-block reinforcement under the top between the pickups, there's slightly thicker support under the bridge. Then you can see the two pillars that take the bridge bolts (and connect the top to the back), which sit in another block, routed into the back, around 10mm to 12mm in height and slightly larger in outline than the bridge itself. Powers Electric calls it a "trussed" hollowbody. Why not?

Aside from the light forearm curve and generous edge radius, there are no other comfort contours. And while the back of the guitar is flat, that braced top is actually lightly curved – or arched – in both planes. At the tip of the bass-side horn, for example, the overall body depth is close to 45mm, but measuring next to the bridge the depth there is around 53mm at its maximum, and then by the base strap button the depth drops back to 49mm.

This very bold, different design isn't based on or inspired by any obvious vintage classic

The apparent 'slab' body design might suggest a bolt-on and yet here we have a glued-in mahogany neck that also forms the heel. It's lightly pitched back to allow a pretty regular height at the bridge. To be honest, the neck feels very acoustic-like with a slightly open-pore texture and clearly thin natural finish, and it's only slightly paler than the light-hued Honduran rosewood fingerboard – with those acrylic 'twin arch' inlays – which has some beautiful dark striping. It's little surprise to see that both neck and fingerboard are quarter-sawn. Then we get another spin in that the fingerboard uses a dual 'asymmetrical' radius: it's smaller on the bass side, flatter on the treble. We only get 21 frets – another throwback to the 50s or 60s, we wonder? – and the impeccably installed wire is pretty big with a slight but noticeable, almost triangular section, as opposed to the more domed and rounded crown of most jumbo frets.

The back-angled headstock is faced with quite a thick piece of Honduran rosewood and again seems familiar but hard to precisely pin down – it's a little Ernie Ball Music Man-like perhaps, but here it has offset three-a-side placement of the pretty regular-looking enclosed tuners. As you'd expect with such a considered design, there's straight string-pull over the perfectly cut nut, which the spec sheet says is ebony, but it looks more like the Delrin used for the saddle. And that aluminium truss rod cover is yet another carefully considered and well-executed touch; the truss rod itself is old-school single action, we're told.

If the neck and body are deceptively complex in design and execution, that theme continues to the hardware. The vibrato looks like a Bigsby on which it's obviously based, but we understand it's machined from scratch by Powers Electric, given an artisan vibe with that brand name that's hard-stamped into the aluminium base. While the string retainer bar has six independent sleeves that lightly roll when the vibrato is moved, it's the camshaft-like pivot bar that is machined so each string wraps around a different diameter (the thicker the string, the smaller the diameter), while the high E wraps around the largest-diameter collar.

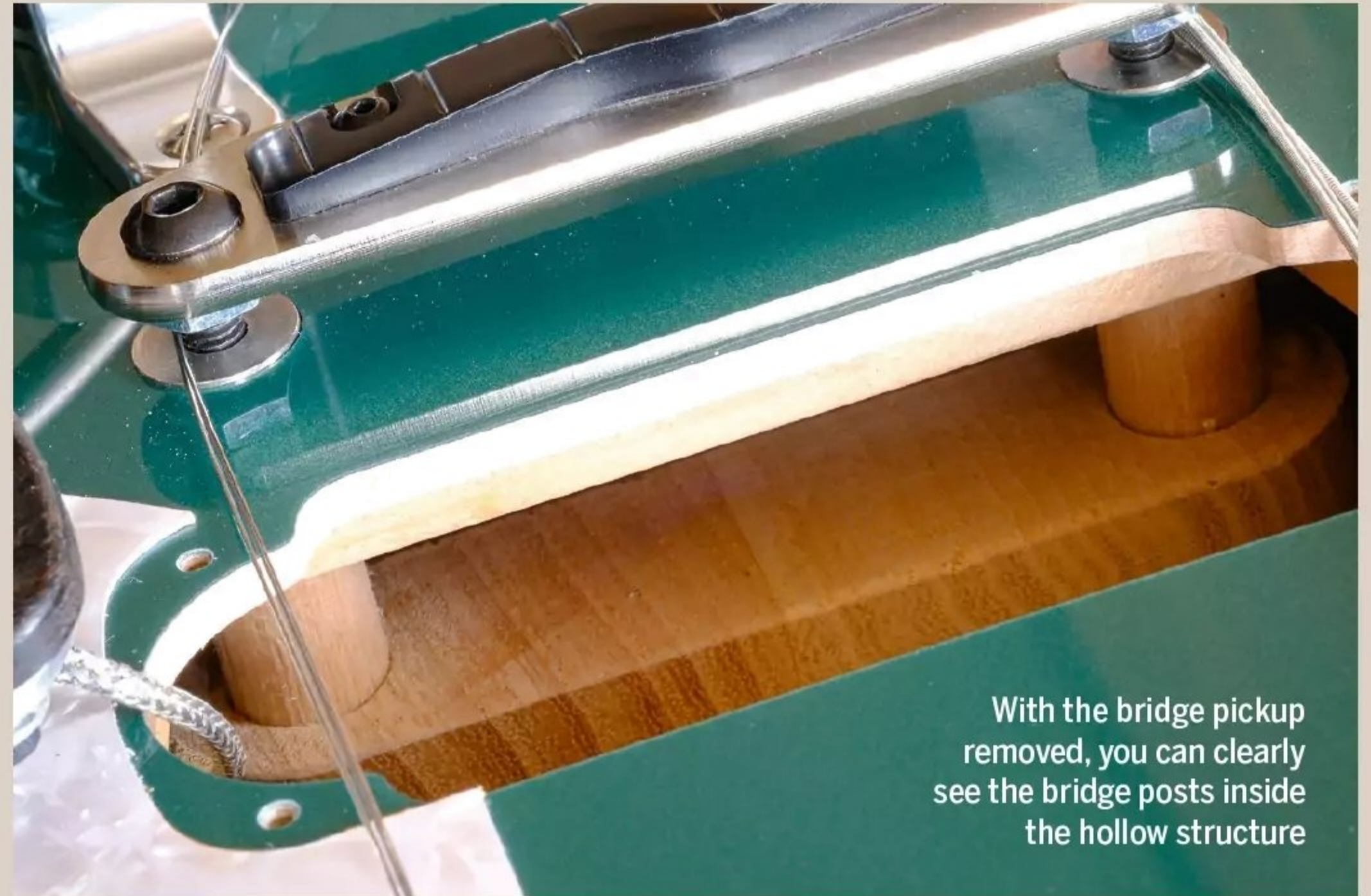
UNDER THE HOOD

The A-Type's outside is extremely clean and tidy. But what's inside?

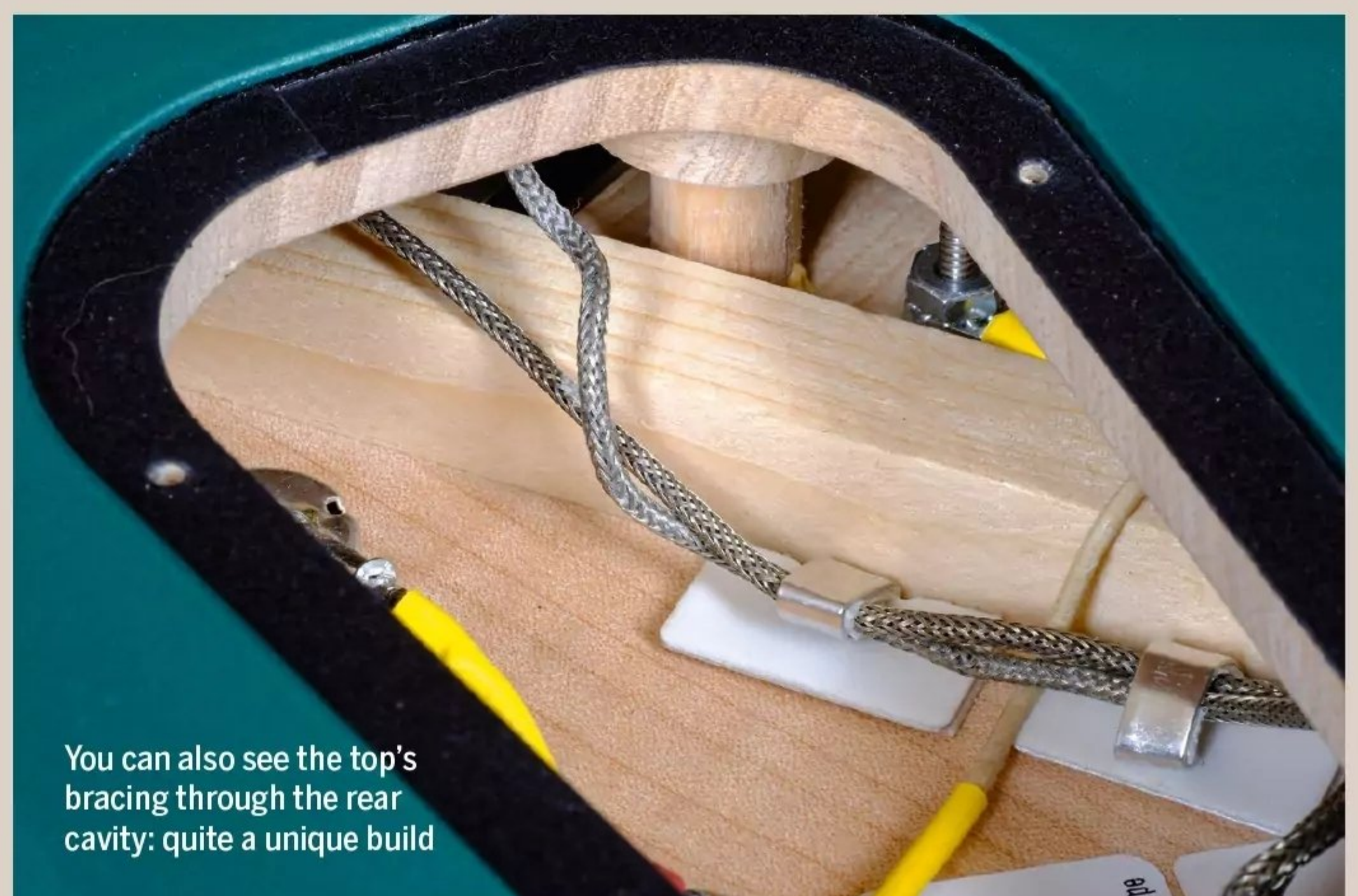
We're not sure we've ever got excited by a backplate before... but this turned aluminium 'plate, which also shows off the hand-stamped serial number, looks like it's come off some vintage sports car's dashboard. Removing the plate you see another detail: the recessed lip around the cavity has a thin felt-like covering, presumably so that the aluminium backplate sits snugly.

As we explained, peering into the spacious cavity you can clearly see the top bracing and the bridge posts but also the mainly hollow construction (as shown in the images, right). The actual circuit (pictured below), however, is a little more standard, using a pair of mini Bourns pots that have a '2301' stamp on their casings, plus a 10A1M code, indicating that they're audio taper with a value of 1meg-ohm. The capacitor on the tone control is lighter in value, too, at .0033 μ F (332k code), which explains why the control, even fully anti-clockwise, doesn't completely muffle the sound as it would with a more regular value. There's also a treble bleed circuit on the volume control that looks like a .001 μ F capacitor and a 133k wired in parallel. It's all very neatly soldered with all the signal wires using shielded push-back wire, and yellow insulation where necessary.

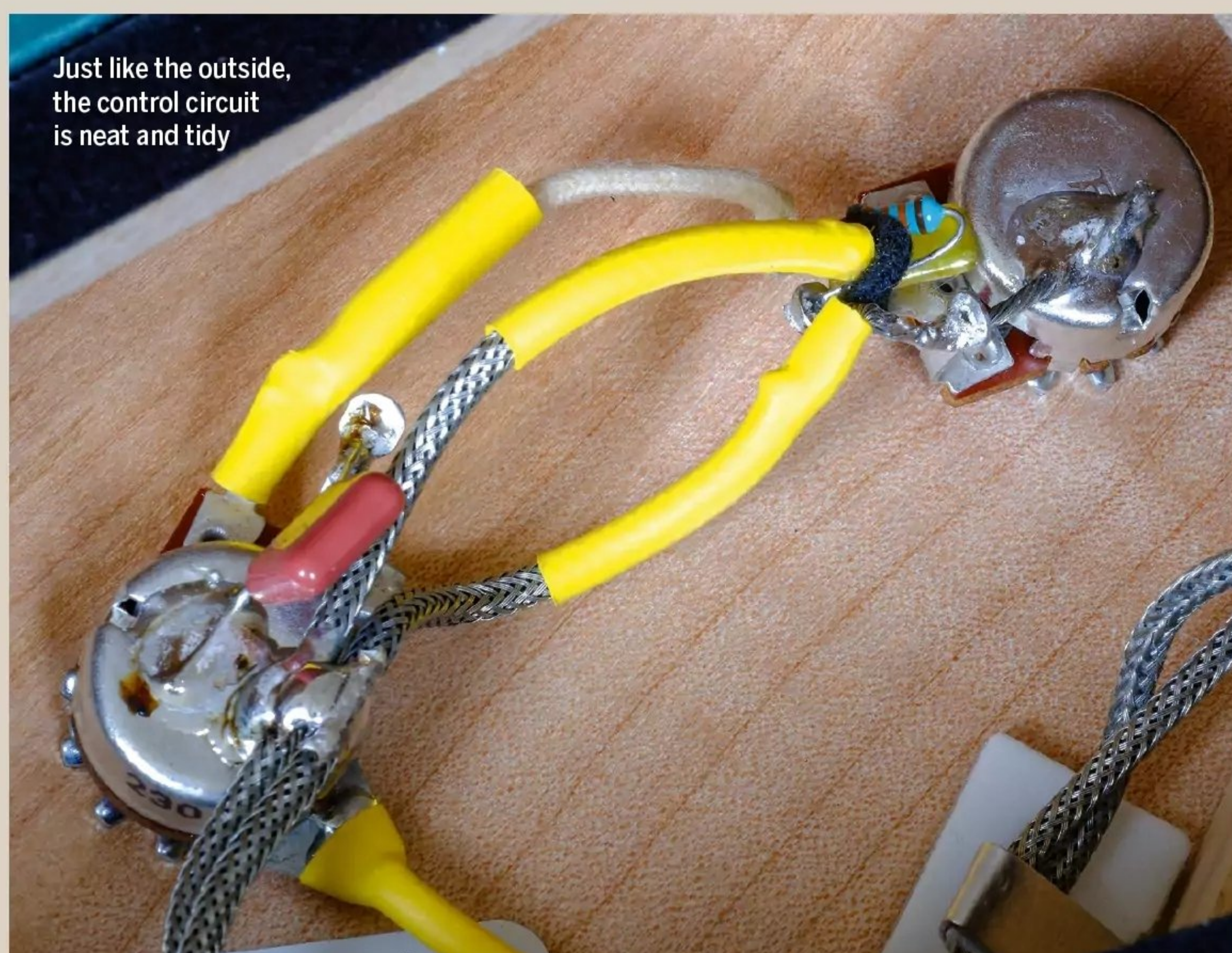
The A-Type is available with two single-coil pickup types, either the "warm, hi-fidelity" FF42 pickups or the "brighter, punchier" PF42 pickups, which we have on our review model. The 'FF' and the 'PF' refer to Full Faraday and Partial Faraday respectively, as in Faraday cage – effectively full or partial screening created by the machined aluminium covers and baseplate. Exactly what's in the pickups, well, apparently we have neodymium magnets, and our PF42 set (the number referring to the wire gauge) has DCRs of 8.48k (bridge) and 7.47k (neck).



With the bridge pickup removed, you can clearly see the bridge posts inside the hollow structure



You can also see the top's bracing through the rear cavity: quite a unique build



Just like the outside, the control circuit is neat and tidy



No, it's not a classic car dashboard – it's the A-Type's recessed rear cavity coverplate, made from engine-turned aluminium. Another nice touch is the hand-stamped serial number



The thick Honduran rosewood head-facing bonds directly to the fingerboard and isn't pierced by the ebony top nut. The layout of the tuners is determined by the pitch of each 'dead string' length between the string post and the nut. As Andy Powers comments: "Everything matters"

Another trick is the vibrato's zero-point return, a small pin that stops the up-bend, which is how the A-Type is shipped. It almost feels like a hardtail with that engaged, with down-bend only, and thanks to that camshaft the strings stay pretty much in relative pitch as you bend, particularly chords. But if that vibrato stop isn't for you, just unscrew it and the vibrato can now be pulled up as well as allowing those light up/down shimmers

that we all love about the original Bigsby design. It's just one of the many hot-rod tweaks that might seem subtle but which add to the considerable musicality of the A-Type's design.

The A-Type comes with either a top-loading Hardtail or (as here) that Camtail vibrato, and the bridge is the same on both. It's devilishly simple with a lightly arched hard-steel baseplate through which two large bolts pass and thread into ferrules in

the body. These effectively limit the height but don't secure the bridge base; that's achieved with two 'jam nuts', as they're called, that not only determine the bridge height but also lock the whole assembly in place once tightened.

The saddle appears simple. It's a single piece of Delrin, a relatively hard plastic, with light grooves that hold the string and are in contact with pretty much the entire length of the saddle. The front edge

The two controls really are key to the kaleidoscope of voices we coax out of the guitar

of the saddle has a pre-set compensation curve, and the overall position can be adjusted then locked down by two small Allen key bolts.

There's another acoustic-like reference with the small glued-on pickguard in a mother-of-toilet-seat plastic that matches the fronts of the elegant-looking pickups. Aside from those open fronts, they're completely encased in machined aluminium covers and the baseplate, and suspend in mounting rings that look like a





3

dark or stained rosewood (or similar). The visible polepieces are Allen-keyed bolts and are easily adjustable like the overall treble and bass height of the pickups.

Feel & Sounds

Rather like the outline shape, the feel of the A-Type is both familiar but a little different. The weight is superb. The extended body length seems compensated for by its lightly offset waist, but there's nothing to get used to in the least, especially when played seated, and strapped on it's equally familiar and hangs beautifully. The neck does have that acoustic-like open-pore feel, but in the hand it disappears. We have a relatively wide nut width (43.2mm with an airy string spacing of 36.5mm) and very regular, mainstream depth dimensions: 21.25mm at the 1st fret, 23mm by the 12th. The profile is a pretty classic 'C', a great balance between full and thin, and the fingerboard edges are well rounded. Whatever effect that dual radius is giving us, well, the neck here feels very classic, and with a pretty standard string height and very little relief, everything feels extremely ship-shape.

For plenty of players, a Bigsby can look and feel like a piece of antique farmyard machinery – and we'd definitely suggest you also audition a Hardtail version – but

its function is superb. And although we don't have huge acoustic volume, there's a lot more than our reference Telecaster. There's undoubtedly a different response, too, with a pushy flavour of an archtop hollowbody – it's a flavour, though, not the full taste.

The hard-to-pigeonhole design is reflected in the A-Type's sounds. These are single-coil pickups, although they are pretty quiet in terms of hum and buzz

2. These layered and striped acrylic push-on knobs, as well as the toggle switch and vibrato arm tips, are inspired by the finishing waste from surfboard builders and car sprayers. The main colours of these parts differ to suit any of the vast body-finish colour choices

3. These PF42 single coils combine modern rare earth magnets with older-technology machined aluminium cases. Like most of the A-Type's parts, these are made from the ground up in-house

THE RIVALS

While there are plenty of semi-hollow solidbody-sized designs out there, downsized true hollowbodies are a rarer breed – not least those with solid-wood (not laminate) construction. PRS's Hollowbody is mainly hollow with a single bridge block that connects top to back. In the full-fat USA Core line, the McCarty Hollowbody II starts at £5,495 and the Hollowbody II Piezo starts at £5,935. More affordable versions come in the SE line-up where the SE Hollowbody Standard kicks off the mini-range at £1,035. New for 2025 – PRS's 40th anniversary year – is the SE Custom 24 Semi-Hollow Piezo with vibrato, 85/15 'S' splittable humbuckers and the LR Baggs/PRS piezo system (£1,499).

Joe Knaggs, who originally designed the PRS Hollowbody, has his own Chena model (from approx. \$6k) with proprietary bridge design, hollow mahogany/flame maple construction and dual f-holes. Another USA maker, Saul Koll has the Duo Glide and Super Glide Almighty (from \$5.9k and available with Bigsby vibratos), which employ a retro style with chambered mahogany back and maple tops.

For those of us on lower budgets, Gretsch's Electromatic Pristine Ltd Jet single-cut (£699, see review on page 8) features a chambered mahogany body with curved maple top, dual FT-5E Filter'Tron pickups, a licensed Bigsby and some snazzy colours.

in general use, and are hum-cancelling with both pickups on. While there's a steely bite at the bridge, it's not as abrasive as our Telecaster, and there's a fullness to the voicing that does nod towards a classic-output humbucker or a P-90 but without the mid-push. It's a similar trick with the neck pickup, and again we're in a P-90-ish mode here with a robust fullness and depth and just enough clarity on top. The mix, then, is noticeably fuller sounding than our Telecaster, as you'd expect. Our A-Type is also *very* stable in terms of tuning: overall, it's a very in-tune guitar, too.

As you wind up the wick, that hollowbody flavour is very obvious, and with gain things get pretty lively – just lean into your amp for some musical feedback. That edge-of-chaos scenario might not be to everyone's taste, but dropping back into more rootsy territory seems to be the A-Type's default setting. The volume control works really well to clean up an over-egged amp, and that tone control is really sensibly voiced – full 'off' it pulls back the highs, but it's still a usable sound, and the two controls really are key to the kaleidoscope of voices we coax out of the guitar.

Despite the glossy exterior, there's nothing remotely modern about the sounds we're hearing, either. There's a 'loose' open-sounding character to the acoustic response that informs the sounds we hear and feel to a certain extent. It's a very vibrant, resonant guitar – and yet in every regard it's well balanced. Just when

you think you've got the measure of its powers, it surprises you. But let's be clear: we're smiling, not wincing.

Checking out a few Andy Summers' performances with his recently acquired A-Types is very illustrative. Yes, it sounds like Andy with a Fender-y attack, but there's noticeable depth, too. And with some level boost for a couple of his out-there solos, well, the A-Type sounds more like a characterful old 'Burst. We can't help wondering if the 'A' in the name stands for alchemy...

Verdict

For many makers right across the price/quality range, a 'new' guitar involves someone else's outline, off-the-shelf hardware and a couple of posh (or not) pickups. That is not in any way the premise here. True, it's not exactly cheap, but the A-Type is one of the most detailed and considered new-design guitars we've had in our hands for a considerable time. That would apply if it were a solidbody, too, but the hollow 'trussed' construction creates something rather different with echoes of a classic semi- or hollowbody response but without the physical size and with far from modern voices.

Aside from all the detailed craft, it's first and foremost a superb musical instrument that would sit just as well in a small Latin jazz combo as it clearly does on a much bigger rock-aimed concert stage. Above all, it's far from someone else's design – it's a Powers Electric and our advice is to check one out as soon as you can. **G**



POWERS ELECTRIC A-TYPE

PRICE: £3,899 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Double-cutaway 'trussed' hollowbody electric

BODY: Urban ash back with solid maple top

NECK: 1-piece mahogany, 'Powers Electric carve' profile, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 632mm (24.875")

NUT/WIDTH: Ebony/43.2mm

FINGERBOARD: Honduran rosewood, Italian acrylic 'twin arch' inlays, asymmetrical radius

FRETS: 21, jumbo

HARDWARE: High-carbon steel baseplate with Delrin saddle, machined aluminium Camtail vibrato tailpiece, enclosed tuners (chrome-plated)

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Powers Electric PF42 single coils, 3-way toggle pickup selector, master volumes and tone controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.02/6.64

OPTIONS: FF42 pickup set, top-loading Hardtail bridge

RANGE OPTIONS: The A-type comes in 2 finish styles: solid, classic auto-inspired colours (as reviewed), or as the Select with figured/flamed maple and transparent 'bursts' (£4,399). A Select quilted maple top version, when available, is £4,599. Each style is available with either of the 2 pickup types

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: Silver Jade Mach 1 (as reviewed), huge number of hot-rod vintage colours – gloss opaque body, satin neck



10/10

PROS Hugely detailed and considered design using mainly proprietary hardware; wonderfully vibrant response; superb playability; improved Bigsby-style vibrato; gorgeous and expansive sounds

CONS Hard to fault in any regard



Adding to the unique style of the A-Type, the supplied 'hard' gigbag is crafted using materials that are inspired by the seat upholstery in classic Porches. Why not?

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Time Travel

The A-Type might be a state-of-the-art design, but its inspiration and roots lie in a past age. We jump in the time machine with Andy Powers to find out more

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Charles Torrealba

Let's be honest, it's pretty easy to trace most new guitar designs back to a few classic guitars: the usual suspects. Everywhere you look there are 'inspired by' or pretty direct copies masquerading as new designs. While that can be fun, comfortable and very often quite a success on the sound and playability front, it's not exactly bringing anything new to the table.

The Powers Electric A-Type, you could argue, is one of the more original takes on the electric guitar with a raft of new design elements that seem to encompass old style with contemporary function. But where did the design start – and why? Time to dig deep with the company's founder, Andy Powers...

You're the master guitar designer at Taylor Guitars. Why on earth would you want to start a new guitar company making electric guitars?

"You know, this might come as a total shock, but I really like guitars [laughs]. I like the design of them, I like what they do; I like different kinds of guitars, different sounds, different feels. But when I play them I also understand there's a different thing for each one. There's a certain language you can speak within the realm of a design. The vocabulary might be curves, shapes, textures, the materials, the aesthetic of a design, but there's a certain language that goes with all of that. So when I wanted to make an electric guitar,

it was very much like creating the electric guitar I wanted to own when I was 13, but it never existed so I played with all sorts of other things, built other things. In a way I went back and built the guitar I would have wanted to have.

"But the A-Type is a totally different thing: a different style of building, a completely different aesthetic compared with what I would do for a Taylor flat-top acoustic design."

But there is some Taylor DNA here, isn't there? The scale length, the hollow thinline body of the T5, for example. Obviously, the SoCal sunshine and surf. It's even in that clear single-coil voice that the A-Type has.

"Yes, it is very Southern California: a product of where I grew up. It was one of the mental tricks I played on myself when I was designing it. I see Southern California as the birthplace of the modern electric guitar and I think it's heavily influenced by the car craft automotive culture, the surfing and skateboard culture, of course the music culture – a lot of these things we think of as post-WWII Southern California culture. So I thought, 'What if I were alive back then, living where I live right now, what would I have designed?'"

"There were no parts catalogues to order from, we would have had no preconceived notion of what the thing is, or how it should get made, or the direction it should go. It was like entering a parallel universe: if I had been there, what would I have done, what would I have made?"

You could argue, with a little time travel, you've just gone back and met up with Paul Bigsby and said, "Hey, don't do what you're doing. I've got all these CNC milling machines and modern equipment and plenty of people that know how to use them. We can make you a guitar."

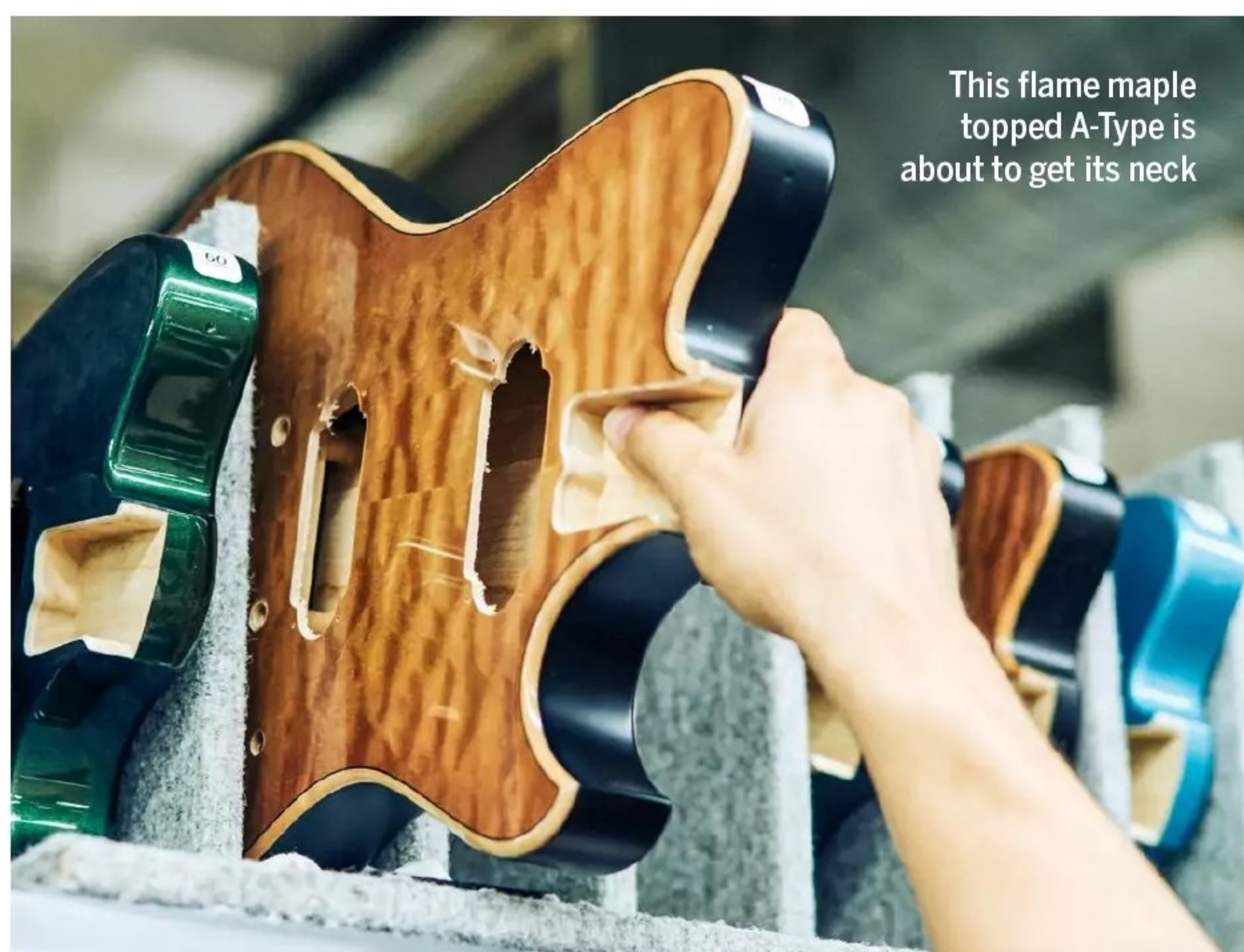
"Yes [laughs]. But funnily enough, I didn't start that way. I built the first one in my house workshop. Every component I started making on my Bridgeport mill, manually working on stuff and thinking, 'This is kinda fun.' I then brought the guitar to the Taylor's shop and said, 'Okay

Along with the Camtail vibrato of our review sample, the A-Type comes with an option for this top-loading Hardtail bridge





Designer and Powers
Electric founder
Andy Powers play-tests
a Camtail A-Type



This flame maple topped A-Type is about to get its neck



The style might suggest a bolt-on, but the A-Type's neck is checked for fit...



... before the neck itself is glued in and clamped up

guys, this thing is really fun to play. We've got to make at least a couple of these. Let's work out how we do it. See, we have a great team of machinists here, and hot-rodders. We're a bunch of people that like making stuff! Let's make this thing."

Why a hollow body? It's almost like it's a small, sealed-body archtop, isn't it?

"Yeah, it sort of is. I've never seen a body done like this before. There's no plywood in it; it's a piece of ash for the main body that is capped with a braced, solid maple top. The maple top is very interesting; it's very resonant, but it's actually shaped like a sphere. It's not just an arch, it's actually a part of a sphere, and that curved armrest area is actually bent into the top. The whole top is then braced. So there is some acoustic engineering in this thing.

"Then, inside, there are two sound-posts, almost like a cello. So when I do that I have the resonance of a hollowbody guitar, that dynamic quality. It's kinda loud and touch-sensitive when you play it, even unamplified. But with no soundhole, and these two sound-posts that connect the top and back and make them move

in parallel, it's very feedback resistant. So you have the dynamic range and responsiveness of a hollowbody guitar, but [this construction] takes it to a place where it's not hard to manage on a stage the way a hollowbody guitar can be.

"So this body is built in a very unique way to create this kind of response. But at the same time the neck is also designed and built to contribute to this response."

How so? It sort of feels like an acoustic guitar neck.

"Yes, it feels almost like raw wood. Honduran rosewood is one of my favourites. It is one of the most dense rosewoods you can obtain; it's denser even than most Brazilian rosewoods. It's hard, like ebony, an incredibly dense wood, but it has a different damping factor than something like ebony. It's the material traditionally used for a marimba key.

"I'm sure many players think that it's the pickups that are the main contributor to the way a guitar sounds and, yeah, that's somewhat true. But if you change what the string does, that changes the guitar. So for an electric guitar you've got a few

elements that all really matter here. What does the string do to begin with? How does the string move? How does it behave? How does the player articulate it? What does the player bring to it? And then you've got your circuitry, your pickups, all the other components that also matter. But really, everything matters in this case.

"When you consider the neck of an electric guitar, you've got to think of it as

"The A-Type is a totally different thing from a Taylor flat-top acoustic design"

ANDY POWERS

one leg of a tuning fork: it's resonating all over the place. If you change the way that thing resonates, the way that the neck vibrates, you will hear it. So the choice of fretboard wood, that matters. The choice of the wood for the main shaft of the neck – whether it's mahogany or maple or whatever – that matters. It absolutely



Installing the PF42 pickups, which – like virtually every other part – are made in-house

matters. On an acoustic guitar it matters somewhat less because there are other variables that matter so much more by comparison. On an electric guitar, oh man, you're going to hear that and, importantly, you're going to feel the difference. The length of the neck, that matters. How it attaches to the body, that matters. The headstock matters.

"See, the construction here is interesting. It's got an extra-thick head plate, what we would call the 'headstock veneer'. It's unusually thick and it's also made from Honduran rosewood, and the headstock veneer and the fretboard are actually bonded to each other – they don't get pierced by the nut slot, and that creates a sort of different resonance pattern. The piece of mahogany under that headstock veneer and fingerboard has been stress relieved so it's a very relaxed piece of wood underneath it; the entire neck becomes incredibly dynamic. If I take the whole neck before I attach it to the body, and tap it, it sounds like a marimba bar.

"Also, the way the headstock is designed is based around the length of each string between the nut and tuning post – that

matters. By the time you put all of these factors together, man, you can just strike the string and go, 'I like the way this feels, this makes a good sound and it feels good when I hold the thing,' before we ever even talk about the electronics."

Speaking which, and continuing our time travel theme, these pickups look like descendants of Paul Bigsby's designs.

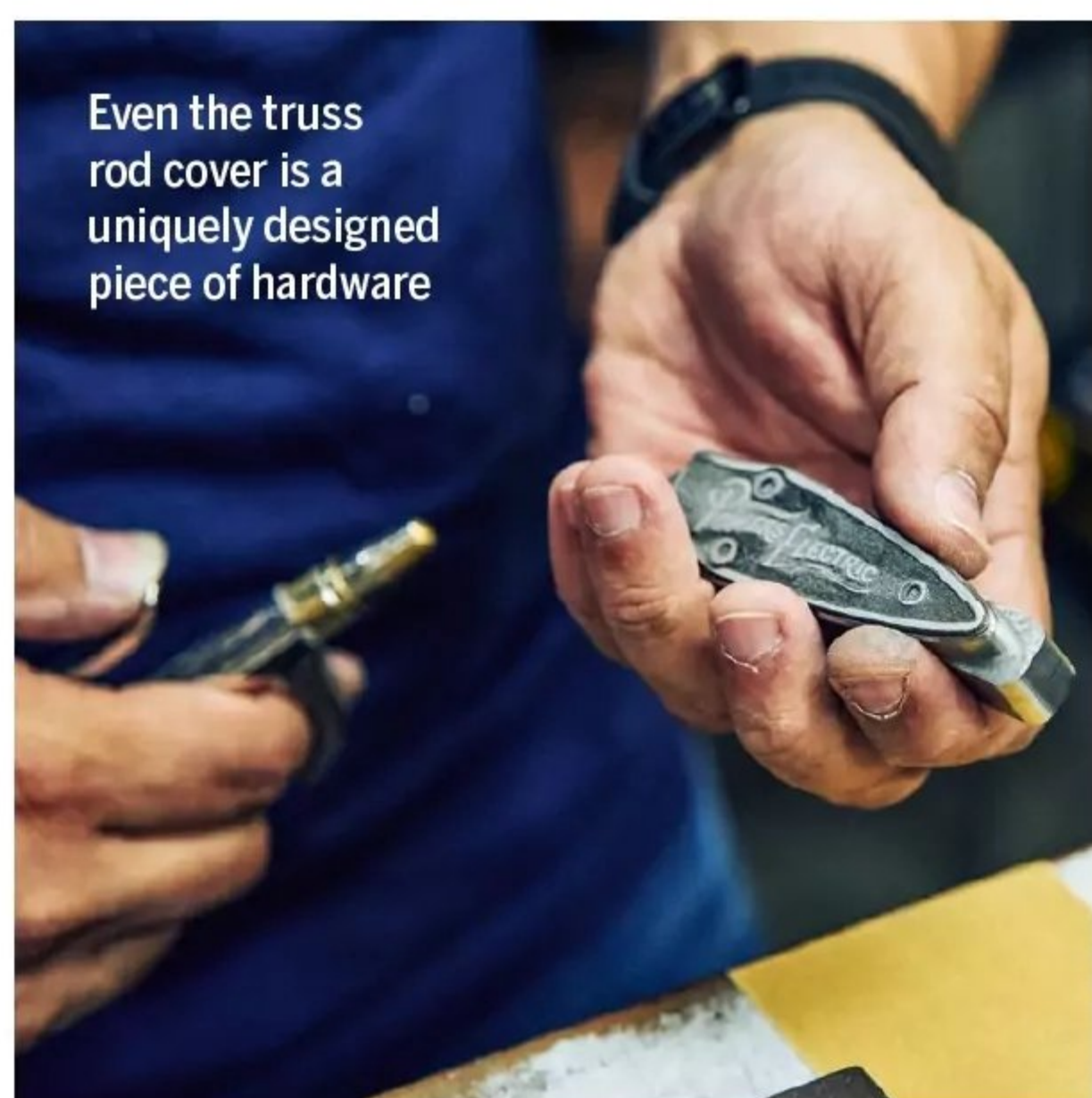
"I started playing with the design some seven to eight years ago. It's based around an aluminum housing. So, yes, it's got some element of early electric guitar pickup design. I mean, it's all very 1930s aero-technology that's going into the electronics in this guitar! But essentially what I'm doing is using the aluminum housing of that pickup to shape or help control the magnetic field that the string sits in. It is a true single coil – there are no dummy coils or anything like that. The modern element is the neodymium magnet – they are very powerful and would be overly harsh in a conventional pickup. But then I can use the magnetic influence of aluminum, which does have magnetic influence.

"Now, a magnet won't stick to aluminum, but that just means it's not ferromagnetic, there's no iron in it, but there are metals – some forms of brass, copper, aluminum – that are paramagnetic. They will become momentarily polarised by a moving magnetic field and in doing that you can use it to control some of the current that's induced in that coil, you can control the magnetic field a little bit. So that cover is actually shaping the field that the string sits in. It diffuses the focus on the string, so when you strike the string you notice that it doesn't oscillate in irregular ways – it almost looks like there's not a pickup underneath the string. So the string itself retains a lot of its natural harmonic content and a lot more sustain than it would typically have if I put a different pickup underneath it.

"The sound of the pickup itself is very warm. The first iteration was the 'Full Faraday' FF42 that's completely shrouded in this machined aluminum housing and it uses 42-gauge coil wire. The PF42 'Partial Faraday' has some of the top of the casing milled away. It



Checking the string height during final setup



Even the truss rod cover is a uniquely designed piece of hardware



With the figured top A-Type all finished up, Andy Powers is rightly proud of his creation

exposes the string to a little more of the direct magnetic field, so it punches up the response and makes an amp sweat a little more. And, to clarify, a Faraday cage is a way to shroud an electric component from electromagnetic interference.”

Like a covered humbucker or those cans Gibson used to put over its pots?

“Yeah, remember those things? But, yes, the pickups tend to run pretty quiet, so we could build a true single-coil pickup and not have any of the resonant peaks or bumps that you can get when you add dummy coils or things like that because that changes the high-end response. But with these casings you can get it to run pretty quiet but still get that linear, smooth response that I want from a design like that.

“Also, the simplicity of the circuit, to me, feels elegant. I like those particular Bourns pots, I like the taper on them, I like the quality. I like that there’s no active electronics or batteries, no extra stuff. But I do like to use a tone control, and I’m not always that fond of traditional tone controls where, yes, you can roll the

high-end off, which might make sense if you were after a kind of archtop rhythm guitar sound or a sort of muffy thing. But even the jazz players I listen to, no-one is rolling that thing fully off because there’s not much left of the interesting part of the sound.

“But what I want is to use that tone control almost like an overdrive contour control when the amp is breaking up and it’s kinda distorted. You can actually do a great deal of tone shaping by using that tone control because the front-end of most amps will respond in interesting ways.”

I believe you’ve said it was quite purposeful to create a guitar that didn’t quite sound like anything else.

“Yes, it was to underscore all of these different ideas. An idea is great, it’s fun to look at all the different pieces, the minutiae of the design, but the guitar I set out to build for myself was a musical instrument. I wanted to make a sound that was musically useful and inspiring to hear. I wanted it to inspire me to play new things, to play and re-examine old things. I wanted it to have a lyrical response.

I wanted it to be balanced. I wanted it to be clear and warm. There’s almost a singer-like human voice quality that I want to hear in that guitar.

“You can look at the guitar and say it’s inspired by Southern California, surf boards and hot-rods because, yes, it is. There are different colours, all sorts of

“I wanted to make a sound that was musically useful and inspiring to hear”

ANDY POWERS

detail taken from cars I’ve worked on. Could you look at it as an engineering puzzle? Yes, because that’s also fun. Is it an interesting product? Yes, I think so. But ultimately it has to be a fun guitar to play: if it’s a musical instrument that inspires a person to make sounds and play songs and sits well with other musicians, that is the ultimate goal.”

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SRD905F/SRD900F

BTL : BROWN TOPAZ BURST LOW GLOSS

- Half semi hollow body/3 Oval holes
- Exotic Maple top with Okoume body
- Fretless/30-fret Neck
- 5-piece Maple/Walnut neck
- Bound Panga Panga Fingerboard with Abalone oval inlays
- Nordstrand™ Big Break/AeroSilk piezo pickups
- AeroSilk MR5 bridge with 16.5mm string spacing
- Ibanez 2-band EQ with Piezo active tone control
- Luminescent side dot inlay

Ibanez



Smart Move

Yamaha has expanded its TransAcoustic concept to include more onboard effects, including delay and looping, with fine-tuning and the option to play backing tracks via a dedicated smartphone app

Words David Mead Photography Olly Curtis





YAMAHA TAG3 C TRANSACOUSTIC £1,699

CONTACT **Yamaha** PHONE **0344 811 1116** WEB <https://uk.yamaha.com>

What You Need To Know

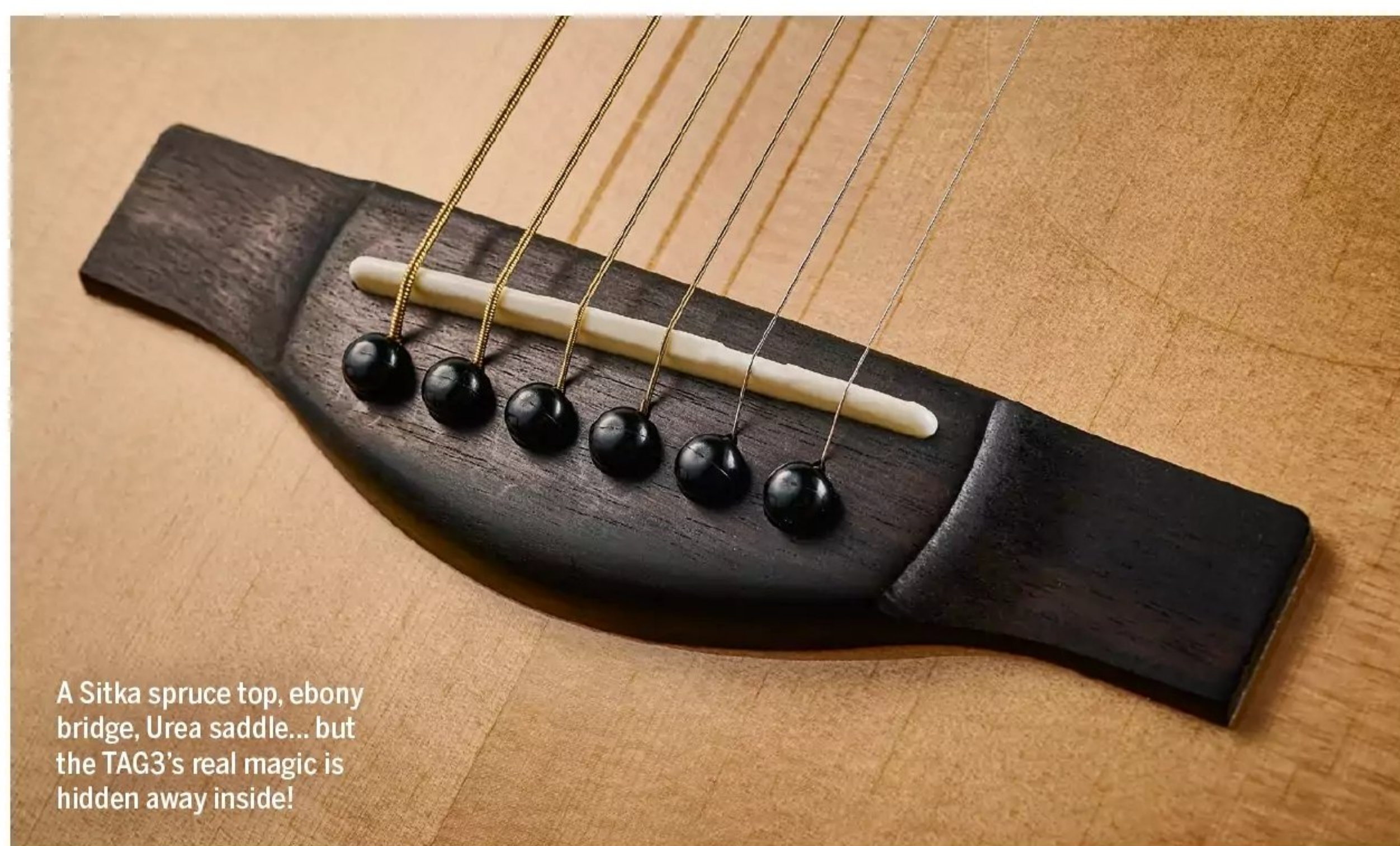
- 1 The TransAcoustic concept has been around for years, hasn't it?**
Since 2016, in fact. That was when Yamaha introduced the groundbreaking LL-TA that first alerted the acoustic guitar world to the concept of built-in effects. Since then the range has extended to include many different body shapes and has even reached the classical guitar market with the CG-TA nylon-string.
- 2 So what's new about this version?**
Bluetooth functionality, for a start. This has expanded upon the TransAcoustic idea and opened the floodgates to greater control over reverb types, looping, delay and even using your acoustic guitar as a Bluetooth speaker in order to stream backing tracks. As such, it's the answer to a busker's prayer!
- 3 What's the app control all about?**
The actual controls onboard the TAG 3 are extensive, offering immediate command over the basic functionality of the reverb, chorus and so on. But the app allows a much deeper dive into the effect parameters, as is the case with many effects units on the market today. As an example, it gives the option to switch between reverb types such as Hall, Room or Plate.

We can clearly remember the first time we encountered Yamaha's TransAcoustic technology. It was a bit of a culture shock, hearing reverb and chorus coming from an acoustic guitar's soundhole, as if by magic. At the time, we wondered if this was too gadgety for the unplugged fraternity and would hence be viewed as a mere novelty that would soon fizzle itself out. But we were all wrong. Not only did players take to the TransAcoustic, Yamaha spread it across selected guitars from its acoustic range, even reaching the notoriously more conservative classical players when it landed in the nylon-string CG-TA.

Back then – approximately eight years ago – the TransAcoustic tech that was launched in the LL-TA comprised reverb

and chorus. But now it has evolved to include delay and a looper, plus a built-in tuner and Bluetooth connectivity that links to a dedicated app and allows the player to fine-tune the settings. Not only that, you can use it to channel backing tracks to play along to, or use it as a Bluetooth speaker and just play your favourite music via your guitar's soundhole.

This might sound like an awful lot to take in, and we must admit that initially we were a little concerned that perhaps Yamaha had taken its concept a little further than the acoustic playing gentlefolk would be willing to venture. However, once you spend time exploring the potential of this next generation of TransAcoustic goodies, you might just have to rethink things. For starters, the



A Sitka spruce top, ebony bridge, Urea saddle... but the TAG3's real magic is hidden away inside!



TAG 3C is quite possibly the ultimate busker's tool, not to mention the possibilities it presents for practice or learning new tunes. But let's not get too far ahead of ourselves. All this amazing technology is all well and good, but if it isn't inserted into a well-built and great-sounding instrument in the first place, the point is all but lost.

So let's take a little time to look at the TAG3 C as a guitar, without all the accompanying whistles and bells. Fundamentally speaking, it's a cutaway dreadnought with a Sitka spruce top and mahogany back and sides, all beautifully understated in line with Yamaha's tradition where building acoustic guitars is concerned. No unnecessary bling here, just all-solid woods married to superb craftsmanship.

The neck is mahogany, with an ebony fretboard, ebony bridge and a Urea (essentially a resin or polymer) nut and saddle. Decorative touches include the attractive rosette that comprises a composite of different woods and something that looks like bluish abalone. Other than that, at least as far as the guitar's top is concerned, there's a transparent scratchplate and a mysterious ring of darker wood down near the cutaway, which we'll come to in a minute.

1. A close-up of the top reveals the TAG's arty rosette, transparent scratchplate and that mysterious circle – which turns out to be a touch-sensitive stop button for the looper

All of the Yamaha acoustics we've seen in the past have been constructed to a very high standard and the TAG3 C is no exception. But underneath its innocent and unassuming exterior lurks some state-of-the-art electronics that give this fine-looking beast its superpowers...

Yamaha provides the following as a comprehensive overview of how the TAG tech actually works: "Two actuators installed on the inner surface of the guitar resonate in response to the vibrations of

2. Open-gear tuners in what Yamaha refers to as 'Champagne Gold' keep everything harmonious

3. Screenshots from the TAG3's dedicated phone app display the extra levels of control available for the onboard effects

THE RIVALS

Needless to say, this kind of technology embodied in an acoustic guitar is still quite a rarity in today's marketplace. Yamaha's closest competitor is the Lava (from UK distributor JHS). The Lava range is extensive with instruments that start from the base model Lava Me Play at £489, up to the Lava Me 3 that just sneaks past the £1k price point at £1,049. The Lava has many built-in features similar to those on the TAG 3 but accessed via an onboard touchscreen – a little like you'd see on a tablet or smartphone – on the guitar's upper bout.

Similar functionality is offered by the ToneWoodAmp (around £264), which is a separate unit around the size of a regular guitar effect that attaches to the back of your acoustic guitar and is held in place via magnets on the inside. The website proclaims that it offers "reverb, delay, tremolo and more from any acoustic guitar", the advantage being that you can fit it to a guitar with which you're already familiar to benefit from amp-free effects. There is currently a Kickstarter campaign for the ToneWoodAmp 2, which will enjoy additional functions and app control, too.



the strings. The vibrations generated by the actuators are then transmitted to the body of the guitar and to the air in and around it, resulting in authentic reverb, chorus and delay sounds that radiate from within the body.” In other words, and simply put, the guitar’s body takes on the guise of a speaker cone. Naturally, it’s all a lot more complex than that when you get into the actual science behind it, but that’s probably enough to be going on with for the purposes of this review.

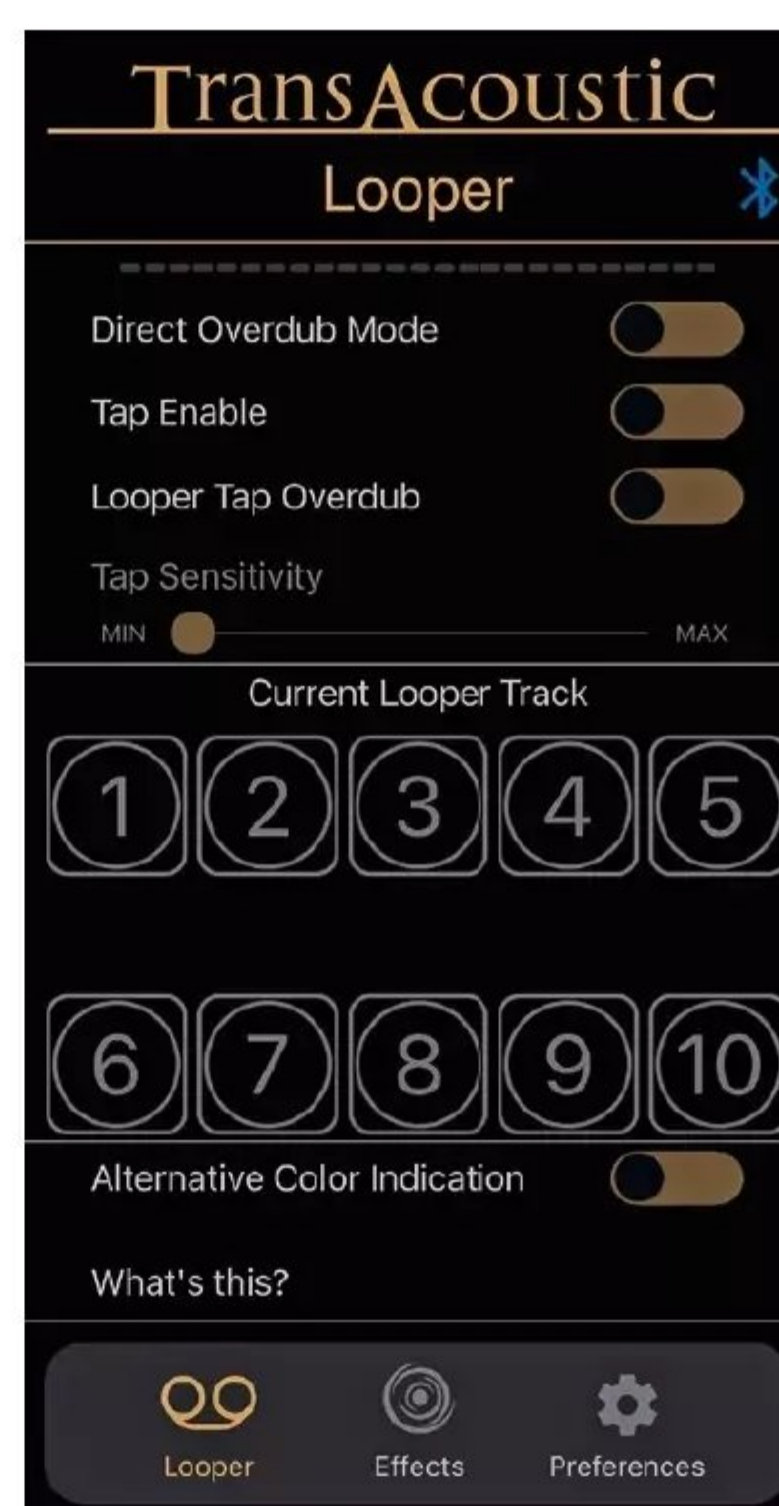
Local controls for the effects are situated on the guitar’s upper side and consist of four multi-purpose rotary buttons, plus a smaller central on/off switch that’s surrounded by a ring of LEDs. Essentially, the buttons’ primary function is to control how much presence you want from the onboard reverb, chorus, delay or looper in the mix of your acoustic sound. Delve a little deeper and things become more involved as their secondary functions control things such as tap

tempo for the delay, and start and end recording for the looper.

And while we’re on the subject of the looper, the mysterious circle of wood near the cutaway that we mentioned earlier is a tap control to end sections of the loop. In other words, when your loop – or a section thereof – is complete, you merely tap the soundboard inside the ring. There’s a lot to get used to here, especially if your acoustic performance world has previously been dominated by foot-operated pedals.

The looper is the star of the show here. Once you get into it, things can become very sophisticated

Understandably, all this requires a power source and here Yamaha has gone for a rechargeable lithium-ion battery with a magnetic charging connection, giving over five hours’ battery life. The battery connection is made on the guitar’s upper bout, near the neck, and the dedicated lead supplied is a custom affair that’s not that long and so charging up while the guitar is in use would be nigh on impossible.





4

To cap everything off, there's a piezo undersaddle pickup that will send everything out to a dedicated acoustic amp or PA system, controlled by a master volume thumbwheel stowed away inside the guitar's soundhole. Yamaha's idea is that this generation of the TransAcoustic really has the potential to be a one-stop shop for a fully fledged professional-level performance tool, as well as offering no-fuss studio-quality effects for casual living-room strumming.

4. Back and sides are mahogany, the build quality well up to Yamaha's exceptionally high standards

have all been upgraded and refined, and we'd definitely agree. The chorus, too, is much more rounded and less nasal than before. Used sparingly, it adds a fullness to chords, but turn it up a little and solo lines almost sound like they've been double-tracked. Despite the fact that delay isn't an effect you'd necessarily reach for with an acoustic guitar, here it adds depth and it's great for all those special effects – the tappy-slappy percussive players are going to enjoy this feature.

5. The controls for the onboard effects are clustered together discreetly on the upper bout of the guitar

6. Yamaha chose a magnetic interface for the lithium-ion battery's charging port, which offers up to five and a half hours' playing time on a full tank

Feel & Sounds

Turning off the effect side of the TAG3 and evaluating it as a standalone instrument, it's well up to Yamaha's usual high standard with sweet trebles, solid basses and smooth playability. The actuators inside the guitar have added to the weight – it's quite a hefty lapful – but after a while we barely noticed it. The satin feel to the back of the C-profile neck feels exceptionally good in the hand and so everything here checks out as far as the TAG3's credentials as an acoustic guitar.

Taking the effects one by one, the reverb really does add a different dimension to even casual chordwork. As an effect itself, it's definitely a step up from the earlier TransAcoustics we've had in our hands. Yamaha tells us that the effects



5



YAMAHA TAG3 C TRANSACOUSTIC

PRICE: £1,699 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Cutaway dreadnought with built-in effects/Bluetooth
TOP: Sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Mahogany
MAX RIM DEPTH: 125mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 412mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 650mm (25.6")
TUNERS: Open-gear, Champagne Gold
NUT/WIDTH: Urea/44mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Urea/55mm
ELECTRICS: Undersaddle piezo
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.5/5.58
ONBOARD EFFECTS: Reverb, delay, chorus and looper with enhanced editing features via a dedicated app
OPTIONS: Finish only
RANGE OPTIONS: Other TransAcoustic models (without the Bluetooth, looper and delay options) include the LL-TA (£1,377), LS-TA (£1,312), FG-TA (£785) and FGC-TA (£846)
LEFT-HANDERS: Not yet
FINISH: Natural (as reviewed), Sand Burst – gloss poly with satin neck back

As a standalone instrument, the TAG3 C has sweet trebles, solid basses and smooth playability

But it's the looper that's the star of the show here. Once you get used to the fact that it's all hand-controlled – and manage to target that circular sensor accurately – you can build up all sorts of orchestrations. Furthermore, each overdub you do can have its own effect, so you can add delay or chorus to just one element of your loop. Once you get into it, things can become very sophisticated here – buskers and open-mic warriors take note!

The app that accompanies the guitar isn't, we're told by Yamaha, essential, and we'd agree. There's plenty here to explore without going any further. But if you're feeling adventurous the app will give you three different types of reverb – Hall, Room and Plate – and additional control over tone and pre-delay. Chorus offers a second voice and control over Depth, Tone, Speed and Voices. With Delay, you choose between Simple or Analog, and get to play with Feedback, Bass, Treble

and Time. Meanwhile, the Looper allows you to store your loops alongside control over overdubs and features including Tap Enable. We found it easy to use, although we wouldn't necessarily want to whip out a smartphone mid-performance and start fiddling with it and so you'd have to set up everything you need first.

Verdict

The TAG3 C is definitely an upgrade from the earlier iterations of the TransAcoustic. The effects are better and the presence of the looper adds an entirely new dimension to the proceedings. It really is a lot of fun, and the fidelity of the recorded sounds emanating from the soundhole is quite amazing – right up there with the kind of quality you'd get from a Bluetooth speaker. For practice, it's invaluable as you get to hear songs and ideas in a fully produced format without the drag of having to fire up an amp and pedals when inspiration strikes. Streaming backing tracks via Bluetooth is another tool in the box, too.

Would we use it live on stage? Well, the 'shock of the new' might factor against it for some, but the fact that you could, in theory, turn up to a venue with just a gigbag and possibly a lead to connect the guitar to a PA is something that's well worth considering. 

**Guitarist
CHOICE**

9/10

PROS A definite asset for practice or writing songs with a wealth of features to explore; the looper is a lot of fun, too

CONS The shock of the new will put a few players off; the controls/app combo call for some serious homework initially

Sound Ideas

After experiencing the enhanced version of TransAcoustic tech with the TAG3 C, we spoke to Yamaha's European product specialist, Dan Stock, to learn more

Words David Mead Photography Yamaha

As we determined from the time we spent with the TAG3 C, there's a lot of advanced technology in this new generation of TransAcoustics. But the amazing design and development aspect shouldn't detract from the fact that the overriding factor here is fun. The looper, for example, gave us hours of amusement, and working with the accompanying app expands things even further, transforming the instrument into a powerful performance tool. Yamaha's Dan Stock joins us to talk through the design process.

When did the idea to expand upon the TransAcoustic technology originate?

"This idea has been in the works from the beginning, really. Initially, when the concept came about, these ideas were always there, and this product specifically has been pretty much in development since the initial launch. Obviously, there were some iterations after the first LL-TA launch. But since then, there have been a few significant changes.

"From our point of view, the beauty of the original TransAcoustic was the fact that the technology was completely hidden. And that was something that I thought was very, very Japanese and very Yamaha. But we found that, particularly on a shop wall and in the customers' minds, the guitars were kind of lost and they just looked like ordinary guitars. That was where this new strategy was born, in

Yamaha's Dan Stock (right) talks us through the thinking behind the new TransAcoustic



terms of having TransAcoustic being its own guitar, rather than a technology that was implemented into an existing model.”

Have you found that the more traditional acoustic players have had difficulty embracing the new technology?

“Absolutely, and that’s why a lot of thought and care was put into this to make it as intuitive as it possibly could be. Of course, there is an app that you can use alongside it, but that’s really not the focus. As with a lot of Yamaha products, much like THR [amps], the app is there for people who

“A lot of time went into tuning the effects to make them as authentic as possible” **DAN STOCK**

want it. The intention, from our point of view, is to make something that is easy to use and can be operated without the need for any high level of skill or knowledge. But, having said that, we’re well aware that not all users will use all the features of our products. With all technological industries, often products go far beyond what the users actually choose them for.”

From what we’ve heard, the original effects – the reverb and chorus – have received an upgrade in quality.

“Absolutely. A lot of time went into tuning the effects to make them as authentic as possible and to not sound artificial. When you play them side by side they are quite different to the originals – and better, in our opinion.”

What was the basis for the decision to add delay and looping to the TransAcoustic?

“As I mentioned, that was something that was always there when the initial concept of having built-in effects in an acoustic guitar originated. The thinking to pair those two was that they fit together quite well. Delay isn’t something you really think of when you think of an acoustic



PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS

guitar; it’s not necessarily something that you’d dial in when you’re sat on the sofa. But the delay works quite well when you’re adding on a top line to a loop.”

The looper is, in many ways, the star of the show, and it’s great that Yamaha has included the functionality to add effects to individual layers of the loop as you build them up.

“Well, I think that’s really important to make it functional and fit for purpose, you know? We wouldn’t have wanted to implement a looper without those kinds of details being covered. It’s great that you picked up on that.”

Is there now a plan to spread this new technology throughout the range of TransAcoustic models?

“There’s a limit to how much I can say, of course. But the plan isn’t to spread this out towards existing models. It’s definitely the plan to expand the range, but it won’t be sideways, if that makes sense. The strategy is very much to keep the TransAcoustic as its own family in line, rather than spreading into existing models.” **G**

<https://uk.yamaha.com>

1. The concept for expanding upon the initial TransAcoustic idea was in place from the start, Dan tells us

2. A master volume for the TAG3’s undersaddle piezo pickup is located just inside the rim of the guitar’s soundhole





In The Zone

TC Electronic's AmpWorx Series makes the tones of your favourite classic amps available in a selection of multi-purpose pedals

Words Trevor Curwen
Photography Olly Curtis



TC ELECTRONIC AMPWORX PEDALS £129 EACH

CONTACT **Music Tribe** WEB www.tcelectronic.com

What You Need To Know

- 1 So these pedals work like amps?**
Yes, these stompboxes are part of TC Electronic's range of preamp pedals, each one recreating the sound of a specific amp using digital modelling.
- 2 What sort of sounds do they cover?**
There are six pedals in the series at the current count. TC Electronic has put them in two sets of three: the Vintage Series with classic 60s sounds from Fender, Vox and Marshall; and the Hi-Gain series, featuring more modern amps from Marshall, Mesa/Boogie and Peavey.
- 3 How would I use one?**
Put them wherever you need amp sound in your signal chain – there are outputs for the straight amp sound or the amp sound with built-in cabinet simulation. You also get a headphone output.

It's a familiar genre – the relatively compact, digitally modelled amp emulator pedal that sits on your pedalboard or your desktop and is equipped with enough facilities to fulfil a number of functions in live work, recording and practice. Strymon may have kickstarted the trend with its Iridium, which has three onboard amp types, but it was soon followed by others with multiple built-in amps, and some that modelled one specific amp such as those in Universal Audio's UAFX range.

TC Electronic's AmpWorx range falls into that latter category of single-amp modelling, and the range is divided into three pedals in each the Vintage and Hi-Gain Series. It's predominantly the Vintage Series that we're taking a close look at here, plus the only Brit in the Hi-Gain Series, the JIMS 800 – a take on a more contemporary JCM800 Marshall, which sits alongside takes on a Mesa Dual Rectifier and a Peavey 5150.

The three Vintage Series amps are based on models from 1965: the Combo Deluxe 65' is based on a black-panel Fender Deluxe Reverb, the DC30 recreates a

Vox AC30 Top Boost, and the JIMS 45 – affectionately named, we assume, after Jim Marshall – is modelled on a Marshall JTM45. TC Electronic says that in all cases every aspect of the original amp has been recreated in painstaking detail, right down to each component in the circuit. However, the company has added some custom modifications for more flexibility in dialling in tones.

While each pedal is based on an individual amp and has a different function for its six-knob/twin-footswitch control surface, there are some features common to all. The output jack, for example, allows the raw sound of the pedal to be sent to an amp's effects loop return or to some other power amp and speaker setup.

Each provides the flavour of the amp they're modelling. In some cases the range of sounds is extended



A nice touch is that the knobs match the style of the modelled amps, as on this Vox-inspired DC30. The Normal and Brilliant knobs here control the gain of the respective signal paths, while Cut operates a low-pass filter to cut treble in the emulated power amp section.

Alternatively, you can just plug it into the front of your amp, although that would require a greater degree of tweaking. There's also a DI output with speaker emulation that can see the pedal employed for direct recording, or connect to the sound system or to a FRFR speaker for a live show. The speaker emulation, which consists of a single Celestion IR optimised for the pedal, also extends to a headphone output, allowing some silent practice.

Each pedal actually has two amp channels (Green for clean sounds, Red for a gainier sound) that are selected via its Channel footswitch. The default status, as shipped, is that the pedal is always active, but you can easily change the

Channel footswitch function to Bypass for standard stompbox use (with the last selected channel). With the exception of the Combo Deluxe 65' model, which has footswitchable reverb, each pedal's second footswitch brings in a boost. A rear-panel Pre/Post toggle switch determines whether this operates before the amp for +12dB of gain boost, or after it for kicking up the volume by +4dB.

In Use

Checking out the pedals in a variety of scenarios proves them totally fit for purpose. Each provides the flavour of the amp they're modelling, although in some cases the range of sounds is extended. The Combo Deluxe 65' features a Mid knob, which the original never had, but retains the clean and 'edge of break-up' sounds that make it a favoured pedal platform. Meanwhile, the JIMS 45 adds flexibility via a tweaked tonestack and has a Treble bleed mod for sweeter high-mids. There's also a Gain mod for a touch more level to the second gain stage, delivering an enhanced take on the higher gain Marshall rock sounds in contrast to the sparkly cleans and vintage Marshall drive of the JIMS 45.

Both the JIMS 45 and the DC30 have separate knobs for adjusting the gain of their Normal and Bright signal paths, offering the either/or option or juxtaposition of the two to zero in your preference for the amount of drive and its tonal content.

Although you only get a single IR for each pedal, they have been sympathetically chosen to mimic the real-world scenario and all do the job well. The Combo Deluxe 65' has a Celestion 12-inch G12M



Creamback, and you also get those in a 4x12 cabinet configuration with the JIMS 45. The JIMS 800's 4x12 cabinet is loaded with Celestion G12-65 speakers, and the DC30 gets the correct 2x12 Celestion Alnico Blue combo speaker simulation.

Recording into our DAW through the cab-sim output yields very positive results. And while some may wonder why the USB port hasn't been set up to load different IRs, the answer is you can't have everything at such a low price point and such a facility would be to the detriment of the ease of use. Of course, if you'd like to use a different IR, you can record the other output of the pedal into your DAW and use any IR plug-in. When using the pedals for headphone practice, the cab sims give you a fine playing sound, but the Combo Deluxe 65' has the added bonus of nicely adjustable reverb to open up the ambience.

If you're going to use the pedals on stage, the footswitching facilities will be

important. Internally, the Green and Red channels differ slightly, but they're still two sides of the same coin and you can set them up accordingly to complement each other. You can set different knob settings for each channel, and the pedal automatically stores those settings so they are recalled when switching. If a channel has the Boost active (or the Reverb for the Combo Deluxe 65'), that's also remembered when channel switching, and in all cases the boosts add great flexibility.

Verdict

Straightforward and hands-on, this set of pedals has been carefully designed to deliver in live, practice and recording scenarios. Look elsewhere if you'd like a variety of amp types in a compact pedal, but if you know what type of amp sound you want, then one of the AmpWorx series will provide you with a flexible workhorse at a very attractive price. **G**



THE RIVALS

There are plenty of alternatives to these pedals, but they're usually found at a higher price point. For pedals with a selection of amp types, try the Strymon Iridium (£379), Walrus Audio Mako Series ACS1 (£289) and Boss IR-2 (£179) – all of which we've looked at in these pages. The Nux Amp Academy (£169) is another option.

For single amps, Universal Audio's UAFX Ruby '63 Top Boost Amplifier (£379) offers an excellent take on the AC30 sound, while the UAFX Lion '68 Super Lead Amp (£379) channels the 100-watt Marshall 'Plexi' sound. You'll find Fender Deluxe sounds in the UAFX Dream '65 Reverb Amplifier (£379), while the Woodrow '55 Instrument Amplifier (£379) offers Fender Tweed sounds.



This footswitch moves between the Red and Green amp channels, but it can be set as a standard bypass footswitch by a simultaneous press on both footswitches



Each pedal has a small set-and-forget knob on the rear panel that sets Reverb Tone (as here) for the Fender-inspired pedal, Presence on the Marshall types, and Boost Gain for the Vox emulation



TC ELECTRONIC AMPWORX COMBO DELUXE 65

PRICE: £129
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Preamp pedal with modelled amp sound and speaker emulation
FEATURES: Buffered bypass, 2x channels, speaker-emulated DI and headphone outputs
CONTROLS: Reverb, Gain, Level, Bass, Middle, Treble, Reverb Tone, Bright switch, Reverb footswitch, Channel footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, Standard Output, Standard TRS DI output, 1/8" headphones output, USB
POWER: 9V adaptor (not supplied) 300mA
DIMENSIONS: 112 (w) x 135 (d) x 50mm (h)



PROS Affordable; hands-on ease of use; twin-channel design; cabinet emulation; headphone output; onboard reverb; added mid EQ

CONS No battery power; momentary lag in changing the knob settings



TC ELECTRONIC AMPWORX JIMS 45

PRICE: £129
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Preamp pedal with modelled amp sound and speaker emulation
FEATURES: Buffered bypass, 2x channels, speaker-emulated DI and headphone outputs
CONTROLS: Normal, High, Level, Bass, Mid, Treble, Presence, Pre/Post switch, Boost footswitch, Channel footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, Standard Output, Standard TRS DI output, 1/8" headphones output, USB
POWER: 9V adaptor (not supplied) 300mA
DIMENSIONS: 112 (w) x 135 (d) x 50mm (h)



PROS Affordable; hands-on ease of use; twin-channel design; cabinet emulation; headphone output; boost; Normal and Bright signal paths adjustment

CONS No battery power; momentary lag in changing the knob settings; headphone practice sound would benefit from reverb



TC ELECTRONIC AMPWORX DC30

PRICE: £129
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Preamp pedal with modelled amp sound and speaker emulation
FEATURES: Buffered bypass, 2x channels, speaker-emulated DI and headphone outputs
CONTROLS: Normal, Brilliant, Level, Bass, Treble, Cut, Boost Gain, Pre/Post switch, Boost footswitch, Channel footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, Standard Output, Standard TRS DI output, 1/8" headphones output, USB
POWER: 9V adaptor (not supplied) 300mA
DIMENSIONS: 112 (w) x 135 (d) x 50mm (h)



PROS Affordable; hands-on ease of use; twin-channel design; cabinet emulation; headphone output; boost; Normal and Bright signal paths adjustment

CONS No battery power; momentary lag in changing the knob settings; headphone practice sound would benefit from reverb



TC ELECTRONIC AMPWORX JIMS 800

PRICE: £129
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Preamp pedal with modelled amp sound and speaker emulation
FEATURES: Buffered bypass, 2x channels, speaker-emulated DI and headphone outputs
CONTROLS: Gain, Boost, Level, Bass, Mid, Treble, Presence, Pre/Post switch, Boost footswitch, Channel footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, Standard Output, Standard TRS DI output, 1/8" headphones output, USB
POWER: 9V adaptor (not supplied) 300mA
DIMENSIONS: 112 (w) x 135 (d) x 50mm (h)



PROS Affordable; hands-on ease of use; twin-channel design; cabinet emulation; headphone output; boost; higher gain sounds

CONS No battery power; momentary lag in changing the knob settings; headphone practice sound would benefit from reverb

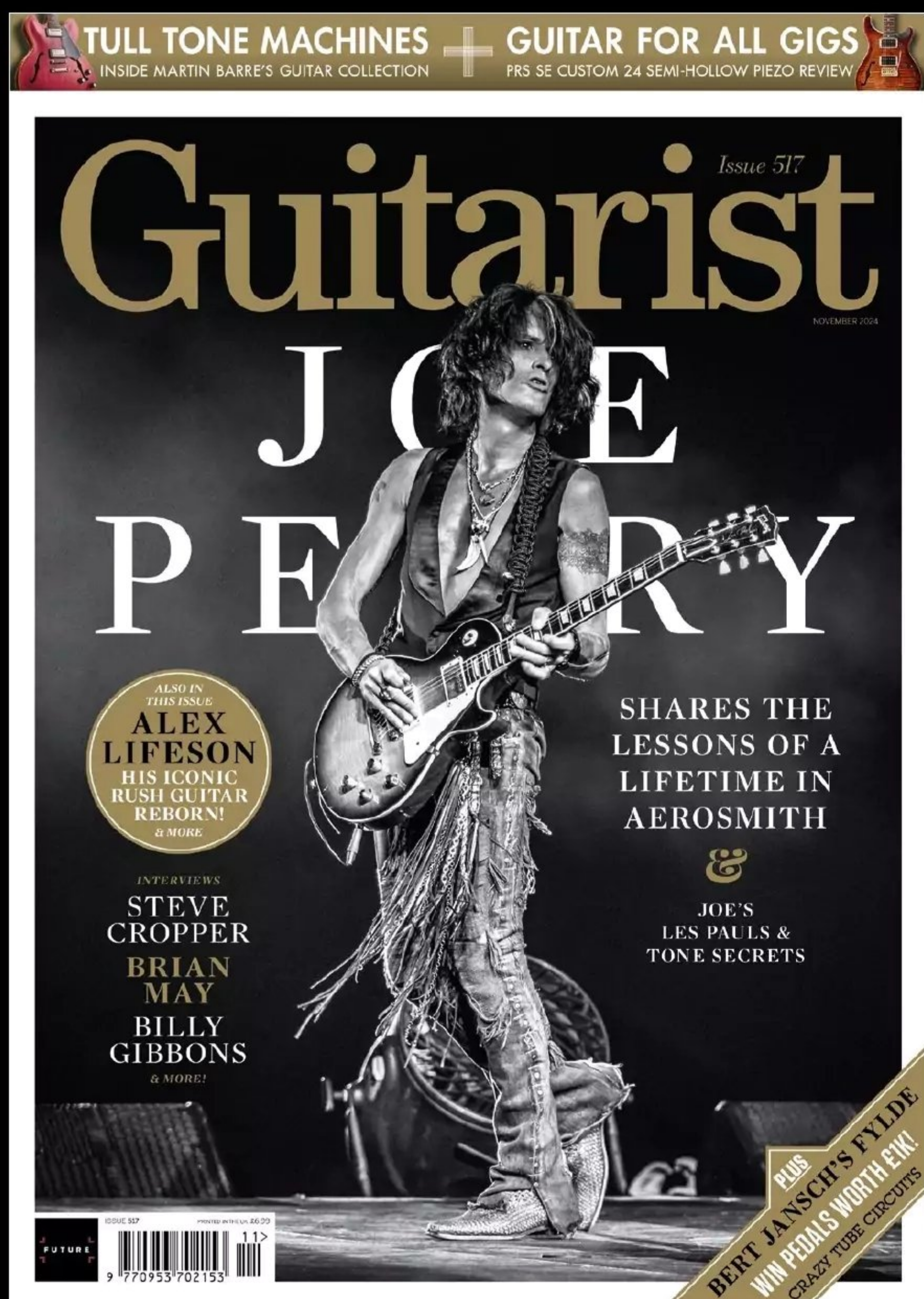
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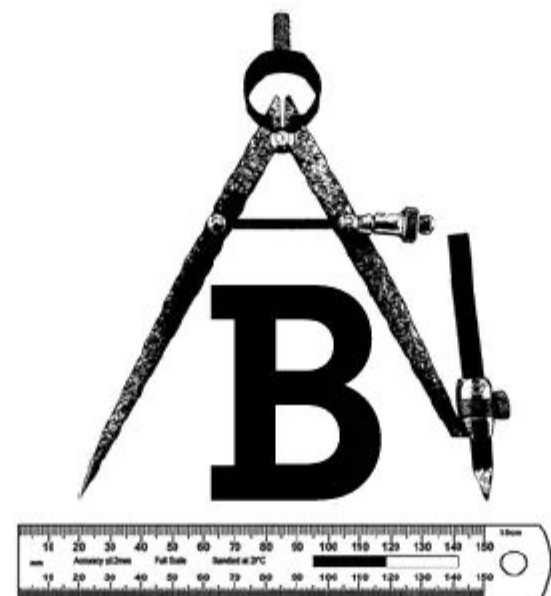
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VINTAGE EVOLVED

Producer and contemporary metal maven Adam ‘Nolly’ Getgood is an acknowledged expert in sculpting killer guitar sounds. So when we learned he’d developed an entirely new type of PAF-inspired pickup with Bare Knuckle, we decided to find out more about how they had gone back to the future...

Words Jamie Dickson Photography Josefa Torres & Olly Curtis

It’s a cliché of product marketing to claim that a new piece of gear is ‘revolutionary’. But so much of the gear we use and love as players is really built upon sounds that we already love from classic recordings – and if you want to bring something new to the table, here the name of the game is to take what was inspirational about sounds from the past and carefully prune away their shortcomings and limitations while retaining the sonic soul of the original.

Tim Mills of Bare Knuckle Pickups is an expert in subtly (and not so subtly) tweaking the ingredients in established pickup designs to produce something magical: classic at heart but new in spirit and application. And that is exactly what, in partnership with producer and contemporary metal guitarist Adam ‘Nolly’ Getgood, Bare Knuckle has achieved with the new PolyPaf humbucker, which aims to yield up iconic sounds but which can also handle heavier gain and contemporary styles more confidently. We join Adam to find out more.

Tell us about the inception of the PolyPaf.

“I think the idea for it was in my mind right back from when we designed the Polymath, the pickup we launched a few years ago, which is intended to be a Goldilocks pickup in that it’s right in the sweet spot in terms of output and voicing where you can do anything with it. It can do an extraordinarily good job of what you’d want from a high-output pickup without giving you the negatives that might be associated with that. We achieved that really by Tim’s expertise in winding, along with my feedback. He came up with a slightly different way of offsetting the coils of a humbucker. So winding slightly different turns onto each of the coils, particularly on the bridge pickup.

“It worked so well that it made me feel like I would love to hear that applied to a 42-gauge plain enamel wire – the traditional PAF-style vintage-spec wire – which will obviously give you that more open top-end and more dynamics, and that really amazing swirling complexity.

“It wasn’t just the wind. The other thing was that we settled on using this

unoriented Alnico V magnet, something that Tim suggested, which is a really huge difference in terms of the sound and the feel when you compare it with the standard oriented Alnico V. You’ve got less output, but [it’s] kind of a lot more mid-forward and a lot sweeter in the top-end and yet also more juicy in the low-end.

“The combination of those winding decisions and that magnet... I really wanted to hear what would happen if we did something in the PAF’s output range using the PAF wire. Because, as you’ll know – if you’re talking about originals – it was kind of luck of the draw how each PAF was going to come out. Like, had the coils just been randomly put together without any real selection process?

“The problem, when you’re talking about an original PAF, is there’s such a wide range of sounds that you can get from the pickups. But a lot of the PAF-style pickups on the market – either PAF replicas or PAF-inspired pickups – are more focused on the blues and jazz end of things and are really low output. They’re quite weak magnets and you get that very lovely [nuanced] vintage sound. But being

“I really wanted to hear what
would happen if we did
something in the PAF's output
range using the PAF wire”

One of the most distinctive
artists in progressive rock
and metal, Adam 'Nolly'
Getgood is also a highly
experienced producer,
audio engineer and mixer.
This expertise was brought
to bear developing the
PolyPaf humbucker set

someone who does like a fair amount of gain in my tone sometimes, I can find that those pickups sound a bit too scooped and harsh by the time you run them through some high gain.

“What I was really keen to hear was what happened if you used an unoriented Alnico V and the Polymath offset on a pickup that otherwise falls within original PAF spec. Because what Tim does in terms of the way the bobbins are made – the maple spacer that’s in there, even the use of unoriented Alnico Vs, which would have been what was around at the time of the PAFs – is all actually within the original spec of the original pickups Gibson were making.

“It has the PAF touch-sensitivity but with this really rich midrange and juicy feel”

“In applying those things to the bridge pickup, straightaway I felt like we created something really special because we ended up with a pickup that had the PAF touch-sensitivity, the openness, the dynamics, the complexity, but it had this really rich midrange and juicy feel. Which is something that I value so much in the Polymath, and it also seems to have struck a chord with players and reviewers.

“This is a pickup that could have come out of a Gibson from the late 50s or early 60s. I feel like if you did have a guitar from that era and these happened to be the pickups that were in it, everyone would be like, ‘Wow. That’s a pretty badass-sounding Les Paul,’ or whatever. So it’s just about finding the right combination of variables to take the original PAF spec and make it something that’s very appropriate, still, for vintage applications.”

What musical application would the PolyPaf have in your world, do you think?

“There are a few different applications for the PolyPaf. I’m going to focus mostly on the bridge pickup because I feel like PAF neck pickups are such a well-known sound, and while I feel like we’ve created a really amazing one here, I think it’s the chameleon nature of the bridge pickup that needs to be talked about the most.

“There are plenty of players around now, even in my progressive metal world, who are using less gain – fusion players, too. I’m thinking about guitarists like Plini, Olly Steele and a few others who are not driving super high-gain amps, but



they’re playing aggressively, and having a more dynamic pickup with that kind of swirling complexity and open top-end can be a really beautiful thing in that kind of application.

“I’m thinking there are players who do anything from blues, rock through to Southern US rock metal – especially if they’re playing a guitar that has got lots of natural body to it, particularly of tune-o-matic loaded instruments. With those kinds of guitars that are providing quite a lot of body, you can stick a PAF in and it’s still going to sound absolutely huge because the guitar itself is providing so much body.

“There are also players – and this is something that Tim at Bare Knuckle has championed for a long, long time – who are using really thick strings, or are playing baritone instruments and getting lots of string movement, very heavy string mass, and are generating loads more output that

way. Dropping down to a lower-output pickup can really help keep that sound from getting overblown due to the clarity and brightness.

“I’m talking about all this in [the context of] contemporary rock and metal circles, but I really don’t want to get away from the fact that these are still a PAF set. You could use these to play absolutely any style. I have a Seth Baccus hollowbody that arrived earlier this year and Tim wound up some of the first prototypes of the PolyPaf to go into it. It’s an absolutely gorgeous guitar for any style – jazz, fusion, blues – just an incredible-sounding instrument. I really don’t want people to get the impression that this is only a PAF for metalheads.

“One point I’ll make is that the PolyPafs are not actually super hot. Maybe they’re a little bit hotter than those very blues- and jazz-focused PAFs, but it’s the combination of the offset [coil windings]



1. Classic covered-humbucker styling conceals many subtle evolutions in tone

2. Though Adam is a proud Manson Guitar Works artist, he has also tested this stunning PRS Modern Eagle with the PolyPafs



and the magnet spec that are bringing the midrange forward in a way that allows it to work for players who are used to hotter pickups, without over-winding it and losing too much top-end. In fact, I think that's kind of the party piece of both the Polymath and the PolyPaf pickups. It's not that these are like the most overwound PAFs on the market – there are plenty of those around. These are well within the original tolerance you could find in a PAF.”

What guitars do you envisage having PolyPafs in, in your own collection?

“The guitars that I’ve put them in... there’s the Seth Baccus and I’ve got a couple of PRS guitars. I’ve got a Modern Eagle with a Stoptail, a Custom 22 Stoptail... those are amazing donor instruments for the PolyPafs. I think if you’ve got a Les Paul, or anything that you would typically use a PAF-style pickup for, it’s going to drop in really nicely.

“Having a more dynamic pickup with an open top-end can be a really beautiful thing”

“The guitar we created for the promo package for this was a wonderful Manson MA guitar that they built for me in a silver ‘burst, again with a tune-o-matic bridge. It’s kind of like a Les Paul-cum-bolt-on-Tele [laughs]. That’s one of the biggest-sounding instruments I’ve got, acoustically. It’s got a big mahogany neck on it and the PolyPafs work brilliantly well.

“What I think it’s not ideal for – and this is always important to say because people can try to tell you that one pickup does absolutely everything under the sun, but it’s just simply not so... They’re not

as suited to really bright guitars, unless you want a really brightened up tone. It could be brilliant for punk sounds, or if you want brash *kerrang*; there’s definitely a lot more *kerrang* to the PolyPaf than the Polymath. If that’s what you’re after, it could be good. But if you have a thinner-sounding instrument that doesn’t have a lot of natural sustain, you might be better served going to a higher-output pickup that’s going to fill out the low-end and give you the kind of compression that guitar would require.”

You mentioned working with Tim Mills. Tell us about your working relationship with him as co-developers of pickups.

“I owe so much to Tim. Tim was the first person in the music industry to take notice of what I was doing, which was very little at the time. I don’t even really know how he saw enough of what I was doing to see potential. But very early on,

back in the early days when you called up Bare Knuckle Pickups and he would answer – I’m talking 15 years ago – he’d talk to you for an hour just about tone and pickups, and maybe after a few of those conversations you might buy a pickup. I was a broke uni student back then!

“But I don’t know if it was just my persistence in calling him, coupled with him hearing a little bit of my playing, but when Bare Knuckle wanted to revamp their website – which is the one prior to the one that’s up now – he asked if I’d like to come down and do the sound clips for all of the pickups. He placed a huge amount of trust in me.

“That was the beginning of a really lovely thing. That’s when I travelled down and I spent around 10 days with him – he would hand me guitar after guitar loaded with the next set of pickups, and I would record clips of all sorts with them that I’d come up with. That was an amazing experience. At that quite early stage in my career, I had this formative experience of hearing the entire range of Bare Knuckle pickups back to back, played through the same rig. Because of that, my ear latched onto what it is that pickups do and how they work with guitars.

“Then Tim involved me in creating some other promotional content talking

“We did blind shootouts where I’m acting as a producer and Tim is the scientist”

about basic differences between pickups – the difference, sonically, between a covered and an uncovered humbucker, for example. We went on to have this really rich friendship, where he mentored me a lot and always stayed up to date with what I was doing. I would introduce artists to what he was doing and that led to certain things like the Misha Mansoor Juggernaut [pickup set] – Misha being the founding member and guitarist in Periphery, the band that I played in. And because of my understanding of both the pickups and the band, Tim and Misha asked if I could come along and be a part of that prototyping session.

“I guess that formed the archetype of the process we’d subsequently go through with several artists, including Rabea [Massaad], and the next Misha pickup, and a couple that haven’t come out yet. We used this process of doing blind shootouts with the artists where I’m acting as a

producer and Tim is the scientist who isn’t telling us what he’s changing with the pickups as we go, and using that as a process for refining the pickups.

“I feel really privileged to have had as much insight as I have into the creation of pickups. Somehow I’ve got this far without saying it, but Tim really is an incredible pickup winder – his ear for tone and his ability to do stuff without recording. And that’s always my benchmark; everything I do, I pretty much don’t believe it until I record it and hear the difference. With Tim, he can just pick up a guitar and plug it in and know. He really relies on the primal intuition that he has, which is so powerful.

“When the idea of doing the Polymath came about, that was really to service the Manson Oryx guitar that I designed with Manson Guitars, which I wanted to have a unique pickup set. I didn’t think that I merited having a signature set for sale

Adam says that progressive metal and fusion artists are paying closer attention to how vintage-inspired pickups can play a role in their sound, especially when they have been as deftly updated as the PolyPaf set, seen here on a Seth Baccus hollowbody electric



PHOTO BY JOSEFA TORRES

on the market; I thought we could just design an OEM pickup. But Tim pushed for it to be released and it went on to be really successful. That was something unexpectedly cool, and it seems to have resonated with so many people.

“So – here we are doing it again. It’s such a pleasure to work with Tim, this time a little bit more at a distance with the PolyPaf. Having worked together in close proximity so much, it’s less necessary for us to do the blind shootout thing. I can switch out magnets and other components and install the pickups myself and do my recordings. That way, we can each do tests and then have a conversation or get together in the studio – as we did recently with various amps and guitars – and test out the prototypes, so that we can get our heads in front of the same speakers. It’s been a really wonderful process to work with Tim. It’s an honour.”

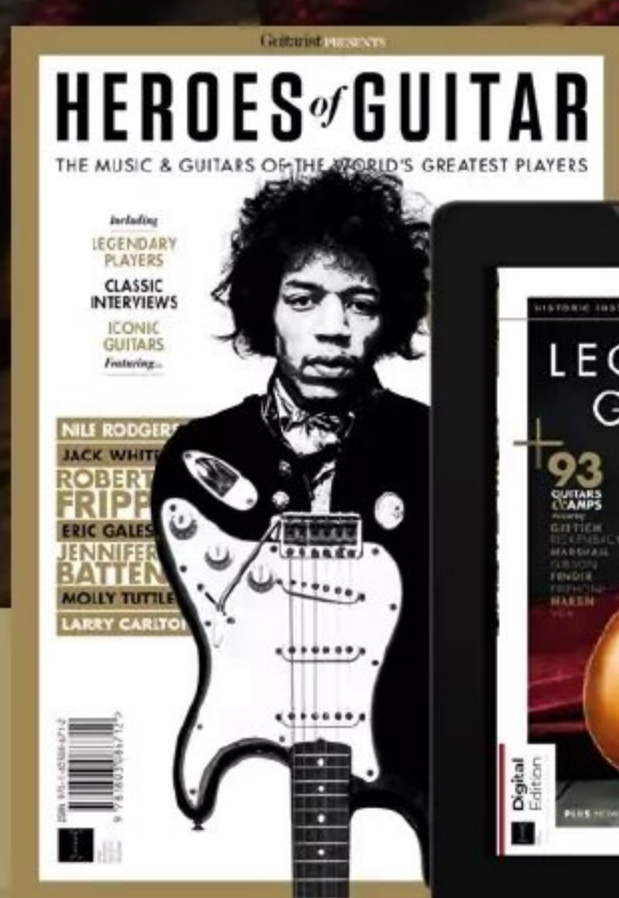
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Longtermers

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

Boss Katana-50 EX Gen 3 Combo

With David Mead



The Boss Katana-50 EX Gen 3 is awash with features in a lightweight portable package

Writer

DAVID MEAD
Guitarist Deputy Editor



Swapping his laptop for a whiteboard, David assumes the role of tutor at 2024's International Guitar

Festival Summer School at the University of Bath. But first he needs an amp...

The Katana's plug-in-and-play appeal made it the perfect classroom companion at this year's summer school



The International Guitar Festival Summer School in Bath has been a calendar staple since the mid-90s and sees students descend upon the city for a week of tuition and, it has to be said, a lot of fun. I first became involved in teaching at the festival in 1998 and taught there every year until 2007 when other commitments took over my diary. So I was delighted to be invited back to teach the Foundation Blues & Rock class at this year's event.

Generally, the event is held at Bath Spa University, but this year, owing to the amount of building work on campus there, the summer school was moved across the city to the University of Bath. Naturally, some preparation was called for in the form of

“I set the amp to Pushed and felt at home straight away. The amp sounded full and fruity”

extensive course notes that addressed the topics we'd be covering in class during the week. The other thing, obviously, was to choose which gear I'd be taking with me. The choice of guitar was a relatively simple one as my trusty Fender Road Worn Strat qualified on every level: I know exactly what it's capable of, it sounds great and it stays in tune. What else do you need?

The main problem for me was the choice of amplifier. Having sold my Peavey Delta Blues Combo (as it just wasn't getting used), I was now in a position where the only other choice I had hanging around the house was my acoustic AER Compact 60 – great for acoustics, but I need something that would dish out the dirt where necessary. What to do...?

Around the same time, *Guitarist* published a review of the new Gen 3 Katana amps – namely the 100-watt Artist combo in issue 515. Reviewer Richard Barrett had highly recommended the Katana as being a “portable size” and having “the ability to produce virtually any sound” and so that was two of my criteria green-lit from the start.

I decided that 100 watts might be overkill in what was destined to be a medium-sized classroom and so I elected to go for the 50-watt EX 1x12 combo instead as it was physically a little smaller and hence more portable than its bigger sibling. I checked in with the good folk at Boss who were pleased to lend me the amplifier for the week and confirmed my thinking that the 50 EX was a good match for the task in hand.

Study Time

In order to familiarise myself with the ins and outs of the amp, I took it home from the *Guitarist* studio about a week before the summer school was due to commence. Now, I'll be the first to admit that I'm not good where reading manuals is concerned, preferring to use my intuition instead. More recently I've found that even effects pedals arrive with a weighty tome of guidance and, with the complexity of modern digital-based equipment, it's becoming increasingly more important to prep before plugging in. Despite this, I thought I'd just switch the amp on, connect it up to my Strat and see how far I could get before reaching for the paperwork – or, in this case, the online manual.

I'm pleased to report that the initial test run was a complete success. Lowering the output to a neighbour-friendly 0.5 watts I found the Katana-50's controls were very easy to navigate – I mean, you can't really go wrong with basic Gain, Volume, Bass, Middle and Treble, can you? The only leap into the

unknown was which setting I needed on the rotary, which offered me preset voicings that include Clean, Pushed, Crunch and Lead. I knew from Richard's review that the Pushed setting is new for the Gen 3 iteration of the Katana and is set to emulate the mood of a valve amp when it starts to get a bit angry. This was something I was already familiar with from the valve amps I've had in the past.

I've never been one for saturated, shred-ready levels of gain, preferring instead a clean-ish tone with perhaps just a little grunt factor on the side. So I set the amp to Pushed and felt suitably at home straight away. Even at bedroom levels the amp sounded full and fruity, the Strat cleaning up completely with the guitar's volume at around 7 or 8 but with enough dirt for riffage and soloing by knocking it back up to 10. Just a touch of reverb to add a little air to the sound and I was happy.

Looking along the control panels I knew that the Katana offered me the opportunity to add effects – tremolo, boost, delay and so on – and Boss very kindly lent me the Bluetooth dongle, which also gave me the ability to dive into the amp's digital innards even further. But I was sure that what I had already found would see me through the audio needs of the summer school, and I was confident that if any more grit was needed on the amp, I could easily increase the air pressure by moving the rotary dial up another notch or two into the realms of Crunch or Lead. All I had to do next was load up the car and go back to school! **G**

Reviewed N/A **Price** £359 **On Test Since** August 2024 **Studio Session** No **Gigged** Sort of **Mods** No **www.boss.info**



YNGWIE MALMSTEEN

The inimitable shredder joins us to extol the virtues of a certain white Strat and also delve into why voltage matters

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

"Well, if you want to be serious but it involves no money, the first guitar that I actually got was on my fifth birthday. When I turned five years old, I got a guitar and that guitar was the one [on which] to learn how to play. And this was a piece of shit, you know? And then my older brother, he also plays guitar, too. I started getting better, and he said, 'Like, the kid's getting better. I've got to show him up.' Anyway, my brother's electric guitar was around, and I would play it all the time because he was never there. He was running around with girls and stuff.

"After seeing him playing the guitar, I got an exact copy Strat. I was nine or around that age, and it really wasn't very good; it was bad. And then, I got my first real Fender when I was around 12 years old."

What was the last guitar you bought and why?

"You know, that's a funny thing because I actually haven't bought a guitar for years. I used to all the time, though. There was a place in Sweden that I'd go to when I went home to visit; I'd always walk away with some expensive guitars. I used to go into some really good vintage stores here in Miami, too. But I really can't remember the last time I did."

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

"Quite a few, actually. When I was on tour in 1985, I got a Strat from a kid who basically had this '56 Strat and he didn't like it; he thought it was shit. So I bought it from him for, like, nothing. And then I guess the '54 Strat is one I can't put a price tag on – the guy I bought it from is the biggest dealer in Sweden and he was kind of crying when I walked away with the guitar. He really didn't want to sell it.

"But I collect other things. I collect watches, cars, guns, you know? I have a lot of shit that I'm collecting. I still have some amazing guitars... I mean, I'm looking at this '68, I wish you could see it, it's so fucking nice. It's blonde with a maple neck. It's incredible. That was my main guitar for a long time. Oh, and then there was the guitar I came to America with when I was 18. I came to America with a guitar and a toothbrush. That guitar is on the cover of my *Rising Force* album. But now it's all beat up. It's called the 'Duck' or the 'Play Loud' guitar. Fender made hundreds of exact replicas of it."

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

"Well, if that happened way back when I'd just go back and get rid of it. So it was never like I was stuck with it or something. And I've had some really interesting guitars: I've got a guitar that Brian May gave me, one of [Ritchie] Blackmore's guitars, Steve Vai gave me one of his guitars, so did Neal Schon, and Uli Jon Roth gave me one, too. I've got a lot of cool ones."

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

"No, not really. If I let it go, it was probably meant to be let go. It probably would have gone to a better home. I mean, if it's just sitting in a big pile, there's no point."

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"My best tip is to go straight to the store and get a white YJM Fender Stratocaster – you want a Fender Stratocaster Yngwie Malmsteen signature model. That would be the end-all-be-all guitar you can go to war with and always win."

The unparalleled Swede won't be swayed when it comes to his rig. But he's been keenly adding to his collection of studio gear

PHOTO BY JESSE WILDE





If forced to make a choice, would you rather buy a really good guitar and a cheap amp, or a cheap guitar and a top-notch amp?

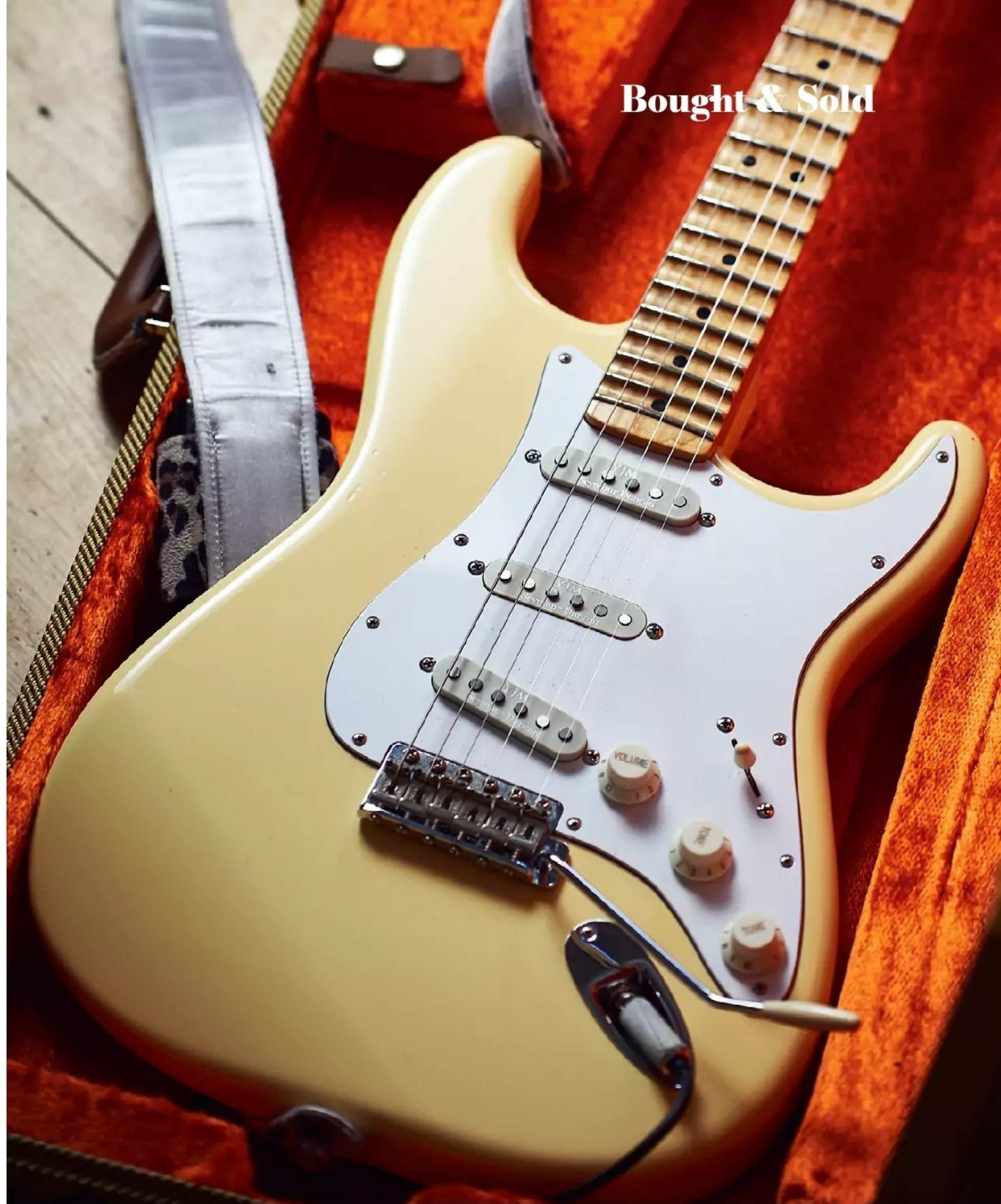
"You know, I really wouldn't want to have any of these combinations [laughs]. But you can make a shitty guitar work, actually; you can do that. Because you can always overcome the physical crappiness of a guitar. But if the guitar is good, a bad amp is not gonna make it worthwhile because it's not going to produce anything; it won't work. It's kind of a strange hypothetical, though, because I would never allow that to happen. But there you go."

When was the last time you stopped and looked in a guitar shop window or browsed online and what were you looking at?

"It's funny because I have my own studio now and I buy studio gear. I have some pretty sick stuff – all the tube compressors, Neve [console], recording stuff, some very expensive microphones. That's kind of cool because the best converters for the Pro Tools and all this stuff... that's really what I've been looking at. But the amps and guitars are a no-brainer for me. I've got the best; that's it. They never make bad ones. That's it. They don't get better for me."

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

"See, when I came to America it was different. There's 60-cycle electric here in America, but in Sweden and Europe, it was 50-cycle, so it hums less with a single coil. I was using these single-coil pickups that were kind of a little hotter, but I came to America and they sounded like shit. So I spoke to somebody DiMarzio and they said, 'Oh, no worries. We'll send you a PAF now.' And I said, 'I'm



not using a PAF.' Everybody and their grandmother would put a PAF in their Strat, right? Not me. So, I said, 'Hey, why don't you take the coils and put them on top of each other instead of side by side? You can stack the humbuckers and make them look like a single coil.'

"So that's what they did. And now, of course, the best pickup money can buy is the Seymour Duncan Yngwie J Malmsteen [YJM] Fury pickup. It's perfection, really – because when I first did the stacked single-coil-looking humbucker back in the 80s, it was only to kill the noise. They never really got the tone right. They didn't have the

It's one and done as far as Yngwie's concerned – his signature Strat has all he needs. But it also reveals another of his great loves, a passion for car collecting

"My best tip is to get a YJM Fender Stratocaster signature. You can go to war with it and always win"

capacity or something. But Seymour Duncan did it for me about 15 years ago and it's unbelievable.

"I think that those Gibson [PAF] pickups sound great, are really cool, and people like Van Halen did amazing stuff with them. But, for me, it's not preferable because it's less of an attack sound. It's mellower, softer and tends not to be as cutting. That's not what I want.

"Having said that, I actually have a 1968 [Gibson] Flying V here with Strat pickups in it. It's kind of crazy... Anyway, for me, the Stratocaster pickup layout is the way to go. But the original pickups are not what I want. I have the Seymour Duncan ones that look exactly the same, but the sound is perfect." **[AD]**

www.yngwiemalmsteen.com

BEYOND THE PARTSCASTER

The partscaster is the obvious place for domestic modders to start, but what if you fancy creating something a little different? Dave Burrluck investigates...

Us domestic modders and wannabe guitar builders are limited by our environment. A table in a spare room or well-used space doesn't really qualify as a workshop, and yet, as we've proven before, with just a few well-chosen tools you can assemble a pretty credible partscaster. The trouble is it'll probably be a Strat-style model or a Tele-alike, maybe an offset – and does the world really need any more of those?

While those classic designs are indeed a perfect place to start your building journey, there are plenty of professional makers that earn a good living by adding their own spin to those classic shapes in terms of finish style, not to mention pickup choice and hardware. As we've documented, this whole process can be made easy to achieve with a quality kit as offered by the likes of Trev Wilkinson, for example. A more convoluted route is to buy a neck and body (finished or unfinished) and install pickups and parts from the plethora of suppliers. All good.

Once you get the bug, though, it can be highly addictive and before you know it you'll have a mini collection of partscasters. There's nothing wrong with that, of course, but what about if you want to come up with a domestic build that doesn't look like a good ol' Fender?

“A viable route is to approach one of the many custom makers working here in the UK”



The top of the Maybury body is pre-used ash that has a strong figure

Creating a more original design is much harder, and I've been considering some options. One avenue is to create a mash-up using your S- or T-style as a basis. What about a T-style with an offset vibrato and a couple of soapbars or Gold Foils? Or a hardtail S-style with a more Gibson-esque pickup array? On it goes. Head over to Instagram and you'll find plenty of inspiration, but us kitchen-table makers are going to need some help to perhaps rout the necessary new pickup cavities or a hole for that offset vibrato.

A viable route, then, might be to approach one of the many custom makers working here in the UK. Some may be happy to craft you a body and neck that could form the basis of your 'original' build. I've certainly taken that route over

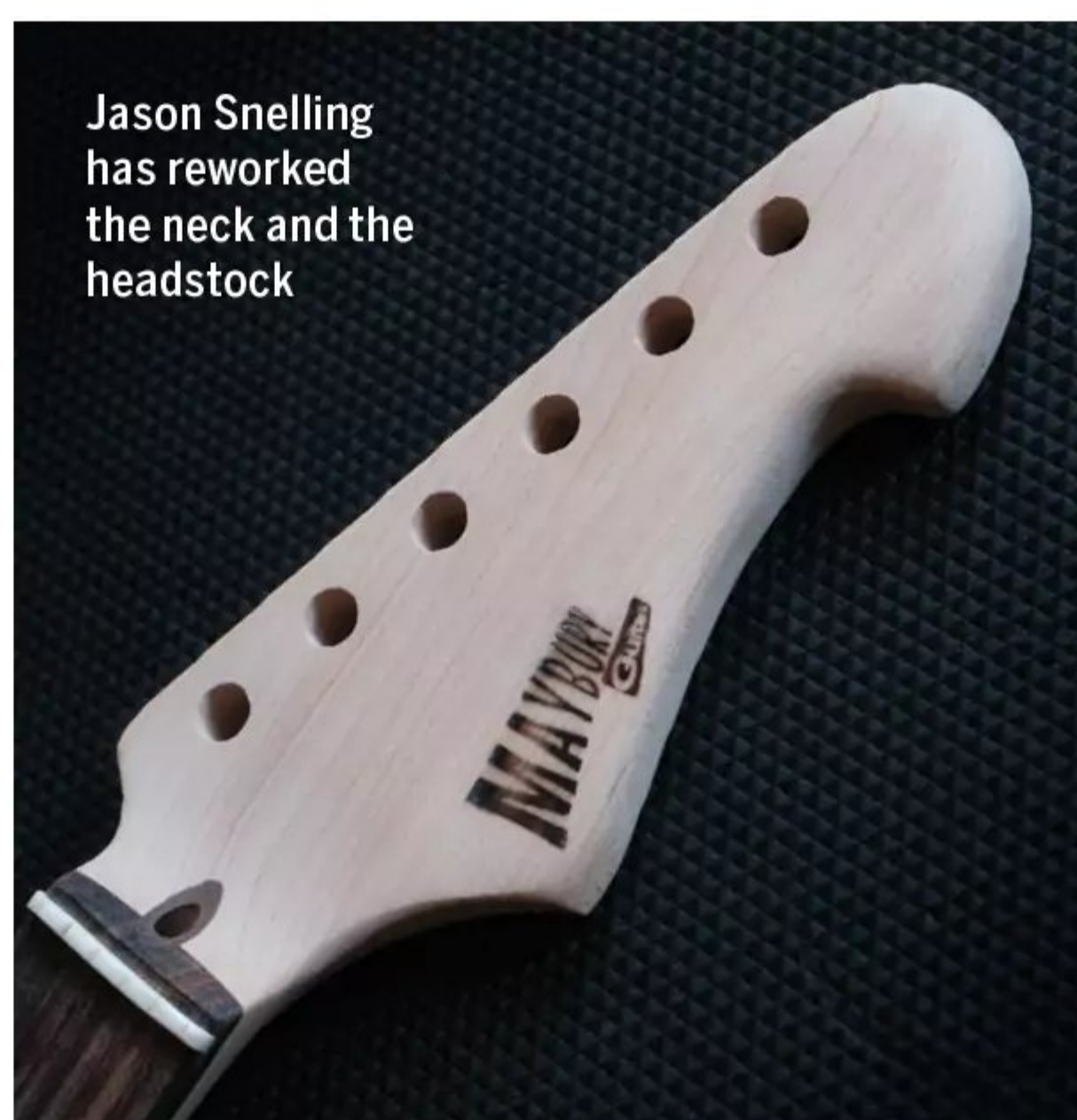
the years when luthiers such as Sid Poole and Chris George turned a bunch of parts into a credible instrument that I could load up with whatever pickups and hardware I fancied. And let's be honest, if you've been tinkering away in the modding department for a little while, then I'll bet, like me, you have plenty of parts and bits tucked away.

Starting Line

Last year, Jason Snelling of Maybury Guitars sent us one of his Upscaler guitars – basically a body made from reclaimed material and a bunch of secondhand parts sourced from eBay and the like. It was a great build and certainly ticked the recycling box. A quick phone call later and Jason was onboard: the idea was that he'd craft a body from some recycled wood and I'll supply the rest, screw it all together and then do a spot of DIY finishing. A collaboration was underway!

Our first decision was what shape to go with and obviously Jason has patterns and routing jigs for a number of his pretty original designs: the Fish Hook S and T shapes, the Cholla offset, and the Saguaro double-cut. I was drawn to the latter, a sort of downsized ES-335 with symmetrical horns. It was a start. “Have you got any wood?” asked Jason, to which my answer was in the negative. “I'll have a think...”

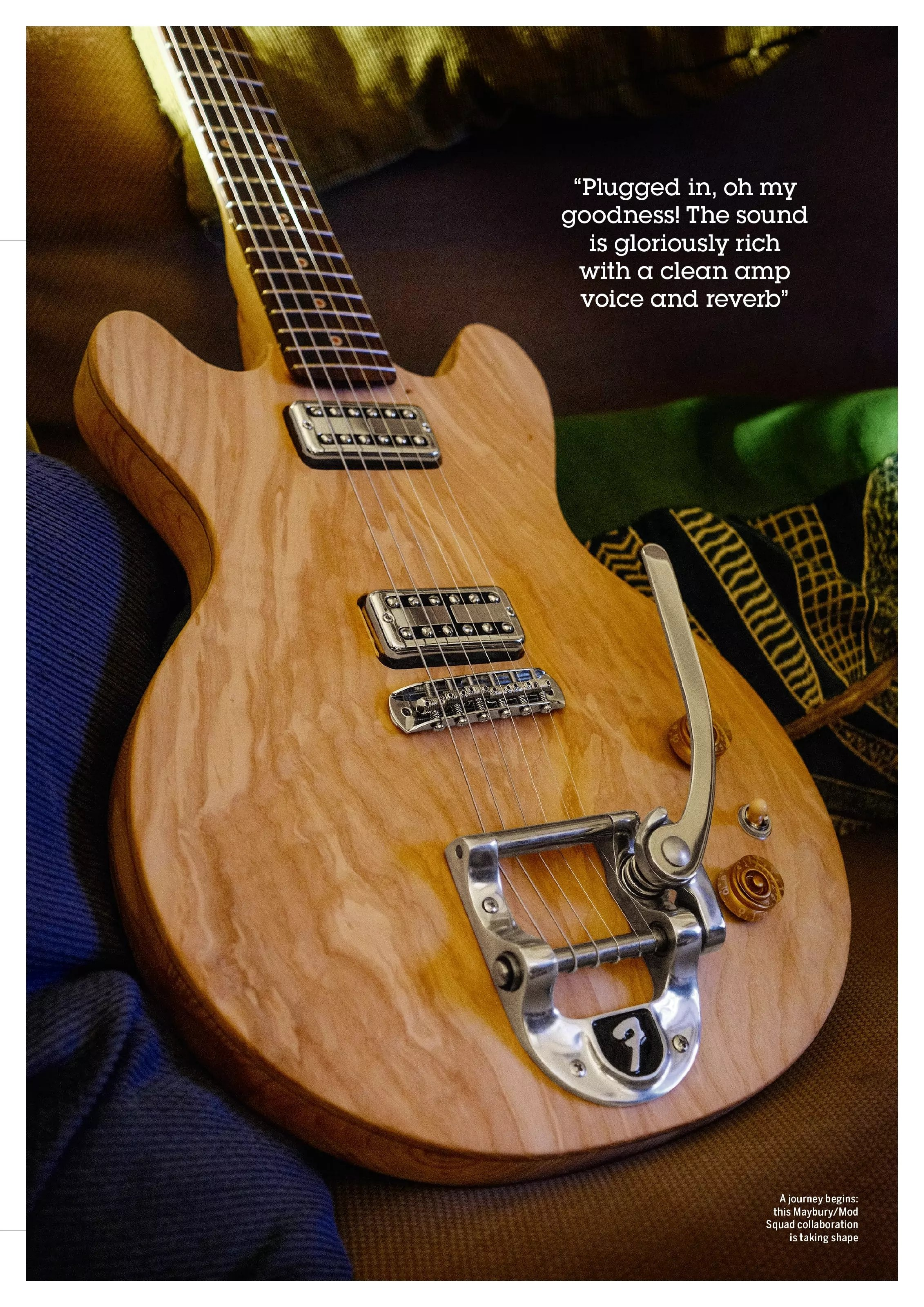
A little later a plan was forming. “As I was going through the wood I had an epiphany,” Jason said via email. “What



Jason Snelling has reworked the neck and the headstock

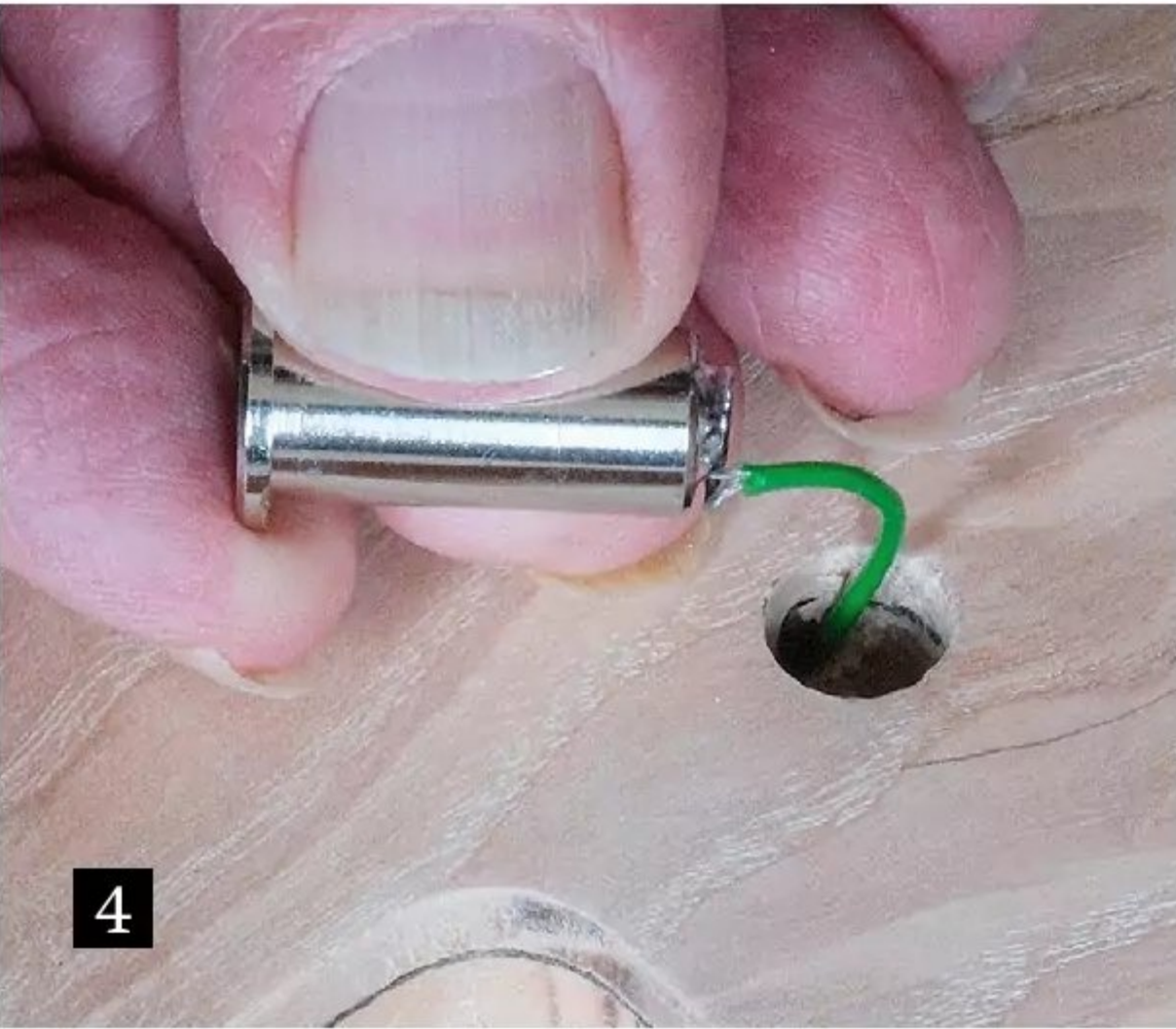
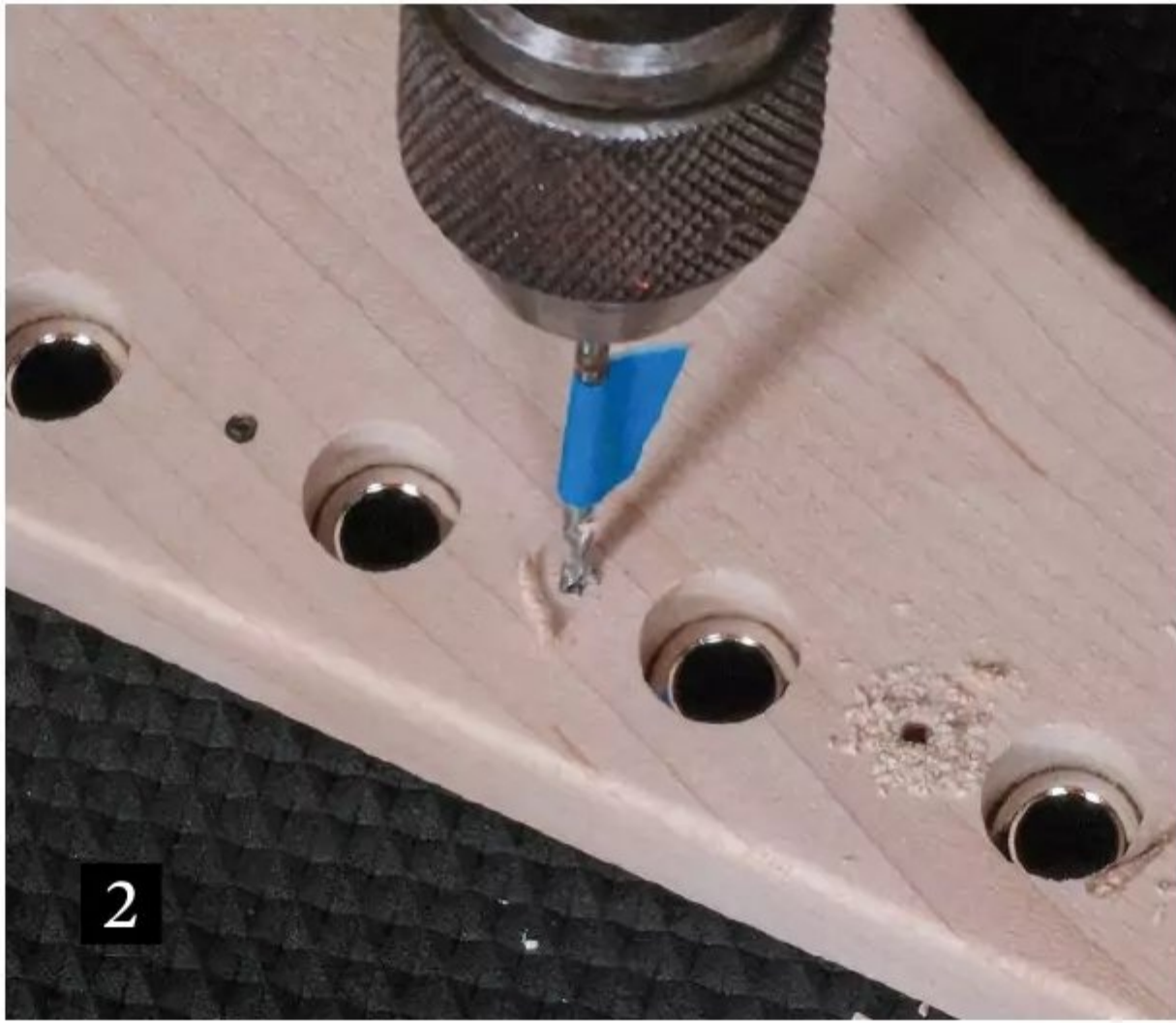
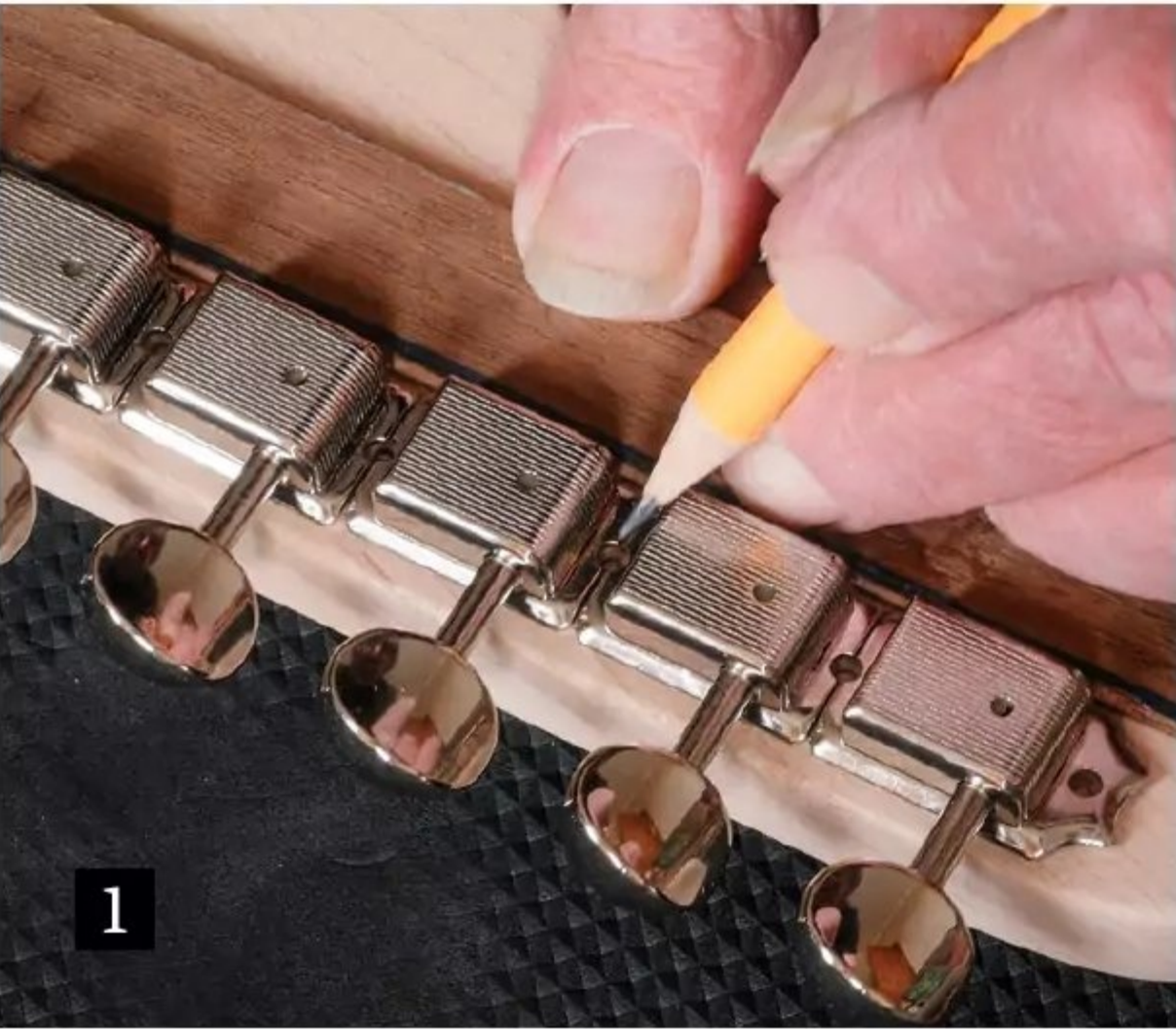


The back is recycled pine with a very characterful figure. Oh, and it's chambered



“Plugged in, oh my
goodness! The sound
is gloriously rich
with a clean amp
voice and reverb”

A journey begins:
this Maybury/Mod
Squad collaboration
is taking shape



1. After installing the conversion bushings, I position the tuners and mark the mounting holes
2. Using a 2mm bit to drill the screw holes, then the tuners can be screwed in place
3. The neck fits the body perfectly. All I needed to do was screw them together, with a little Wilkinson SlipStick lube on the screw threads as usual

about a pine body with an ash top? I have this top left over from a chopping block that I processed into top blanks.” The pine, meanwhile, had had a previous life as shelving in what had become a derelict car workshop and was demolished as part of a new building regeneration project. Their loss is our gain.

“I get most of my reclaimed stuff from a local charity that collects timber from building sites and private residences and then sells it on,” continues Jason. “They also run courses for young people so they can learn the skills to get into carpentry.”

Initially, I worried that our ash and pine construct might be a little weighty. Jason quickly suggested some chamfering – quite a lot actually – and reported the body now weighed around 2.27kg (5lbs).

“What about a neck?” That previous Maybury Upscaler model had used a pre-loved Squier neck that Jason had purchased on eBay and then rather skilfully repurposed with his own headstock shape, inlays and branded logo. I had a couple of used and one unused Fender-style necks and the latter, a spare neck from a Wilkinson kit-build, could be put to good use, rather than gathering dust. These necks were made by Harmony Musical Instruments (HMI), based in Chennai, India, the company that is now making the Chapman guitars, as we recently reported. They’re really good and my spare one has a rosewood fingerboard with medium jumbo frets and top-end truss rod adjustment. In theory, we had the basic building blocks.

4. You’ll need to attach a wire to the bridge mounting ferrule before you push it into the body
5. Jason has done all the positioning and drilled guide holes for the Bigsby. All I need to do is screw it on!
6. With strings on and tuned to pitch, I can set the basic relief of the neck by slightly tightening the truss rod
7. I’m using hard foam blocks under the Sunbears and here just drilling pilot holes for the mounting screws once I’ve lined up the pickup polepieces with the strings
8. Roughing in the pickup heights with my homemade pickup-height gauge
9. Here, I’ve used recycled and cleaned pots from a 90s Les Paul. These measure under 500k and prove a good match for the Sunbears
10. The final job is to mount a plate for the output jack socket. This one is recycled from a PRS makeover



Voicing Your Build

Fairly obviously, a fundamental decision that had to be made is where we were going to take the theoretical design in both looks and, more importantly to me, sonic intent. I have a box or two of pre-used pickups, but then I remembered a mod I did back in issue 505 where I upgraded one of Shergold’s neat Telstar models with a superb set of Sunbear BearTrons that Stuart Robson graciously wound for me. No sooner had I done that – and the guitar was sounding superb! – Shergold needed it back as they were low on stock to take to the 2024 NAMM Show. Thankfully, the mod was easily reversed and the Telstar was returned, which left me with



a rather fine set of pickups that I'd been looking forward to getting to grips with. So, technically pre-used, the BearTrons got the gig.

Now things were moving forward, and the combination of that chambered body and Filter'Tron-style pickups suggested a vibrato, right? 'Let The Mod Squad's bitsbox be my guide,' I thought and – hey presto! – a Bigsby I'd, ahem, blagged for a Danelectro rebuild some years ago (that never quite happened) seemed the obvious choice. In the same box was a Fender offset bridge – not my favourite, but it'd certainly suit the emerging style.

Jason offered to do the donkey work: create that body and rework the neck. Although the Saguaro was usually a set-neck model, I was keen for it to be a bolt-on, so that involved shaping the heel and using inset washers for the screws, rather than a neckplate. I shipped my parts to Jason and a little while later what was effectively an original 'kit' came back ready to assemble and finish.

Assembling The Parts

If Jason were to offer a 'guitar-making for idiots' service, I think he'd be rather successful. Even in their raw unfinished states, the neck and body were really craftily created. The neck's paddle headstock had been transformed, Jason's aluminium and resin ring inlays installed, the fret ends domed, and the fingerboard edges nicely rounded. Even the nut had been fitted and notched. The tuner holes

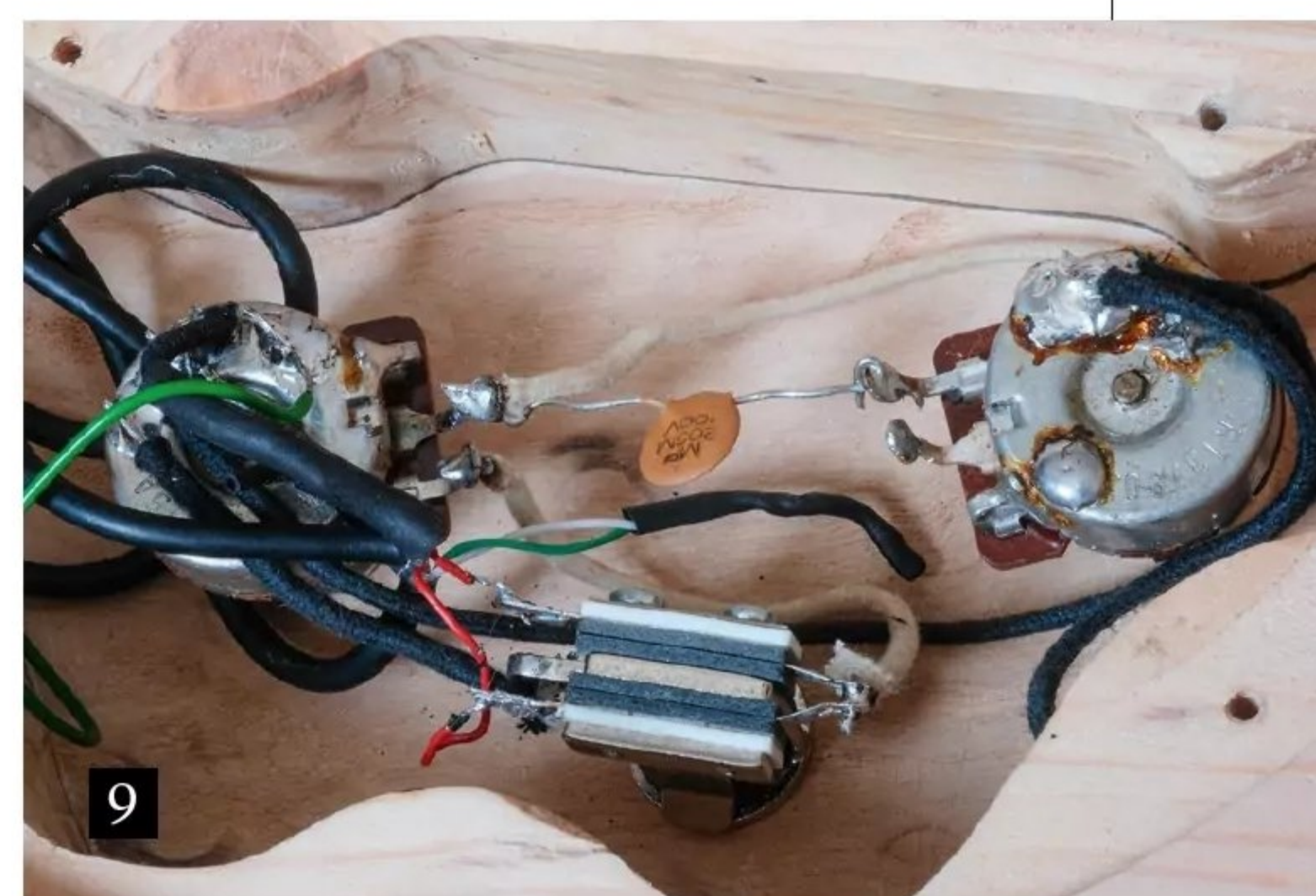
were pre-drilled for modern tuners, which I'd forgotten when I'd ordered up a set of vintage-style slot-post Gotohs that will need conversion bushings. No problem.

What I wasn't expecting was the vibey body. The centre-joined and pretty much quarter-sawn pine back arrived full of stripy character, plus a couple of knots, while that thin top had an equally

"If Jason were to offer a 'guitar-making for idiots' service, I think he'd be rather successful"

interesting mottled figure. At this stage, I didn't have a finish plan in mind, but there's no way I want to lose the woody vibe. Importantly, along with the pickup cavities, Jason had also drilled the holes for the bridge ferrules and the Bigsby, as well as rear-routed a control cavity with top holes for volume, tone and a three-way toggle as we'd discussed.

Obviously, if this was a production guitar, the first thing you'd do is apply a finish – then assemble it. But as any custom build such as this is effectively a prototype, I decided to assemble it all first, get it playing well and hopefully sounding good before I go to the trouble and time of applying a finish. And living with a guitar often suggests a colour scheme.



Thanks to Jason's diligent preparatory work, the basic assembly was dead easy. After stringing up, all that was needed was a slight truss rod tweak to reduce the relief in the neck, rough cut the nut, and check the string height was in the right ballpark. I can fine-tune the setup and details once the pickups are loaded and the simple circuit wired in.

Play Test

I had little idea of what to expect here, but that's the fun of a new build, isn't it? First off, fully loaded, it weighs in at 3.62kg (7.96lb), which is very manageable. As you'd expect, initially things feel a little alien, raw and very acoustic-like lively, as if everything's getting used to being a guitar. The offset sound, with the low string-angle over the bridge, is very evident, and while the Bigsby feels a bit 'creaky ship' and might need a little TLC, it's all working well. Even with such new lightly stretched strings it's not going wildly out of tune. But plugged in, oh my goodness! Despite the fact that the playability needs more refinement, the sound is gloriously rich with a clean amp voice and lashings of reverb. Running through a dirtier amp path there's a gruff 'n' ruff midrange that's rootsy and bluesy. It might be early days, but on the evidence of this embryonic stage, I think this one might work! 

For more info about Maybury Guitars, head over to www.mayburyguitars.co.uk



Huw Price's *Nitty Gritty*

Time to 'burst the body and find out if all that preparation work is going to pay off

1957 Stratocaster Restoration (Part 4)



Mocked up with the pickguard, bridge and jack socket, we get a glimpse of how the guitar might turn out

Many years ago, I was gearing up to spray my first sunburst finish and I phoned the world-renowned guitar restorer Clive Brown for advice. I told Clive I was building myself a 50s-style S-type partscaster and his first question was: “Early 50s or late 50s?” Assuming he meant two-tone or three-tone, I told him I was shooting for an early 50s look. Clive then asked, “’54, ’55 or ’56?” I told him I was making a 1954 replica. And after a short pause he said, “Early ’54 or late ’54?”

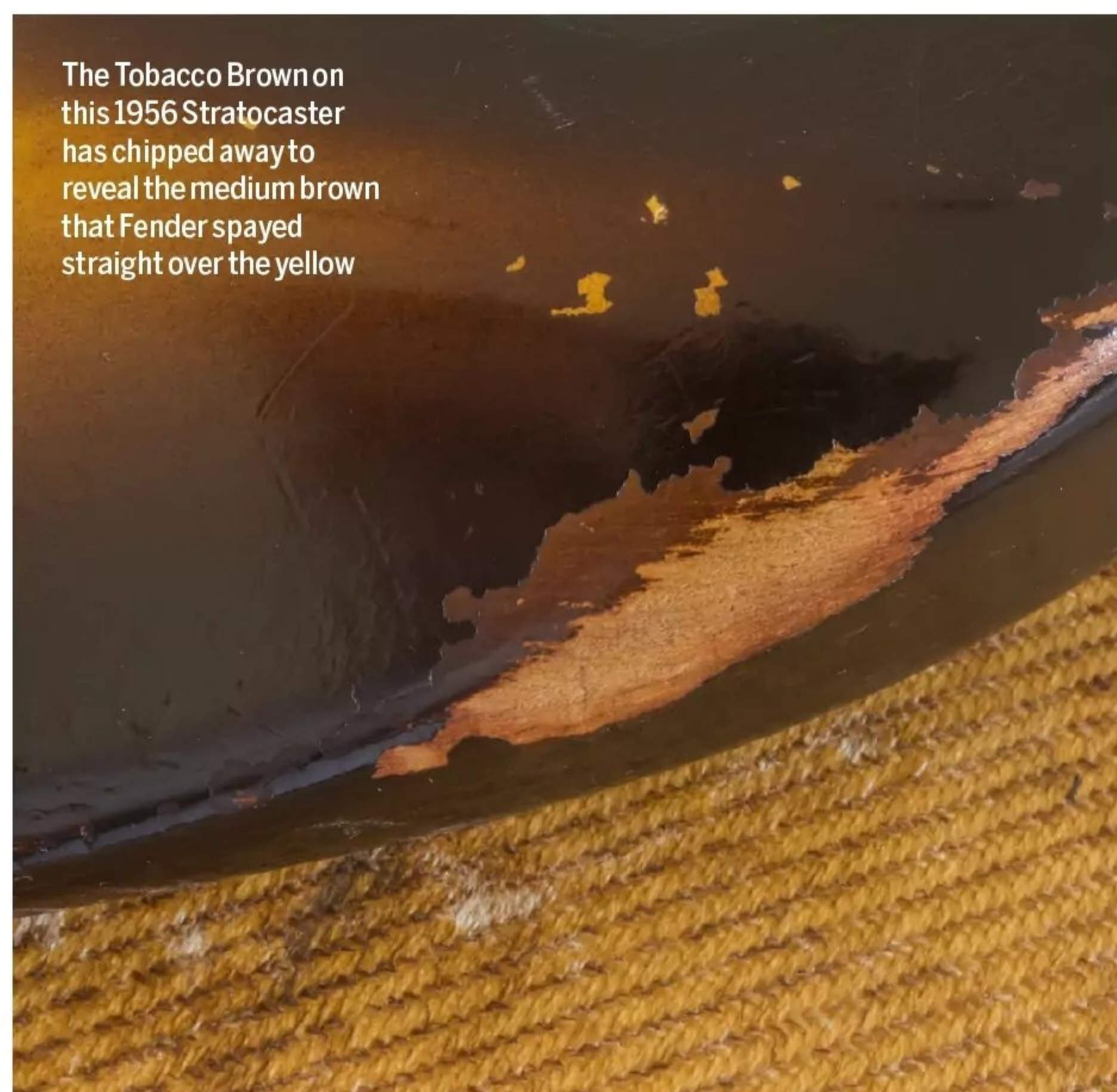
Clearly, I was out of my depth, but what followed was a masterclass on Fender sunbursts of the 1950s for which I’ll be forever grateful. Pre-CBS Fender sunbursts are usually categorised as two-tone or three-tone, depending on whether a band of red has been added. Clive put me straight on that because Fender only sprayed genuine two-tone sunbursts in 1954.

The sunbursts that most consider two-tone are, in fact, three-tone because after the yellow coats Fender sprayed a mid-brown called Salem Maple around the edges. This was followed up by a darkened shade of Salem Maple that is more commonly referred to as ‘Tobacco Brown’. The medium brown eases the transition from yellow to the darker edges and is clear to see on Andrew Raymond’s 1956 Strat in areas where the dark brown has chipped away.

“By my count, four styles of sunburst were used for Strats between 1954 and 1960”

I recently worked on a fabulously well-preserved 1958 Stratocaster belonging to Guitar Gear Giveaway that must have been one of the very first that Fender did after introducing red to its sunbursts. Rather than Tobacco Brown, the outer edges were a deep maroon. Since brown and red combine to make maroon, it looked like the factory sprayed red after the medium brown and went pretty heavy on the edges.

By 1959, sunburst Strats had much darker brown outer edges sprayed over the red



layer. By my count, that means four styles of sunburst were used for Stratocasters between 1954 and 1960. And that's before you even consider inconsistencies in 'burst widths that often reflected the individual styles of the employees who sprayed Fender's finishes. The upshot was that for this guitar I needed to replicate a three-tone finish with a mid-brown layer.

Spraying Solutions

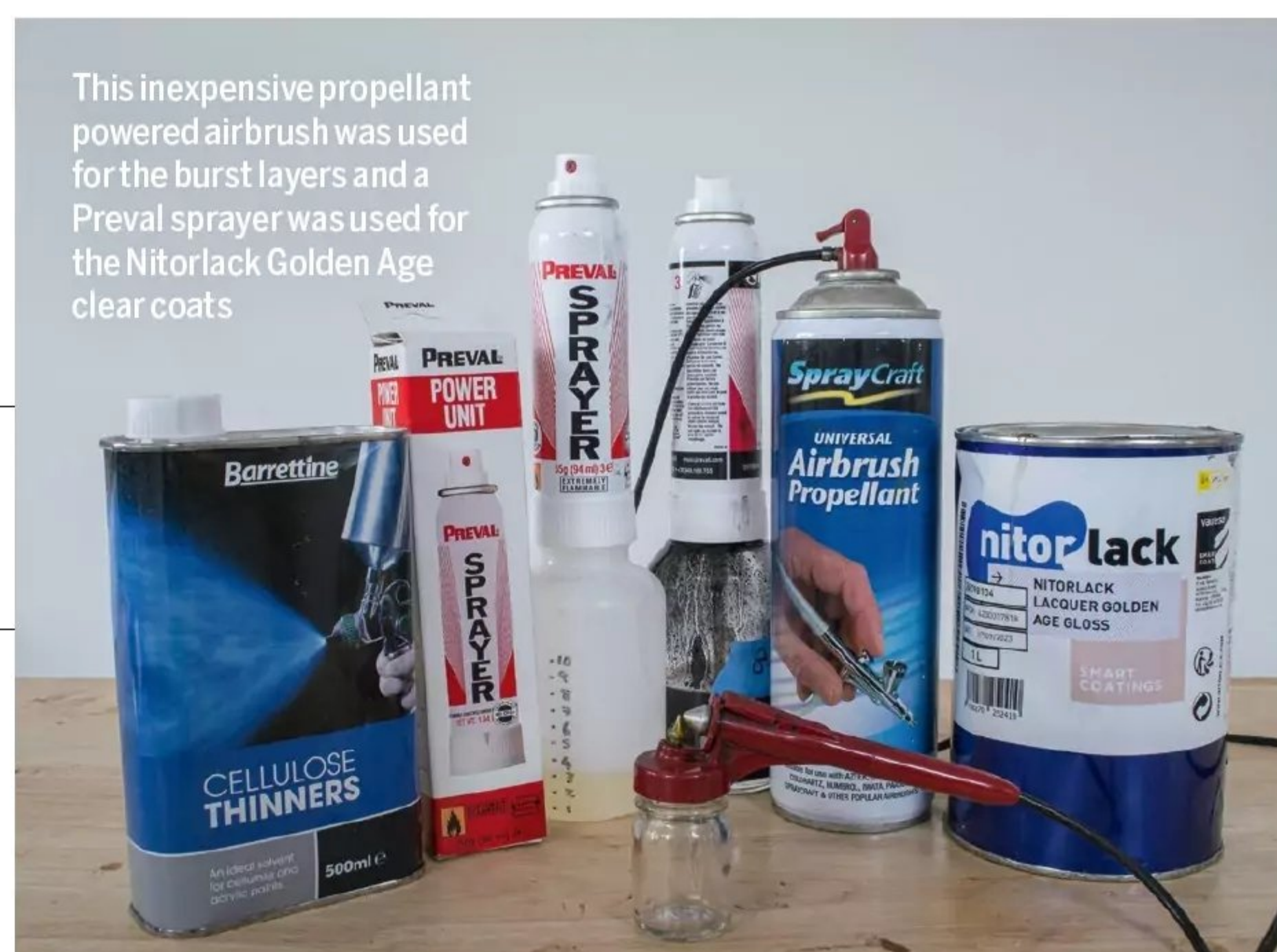
For those of us who like to spray our own guitars, it's very easy to source almost all the classic guitar colours in aerosol form. With meticulous preparation and careful spraying technique, it is absolutely possible to achieve professional quality results using aerosols, rather than a compressor-driven spray gun. And, let's be honest, doing relic finishes does provide some margin for error.

Here in the UK, nitrocellulose in aerosol form is available from Manchester Guitar Tech, Six String Supplies, Northwest Guitars, Rothko & Frost and others. This is ideal if you're spraying something like Fiesta Red, Lake Placid Blue or even clear gloss. But if you're aiming for the very specific shades of a vintage sunburst, off-the-shelf solutions aren't always available, and you may be obliged to tint lacquer yourself. But we'll get onto that later.

If you want to try refinishing without buying a professional spray gun and compressor, there are two solutions for hobbyists and both will probably work out cheaper than buying pre-mixed aerosols. The first is to use an airbrush. The cheapest cost around £30 and can be found online and in model shops. They are powered by cans of airbrush propellant, but airbrush kits with electric air compressors can often be found for well under £100.

Airbrushes are fantastic for spraying sunbursts because they tend not to splatter droplets of lacquer where you don't want them and produce a very fine mist. As such, they're ideal for beginners because the sunbursts build up slowly and they're easier to use than aerosols. If you plan on spraying a few sunbursts, buying an airbrush with a compressor will soon start saving you money because propellant cans are expensive, don't last very long and lose power as they empty.

Preval sprayers are another option and I get mine from Spray Guns Direct. They comprise an aerosol section and a container that you can fill with lacquer and attach to the aerosol. The lacquer containers can be cleaned for reuse or you can pop the lid on when you're done and store the leftover lacquer for another job.



Tint Hints

Having completed the yellow staining in the last instalment, it was time to replicate the medium brown and for that I needed to tint some lacquer. Examining Andrew Raymond's 1956 sunburst closely, I could see that Fender's Salem Maple was opaque. The tints I used are made by Mixol and they are easy to source in the UK.

I started with Oxide Brown, which looks like milk chocolate, and added some Oxide Red to try to get it closer to Fender's colour. This helped, but the shade was a bit too bright. A few drops of Mixol Black gave the tint a richer quality and after several minor adjustments I decided it was about as close as I was going to get.

I added Halfords' cellulose thinners into the tint slurry and mixed them thoroughly before adding Nitorlack Golden Age lacquer. For this medium brown edge I used a lower ratio of lacquer to thinners than I would normally use for colour or clear coats. The tint mix was actually very strong and the lacquer was added to bind everything together, rather than build up a thick coat.

I used an airbrush for the medium brown and I mostly concentrated on the rolled over edges where Fender laid it on thickest. Holding the airbrush over the body and spraying outwards, it's possible



This is how the body looked after the medium brown shading was applied

to achieve a natural transition from yellow to brown almost by accident.

The sides ended up mostly covered by the medium brown, but I didn't attempt full coverage because Fender didn't. Once the medium brown had dried thoroughly, I brushed the front and back of the body to remove any lacquer dust from the yellow area.

Tobacco Brown

A pre-mixed Tobacco Brown aerosol is an option, but the main downfall with using aerosols for 'bursting is that they tend to splatter. Droplets of lacquer usually end up in the transition areas and unless you wipe the nozzle from time to time, large drops can build up and drip onto your work. Additionally, the spray pattern tends to be quite wide and aerosols are harder to direct accurately than an airbrush.

That said, there are some simple workarounds and if you ever get to examine one of Fender's earliest sunburst attempts in person, it almost looks as if they used aerosols, too. Don't worry – because doing things too well can, on occasion, be counterproductive when you're attempting to replicate a vintage look. Flawless lacquer scraping on 1950s Les Paul replicas is a prime example.

If you decide to use an aerosol, start by cutting a piece of card or stiff paper to the same shape as the body but about 15mm shy of the edge. Stick this to the top using loops of low-tack masking tape to

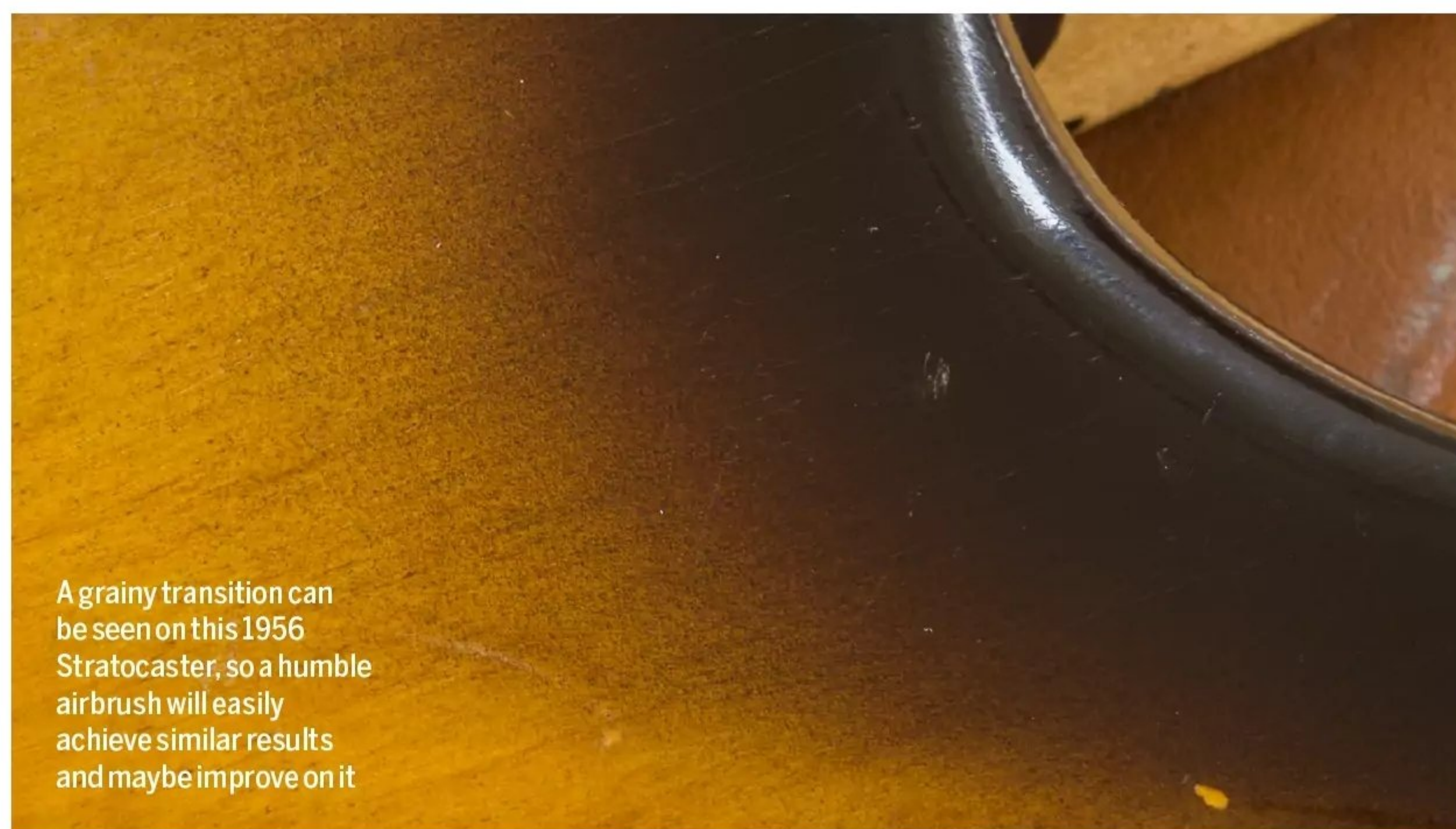
maintain a gap between the card and the surface of the body. The card will act as a shield when you spray the body edges and the gap prevents a hard lacquer edge from forming.

Once you've gone around the edge, remove the card and ensure there are no bits of debris or sticky residue from the tape. Then, holding the aerosol over the centre of the body and aiming the spray beyond the outer edge, begin spraying and carefully adjust your aim until you see the Tobacco Brown start to build up on the outer edges. Be patient and allow the colour to build up gradually.

If it seems that most of the lacquer is missing the body altogether, you're doing

it correctly. When you're happy with the look and the lacquer is sufficiently dry, flip the body and repeat the procedure for the other side. You can reuse the same shield by turning it over, but I have to warn you that aerosol sunbursts may end up looking a bit too 'dirty' and 'grainy' until you get the hang of it.

I had some Tobacco Brown aerosol in stock, but a quick comparison with Andrew Raymond's Strat showed that it was slightly too red and not quite dark enough. I needed a brownish black, rather than blackish brown, so I mixed some of the mid-brown lacquer with some black lacquer and the colour looked a lot closer. I applied it using an airbrush, which is



A grainy transition can be seen on this 1956 Stratocaster, so a humble airbrush will easily achieve similar results and maybe improve on it



After Tobacco Brown and clear gloss top coats have been applied, the next stage will be cutting and polishing



Going slightly heavy on the shading coats has almost made the body repair disappear

always my preferred option, and managed to achieve a fairly pleasing transition from the mid-brown to the dark brown.

Clearing Up

For whatever reason, sunburst finishes never quite look complete until they've been oversprayed with clear coats. Each fresh coat of lacquer melts into the previous coat, rather than simply sitting on top. There's something about this process that seems to soften and refine sunburst shading.

An airbrush is ideal for slowly building up a sunburst, but for clear coats or solid colours you really need a spraying method that lays the lacquer on quicker and provides wider coverage. Here, there's no disadvantage in using aerosols, but I chose to use Preval sprayers.

I mixed Nitorlack Golden Age gloss nitrocellulose with cellulose thinners in a 1:2 ratio because I find that Preval sprayers work better with a slightly lower lacquer content. The Nitorlack came from Six String Supplies and I used it because it can be made to check a little more easily than most other lacquers. Cellulose thinners can be found in auto accessories shops such as Halfords.

Very quickly, the sunburst smoothed out into a sort of softer focus and I ended up spraying about four coats. I was looking for a good build-up, but at the same time I wanted to keep the finish as thin as possible for a 1950s look.

Flash Coat

Lacquer's 'melting' characteristic can be used in another way towards the end of the finishing process. I rarely sand between coats, but once my final coat has hardened for a few days, I sand the surface with 320 or 400-grit dry paper. Care is needed not to sand through to the colour coat or, worse still, through the colour coat itself.

The idea is to smooth out any 'orange peel' and achieve a fairly flat surface. With all the sanding dust carefully

“Sunburst finishes never quite look complete until they've been oversprayed with clear coats”

removed, I loaded one Preval sprayer with a regular 1:2 mix ratio and a tiny dash of N-Butyl retarder. I prepared a second Preval sprayer with a flash coat, which was lacquer and thinner in a 1:4 ratio and another dash of N-Butyl.

I sprayed a light flash coat first to melt the surface and quickly followed this up with the regular lacquer coat and then a second application of flash coat. If you get this right, you'll end up with a very smooth surface that will need minimal

sanding before the final polish up. In fact, some 1950s finishes look like Fender called it quits straight after the flash coats and went straight to buffing. I generally find flash coating allows me to begin wet sanding with 1,000 or 1,200-grit wet and dry paper, without having to work my way up through 600 and 800 grit.

N-Butyl Acetate retarder can be found online and I use it to prolong the amount of time the surface of the lacquer takes to skin over. This helps it to melt in nicely and prevents any white 'blush' or 'bloom' developing if you're spraying in humid or rainy conditions.

After applying flash coats, leave the body laying flat for several minutes to prevent drips and runs. These coats don't need to be heavy, but waiting before flipping the body to flash coat the other side is always advisable. I should also say that if you're spraying guitars, always work in a well-ventilated area and don't even consider doing this without wearing a suitable respirator mask.

With the spraying complete, the lacquer will now be left to cure for a few weeks. In the previous instalment I promised to get started on the neck, but having underestimated how much there was to say about Fender sunbursts, that will have to wait until next time. **G**

www.huwpriceguitar.com

With thanks to Andrew Raymond and Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath



David Davidson's *Vintage Icons*

Was Suzanne the name of the guitar or the first owner of this maple-bodied single-cut?

1954 Les Paul Junior



The evidence suggests that this first-year example of a Les Paul Junior belonged to someone called Suzanne, who applied letter decals to the pickguard

I got this 1954 Junior some time ago and I think the original guitar's owner must have been Suzanne. It's spelled out in little letters right down the pickguard and they're all perfectly placed as only a woman could do it. It has a maple body, which isn't super rare, even though Gibson only did that for the first three months of production before switching to mahogany.

"The body is a two-piece with a perfectly joined centre seam and there's a big mahogany neck. Juniors always had big necks and stayed that way into 1960, when other Gibson models got slimmer necks. Juniors didn't get blade necks until Gibson changed to the SG body shape.

"It's a good-sounding guitar, but these early Juniors and Specials have the short bridge post bushings that lean and cause intonation problems. Another issue with the early ones is that the bridge pickup was positioned closer to the bridge, so on the treble side in particular there wasn't much wood to withstand string tension.

"The right fix is to pull the original bushings and install deeper ones, but some people prefer to have guitars that are totally original, rather than ones that they can actually play. When we sell one of these I always explain the issue to the customer and offer to install longer bushings from maybe a broken-headstock 1957 Junior. It's not like you can see the modification, and the guitar will play perfectly forever, but for some customers that would make a guitar less desirable.

"I recently learned from Mat Koehler at Gibson that Juniors and Specials were made with four different neck angles due to the various tailpieces. Because these were inexpensive guitars, many ended up being assembled with an incorrect neck

angle, especially earlier on, and that's why some don't play very well. Gibson was very busy, and because these were student models, they didn't think that kids would notice or care. They sold for considerably less than a Fender Esquire, and Gibson probably didn't realise that Juniors would end up in the hands of some really great guitar players.

"Now, we understand that a Junior is one of the most important tools in a guitarist's toolbox. It has a very distinct sound that you can't get out of any other guitar, including Les Paul Specials. There's something about that one pickup being mounted to the top of the guitar that makes them wonderful beasts.

"The Les Paul Junior has a very distinct sound that you can't get out of any other guitar"

"The difference between a musician and a collector is that musicians understand what Juniors are. They recognise the unique punch that you can't get from any humbucking guitar – or even P-90 guitars – with hollow bodies. The Junior was the happy accident and Gibson couldn't have known that it would become the iconic rock 'n' roll instrument.

"I recall buying these used during the 1970s, and people would always take off the tuners and Grover them. So many had broken headstocks because they belonged to children and teenagers, and they didn't really look after them. Then there was

the flimsy cardboard case that would pop open and the guitar would fall on the floor. Back then we could buy Juniors for \$50 and we'd sell them for \$75, or \$100 for a really good unbroken one. They were so hot we could sell 10 on a Saturday because people wanted to plug them into Marshalls and sound like Leslie West – although Leslie was recording through a Tweed Fender Champ and just dimming it, like most people were.

"The later double-cutaway Juniors may sound very subtly different to the single-cutaways, but you'd only really notice if you were playing quietly and clean. If you play them through a cranked amp, as I think they should be, you can't really hear any difference.

"Maple is a harder wood and sounds a little brighter. The maple bodies are a little thicker, maybe by $\frac{1}{16}$ or $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch, and they're a little heavier. The mahogany ones are usually about a pound lighter and they are better-sounding guitars. When people talk about Junior tone, they're probably thinking about what the mahogany ones sound like.

"Even so, maple Juniors appeal to collectors because they are different and they represent the first year of production. They'll pay a premium to get one because Gibson made tens of thousands of mahogany-bodied Juniors and only a few hundred maple ones. But I think the darker and richer tone of mahogany is what most players would want, and you can buy one for a lot less." [HP]

Vintage guitar veteran David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York
www.wellstrungguitars.com / info@wellstrungguitars.com / 001(516) 221-0563

Although maple-bodied Juniors are the rarest, they appeal more to collectors than players, and very little wood grain can be seen through the lacquer

“The Junior was the happy accident that would become the iconic rock ‘n’ roll instrument”



PHOTOGRAPHY BY KAITLYN CRISP / WELL STRUNG GUITARS

Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks



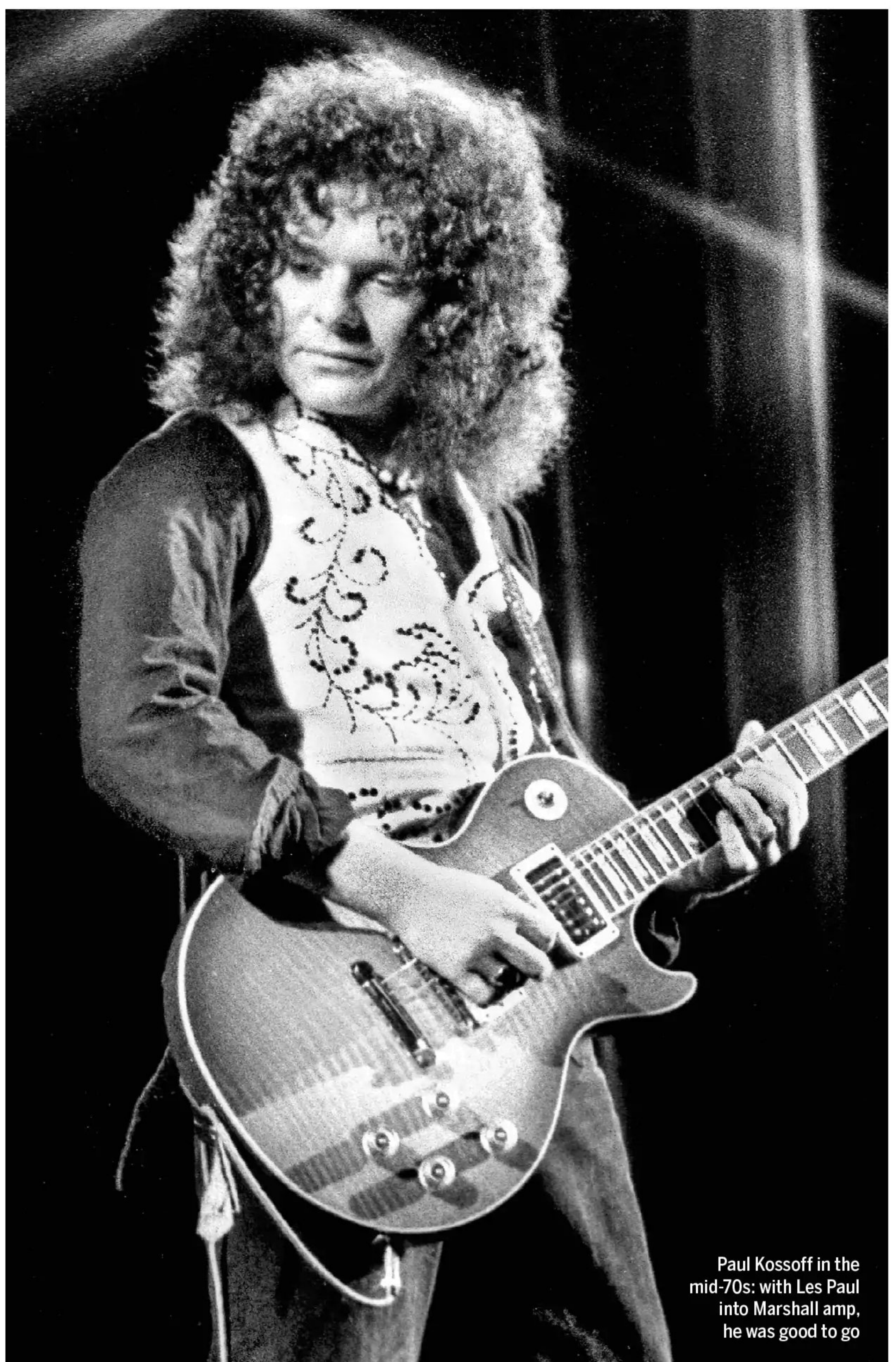
Remembering Paul Kossoff

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Knaggs SSC & Marshall JTM45 MkII reissue
Difficulty ★★☆☆☆ | 15 mins per example

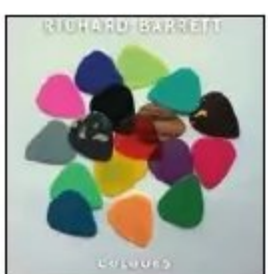
PAUL KOSSOFF'S STORY is regrettably short, but it's packed with classic songs and great guitar playing. Starting out on classical guitar, Paul gravitated to electric after seeing Eric Clapton with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers as a teenager. It's clear from his earliest recordings with London-based act Black Cat Bones in 1967 to his final recordings with Back Street Crawler in 1975 that 'Koss' was intensely passionate about music, regarding the guitar as his voice, rather than a vehicle for showboating.

Paul's best-known work was as a member of Free, and that's what I'm primarily referring to with these examples. They were devised and recorded separately, with the intention that they could be joined together later to form one 'take' (and the beginning of another). By combining some notable characteristics of Paul's playing such as his approach to pentatonics, bends, doublestops, chord fragments – and, of course, that virtually impossible to imitate vibrato – the intention is to gain further insight into his style and capture some of the intensity and drama that his peers (including Eric Clapton) admired.

Though Paul experimented with layering different guitars and tones (check out *The Stealer*), and occasionally used effects such as wah and a Leslie rotary speaker, he's probably most associated with plugging straight into a Marshall head (typically a 100-watt Super Lead). It is known that Paul liked to use Marshall bass speakers, feeling they had a rounder sound, but there's no getting away from the well-worn 'tone is in the fingers' adage here. I found that reducing the bass and cranking the mids on the studio's JTM45 Mk II reissue helped focus the tone, as did linking the inputs and using a higher level on the High Treble volume – no master volumes in those days! 🎸



Paul Kossoff in the mid-70s: with Les Paul into Marshall amp, he was good to go



Richard Barrett's album, *Colours*, (complete with backing tracks), is available now from iTunes and Amazon

Example 1

IN THIS FIRST EXAMPLE, I'm combining fretted notes and open strings in a way that Paul did in his famous *All Right Now* solo. There is fairly fast vibrato applied throughout, and this phrase moves into B minor pentatonic (shape 1) towards the end. Note that the final bend is raised to F# before the note is played. Also, the vibrato emphasises lowering the pitch below and coming back to F#, rather than the 'above and below' vibrato Paul also used.

♩ = 110

B5

Let ring - - - - -

BU BU BD PB 9

9/11 0 11 0 9 9/11 0 11 0 9 (11) 10 7 9 (11) (9) 7 9 (11)

Example 2

CHANGING TO E MINOR PENTATONIC (shape 1) as the backing chord changes to E, we find a more rhythmic approach, certainly by bar 2, where the repeated bends and releases are most emphasised. Unlike Example 1, the vibrato on the final bend clearly goes above and below the targeted pitch of B. There is (albeit briefly) also some intentional 'bleed' between the penultimate bend and the D at the 15th fret of the second string.

Example 3

BUILDING HIGHER, this example continues the combination of bends, doublestops, vibrato and letting notes ring together. The final note dies short fairly quickly, but this allows the turnaround in the backing track to take centre stage, much in the way Paul himself might have done. I'm keeping the vibrato as intense as I can here. Paul worked very hard on this technique and apparently favoured heavier strings and picks than many of his contemporaries, probably to maximise tone and sustain.

Example 4

THIS FINAL PHRASE occurs as the backing track starts another round, and is based on some of the ideas that appear in Paul's epic solo on *Mr Big*. Playing in a trio meant there could often be holes to fill (even with the great Andy Fraser on bass!), and Paul took an interesting approach to both solos and chords on many occasions to fill out the sound with unusual voicings. You'll hear this on *Fire And Water* and even the classic *All Right Now*.

B5
♩ = 110 8^{va}

Let ring throughout

1

(8^{va})

4

Hear It Here

FREE

TONS OF SOBS



Free's first album was recorded in 1968, only a couple of years after Paul's switch from classical to electric. Actually, his classical guitar makes a brief appearance on *Over The Green Hills (Pt 1)* before segueing into *Worry*, with his electric playing already a distinctive voice. Innovative use of controlled feedback and unison riffing with the bass introduce *Walk In My Shadow* with further solo highlights. Another standout track is *I'm A Mover*, which sounds very 'live' with the guitar solos providing lots of excitement.

FREE

FIRE AND WATER



To many, this is probably the definitive Free album, containing some of their finest moments, including the single *All Right Now*. However, there is much to be gained from checking out the title track, which contains some interesting chord voicings and fabulous soloing. Also check out *Oh I Wept* for more examples of this, plus a reminder that Free were influenced as much by soul as by blues and rock. Finally, have a listen to *Mr Big* to hear Paul's minimalist rhythm playing and epic soloing.

BACK STREET CRAWLER

THE BAND PLAYS ON



Though addiction caused turbulence in Paul's career, he was still making music till the end. This 1975 album opens with strident playing on *Hoo Doo Woman*, with Hendrix-inspired rhythms, and the title track showcases Paul's expressive vibrato and bends. *It's A Long Way Down To The Top* is reminiscent of Free's laid-back soul, with a more stripped-back arrangement – maximising the impact of the solo! There are clearly stylistic nods to the era, but parts wouldn't sound out of place on a Free LP.

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Guitarist

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