

PHIL COLLEN PC1-E
DEF LEPPARD STAR ON HIS NEW SIG MODEL

QUO MACHINES
RICK PARFITT'S ICONIC TELE, SG & ESQUIRE



Issue 544

Guitarist

DECEMBER 2026

25 HOT NEW ELECTRICS

THE BEST MODERN GUITARS YOU CAN BUY NOW

Artists

YNGWIE MALMSTEEN
ALLY VENABLE
STEVE HACKETT &
STEVE ROTHERY
J MASCIS
& More

Featuring

FIRST TEST!
THE ALL-NEW
PRS TEKTON

2026 ELECTRIC BUYER'S GUIDE

THE FUTURE OF GUITAR

Reviews

SCHECTER NICK JOHNSTON TRAD HH
HAMMETT GUITAR CO COMMODORE
YAMAHA F7 SERIES ACOUSTICS
& More

PLUS
ORANGE BABY TERROR
SHERGOLD TELSTAR 12-STRING
THE PROCLAIMERS

FUTURE

ID:X

ADVANCED DSP MODELLING AMPLIFIERS

A CUT ABOVE



ID:X puts everything at your fingertips.

Real-time control, USB-C audio, CabRig speaker and mic simulation, XLR out, headphones, MIDI (100W only) and selectable power modes, all in a compact, gig-ready combo.

MORE TONES. MORE FEATURES.

- DISTINCT AMP VOICES
- CLASSIC EFFECTS
- EASY 'ON-AMP' EFFECTS CONTROL
- PATENTED ISF TECHNOLOGY
- AUTHENTIC VALVE RESPONSES
- IR-BASED CABRIG™
- MIDI CONNECTIVITY (ID:X 100 ONLY)
- POWER REDUCTION

Designed & Engineered by Blackstar Amplification UK

Blackstar® AMPLIFICATION

the sound in your head

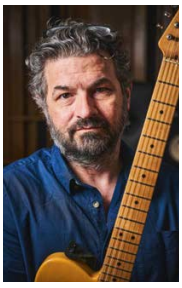
EXPLORE NOW:

www.blackstaramps.com

Guitarist

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

Brave New (Old) World



This month's examination of the state of the art in electric guitar design reveals some surprising things about what making guitars right is all about in 2026. Firstly, the temptation to load technology onto guitars in a bid to make them relevant has been, rightly, set aside as a false path. Clever electronics quickly become obsolete, and effects built into the guitar simply remind us we don't have any choice when there's already a million pedals out there that allow us to pick exactly what we like, rather than stick with what a guitar maker thought we'd like to have. Even robot tuners, in the long run, seem to have received no more than a collective shrug from guitarists who, by and large, have simply concluded it's easier to do the job themselves without involving clunky, mechanised machineheads – the classic '$100 solution to a $1 problem' as someone once put it. Onboard tech limits us as often as it sets us free, it would seem. I'd go one step further and say that's always been the case with over-zealous gadgetry on guitars, from mechanical mutes on old Gretsches and stereo circuits on 60s Gibson semis to onboard effects through the decades and so on.

So what does that leave? The more patient work of evolving and refining the playing experience of the electric in step with what musicians want and can make use of – the very same design philosophy Leo Fender applied to invent the most timeless of electrics back in the 50s, in fact. The method still works today, and though the improvements gained are typically incremental not revolutionary, pick up a guitar built to 2026 tolerances – especially when made under the exacting eye of thoughtful, progressive luthiers such as Patrick James Eggle, Paul Reed Smith, Seth Baccus and Nik Huber – to name but four, and you can really feel where that incremental progress has gone. They're just beautiful guitars to play that, ironically, after all that work, disappear in the hands. Enjoy the issue.



Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights



Hackett & Rothery
The two most prolific Steves in prog (and the most revered for their playing) have buddied up for a new album and they tell us all about it on **p78**



Cheap Thrills
Huw Price's judicious tweaks to an already bargain acoustic from Cort show that modding isn't just for the electric players out there on **p116**



Yngwie Malmsteen
The straight-talking Swede is back with nary a word minced on the subject of his new album, modding vintage Strats and the best era for old Marshalls **p84**

COVER: MAIN PHOTO BY LUCY ROBINSON JACKSON PRO SERIES SIGNATURE PHIL COLLEN PC1-E PHOTO COURTESY OF JACKSON GUITARS RICK PARFITT TELECASTER PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS
ABOVE: STEVE HACKETT & STEVE ROTHERY PHOTO BY PHIL BARKER CORT PHOTO BY HUW PRICE YNGWIE MALMSTEEN PHOTO BY TERJE DOKKEN/GONZALES PHOTO/ALAMY

Guitarist

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

EDITORIAL

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

Art Editor
Darren Phillips
darren.phillips@futurenet.com

Deputy Editor
David Mead
david.mead@futurenet.com

Acting Reviews Editor
Stuart Williams
stuart.williams@futurenet.com

Managing Editor
Lucy Rice
lucy.rice@futurenet.com

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

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

Contributors
Richard Barrett, Alex Bishop, Olly Curtis, Milford Coppock, Trevor Curwen, Andrew Daly, Connor Flys, Martin Holmes, Matt Lincoln, Neville Marten, Ed Oleszko, Huw Price, Davina Rungasamy, Amit Sharma, Martin Smith, Alvin Weetman, Charlie Wilkins, Stuart Williams, Henry Yates

In-House Photography
Phil Barker, Lucy Robinson

ADVERTISING
MEDIA PACKS ARE AVAILABLE ON REQUEST
GROUP COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR Clare Dove clare.dove@futurenet.com
ADVERTISING SALES DIRECTOR Lara Jaggon lara.jaggon@futurenet.com

MARKETING
SENIOR DIRECTOR, MARKETING INTEGRATION Sharon Todd sharon.todd@futurenet.com

PRINT & PRODUCTION
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR Mark Constance mark.constance@futurenet.com
SENIOR PRODUCTION MANAGER Maaya Mistry maaya.mistry@futurenet.com
SENIOR AD PRODUCTION MANAGER Jo Crosby jo.crosby@futurenet.com
DIGITAL EDITIONS MANAGER Jason Hudson jason.hudson@futurenet.com
DIGITAL EDITIONS PRODUCER Daniel Short daniel.short@futurenet.com

INTERNATIONAL LICENSING & SYNDICATION
Guitarist is available for licensing and syndication.
to find our more contact us at licensing@futurenet.com
or view our available content at **www.futurecontenthub.com**
HEAD OF PRINT LICENSING Rachel Shaw licensing@futurenet.com

CIRCULATION
BRAND DIRECTOR Tim Mathers
HEAD OF FUTURE NEWSTRADE Emma Bone

MANAGEMENT
SVP MAGAZINES, SUBSCRIPTIONS, EVENTS, NEWS, WEALTH, SPORTS & KNOWLEDGE
Joel Griffiths joel.griffiths@futurenet.com
MANAGING DIRECTOR MUSIC, PHOTOGRAPHY & DESIGN
Stuart Williams stuart.williams1@futurenet.com
GLOBAL DESIGN DIRECTOR Rodney Dive rodney.dive@futurenet.com
HEAD OF DESIGN (MUSIC) Brad Merrett brad.merrett@futurenet.com

CUSTOMER SERVICES
APP SUPPORT apps@futurenet.com
ONLINE www.magazinesdirect.com EMAIL help@magazinesdirect.com
How to order & access back issues: If you are an active print subscriber, you have instant access to back issues through your iOS or Android device(s). Your digital magazine entitlement is available at no additional cost and no further action is required. Pocketmags library may not have access to the full archive of digital back issues.
You will only be able to access the digital back issues as long as you are an active subscriber.
To purchase single back issues (print format only) visit magazinesdirect.com (click on 'Single issues' tab) or email help@magazinesdirect.com
BAR subscription prices: £87.75 for UK, €173 for Europe, $195 for USA, £150 for Rest of World
Subscription delays: Disruption remains within UK and International delivery networks.
Please allow up to 7 days before contacting us about a late delivery to help@mymagazines.co.uk
Magazinesdirect.com is owned and operated by Future Publishing Limited

USPS INFORMATION
Guitarist (ISSN 0953-7023 PE 23920) is published monthly with an extra issue in May by Future PLC, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA, United Kingdom.
Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA.
Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Guitarist, World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA

GPSR EU RP (for authorities only)
eucomply OÜ Pärnu mnt 139b-14 11317
Tallinn, Estonia
hello@eucompliancepartner.com
+3375690241

General Product Safety 2023/988: The use of our product under normal or reasonably foreseeable conditions of use, including the actual duration of use, does not present any risk or only the minimum risks compatible with the product's use, which are considered acceptable and consistent with a high level of protection of the health and safety of consumers.

ipso. Regulated

Guitarist is a member of the IPSO (Independent Press Standards Organisation) which regulates the UK print and digital news industry.

We abide by the Editors' Code of Practice and are committed to upholding the highest standards of journalism. If you think that we have not met those standards and want to make a complaint, please contact legal@futurenet.com

If we are unable to resolve your complaint, or if you would like more information about IPSO or the Editors' Code, contact IPSO on 0300 123 2220 or visit www.ipso.co.uk

FUTURE
Connectors. Creators. Experience Makers.

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

Chief Executive Officer **Kevin Li Ying**
Non-Executive Chairman **Mark Brooker**
Chief Financial Officer **Sharjeel Suleman**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

All contents © 2026 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

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

THE NEW AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL

HOTSHOT™ TELECASTER® in Three-Tone Sunburst with TONE MASTER® DELUXE REVERB®



Fender

The One. For All.

©2026 Fender Musical Instruments Corporation. All Rights Reserved.

Contents

COVER FEATURE



PHOTO BY LUCY ROBINSON

REVIEW



PHOTO BY LUCY ROBINSON



Guitarist
SUBSCRIBE TODAY FOR ONLY £24.99 AND SAVE 45%!
See p108 for details

FEATURE

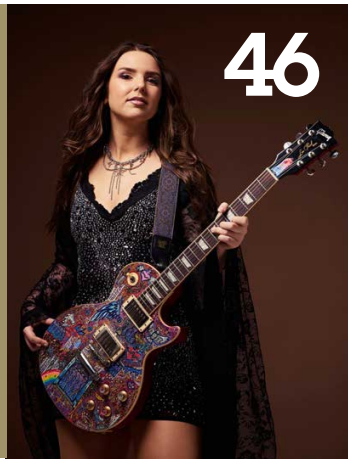


PHOTO BY PHIL BARKER

REGULARS

030 Gas Supply
032 Fretbuzz
034 New Music
036 Tones Behind The Tracks
038 Opinion
042 Substitute
044 Feedback
108 Subscribe
114 Bought & Sold
116 Mod Squad
120 Nitty Gritty
124 Vintage Icons
130 Next Month

FEATURES

046 Ally Venable
052 Modern Electrics
078 Steve Hackett & Steve Rothery
084 Yngwie Malmsteen
090 Historic Hardware: Rick Parfitt Collection

NEW GEAR

008 **Schecter** Nick Johnson Traditional HH
014 **Orange** Baby Terror
018 **Shergold** Telstar Standard ST14 12-String
024 **Crazy Tube Circuits** White Whale Junior
026 **JHS Pedals** Coyote
028 **Hammett** H540 Commodore Semi-Hollow
070 **PRS** Tekton T & SVN
096 **Yamaha** FG7 R & FS7 MX
104 **Boss** Ex-4 Effects Expander
110 **Jackson** Pro Series Signature Phil Collen PC1-E

TECHNIQUES

126 Blues Headlines with Richard Barrett

VIDEO & AUDIO

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

The Pick. SCAN TO GET THE LATEST GUITAR NEWS

WALRUS AUDIO

Lüm

TEXTURE ENGINE



Lüm seeks to illuminate your path with three unique granular and textural reverb modes, momentary automation, and presets. Drawing on elements of the Slö Reverb, Lore Reverse Reverb, and Fable Granular Generator, Lüm takes your audio signal and fractures it into tiny "grains" wrapped in different washes of reverb to create sporadic and atmospheric textures.

EXPLORE MORE AT **WALRUSAUDIO.COM**

FACE Exclusive UK/EU-Distribution - www.face.be



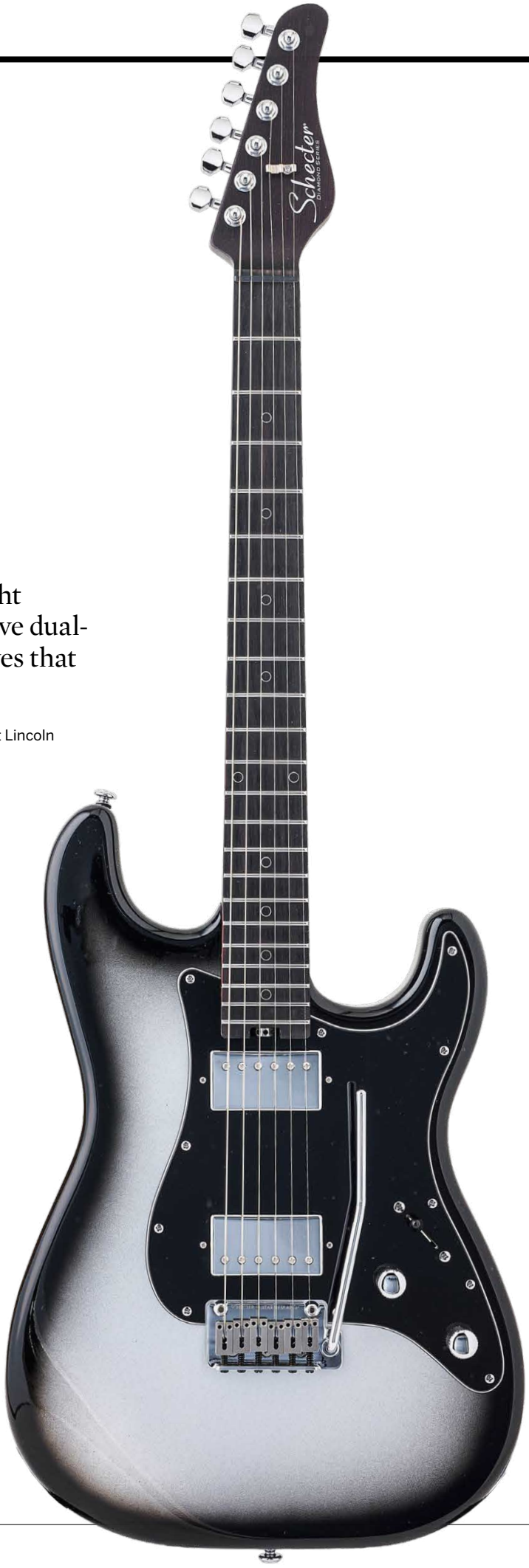
SCHECTER NICK JOHNSTON TRADITIONAL HH
£1,329

WHAT IS IT? High-performance, dual-humbucker signature model for solo artist turned Mastodon guitarist, Nick Johnston

Atomic Fireball

It's a Schecter, but not as you might know it. Nick Johnston's distinctive dual-humbucker signature model proves that modern and vintage can co-exist

Words Stuart Williams **Photography** Phil Barker & Matt Lincoln



If you were to write a guide to navigating the music business in the second decade of this century, you'd probably do well to use Nick Johnston as a case study. Beginning as an independent artist, self-releasing albums under the musical influence of the likes of Vai, Satriani, Malmsteen and more, Johnston's career to date has seen him contribute with a melting pot of heavily respected players, eventually arriving as a current member of prog/stoner/metal heavyweights Mastodon.

Along the way, Nick has forged a close relationship with Schecter, putting his name on his first signature model in 2016. 10 years on and we see the release of the latest guitar to bear his name: the Nick Johnston Traditional HH, part of Schecter's more affordable Diamond Series range.

Think of a Schecter and, depending on your era, an 80s hot-rod most likely comes to mind, born out of the bustling Californian custom shop boom. Conversely, the more modern era of Schecter will probably have you picturing the guitars that helped shape the flood of Noughties metalcore, NWAHM and something of a shred revival.







1. The Traditional HH's ebony fingerboard features subtle inlaid rings, as well as side dots, and deviates from the Fender-style tradition with a flatter 355.6mm (14-inch) radius

Interestingly, much like Nick's playing, this guitar pulls from different ends of the Schecter wheelhouse. First up is the shape, and there are no prizes (and hopefully no surprises in the post) for identifying where it draws its inspiration from. It's called the Traditional, and follows suit with a 648mm (25.5-inch) scale length as well as a vibrato, but – less so than with its golden age-flavoured S-type Traditional HSS siblings – there's a lot more to this guitar than simply apeing a vintage-style Strat.

Picking it up, the first thing that's apparent is that this guitar's aspirations for 'heavy' are both figurative and literal

The neck, for example, uses wenge, rather than the maple you might expect. It features a Nick Johnston C-shape profile with an open-grain finish on the back: no thick clear coat here. As we move to the front, it's like ticking-off a contemporary spec sheet wishlist: locking tuners (Schecter's own), third-party synthetic bone nut (Graph Tech Tusq), 22 (count 'em) stainless-steel frets. So far, so 'add to cart'. The fretboard itself is a lovely slice of ebony, which Johnston has cannily opted not to fill with shellfish or plastic, instead keeping things understated with finely inlaid rings, bolstered by subtle side dots.

At the body end, adjustment of the two-way truss rod is made constantly accessible thanks to an exposed spoke wheel: no covers, and no awkward Allen key manipulation or neck removal to keep your relief in check.

Then there's the humbuckers. These are Schecter Nick Johnston signature Atom-Buckers, stocked with Alnico III magnets for a lower output. They're wired into a five-way 'Super Switch', which offers the full humbuckers in isolation for positions 1 (bridge) and 5 (neck). In between these, the remaining positions serve up each pickup split on their own, then together for position 3, offering what is, on paper, a versatile palette to select from.

Feel & Sounds

Picking up the Traditional HH, the first thing that's apparent is that this guitar's aspirations for 'heavy' are both figurative and literal. On the scales, it's screaming out for a Mounjaro prescription at a shoulder-bothering 3.9kg (8.6lb), putting itself firmly in the same weight class as our non-chambered Les Paul Standard.

Get past that, though, and you'll find the neck profile to be full of personality. This guitar is very similar in appearance to our own Silverburst Fender HSS Mexican

2. The spec sheet is brimming with 2026 must-haves including Schecter-branded locking tuners, a satin-finish neck, extra jumbo stainless-steel frets and more. All of these things combine to make this the sort of guitar that makes life just a little bit easier. It's a rock machine for the second quarter of the century

3. Nick Johnston's signature Atom-Buckers are designed around Alnico III magnets. As such, they're low-output humbuckers offering a big dynamic range and, here, they can be split by the five-way Super Switch for authentic single-coil sounds

4. The body is alder and the neck is wenge, which is known for its added weight compared with maple. There's no getting around it, this thing is heavy. While that might not be an issue for some players, if it is for you then you'll want to find a lighter example than our review model



3



4

Standard Strat, but where the common-or-garden Fender C shape is thinner, this has a little more meat to its shoulders, making it more of a vintage-style palm-filler. The open-grain satin finish lends it an extremely smooth feel that didn't get tacky during our time playing it.

A big departure from F-style tradition comes from the 355.6mm (14-inch) fingerboard radius. Coupled with the jumbo frets, there's no mistaking that this guitar is designed for big bends and the kind of chords that have initials after them. So you might expect a low action to match, but this comes out of the box with a comfortable but not effortless 1.5mm on the bass side at the 12th fret. Of course, this leaves room for some down-tuning, but while it coped perfectly well with drop D, E♭ standard, going much lower began to upset the vibrato in its factory configuration – something that would require a little more tweak time to set perfectly if Mastodon's drop C is your natural home for this guitar.

Tonally, the Traditional is packing some serious punch. While those Alnico III Atom-Buckers aren't likely to intimidate your amp's front-end, they make up for it in clarity and dynamics. Through a Fender Deluxe model on a Neural Quad Cortex, the neck position is big and woody, almost boomy. Meanwhile, the typical S-type



The physics theme continues with the Atomic Mercury finish. To the uninitiated, that's a silverburst, which very much fits the tradition of Johnston's band, Mastodon, and offers a fresh alternative from the warmth of a sunburst or the 50s-style colours of Johnston's other signature guitars

bridge humbucker – which sounds like it's had a studio-style high-pass applied – is replaced with a full-bodied vintage humbucker sound.

The split positions are interesting. Often a 'there if you need it' but sometimes lacking feature, here, the 648mm (25.5-inch) scale adds some real authenticity to the coil-split neck pickup. It dips considerably in level, so you'll probably want to boost it, but if you do, you'll maintain its hollow, spanky single-coil sound nicely. Position 3 on the selector offers coils from both humbuckers and makes for a nice blend of the two split coils: weight from the neck position with clarity from the bridge.

Verdict

This is an unapologetically modern rock guitar, and in that regard it hits the brief perfectly with lots of well thought-out features combining to make everything really quite effortless. Some might miss the second pair of controls, while to others, it's a convenient efficiency that

> While the Atom-Buckers aren't likely to intimidate your amp's front-end, they make up for it in clarity and dynamics

makes taking control of the dynamics on offer from the Atom-Buckers a breeze. Likewise, the vibrato behaves and responds smoothly, but if you're going to be leaving this in a non-standard tuning for the majority of the time, you'll likely want to get it rebalanced. Then there's the weight: if this guitar appeals as a lightweight dual-humbucker replacement, it's definitely worth tracking down a more slight example, if possible.

Sound and playability-wise, though, it's got a lot going for it with high-quality pickups you're unlikely to want to change, and an extremely solid range of appointments that make it tooled-up for its purpose.



SCHECTER NICK JOHNSTON TRADITIONAL HH

PRICE: £1,329
ORIGIN: Indonesia
TYPE: 6-string solidbody electric guitar
BODY: Alder
NECK: Wenge, Nick Johnston "C" profile
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech XL Black Tusq/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, 355.6mm (14") radius
FRETS: 22, jumbo, stainless steel
HARDWARE: Schecter Nouveau locking tuners and 2-point vibrato, nickel
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Schecter Nick Johnston Atom-Bucker humbuckers, 5-way switch w/coil-splitting, master volume, master tone
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.9/8.6
OPTIONS: N/A
RANGE OPTIONS: Schecter Nick Johnston HSS (£948), Schecter Nick Johnston PT (£949)
LEFT-HANDERS: No (HSS and PT models only)
FINISH: Atomic Mercury (as reviewed)

Westside Distribution
0141 2484812
www.schecterguitars.com

8/10

PROS Very capable rock/hard rock tones; playability and setup is decent straight out of the box; it doesn't scream 'signature model'

CONS Our review model is very heavy; drop tunings are made more complicated with the inclusion of the vibrato


EFFECTS EXPANDER EX-4
A NEW DIMENSION TO YOUR BOARD
EX-4
EFFECTS EXPANDER
MIDI
OUT
IN
BOSS
DC IN
USE BOSS PSA ADAPTOR ONLY
L/MONO
R(RETURN)
L/MONO
R(SEND)
CTL 1(3),2(4)/ EXP
INPUT
BOSS
FIND OUT MORE



The signature enamelled and vented steel chassis, with solid metal handle atop, feels satisfyingly solid and substantial, contrary perhaps to its visual impression. The unit's size prohibits a regular IEC connection, so instead it's powered by an external 15-volt power supply



ORANGE BABY TERROR
£199

WHAT IS IT? Single-channel, 20-watt, solid-state micro lunchbox-sized amplifier head

Enfant Terrible

Orange, creator of the lunchbox format, answers the question of 'just how small can a fully fledged 20-watt amplifier get?'

Words Martin Smith **Photography** Lucy Robinson



As a company famed for creating some of the amplifier world's most recognisably oversized heads and cabinets, it seems almost comically perverse to have become synonymous with the other extreme. However, since pioneering its first lunchbox amp, the Tiny Terror, in 2006, the decision to offer a miniature range has been fully validated by the guitar-playing public's response (the late Gary Moore absolutely loved them). Clearly, a great many players were ready for just such a scaled-down, giggable amp, and both the guitar and bass versions are familiar sights on the gigging circuit.

This micro series of even smaller metal chassis-mounted heads reduces the size to the next level of miniaturisation. While the first Orange micro-lunchbox amps incorporated a single 12AX7 valve, this model comes directly from the company's Baby series, in which a single-ended Class A JFET front-end and a solid-state power stage are voiced to mimic valve-like response and clipping. The speaker output delivers the amp's 20 watts as a eight- or 16-ohm load and can happily power 2x12s and 4x12s with ease.

1. Orange provides a switchable solo boost, indicated on the back panel by an image of a foot, making the amp even more of a consideration for gigging musicians who like to be heard at all times

2. For bigger cleans and punchier rhythms, engaging the Tubby switch will boost the size and thump of the low-end. This well-judged bottom-end enhancement avoids becoming overly sub-y

3. The included utterly portable padded gigbag will keep the Baby Terror protected on your travels. With compartments for all the necessary connections, it's a tidy grab-and-go package



1



2

The Baby Terror also brings a three-band EQ to this micro format for extra sonic flexibility, and an effects loop on the rear panel to incorporate delay, reverb or modulation-based effects that might suffer in clarity from being fed into the amp's front-end input. Additionally, the head has a footswitchable second master volume, for solo-boost deployment, for instance. However, you'll have to supply your own footswitch or purchase Orange's FS-1 single-button version (£29.99) as an optional extra.

We also find an XLR DI output on the rear. This doesn't provide a speaker-emulating signal, however, so will necessitate the application of an impulse response (IR) or speaker emulator to get a fully realistic tone from this output. Perhaps this will be more useful for recording the amp into your DAW, where software IRs can be easily employed via plug-ins such as Two Notes' Genome or Tonex from IK Multimedia.

Feel & Sounds

Any assumptions that the sound produced by this diminutive amp might be in any way related to its tiny dimensions are immediately dispelled. With a 1x12 closed-back cab containing one Celestion Greenback hooked up to the single speaker jack, the amp projects the recognisable Orange sound just like the larger units, and we were genuinely impressed by the power it delivers.

The Baby has the signature Orange tone with that distinctive thick midrange depth offset by a sizzling high-end. Its single gain control has a very usable range, beginning with warm cleans that can produce rounded jazz-style sounds with the application of its Tubby switch. This tone-enhancer bolsters the low-end with a punchy quality that doesn't seem to become excessively bottom-heavy. For a more articulate tone, the switch is best in its off position. The usual bottom-end offenders – such as seven-strings and drop-tuned guitars – will likely also benefit from this switch turned off.

Around midway on the gain dial we begin to approach the edge of break-up, certainly with our humbucker-equipped guitar, and we're met with an abundance of surprisingly lively overtones for a solid-state circuit: presumably the Class A JFET is responsible for a larger portion of this. AC/DC riffs sounded classic enough through the Baby to get carried away with, yet there is more fun to be had opening out the gain control further. By 6 or 7 we start to hear that fat yet grindy tone Orange is known for, where riffs and powerchords resonate with aggressive gain. With the gain fully cranked, it's game on for modern metal tone.



3



The effects loop preserves clarity, while the balanced line-out enables studio-ready direct recording. The line-out isn't a speaker-emulated signal so will require the addition of an IR or an emulation of some sort

The unique sound character that differentiates this manufacturer has been variously described as grinding, mid-heavy, savage and crispy. Perhaps the essence of this, if you are more familiar with Marshall amps, would be to imagine an extra layer of grainy sizzle that doesn't require a heavy pick attack. The three-band EQ gives us a fair degree of tweakability, too. Dipping the mids and boosting some treble gets into the shred-era sound, whereas some weightier, doomier sounds were achieved with the Tubby switch engaged.

The speaker cabinet you choose to pair this with will have a large part to play in the resulting sound. A Celestion A-Type or V30 would open out the top-end further and may suit less saturated styles. However, we were more than happy with the Celestion Greenback as a tonal match for the Baby.

Verdict

Once experienced, this amp will defy many expectations. It produces enough volume to rehearse with your band (unless you have 'one of those' drummers), record, practise at home or, heck, even to gig, subject to the room and PA. The tone itself is as good a rendition of the classic Orange grinding overdrive as we could expect, especially from a sub-£200 unit that fits in one's hand. If you can arrange for a cabinet to be supplied at your intended musical destination, you could enjoy the easiest load-in you'll remember. In fact, it's quite likely your pedalboard will be promoted to the largest, heaviest rig component. The supplied gigbag – comparable to the size of a camera bag, with all the slots to stow the power adaptor and perhaps a speaker lead (not included) – completes this tidy package.

The Baby Terror projects the recognisable Orange sound just like the larger units – the power it delivers is impressive

While your local traditional repair person is unlikely to be equipped to service the micro-componentry contained within the Baby's circuit should anything go wrong outside of its two-year warranty, the unit appears well constructed with all controls and fittings tightly secured to the robust metal chassis, so hopefully this will not be required.

The combination of affordability, portability and great sound make this amp worthy of consideration even for guitarists who might not be looking for such a micro-sized amp, since it can do the job of a great many larger and more expensive units. Oh, and, of course, there's also the comedy value of sitting this on top of a 4x12.



ORANGE BABY TERROR

PRICE: £199
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Solid-state micro head
VALVES: None
OUTPUT: 20W
DIMENSIONS: 165 (w) x 140 (d) x 100mm (h)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.5/3.31
CABINET: Metal
LOUDSPEAKER: None
CHANNELS: 1
CONTROLS: FS Volume, Volume, Gain, Tubby Switch, Presence, Treble, Middle, Bass
FOOTSWITCH: Not included
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Gigbag
OPTIONS: FS-1 single-button footswitch (£29.99)
RANGE OPTIONS: Micro Terror (£139) and Micro Dark (£179)

Orange
020 8905 2828
https://orangeamps.com

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS A 20-watt amp that fits in the palm of your hand is already a massive pro, especially with its included 'camera-bag' sized gigbag; real-deal Orange tone

CONS A Bright switch would be the only feature that would make this even more usable for adding extra sparkle to the clean tones



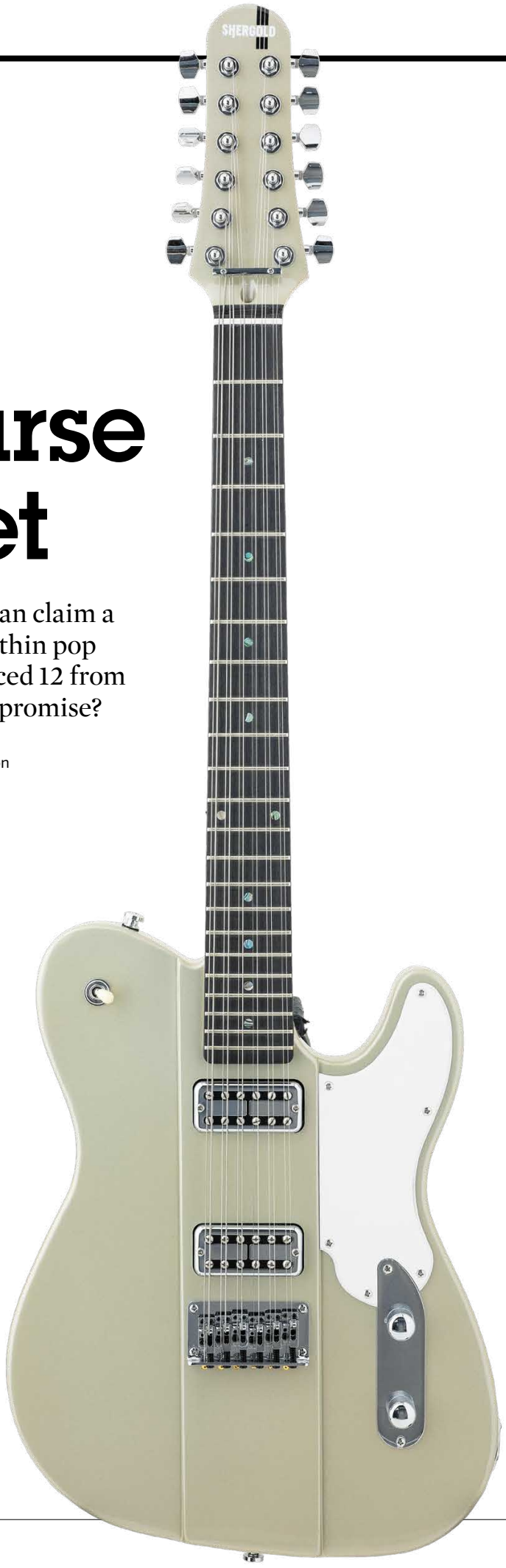
SHERGOLD TELSTAR ST14 STANDARD 12-STRING
£409

WHAT IS IT? Solidbody electric XII featuring an offset poplar body with raised centre section and FilterSonic pickups

Six-Course Banquet

The electric 12-string guitar can claim a long and illustrious history within pop music. But can this keenly priced 12 from Shergold uphold that pristine promise?

Words Neville Marten **Photography** Lucy Robinson



There's an old gag that goes something like: "Did you hear about the 12-string guitarist? Spent half the time tuning up and the other half playing out of tune!" And while that probably relates to semi-unplayable, non-intonatable 12-string acoustics from a bygone era, it's nonetheless true that there's something a little scary about even an attractive modern electric 12 like the one you see before you.

However, before we even start this review let us say that we'd played the Telstar 12 through our Tone King amp pedal with delay and chorus for at least an hour before checking its price. What a shocker! In the back of our head was a likely street figure of around £1,199, but to then discover the Telstar's meagre £409 price tag left the jaw somewhat dangling. From the outset there's absolutely nothing about our Champagne Gold metallic Shergold that screams 'budget'. So let's delve deeper.

Built in China but designed here in the UK by master luthier Patrick James Eggle and set up in distributor Barnes & Mullins' workshops before shipping, the Telstar range – which includes six-string and left-handed models, too – does definitely not reek of cheapo. Its slightly offset Cabronita





1. Shergold's two-string bridge is a clever way of dealing with two sets of wires, with the main (low) set strung through the body, and the high six anchored in the rise of the bridge base itself

body style is most attractive, enhanced further by the Gibson Firebird-influenced raised centre section (also used by Neil Ivison on his similarly good-looking Dakota model), and dressed-away heel.

Poplar is the chosen body timber, while the neck is maple with a 355.6mm (14-inch) fingerboard of dark laurel, which most would confuse for rosewood given its dark colour and close, uniform grain. The 'board is unbound but carries 22 medium frets and pretty abalone dot inlays. At the matching Champagne Gold headstock we find a dozen enclosed tuners, a 44mm faux bone nut, chrome string retainer that captures all 12 wires, the truss rod adjustment point, and sharp '60s-style logo with three vertical black lines transecting the horizontal white Shergold script. All in all, it's a very attractive guitar, and although forearm and belly cuts may well have been welcome, each extra nicety inevitably nudges that final price northwards.

2. Single volume and tones allow a range of sounds to be fine-tuned. This control plate, although used on Cabronita-style guitars, originally came from Fender's 1951 Precision Bass

It's amazing how things that sound quite bland on a six-string gain a more musical, ethereal character on a 12



Electrics and hardware-wise, it's a simple affair, and that's a blessing when confronting something as potentially daunting as a 12-string with all its inherent playing compromises. Twin FilterSonic humbuckers are controlled by 500k volume and tone pots, plus a shoulder-mounted three-way toggle, while the bridge is a clever affair with the six main strings anchored sensibly through the body, and the complementary high half dozen attached to the bridge base itself. There's an individually adjustable saddle for each string, so one big bugbear of the 12-string – the dreaded issue of tuneless intonation – is eliminated right off the bat.



Eggle/Shergold has decided to opt for the traditional 'thin strings on the top of each octave pair, and unison first and second courses', rather than the Rickenbacker scheme, which reverses the four octave pairs. Back in the day, Gibson preferred three sets of unison unwounds and a trio of octaves, so you see even the stringing regimen can be a source of confusion. We concur with Shergold, though, that, overall, this way is best.

Final considerations include the attractive white ABS pickguard, four recessed neck bolts, chrome Cabronita/early Precision Bass-style control plate, and chrome strap buttons. So far the Telstar ST14 Standard 12-string delivers wholly positive first impressions.

Feel & Sounds

Of all the mountains that latter-day 12-string players had to climb, a particularly formidable one was an action that could instantly blunt player enthusiasm, and even for an especially intrepid student, cow the most ardent of fretting hands.

Having spent that hour or so of picking, strumming and arpeggiating all our best-loved Beatles, Byrds, Who, Tom Petty, REM and Smiths licks, it's safe to say that this is a very rewarding instrument to play. The action is super low (some might raise the treble side a little, but since this reviewer plays quite lightly, potential upper-fret rattle was not an issue), so barre chords – the bane of every acoustic 12-string strummer – don't require the vice-like pressure you might expect.

Since it's best to use arched fretting fingers to avoid accidental choking off of adjacent strings, a good filing of the nails ensured that notes all rang loud and clear. The wide nut certainly helps, but you will need to be as accurate as possible with your fretting. And that's no bad thing, is it?

It's amazing how things that sound quite bland on a six-string gain an

3. We've moaned about manufacturers fitting a dozen heavy cast tuners to their 12-strings, but here it doesn't cause neck heaviness. A single bar retains all 12 strings, and we love the mod-style headstock logo



4. Four recessed screws hold the neck in place at the attractive offset heel, while the six ferrules holding the main string-set's ball ends provide maximum tone transfer where it's needed



Twin FilterSonic pickups supply a wealth of toneful, jangly tones that kept us picking and strumming for hours. Note the very dark laurel fingerboard, too – a great rosewood substitute

altogether more musical, even ethereal character on a 12. It's immense fun just piddling about until you find something a bit special. Think how many tunes owe their catchiness to a 12 – *Mr Tambourine Man*, *Eight Days A Week*, *William, It Was Really Nothing*, and so many more. Yours next, perhaps?

Every FilterSonic selection, neck, bridge or both, yields a plethora of beguiling, jangly sounds. Each time you think, 'Ah, this pickup is the one,' you flip the toggle and it's, 'No, this is it.' Add delay and even a bit of extra shimmer from the chorus, as we did on our Strymon Brig, and honestly this thing can steal hours of the day away. One great trick we discovered was switching on the Fulltone OCD distortion: rather than create the confusing mosh that we almost expected, it actually seemed to fatten the thin strings to create a punchy, double-tracked crunch rhythm effect. Such fabulous fun! A good tuner is a must, though, as trying to do it by ear is like painting the proverbial Forth Bridge – never-ending.

Verdict

Having not spent time with an electric 12-string in as long as we care to remember, this one proved a revelation. Everything about it belies that £409 price tag, and you'd doubtless get it even cheaper online. Only two colours are available, this one and black in the 12-string Telstar range, and we'd love to have seen Sunburst, Lake Placid Blue or Candy Apple Red on the roster. But that's no big deal. The action was a little too low on the treble side at the high frets, and our rear pickup did arrive hanging off its screw on the bass side – a one-minute fix, but both these issues seem surprising on an otherwise wholly brilliant guitar.

> This 12 has brought more joy and musical adventure than any new guitar this old muso has met in a long time

The Telstar plays almost effortlessly, and its twin FilterSonic pickups provide a wealth of genuinely superb sounds. Plus it looks and feels like an instrument costing three times more.

Please excuse the effusiveness, but this review has brought more joy and musical adventure than any new guitar that this gnarly old muso has met in a long while. It feels a bit mean docking a point for tiny setup niggles that required the most minor attention, but in every other respect the Shergold Telstar ST Standard 12-String is more than worthy of its *Guitarist* Choice accolade. Now, "Shergold dealers near me..." G



SHERGOLD TELSTAR STANDARD ST14 12-STRING

PRICE: £409
ORIGIN: Designed in the UK by Patrick James Eggle, built in China
TYPE: Lightly offset Cabronita-style solidbody electric 12-string
BODY: Poplar, with raised centre section
NECK: Maple, medium C profile
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/44mm
FINGERBOARD: Laurel, 356mm (14") radius with m-o-p dot inlays
FRETS: 22 hard nickel, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Fixed S-style bridge with 6 through-body, 6 through-bridge string fixing, rim mounted jack socket; knurled nickel knobs on chrome plate
TUNERS: Closed gear, 6-a-side
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 60mm
ELECTRICS: 2x FilterSonic humbuckers, 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way selector switch
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.6/8
OPTIONS: N/A
RANGE OPTIONS: 6-string Telstar (£379) and left-hand model (£379, 6-string only) available in Black, Orange, Blue and Champagne Gold
LEFT-HANDERS: Only on 6-string version
FINISH: High-gloss Champagne Gold (as reviewed), Black

Barnes & Mullins
01691 652449
www.shergoldguitars.com

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS A fantastically inspiring guitar that will give hours of pleasure; brilliant sounds, great playability and sharp looks

CONS Action a little low at around 12th fret, so hard picking can induce rattle; bass side of bridge pickup was off its screw so needed fixing

TEKTON



ONE FAMILY. FOUR MODELS.

The PRS Tekton: For players who demand precision, clarity, consistency, and character. Key specs include a sculpted heel, stainless-steel frets, 16” fretboard radius, pickups made to drive tube amps and digital rigs, and more. If you haven’t played a Tekton yet, experience one for yourself at your preferred PRS dealer.

PRS PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS®



CRAZY TUBE CIRCUITS WHITE WHALE JUNIOR
£256

WHAT IS IT? A compact version of the company's fully analogue reverb and tremolo pedal

Make A Splash

Crazy Tube Circuits puts the three-spring reverb assembly from its White Whale V2 into an even smaller chassis

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Olly Curtis

1. Soft-click footswitches should help stop you from inadvertently triggering spring clangs. Meanwhile, the Tremolo LED pulses in time with its speed
2. This control sets the master volume of the tremolo section. It's crucial to combat any perceived loss in volume when the tremolo effect is engaged
3. The 'Dwell' name dates back to Fender's first outboard reverb unit. This knob controls the strength of the signal going into the power amplifier that drives the spring tank assembly

When we reviewed Crazy Tube Circuits' White Whale V2 in 2024, we concluded that it was the perfect remedy for any amp that doesn't have onboard reverb and tremolo. That sweet combination of tremolo and spring reverb closely associated with vintage Fender amps is something that still has currency today, and CTC's shoehorning of a real spring into the V2 chassis gave players who wanted it the chance to have the real thing on their 'boards, rather than a digital emulation.

The chunky dimensions of the V2, however, meant that it wasn't going to be a hit with everyone, especially those looking to keep a really compact pedalboard. So CTC's next task was to fit its spring tank into an even smaller chassis – the White Whale Junior – which the brand describes as "possibly the world's smallest fully analog[ue], real spring reverb and amp-style tremolo".

Now, the Junior is by no means tiny as it still houses the same three-spring reverb assembly as its sibling. But it does so in a much more pedalboard-friendly format with all the connectivity in the best place and the separate footswitches for tremolo and reverb right where you'd want them. There are, of course, compromises to be made from the larger machine. There is just one tremolo voice here, which is a hybrid of optical and tube bias styles, and one reverb type, which has the V2's long decay setting combined with the EQ of the medium decay setting. There's also a fixed order of the effects, with the spring reverb sitting before the tremolo stage, which is okay by us as it mirrors traditional Fender brown- and black-panel amplifier architecture.

You'll find the expected Speed and Intensity controls for the tremolo, there are Dwell, Mix and Tone knobs for the reverb, plus each effect gets its own Volume knob, both with enough grunt to engender a substantial boost, if desired. Individually, the pedal delivers gorgeous pulsating tremolo and useful reverb variations with Mix setting the amount added to the signal, Dwell adjusting intensity, and Tone building in brightness as required. However, it really shines with the dimensional quality of the composite sound when both effects are active.

Verdict

It doesn't have the flexibility of its V2 sibling, but the White Whale Junior is all about size. If it has to be a real spring for you and you have limited pedalboard space, you might just have found the ideal solution. G



THE RIVALS

The obvious alternative would be the more fully equipped White Whale V2 (£299), which adds selectable tremolo modes and reverb sizes, and choice of effect order. There are other real spring reverb pedals around, though none we're aware of also provide tremolo. Take a look at the (actually smaller) Danelectro Spring King Junior (£173), Surfy Industries SurfyBear Metal (£239), Carl Martin Headroom (£207), Echo Fix EF-P2 (£349), and Anasounds/Third Man La Grotte (£300). For tremolo with reverb you'd have to look at digital pedals such as the Strymon Flint V2 (£315) or the Fender Tre-Verb (£219).



CRAZY TUBE CIRCUITS WHITE WHALE JUNIOR

PRICE: £256
ORIGIN: Greece
TYPE: Spring reverb and tremolo
FEATURES: True bypass, selectable power-up bypass state
CONTROLS: Tremolo: Volume, Speed, Intensity; Reverb: Volume, Dwell, Mix, Tone; Tremolo footswitch, Reverb footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 110mA
DIMENSIONS: 83 (w) x 154 (d) x 68mm (h)

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

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Spring reverb and tremolo in one pedal; compact size (for a spring reverb); easy to operate; separate volume controls for tremolo and reverb

CONS Proximity to strong magnetic fields like power transformers can affect the pedal; no remote switching facility



JHS PEDALS COYOTE
£119

WHAT IS IT? An octave fuzz that replicates a rare US pedal from lesser-known US maker GS Wyllie

1

2

New Moon

As JHS Pedals resurrects an extremely elusive American fuzz, we take the 'Wyllie' Coyote for a run on the road

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Matt Lincoln

1. This Volume control sets the output volume from zero but is interactive with the adjacent knob. You'll probably want to turn it up when the other control is fully in the octave zone
2. Bright yellow knobs and a coyote howling at the moon – what's not to like?
3. The Swell/Fuzz/Octave knob sweeps continuously through three distinct zones, each one offering a different aspect of fuzz

New versions of extremely rare or long-lost fuzz/distortion pedals seem to be coming out of the woodwork recently. Last issue we took a look at the Electro-Harmonix version of the Percolator, and it's not long since we reviewed their Big Muff 2, based on a schematic discovered by Josh Scott of JHS Pedals. Now, Josh is at it again with the Coyote – a complete replication of the rare-as-rocking-horse-droppings Moonrock Fuzz by the late GS Wyllie, a reclusive maker from North Carolina. If this vintage pedal's not on your radar, you're not alone. But you may have heard it in action as it was apparently used by NYC guitarist Mark Stewart who has been Paul Simon's musical director for many years, as well as playing with other luminaries. The original Moonrock pedal, with an enclosure shaped and indented like a meteorite, was hand-built by Glenn and never went into mass production. But now those exact sounds are available for all.

Like many vintage fuzz circuits, this one needs to sit at the front of your signal chain with the guitar plugged directly in. Set the Coyote's Volume knob to suit (there's plenty above unity gain for a bit of a boost) and set your voicing with the other knob, which traverses three distinct arcs marked Swell, Fuzz and Octave, and works somewhat like the bias knobs you can find on other fuzz pedals.

If you just hit a note or chord hard in the Swell area it comes over like gated sputtery fuzz, but it's actually a sound that will respond to picking dynamics. With a more nuanced approach you can get the sound to swell in and bloom violin-style; it's not unlike a reverse tape effect and can be really expressive, especially when on the neck pickup. Around midway on the knob you get thick, midrange-heavy conventional sustain-y fuzz displaying great clean-up with guitar volume. Turn the knob further clockwise and the fuzz thins out with an unmistakable upper octave creeping in. It's lovely raucous octave fuzz that'll also give you sitar-like sounds if you roll your volume back a touch and dig in with your attack.

Verdict

As always, it's great to see a revival of genuine tones from unobtanium pedals. And with circuitry utilising a transformer in an unconventional way, this is a different flavour of fuzz that deserves to be played. G



PHOTO: JHS PEDALS

JHS PEDALS COYOTE

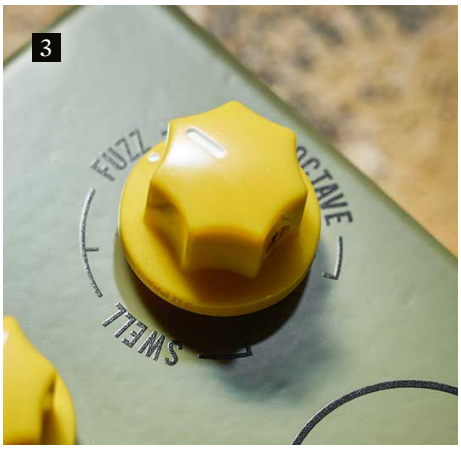
PRICE: £119
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Octave fuzz pedal
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Volume, Swell/Fuzz/Octave, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 5mA
DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 121 (d) x 52mm (h)

JHS Pedals
www.jhspedals.info

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Revival of a rare and obscure pedal for the wider market; compact size; great clean-up; touch-sensitivity; flexibility through three distinct sounds

CONS A bit niche, perhaps



THE RIVALS

Electro-Harmonix's Percolator (£99, right) is a new take on another rare, obscure pedal, long championed by Steve Albini, while the Danelectro 3699 Fuzz (£169) is a modern recreation of the iconic 1970s Foxx Tone Machine octave-fuzz pedal by its original designer. With graphics similar to the Coyote, the Fredric Effects Grumbly Wolf (£140) is a highly versatile combined distortion, fuzz, octave and ring mod effect. If you have a bit more to spend and want some wild sounds, Keeley describes its Octa Psi Transfigurating Fuzz (£259) as "the ultimate combination of polyphonic pitch-shifter, octave generator and analog[ue] fuzz".



The Electro-Harmonix Percolator revives a 70s cult classic



the Wishlist

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

Hammett H540 Commodore Semi-Hollow £3,250

CONTACT **Hammett Guitar Co** PHONE **+44 (0)7595 772121** WEB **www.hammettguitarco.com** WORDS **Jamie Dickson** PHOTOGRAPHY **Lucy Robinson**

There's been a glut of trendy offsets on the market for the past few years now, but every now and then one goes beyond a simple reinterpretation of a Jazzmaster body and taps into something more intriguing via some near-forgotten guitar heritage. This is just the sort of stringed arcana that Somerset-based luthier Pat Hammett thrives on – and the origin story of his latest electric model took him to the far side of the world, he says.

"It's called the H540 Commodore. The inspiration came from a chap online, Robert Hart, whose Instagram handle is @lostincrystalcanyons. He's based in New Zealand and he's a collector of old mid-century guitars, amplifiers and effects, and he owns a guitar called a Commodore that originated from New Zealand. Only a handful of these guitars were ever made, but he has a couple different versions. So it's an almost unique guitar, probably made by one guy in his shed in New Zealand in the 60s, and there are lots of borrowed components from the Matons of the time. There was a Milton vibrato, the tuning pegs, some of the toggle switches and stuff like that.

"Anyway, the silhouette of the H540 Commodore was based on that original New Zealand guitar. Now Robert is a photographer as well and he very kindly mapped the guitar from point to point with rulers and tapes, so I could trace the outline and get the proportions correct for this guitar," Pat adds. "So it was kind of a project between the two of us that started a couple of years ago. But I think he's a pretty busy chap and he lives on the other side of the world, so I took it onwards myself, and this guitar was the prototype."

This particular example is a hollowbody with a stylised vintage f-hole, like other Hammett models.

"Typically, when I come up with a new model, I try making a solid and a chambered version, and so this is the first prototype of the chambered one. It's got a mahogany body and the neck is mahogany as well, but it's got an ebony 'board," Pat says.

"Gold Foils are always my go-to, just because they're not for everyone, and for the string definition and fidelity. They behave in certain ways that are a little unpredictable. Some people don't like that. Personally, [those are] the guitars that make me fall in love with music and blues and rock 'n' roll – yeah, they're sort of woven into that period of time."

So if you want a standout offset with genuine 60s roots, consider adding a Commodore to your fleet. G

1. Styled after that of a long-forgotten New Zealand electric, the headstock looks surprisingly classic – a little like a less bulbously proportioned Tyler Guitars peghead

2. The parts, both plastic and metal, are hand-aged by Pat to look like they've been played in for decades

3. They may look like Filter'Trons, but these Mojo PIckups units have Gold Foil-style internals so that edgy, slightly janky vintage tone is here in spades – and the guitar sounds glorious with a little drive









4. The neck is mahogany, with a bound ebony fretboard that features large pearl dots in an attractive offset pattern that runs along the top edge of the 'board

5. A Bigsby replaces the Maton-derived vibrato of the obscure New Zealand electric upon which the Commodore is based

5. The guitar's three-piece f-holes recall those of vintage Harmony electrics, adding another evocative styling cue. The body is built from chambered mahogany; Pat will also be releasing a fully solid version for a reduced price of £2,950

THE LINEUP

Gas Supply

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

Fender American Professional series From £1,799

CONTACT **Fender Musical Instruments EMEA** WEB **www.fender.com**

JARGON CRUNCHING

Series Wiring

A regular guitar with multiple pickups usually has each pickup wired in parallel: each pickup is sending a discrete output to the control section. In series, the pickups are wired end-to-end, feeding the next pickup in the series with its signal. The result is increased output and power with a fatter tone, but can result in a reduced high-end.

Meet the new Fenders... Let me guess, same as the old Fenders?

Spare a thought for the guys in the Fender design room, who every year have to take on the challenge of reinventing the wheels that have driven a huge part of electric guitar since their inception. Here, we have the latest Fender American Professional series, which replaces the Fender American Professional II.

So what are these? *American Professional III: This Time It's Copyrighted*?

Ouch. No, and we're not talking about that, either. You'll notice there are no 'trilogy' markings here, just the simple branding of the series, which we believe is a bid to remove some of the confusion surrounding what – as you've already pointed out – is a rather congested product line-up.

So, if you weren't already aware, these guitars are the second rung on the entry-point ladder into American-made Fenders, sitting above the American Professional Classic and below the Ultra/Ultra Luxe, which are the US-made performance guitars for cutting-edge specs. American Vintage II are the ones to go for if you want an old-school-style Fender.

Got it. So these are the workhorses for people who want a US-made Fender?

Correct. And rather than leaning too much in either modern or vintage direction, these borrow from both camps to come up with a well-rounded set of features. As such, we get a pretty decent spread of models: two Stratocasters (SSS from £1,799; HSS from £1,899), a pair of Teles (SS from £1,799; Hotshot from £1,849), plus fans of offsets are furnished with a Jaguar and Jazzmaster (both £1,899).

What's different about them, then?

There are a number of changes for the tail end of 2026, namely with hardware, pickup and electronics tweaks.

Hardware, pickups and electronics? That just leaves the wood!

True! But this isn't a blanket 'change everything' overhaul; it's more focused and targeted where Fender clearly believes it counts. Starting with the hardware, every guitar has a new bridge design. The Stratocasters use ClassicGear Radial saddles, which feature recessed height-adjustment screws for a flush, comfortable hand position. The Telecasters use Bullet saddles with grooves for the strings and a smooth surface. And the news that will impress the offset fans the most? The Jag and Jazzmaster have a new bridge, too! The ClassicGear J-Bridge moves away from the often-temperamental bridge designs for a derivative of the revered Fender Custom Shop RSD bridge, which could be the answer to decades of offset frustrations.

NEW PROFESSIONAL

Fender's American Professional range sits at the more affordable end of its US-made offerings. Here, Fender has overhauled the line-up with a number of improvements based on tone and playability

ELECTRONICS

The V-Mod III pickups have been rethought with units targeted at the specific model they're going into, rather than a templated design for all the guitars. The outcome is a variation in magnet types and wire gauges voiced specifically for that guitar

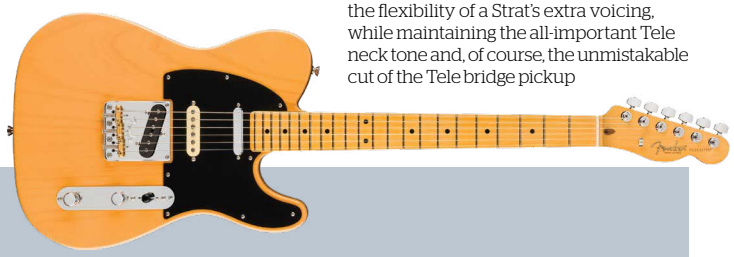
CONTROLS

As well as reworking the taper and feel of the pots themselves, each guitar in the American Professional range has a push-push tone control that adds an additional voice. Series wiring, coil-tapping and pickup combinations beyond the realms of the selector switch are all on the menu, depending on which model you buy



PHOTOS COURTESY OF FENDER





TELE OPTIONS
The Hotshot Tele (below) takes the 'Nashville' approach of adding a third pickup in the middle position, unlocking the flexibility of a Strat's extra voicing, while maintaining the all-important Tele neck tone and, of course, the unmistakable cut of the Tele bridge pickup

What's going on with the pickups?

Fender's Justin Norvell told our colleagues at *Guitar World*: "String balance and clarity were the main changes." That manifests itself with magnets staggered to reflect the radius of each fretboard more closely, with the result being greater separation between each string. Similarly, it's not a one-size-fits-all approach, with different magnet types being utilised, tailored to each model. The HSS Stratocaster employs two different wire gauges for each coil, along with winding-pitch variants to enhance clarity.

Interesting. What about the wiring configuration, then?

The pots have been upgraded to ClassicGear Precision Potentiometers for "custom torque, precise resistance and a musical taper". Each model features push-push tone controls that introduce additional voices. On the Strat and three-pickup Hotshot Tele it brings the neck pickup in for positions 1 and 2, on the Tele you get both pickups in series, and for the Jazzmaster and Jaguar, it introduces a coil-tap to the bridge pickup.

Bet they come with a price bump, too?

Nope, these are actually listed at the same street prices we're currently seeing on the outgoing American Pro II series. They're available now and we'll be putting them through their paces soon. **[SW]**





ALSO OUT NOW...

BOSS KATANA 25 £202



PHOTO COURTESY OF BOSS

Unbelievably, it's been 10 years since Boss launched the Katana digital amps. Now it's bowed to the will of players and retailers worldwide with the introduction of the Katana 25: a home amp the brand thinks will keep new and returning guitarists busy for years. The core features include Boss's Tube Logic modelling, with six voices ranging from the pristine Acoustic through to the gain-soaked Brown, each one featuring a variation for 12 voices in total. There are 60 effects, with five selectable at once, and native Bluetooth means you can connect your phone instantly. But things get smarter with the revamped Tone Studio app for iOS and Android. With a redesigned UI, it's easier to navigate your tone-shaping, and Boss has built-in the ability to browse YouTube, complete with its own playalong videos featuring tab, tone automation and looping/speed adjust settings.
www.boss.info

STRYMON LA BREA £199



PHOTO COURTESY OF STRYMON

It's a well-known fact that the preamp of tape-based echo effects can translate into some stellar drive sounds. So, for its latest release, Strymon has revisited the design of its Deco pedal and formulated the La Brea, an all-analogue, tape-style drive in its Series A range that can take your signal from a warm, compressed boost through to gritty fuzz territory. There are controls for Saturation and Level, as well as a Dry blend control for mixing-in your original signal. As well as this, you get two selectable options for the saturation range (normal and high), plus a preset Shift toggle offering High, Flat and Mid tonal shaping. Being part of the A Series, there's no MIDI, USB or digital component, just a good ol' analogue gain source that's been over a decade in the making.
www.strymon.net

THE LINEUP

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: Parker Barrow

Album: Hold The Mash (The Album) (EAG Music)



Hold The Mash (The Album) by Nashville Southern rockers Parker Barrow is out now on EAG Music. Find out more at **weareparkerbarrow.com**

Megan Kane (centre) started Parker Barrow with husband Dylan Turner (second from right) in 2019, with band leader Alex Bender (far right) joining in 2023

Fast becoming one of the most talked-about names in Southern rock, Nashville-based Parker Barrow return this year with their second full-length recording, *Hold The Mash (The Album)*, which expands on their 2025 EP of the same name. The group (which was named after the outlaws Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow) was started in 2019 by Megan Kane and Dylan Turner and eventually became a six-piece with guitarist and musical director Alex Bender joining in 2023. If you ever wondered what The Black Crowes would sound like with Janis Joplin on vocals, here's your chance.

Page Turner

Every guitarist has that one player who inspired them. For Alex Bender, it was Jimmy Page – the Led Zeppelin legend who "opened the door" to guitar when Alex was still in high school. "I remember hearing *Kashmir* and it was such an experience," he says. "It made me stop and ask, 'What is this?' That's when it dawned on me that a guitar player could create a whole world. His music became sacred to me like a Bible. I then dedicated my life to heavy blues guitar, and started tracing Jimmy's influences, looking into players like Gene Vincent and Cliff Gallup.

"Later, I got into The Allman Brothers," Alex continues. "There's that 20-minute version of *You Don't Love Me* on *At Fillmore East* with that long guitar break where Dickey Betts plays what people call his 'impossible guitar lick'. It's the coolest thing ever."



PHOTO BY JOEDELTUFO

Earn Your Stripes

Not many guitarists can say they ended up becoming the musical director of a band they didn't start. Alex explains how that came to be and why it all came down to perseverance and patience. "I wanted to show I was invested in the group, so we spent time touring and I learned everything for the first album, playing it true to what had been written," he reveals. "Then an opportunity came along, a re-release of an early song, and I was asked if I wanted to come in. It went so well and I showed some of my own songs to Dylan who liked what he heard. We were off to the races from there. Coming into it, I had to respect what was there and pay my dues."

Tones On Tap

For the recordings, Alex used gear owned by producer Stephen McKnight. "He had everything so dialled in, it made sense," he says. "I'm a Gibson guy and there were lot of Les Pauls and SGs that were wired with the Jimmy Page push/pull thing. That coil-tapping was used to cut out frequencies and help it sit better. For the solos, I used this new ES Supreme in Blueberry Burst, which just sings with this phenomenal sustain. The amps were mainly Victory, Friedman and a modded JCM800. Everything lived in that EL34 Marshall world. But there was a little bit of amp modelling. Page went direct into the 1176 for *Black Dog*. If he did it, it must be okay."

Southern Charm

With so many Southern rock influences at play, Alex believes an understanding of both minor and major pentatonic scales is fundamental to his style. Knowing which 3rd to play and when is something he learned from the greats. "All my favourite players, from Billy Gibbons to Derek Trucks, do this to different levels," he says. "Derek is more major than Billy, while Duane Allman was more minor, but then Dickey Betts was very major. A lot of it comes down to knowing when to throw in which 3rd. Page is amazing at that. When you hear him on *Since I've Been Loving You*, he knows exactly which notes to target for more colour without going into jazz. Stepping outside the blues to introduce different modal flavours is important. It can create tension and emotion, provided you don't overdo it." **[AS]**

Standout track: *Make It*
For fans of: The Black Crowes, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Janis Joplin



PEDAL POWER

Alex names the one pedal he just couldn't live without

Though he has deep admiration for the Keith Richards method of plugging a five-string guitar into a cranked combo, there are a handful of pedals that Alex Bender relies on, including the Boss Harmonist and ModTone Harmonic Tremor. But the one that rules the roost actually comes down to practicality: "My Marshall JCM800 is loud, so I use my Electro-Harmonix LPB-1 reissue as a booster," he says. "It's an old late-60s circuit. I leave it on the whole time to push my signal so it breaks up earlier. Tonally, the chip also helps me stand out and cut through, which is important when you have another guitar and keyboards."

PHOTO BY MARK LEAR

THE LINEUP

Albums

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



PHOTO BY KEVIN WESTENBERG

Steven Wilson explores the flaws and beauty of "human gestures" using analogue synths and playing violin, oboe and the drums alongside guitar

Steven Wilson

Requiem For A Village

Fiction Records (available now)

Guitarist CHOICE



The modern prog hero channels vintage folk-horror

For his ninth solo record, progressive-rock mastermind Steven Wilson set himself the task of scoring a human reaction to the digital world of predictability that surrounds us. He also chose to narrow down the conceptual scope from the infinity of space explored on 2025's *The Overview* to a sleepy corner of the UK, inspired by the eerie locations immortalised through the cult horrors of yesteryear, including David Gladwell's 1975 film of the same name.

Scottish actor David Tennant sets the scene with narrations throughout the 12 tracks, his words enveloped by the unsettling discordance of warbling acoustic guitars and mellotrons on opener *Swirl In A Lark's Eye*. The title track picks up the pace with a sonic urgency and directness that lives closer to Wilson's work in Porcupine Tree, its crunchy guitars and driving rhythms placated by the cinematic brilliance of *The Same River Twice*.

Wilson's exploitation of dynamics amazes just as much as his songwriting – these compositions build with a sense of magnificence that will have listeners reaching for their headphones to experience everything to full effect. If you're looking for fretboard heroics, Randy McStine shines above the restlessness of *Now Departing* with some frenetic wah lines, and on *Wheel* a sustainer effect is employed to allow some beautifully chosen notes to ring into oblivion. Throughout its 54 minutes, *Requiem For A Village* is a brilliantly unnerving masterpiece that feels immersive and ambitious in the way only its creator could have conceived. **[AS]**

Standout track: *Now Departing*
For fans of: Porcupine Tree, Radiohead, The National

Chris Corcoran Band

The Burner

For The Road Records (available now)



Jump blues quality from top UK player

Recorded in the Netherlands at Natural Records Studio in the city of Sibculo, new album *The Burner* sees award-winning jump blues guitarist Chris Corcoran enlist the help of Dutch rhythm section comprising Peter ten Wolde (drums) and Walter Wilhelm (bass) alongside his regular horn section of Lee Badau and Mike Austin to lay down 10 tracks of era-evoking bluesy jazz. It's the sort of music that wouldn't sound out of place on film noir detective movie soundtracks of the 1940s and 50s, and the ensemble pulls it off with amazing panache. There are shades of Louis Jordan, Big Joe Turner and T-Bone Walker on tracks like *Headline Blues* or the upbeat *Down With It*, the latter featuring a great guitar solo. Chris has already received a stack of well-deserved awards over the years and we hope that *The Burner* will add a few more. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Vino Collapso*
For fans of: Louis Jordan, T-Bone Walker

BB King

The Montreux Years

BMG (available 20 November)



Classic live performances on new compilation

It's safe to say that we can never have too much BB King, and this live collection, drawn from the blues legend's myriad appearances at the Montreux Jazz Festival over the years, adds yet another chapter to a truly remarkable career. Available in various packages including double-vinyl, the double-CD version's 15 tracks are drawn from nine of the aforementioned sets, recorded between 1982 and 2000, and have been fully restored and remastered from the original tapes in close collaboration with BB's estate. All but one of the tracks here (1993's performance of *All Over Again*) are previously unreleased, and feature some fiery and inspirational playing from the master on tracks like the eternal *The Thrill Is Gone*, plus hardy perennials like *Rock Me Baby* and *Let The Good Times Roll*. But every track stands as a masterclass in touch, tone and technique from one of the greatest players in blues history. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Blues In A*
For fans of: Freddie King, Albert King



Love in all its forms is in the spotlight on Joanne Shaw Taylor's latest

PHOTO BY ALYSSE GAFKJEN

Joanne Shaw Taylor

The Trouble With Love

Journeyman Records (available now)



Brum gunslinger wears shattered heart on sleeve

Joanne Shaw Taylor's 11th studio album explores love in all its thousand shades, from first flush to the toxic fallout from a wrong 'un (*Bad Boy*'s greasy tremolo shudder). For an artist hailed as a standard-bearer for modern blues, this new material thinks bigger than 12-bar dogma. The Old West-sounding *Hell Or High Water* feels as ominous as riding a covered wagon through the badlands. The stormy *This Is Who I Am* is a descending-scale Bond theme evoking naked silhouettes shot from revolvers, while you wouldn't bet against a crossover for *Tired Of Being Right* (a dream-state soul ballad whose effervescent guitar melody burrows into your cortex). Finally, as the defiant, delay-soaked outro of *Death Wish* fades, it seems Taylor's heart is like the Tele on the sleeve – beat-up but still functional. **[HY]**

Standout track: *Tired Of Being Right*
For fans of: Beth Hart, Samantha Fish, Ally Venable

Dominic Miller

Diana

ECM (available 20 November)



Sting sideman conjures rich nylon-string atmospheres

This is Dominic Miller's fourth album for the predominantly jazz-based ECM label and finds him once again at the helm of his nylon-string guitar, accompanied by his regular band comprising bassist Nicolas Fiszman and drummer Ziv Ravitz. Special guest here is bandoneonist Santiago Arias, who offers glimpses of the traditional music from Dominic's Argentinian birthplace throughout. But it's the ethereal nature of the music that takes centre stage, conjuring up enduring images of stark landscapes and wistful structures. Opener, *Jazz Hotel*, wraps itself around the melody of *Lullaby To An Anxious Child*, which featured on the expanded edition of Sting's 1996 *Mercury Falling* album. But it's the beautifully sparse melodies like *Millionaire* and *Pigalle* that find Dominic's playing at its enchanting best. *Diana* is dedicated to Dominic's mother, who died in 2026, and stands as a perfect eulogy. Mesmerising. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Timeless*
For fans of: Pat Metheny, Ralph Towner



THE LINEUP

Tones Behind The Tracks

The Proclaimers' **Charlie Reid** on socially charged songs, the magic of tracking eyeball-to-eyeball and the trusty Taylors that will outlive him

Artist: The Proclaimers

Album: You May Offend (Cooking Vinyl)



The title of the band's latest album leaves its meaning open to interpretation: is it a warning or offering permission? You decide

When Charlie Reid sat down with twin brother, Craig, to break ground on the 13th Proclaimers album, he never intended to set the world to rights. But by the time they wrapped at Rockfield Studios, the Edinburgh duo realised *You May Offend* had teeth, spanning from the teenage soldiers killed on foreign battlefields (*The Grooming*) to the "malignant" world leaders who deployed them (*But It Is*).

"Looking back at the titles and lyrics, a lot of it is social commentary," considers Charlie. "Much more so than in the old days, which was a lot of love songs. It's about the way the world's going, culturally and politically. But it's just the way the songs turn out. You get the grain of an idea and it's about something else when the song finishes. Nothing's really planned."

How would you describe your relationship between songwriting and guitar?

"It's a tool for me for writing the songs. I think, like a lot of guitar players, you feel the song through the guitar chord, y'know? On stage, I play basic rhythm. I try to sit with the hi-hat and Zac [Ware], our electric guitar player, he does anything technical. In the studio, there's overdubs and extra guitar players, like Sean Genockey. And then James Dean Bradfield did some work, as he did on the last album [2022's *Dentures Out*]. But Zac is our go-to guitar player. He's the guy that comes up with the majority of the ideas."

Getting a good acoustic sound on stage can be so elusive. What's your advice?

"In the end, I think it's the quality of the guitar. On *Dentures Out*, our guitar tech Mark Shade was talking about getting some new guitars. But nothing we tried – including some modern Taylors and even some high-price stuff – was giving us the sound we were getting from these Taylors we've used on the last five albums.

"Zac plays a Tele, and for the slide on *But It Is*, we used a four-string guitar that looks like a cigar box. But we [mostly] just stuck with those four Taylors – and an older 12-string – that we've been using on stage. I don't know how many years we've got left playing live, Craig and I. But I hope the guitars outlive us."

Tell us about the *You May Offend* sessions – how did they unfold?

"We recorded in Monmouth with Dave Eringa. This is the fourth record we've done with him, and he obviously made the connection with James Dean Bradfield as he worked with the Manics for many years. Dave's a fantastic producer. He works quickly. With guys like Craig and I, it's melody and lyric-based stuff, so you want somebody who has that technical power.

"All these tracks were done with Craig and I eyeballing everybody in the studio and the basis of it was all live. There's genuine magic when people play together. Not that I'm against the thing of layering stuff up and people recording in their bedrooms. There's some fine records made that way. But, for me, it's nice to actually play together and know that whatever comes out on the record is the experience you had when you were sat looking at each other."

Can you tell us about the social commentary of the title track?

"It's the idea that as culture changes – political and social and sexual culture – people and things that were considered not acceptable now have to be accepted. And if you find yourself on the wrong side of that...



Charlie Reid (left) with twin brother, Craig: everything was tracked with a live band in the studio. "There's genuine magic when people play together," says Charlie

PHOTO BY CHRIS MCCLUSKIE PHOTOGRAPHY

"There's something about the immediacy of live music, particularly, that gets people... It's a question of pure emotional instinct"

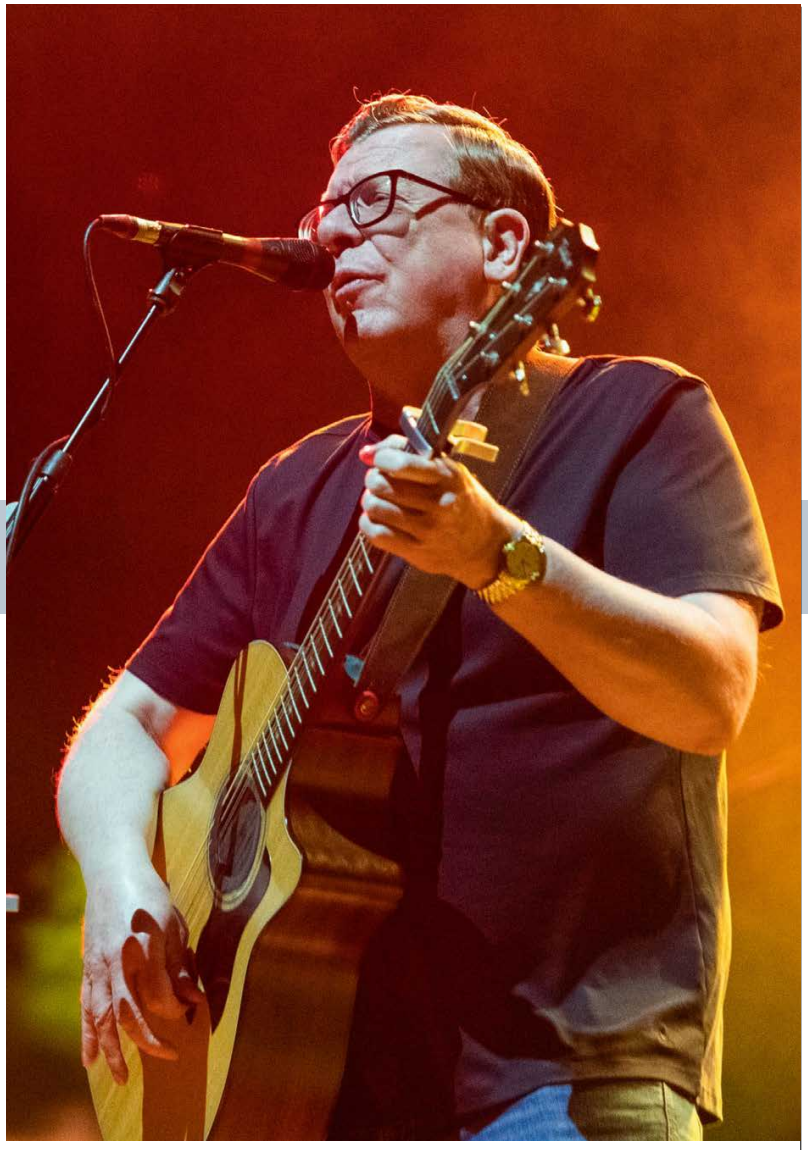


PHOTO BY ROBERTO RICCIUTI/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

certainly someone in the public eye, politicians or whatever, must ride a very difficult tightrope trying not to offend people. I also love the title because it can be taken two ways. Like, something you do or say may offend someone. Or it could be seen as an encouragement – y'know, go ahead and offend."

When people talk face-to-face we have a natural human rapport. But when we go online, we're instantly at loggerheads...

"It becomes an echo chamber. You know that thing of people going to safe spaces at university where they don't have to hear what offends them? I find that absurd. I would have thought the idea of going to university is to have your ideas challenged, to grow up a bit in terms of how you think.

"I was brought up in a house where people debated all the time. And when you start going down the pub and somebody challenges your idea – I never got offended by it. To me, that's one of the great things of life. If you live in a society, whether religious or political, where things cannot be challenged, or you're literally in fear for your life by challenging them verbally or in your actions – where you can be taken out and shot – who the fuck wants to live like that?"

Songs have always had that magic power of helping people see somebody else's perspective, haven't they?

"Absolutely right. I like going to art galleries and I love theatre, films and poetry. But there's something about the immediacy of live music, particularly, that gets people. Nobody doesn't think or feel something, even if it's, 'Christ, I never want to hear that again.' People tend not to be neutral about it. Like, I'll walk in a gallery and see some modern art, or even a classic car, and I don't feel qualified to judge it. But when it's music, it's not a question of 'qualified' – it's a question of pure emotional instinct."

Has your approach to performing changed over the years?

"Craig and I have always taken the attitude that you go out and give 100 per cent, y'know? That doesn't necessarily mean jumping about – I'm 64 now. It's just trying to get the feeling over. Some people get the music in its totality, and some just jump about to the rhythm, and it's not a question of one being right and the other being wrong. It's just that people respond differently and, like with the culture, something that one person might find very profound and beautiful, another finds boring. With some people, it's pure analysis, and others, it's pure emotion. And most people are somewhere in the middle, I guess."

It's almost 40 years since The Proclaimers released their debut album, and their zest for playing material from throughout their career is still strong: "Craig and I have always taken the attitude that you go out and give 100 per cent," says Charlie. "You're serving the public [when playing classic material]"

Do you still enjoy playing the older Proclaimers material live?

"Very much. I can't really get it when musicians go, 'I'm never going to play that song again,' or 'I'll never play tracks from that album again.' To me, you're serving the public. They pay their money and you go out on stage – and you don't play exactly the same song or the same show every night. That's a cabaret thing. And that's fine, if bands want to do that. But we don't want to.

"We've put *I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)* at the end on the last couple of tours. *Letter From America*, *I'm On My Way, Cap In Hand*, *Sunshine On Leith*... we always play those songs. But then we can vary it a bit. We get many people who come to multiple gigs during a tour, so every night they're going to see and hear something slightly different. That keeps them interested – and us interested, too." **[JD/HY]**



The new album from The Proclaimers, *You May Offend*, is out now on Cooking Vinyl

https://the.proclaimers.co.uk

NEVILLE'S ADVOCATE



Carrera (not Porsche!)

Neville Marten tells the tale of how his oldest friend owns an amp that was originally built for *him*, but bears the serial number suffix 'NM'...

My oldest friend Graham lives nary a stone's throw from me, yet we've not caught up enough since I moved back to my old stomping ground in Essex. So we had lunch a couple of times recently and the conversation inevitably went back to the early 70s, when we first met. Graham's main squeeze then was a Fireglo Rickenbacker 325, while mine was a black 1967 Tele.

We met when he walked past a church hall in Witham and heard loud blues-rock rattling the foundations. He sneaked in the door and asked if he could listen. And did so, intently. We steamed through our meagre set and ended up jamming over an uptempo 12-bar – my brother Shaun on bass and a singer who had seen us jamming through the window, knocked on the door and demanded we form a band. This leather-clad man-mountain singer was not the type to be spurned, so there we all were that evening in 1971.

"The crowd were chucking coins into our bucket; one hit the fretboard of my ES-335 in its open case and sliced a string in two..."

With the number dragging on, my lick barrel was dangerously close to scraping point, when I realised we were in the same key and tempo as John Mayall's *Looking Back*. I knew Peter Green's solo and trotted it out note for note, never suspecting our onlooker would clock it. However, when we stopped playing and introduced ourselves, Graham grinned and said, "Nice *Looking Back* solo you slipped in there!" We were mates from that second on.

He introduced me to Glen, a fantastic guitarist (and brilliant cartoonist) whose old AC30 was a joy, and to Alf Fidler, the head of guitar repairs at Selmer's in Braintree. Alf got me a black Les Paul Custom through the staff purchase scheme. Graham already had a Custom that he'd lent me for my first gig, at the Albert pub in Witham (with Glen sharing guitar duties), and for Princess Anne and Captain Mark Phillips' wedding, where we played on a float at Chelmsford carnival. People from the crowd were chucking coins into our bucket; one missed and hit the fretboard of my ES-335 in its open case on the flatbed floor, and sliced a string in two. Graham had sold me the Fender Dual Showman that doubled as the band's PA and bass amp that day.

But back to the Carrera. *Guitarist* forged a friendship with Cornford Amplification when founders Paul Cornford and Martin Kidd brought their fledgling MK50 for us to try out. We loved how they cared about valve amplification so we reviewed every product as they came out. Before long, Cornford was associated with top players who'd become equally convinced of their quality and tone. As new models emerged, I was often asked for input, so came up with the names Hurricane and Hellcat, following on from the Harlequin that started it all.

I didn't name the Carrera, but Cornford built me the first production model, which I specified in black. They gave it the serial number '0001 NM'. This six-watt gem had the facility to switch between four types of output tubes without the need for manual rebiasing. That amp was my main practice rig until one of those gear clearouts when I stupidly let it go. Graham found it online some years later.

Tons Of Sobs

One day Graham asked if I'd like to stand in with his band for a gig at Braintree Institute. He's a huge Paul Kossoff fan and the only guy I've ever known to perfectly nail the Koss 'wobble'. As naive young bucks, we were expecting a heaving audience with girls throwing themselves at our feet and the ecstatic throng staggered at our brilliance. Sadly, the group outnumbered the sorry dribble of souls who showed up for our set, which included several Free covers. How amused we were then to discover that the *actual* Paul Rodgers, Paul Kossoff, Andy Fraser and Simon Kirke were playing that same night in Braintree's Horn Hotel, a mere 200-yard stroll away. Should have gone to see them instead!

So, as you see, in various ways Graham has been a huge influence on my life. It's great to be back in touch and for him to kindly bring the Carrera 'home', as it were. It's my new review and demo amp, so you may well see and hear it soon. Hello again, old friends!

NEV'S GAS OF THE MONTH

Super Supro

What? Supro 64 Super, Blue Rhino **Where seen:** guitarguitar.co.uk
Price: £349 (special offer at time of writing; RRP £649)

Looking for a low-wattage valve amp? You'd be hard pushed to find something with more going for it than this five-watter. Using a single 6V6 power valve and one 12AX7 in the preamp, it's as simple as it gets. A single volume control is about it, but Supro says the amp works great with drive pedals so you could grab a bit of EQ this way. A creamy Jensen C8R speaker, said to have "a beautifully balanced tone with singing highs", provides the baby amp's grown-up voice. It's a gorgeous-looking thing, too, and with a meagre 10.5kg (23lb) weight and diminutive 400mm by 190mm by 300mm cab, there's very little here not to love.



PHOTO: GUITARGUITAR.CO.UK

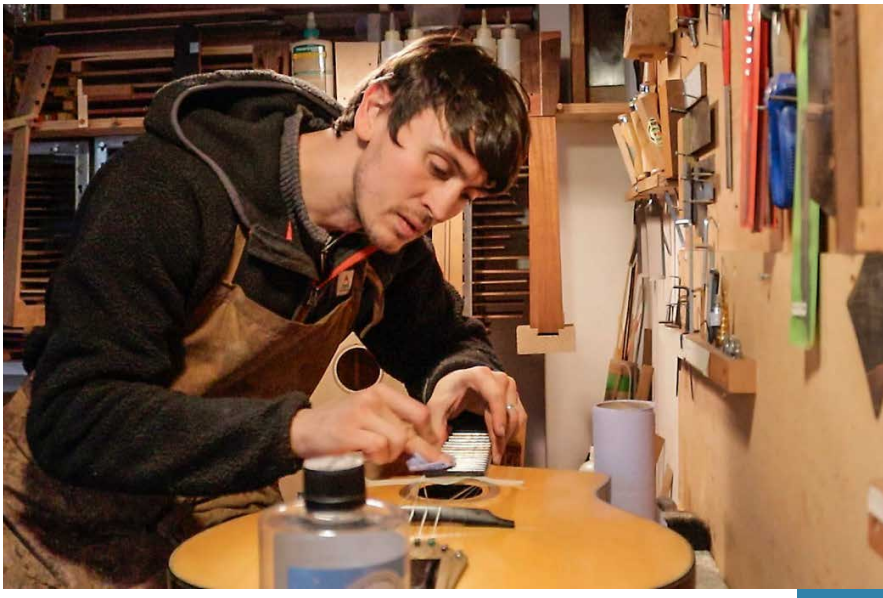


Setup For Success

This month **Alex Bishop** revisits the art of guitar setups and explains that it's not so hard to do it yourself

Given the recent conclusion of our regular three-week guitar-making course, and a glut of one-to-one masterclasses, the flavour of the month is obvious to me. Right now, it seems everyone wants to learn about guitar setups. Building an acoustic guitar might be 90 per cent woodwork, but if the last 10 per cent isn't spent making the guitar play perfectly, it ends up being half the instrument it could have been.

But what makes a good setup? And how can we dodge that expensive trip to the local luthier without spending a fortune on pricey tools? A guitar setup means different things to different people, but fundamentally it comes down to four core principles that, if executed correctly, guarantee you're getting the best out of your beloved instrument.



Setting up can be easier than you think, if you know what's right for your style of playing and your guitar

1. Truss rod

If there's one thing to pin down about this mysterious device it's its purpose: to keep the neck straight under tension. No two guitars respond the same once tuned up to pitch, so this is the first principle to check once you've got some fresh strings on.

We can use the taut E strings as a straight line to check whether the truss rod needs to be engaged to straighten the neck out. Put a capo on the 1st fret, then fret at the body join (normally the 12th or 14th fret) and then check the space between the string and the top of the fret somewhere in the middle of the neck (usually around the 7th fret). A gap about the thickness of a high 'E' string is ideal – any bigger and the truss needs tightening (clockwise). This straightens the neck and lowers the action, but this phenomenon is a consequence of adjusting it (rather than the reason) and shouldn't be used as an easy way to tweak your action.

2. Nut

If the nut isn't set correctly, it's likely to be the number one reason your guitar isn't a joy to play. With all the strings up to pitch, each string must be individually fretted at the 3rd fret, and the gap checked at the 1st fret. This might tell you a lot about the way I was taught guitar repairs, but the gap should be 'no thicker than a Rizla paper', or about 0.02mm for those who prefer to measure. A properly graduated set of nut files are essential for adjusting the nut slots, and should be cut at an angle in between the line of the fretboard and the angle of the headstock, unless you want the open strings ringing out like a sitar.

3. Saddle

Only now do we come to the saddle action (or string height). This is the only grey area in the setup, and no measurement is perfect for everyone, but I like my acoustic guitar action set to 2.4mm at the 12th fret on the bottom E, and 1.9mm on the top E, measured between the bottom of the string and the top of the fret. Higher gauge strings allow for a lower action (news to a lot of guitarists I speak to), but musicians who dig in need a higher action compared with dainty fingerstyle players. Measurements are made at the 12th fret because any desired change in the action here means double the adjustment at the saddle (ie, lowering the action by 0.5mm can be achieved by reducing the saddle by 1mm).

"Higher gauge strings allow for a lower action, but musicians who dig in need a higher action compared with dainty fingerstyle players"

4. Intonation

By this point everything should be playing pretty nicely, but intonation can be a bit off depending on your choice of string gauge. This is simply a case of adjusting the point of contact at the saddle to either shorten or lengthen the string slightly to compensate for flat or sharp notes respectively.

There's obviously so much more to the guitar than what we've covered here. But assuming a half-decent fret job, getting these four elements right is really all that's needed to get through a weekend gig or a rehearsal. While it's not a one-size-fits-all situation, understanding how all these measurements relate to each other and getting the order right will get the guitar working in the way that's best for you. G

PHOTO BY ALEX BISHOP



Heart Of Glass

Ed Oleszko delves into the hot topic of valves to explore how utilising them in pedals can improve the feel and tone of any rig

Sit down with a gaggle of guitarists in their natural habitat (a pub) and the inevitable valves (or tubes in the US) versus digital modelling debate comes up, generally before the first pint is finished, guaranteeing a lively evening of opinionated discourse.

Strong and valid arguments of authenticity, feel and dynamic range from the pro-valve crowd are often met with equally valid counter arguments surrounding versatility, potability and practicality by the digital modeller fans. In today's ubiquitous world of gear choices, is there perhaps a happy medium where both worlds can successfully intertwine?

Classic valve amps are justifiably still beloved by tone-conscious players and studios worldwide, and most of us would agree the 'Mount Rushmore' of Holy Grail tone moments from Hendrix's cranked Marshalls, SRV's Dumble and Fender Super Reverbs, or Neil Young's Tweed Deluxe on 12 are all valve-amp based, and indeed form the basis for the digital recreations thereof. And given unlimited budgets and a team of roadies, we'd love to bring these to every gig.

However, concerns about expense, weight and reliability contribute to many players today turning to the latest digital modelling devices, phone apps and plug-ins to get their guitar tonal fixes, and there's nothing wrong with that.

In recent years mega bands from Metallica to Blink-182 have made the move towards the likes of Neural DSP's Quad Cortex, Line 6's Helix and Fractal Audio in the search for consistency and reliability in their stadium touring rigs. And for the rest of us the likes of IK Multimedia's Tonex One offers a reasonably priced, compact and toneful pedalboard solution.

The catch, however, is that despite these amazing advances in modern technology, many players still feel an all-digital rig is missing a certain tonal *'je ne sais quoi'*, particularly in the crucial but hard-to-quantify area of touch-sensitivity and dynamic range.

The solution, for some players at least, is to get a real working valve somewhere into their rig to get back some of that feel, compression and added harmonic bloom beloved of plugging directly into a valve amp. Fryette's Valvulator Mini offers a great way to get a real valve into your rig, helping bring back much of the touch-sensitive feel of plugging directly into an amp's input, as does the Todd Sharp VTLD1 Vacuum Tube Loop Driver, which also offers a lovely tube boost and flexible controls – and really does sound wonderful.

Valve overdrive pedals have been utilised by many players over the years to either add a certain distinct tonal quality or missing magic to their rig. Perhaps most famously Eric Johnson (along with his prodigious talent) utilises the Chandler Tube Driver for its midrange warmth, smooth compression, amp-like feel to push his Marshall 'Plexis' into his signature singing lead tone. Similarly, Noel Gallagher of Oasis has utilised the valve preamp of an SIB Echodrive as an always-on boost for decades, while many players have utilised valve overdrives from the likes of Mesa/Boogie, Soldano, Kingsley and Effectrode to bring added valve crunch to their rigs.

With great power comes great responsibility, of course, and the downside is that valve-loaded pedals have traditionally been bulky and mains powered, requiring much higher current and voltages to really get the valves working, especially compared with the more traditional nine-volt low current draw of a Tube Screamer or Boss SD-1 and the like. Modern makers such as Kingsley, Effectrode and Keeley have seen a rise in popularity of more 'board-friendly pedals featuring a real valve, often with internal voltage pumps to get the valve working at correct voltages, as players look to create the perfect hybrid rig.

Cardinal Black guitarist Chris Buck is one such player who worked closely with ThorpyFX to create his valve-



PHOTO BY ADAM GASSON

Photographed as part of Eric Johnson's rig in a recent *Guitarist* shoot, the Chandler Tube Driver is an integral part of Johnson's live sound



PHOTO BY NEIL GODWIN

loaded signature Electric Lightning pedal in order to get some valve goodness to his live and recording rig. Chris explains the rationale behind the pedal.

"Part of the thinking behind making the Electric Lightning valve-driven was the opportunity to bring some of that dynamic response, touch sensitivity and warmth to rigs that might otherwise never experience the idiosyncratic charm of such gloriously antiquated technology. Are valves the only way to make a rig feel dynamic and responsive? No. Do they help? Yes. At least, I think so. I'm only human, and as guilty as anyone of occasionally listening with my eyes, but there's something undeniably comforting about playing through something that glows instead of blinks."

Cardinal Black's Chris Buck was keen to capture the "idiosyncratic charm of gloriously antiquated technology" via the inclusion of a valve in his signature ThorpyFX Electric Lightning pedal

A real working valve on your pedalboard offers some of the feel, compression and harmonic bloom beloved of plugging into a valve amp

It's not a simple solution, though. Brand founder Adrian Thorpe explains that the technical difficulties of creating a pedal with a real valve inside are many.

"For me, we knew we wanted to take on the challenge of creating a valve overdrive for Chris Buck, but the sheer physical engineering turned out to be harder than getting the circuit correct. Putting a fragile glass tube into a small metal box and expecting it not to overheat the internals or shatter when stomped on was a challenge. Not only that, but we were also size limited to our double-sized enclosure. The Electric Lightning is the pedal that I'm most proud of [with regard to] the physical packaging of the electronics, and I'm just so glad we could deliver the tone Chris Buck needs."

A great tube overdrive or valve buffer – especially if placed first in your signal chain, directly after your guitar pickups, helping to deal with any capacitance issues – can work wonders for your tone, whatever else is down the line. Perhaps it's time to audition one in your rig. G

THREE TO GET READY

'Board-Based Valves



Crazy Tube Circuits Venus £259

Hailing from Athens, Greece, Crazy Tube Circuits' modern interpretation of the Tube Driver, the Venus, is a highly regarded alternative: it's compact, versatile and much more pedalboard-friendly in size and power requirement. Perfect to cop that classic *Cliffs Of Dover* violin tone.



PHOTO: TODDSHARPAMPS.COM

Todd Sharp VTLD1 Vacuum Tube Loop Driver $699

With two discrete vacuum tube stages, the VTLD1 is a pro-level box designed to sit first in your signal chain and interface your guitar pickups with your effects pedals, clearing up issues of capacitance loading from different pedals and patch cables by letting your guitar plug straight into a valve.



PHOTO: WWW.EFFECTRODE.COM

Effectrode Blackbird Vacuum Tube Preamp From £549

Effectrode's UK-made pedals can be found in the heart of rigs of players such as David Gilmour and Peter Frampton. This flagship two-channel preamp runs three ECC83 valves at correct amp voltages with a host of tonal options that can transform any rig with its valve goodness.



Open G Tuning (PART 1)

Richard Barrett introduces you to the charms of this characterful open tuning, with familiar and surprising chords alike

In open G tuning, both E strings are dropped by a tone to D, with the A (5th) dropped a tone to G. Part of the fun of using open tunings is discovering strange and beautiful chords in unexpected places. However, it's also worth getting to know a few staple chords to help find our way around when we're not looking to cover more basic harmony in between those experimental moments – and I'm looking to cover a balance of the two here.

Open G has a character of its own, lending itself to a more resonant and melodic sound than other tunings like the ever-popular DADGAD and open D. Like all chord shapes, it's well worth moving these examples around, even if they do include open strings as the shifting relationships between fretted and open notes can give some nice surprises – particularly useful for solo guitar pieces and accompaniment without a full band. If you haven't tried this tuning before, this will get you started on the right road.

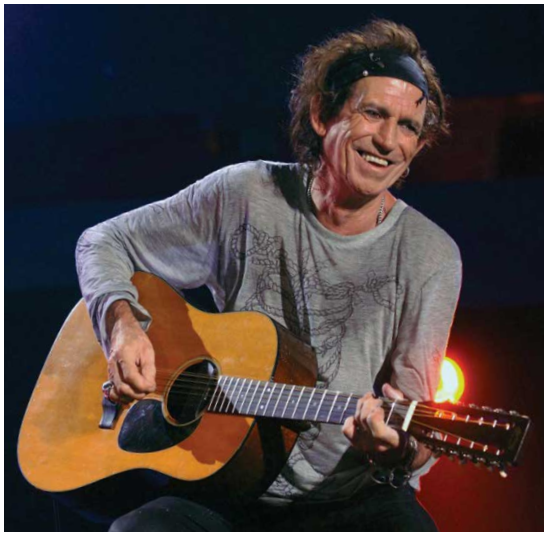
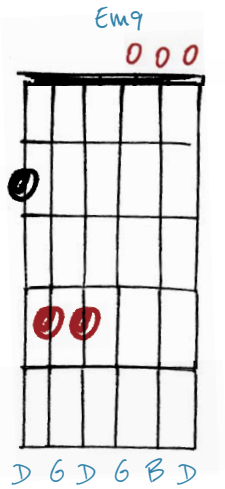


PHOTO BY BRIAN RASIC/GETTY IMAGES

Keith Richards is an open G enthusiast with countless legendary Rolling Stones riffs having sprung from the tuning

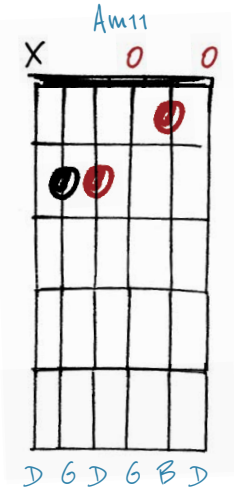
Example 1

This Em9 sounds like we're jumping in at the deep end, but as you'll see it's an easy chord to play. This can be overlaid where there's an Em or Em7 played elsewhere. There are a couple of other positions where this shape is interesting (depending on how dissonant you want to get), but this is the prettiest.



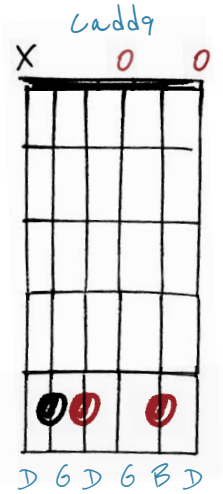
Example 2

A nice alternative to Am or Am7, this Am11 benefits from a D (11th) on the open first string, giving a feel of Keith Richards playing acoustic on *Wild Horses*. This is a great one for shifting about the fretboard in conjunction with the similar shape coming up in Example 3...



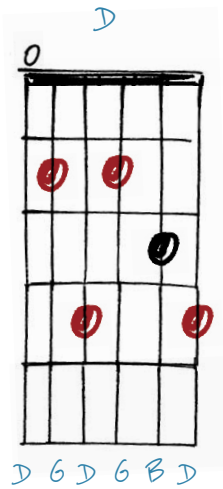
Example 3

In this position, this shape gives us a Cadd9, but it's also very useful for moving up and down the fretboard in conjunction with the shape in Example 2. You'll hear Jimmy Page using both these shapes in the outro to *That's The Way* from *Led Zeppelin III*.



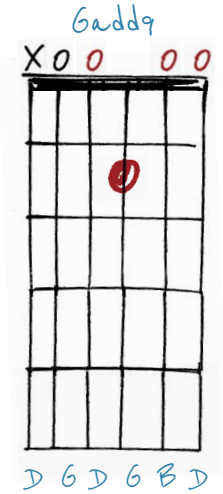
Example 4

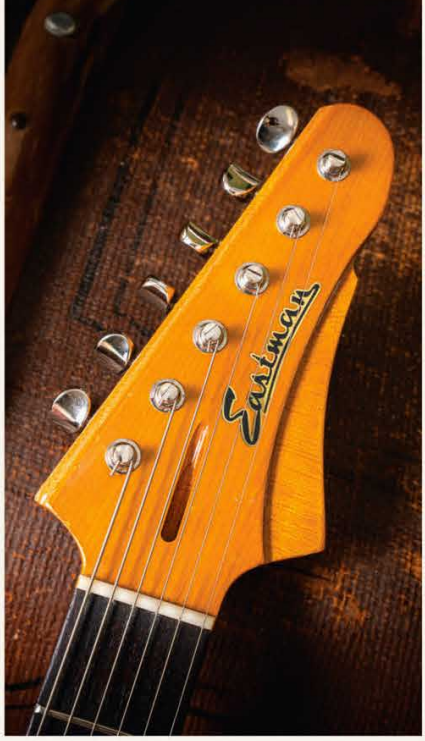
Technically speaking, this is a straight D major chord, but the stacking of notes makes it sound a little more majestic than that. I'm using the open sixth string as the root here, but if you have other instruments or a bass player with you, it can be moved anywhere.



Example 5

The simplest of all saved for last. This Gadd9 adds an A (9th) to the open G chord that this tuning gives us. Try moving the fretted note around while letting the other strings ring as a drone. I've muted the D on the sixth string for a clearer sound here.







SC CLASSIC SAGE GREEN
W/ COMPETITION STRIPE



Eastman

Kauffmann

MADE IN HOLLAND

TIME IS RELATIVE.



eastmanguitars.com

Feedback

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

STAR LETTER

SOUNDS NEW



PHOTO BY BEN BEAUVALLET

I am not really a social media user – far too old for all that. I have, however, started to use it a bit more recently, sparked by your album reviews sending me off searching for some of the players and bands you've covered. It is all too easy as a guitarist to get stuck in the rut of playing and listening to what and who you already know.

For myself at least, despite the ever growing collection of guitars in the delusion that they will make me sound better, my playing has been exactly in that rut. I read the magazine every month, but until fairly recently I tended to skip over the album reviews simply because there were artists and players I had never heard of. But your reviews have opened up my listening and playing style quite a bit and, as I mentioned at the beginning, has lured me onto Instagram in particular. What has really interested me is just how many fantastic new players and bands have been presented to me. The algorithm senses my interest and presents me with more and more to listen to and discover.

I came across one band on Instagram called The Two Ton Shoes who, honestly, blew me away with their sound (to me, a bit like the Jimi Hendrix Experience). The guitarist is unbelievably good, vocal great and the overall sound very tight. They now feature on my 'most played' playlist. Thanks again for the nudge out of my listening and playing rut!

John Pollock

Glad our album reviews section has opened your ears to new musical experiences, John, and if we must praise AI or the various kinds of algorithmic echo chamber, they are indeed useful for exploring new music. While we do nostalgically pine for the old days of flipping through CDs or vinyl records, trying to judge if the music was any good by looking at the covers (a famously poor selection strategy), being able to audition tracks by artists directed our way by Instagram in particular has led us to discover recent favourites such as Mac DeMarco and Sam Grassie (pictured above). How well such social platforms serve artists in terms of eventual revenue coming to them through promotion is a much bigger debate taking in streaming, live gigs, merch and more – but at least they can be discovered by browsing guitar players!

KORG

Each issue, the Star Letter will win a Korg PitchStrap strap-mounted tuner!

www.korg.co.uk



ALRIGHT, SQUIER?

I was thinking how weird we guitarists can be. I've been gigging for 50 years and owned lots of various makes and models, I'm also fortunate to have several 60s and 70s Gibsons, Fenders and Gretsches. But I recently purchased, through Marketplace, a 2000 Squier Affinity Strat for £45. I refretted and swapped pups, but later swapped back the original ceramics. I play pop covers and jazz and it really suits my hands, having a 40mm nut width. Am I nuts or what?

Nick Ridley

As we've said many times, Nick, it's the wizard not the wand – and while high-end guitars offer the most reliable access point to great sounds and playing feel, we'd always advise people to be agnostic about what will work best for them because we guarantee that one day a guitar will surprise you. And if that guitar happens to be modestly priced as well, you'll likely never let it go – not too fancy to gig and ding and, in the case of your Strat, it comes with the added satisfaction that it could literally pay for itself within a couple of modest local gigs.

BERRY PICKIN'

I rarely buy guitar mags as they never feature the sort of guitarists I adore: Johnny Thunders, Link Wray, Poison Ivy... to name but three. But I had to buy a copy to read the Chuck Berry piece. Youngsters today probably don't recognise the huge influence Chuck had on anyone trying to pick up guitar back in the dark ages before video, the internet, TAB, etc, when the only instruction books available contained such hip numbers as *She'll Be Coming Round The Mountain* and *On Top Of Old Smoky*! I learned to play by strumming haplessly along to a beat-up US import LP of Chuck Berry's *Greatest Hits* and it changed my life. As your articles made clear, Chuck was so much more than just another guitar player but also a great performer, songwriter and undoubtedly the best lyricist of the 20th century. You could have included more on his huge impact on music, including R&B, glam rock and punk for starters.

I only got to meet Chuck once when my rockabilly combo, The Sabrejets, supported him here in Belfast at Maysfield Leisure Centre in the mid-1990s. It was the last night of the tour and the merch guy wanted to sell the remaining t-shirts off at half price. Ever irascible, Chuck said that was fine by him – as long as he still got his agreed cut! By that stage of the tour I think his backing band wanted to throttle him as he'd no set list and would change song and key at will expecting them to follow him. But on stage that night



Players such as Larkin Poe's Megan Lovell, above with her Rickenbacker lap steel, demonstrate the versatility and vocal quality of the instrument

there was enough of the old magic and charisma to impress. There'll never be another quite like him!
Brian Young

Thanks for your perspectives, Brian. He was a force of nature within music, with his insouciant blend of R&B and country licks played the way a bluesman might play them. The lyrical wit and the casual yet somehow effortlessly syncopated timing of his vocals made his songs seem almost conversational at times. He was, in a sense, 60s America incarnate – and that's why his style seemed so irresistible to young players in rainy, dreary Britain and, like The Beatles he inspired, he remains a cultural earthquake, whose influence remodelled the landscape of music entirely and to this day.

STROKE SOLUTION

The reason why I'm writing now is the feedback of Andrew Harding about his brother who had a stroke and his question about lap steel. I am exactly one of these cases. Having had a brain bleed in February 2017, which left me completely paralysed on my left side, I first went through a period of depression. I had been playing the guitar since the age of 15 and played in two semi-professional bands just before that event. After a while of very sad tries to get the dexterity on my left hand back in order to play the guitar again, I started playing lap steel. I put a brass bottleneck on my left index finger and tuned the lap steel in open E major, a second one in E minor.

The mates of my main band have been very supportive and patient with me, so I could stay in the blues band – and we've adapted some songs to have more slide in them. Playing a left-hand guitar was never an option because I still have no sensitivity in my left hand, so I would lose a pick or could not feel the strings for picking. I can only encourage Andrew's brother to go that way. I am playing in a band and can follow my passion, although I'm still missing my regular electric guitars. Having said all that, I would as well be very interested in reading some articles about lap steel, the players, maybe a Blues Headlines in open tuning, or maybe a special issue on that topic.
Edgar Kinzig

Thanks very much for your story, Edgar, and more power to you for returning to music so determinedly. We're sure that Andrew, if he's reading this, will take a lot of heart from your experience as will, we hope, his brother. And never forget that, as well as offering an outlet for players who have to radically adapt their style due to illness or injury, lap steel is a very tempting option for every guitarist; David Gilmour certainly used them to craft an integral part of the Floyd sound. Maybe a round-up review might be a great place to start...

LOOKALIKES?

I was reading your article about Dave Gregory's '64 Riviera and struggling to spot any difference in spec between it and my 1962 Sheraton (60th anniversary reissue only, alas). Am I right in thinking these are essentially the same guitar with different names?
Ross Brown

They are indeed quite similar when both factory-fitted with Frequensator tailpieces (some '62 Sheratons had Epiphone Trem-o-Tone vibratos and a few early examples had Bigsbys), but the main differences were cosmetic. The Sheraton had the ornate 'Tree Of Life' inlay on the headstock, plus multi-ply binding and opulent-looking pearl-and-abalone block inlays with an inset triangle. The Riviera, meanwhile, had simpler headstock ornamentation, simpler binding and simpler parallelogram inlays. Think of it as being like the difference between a top-spec ES-355 and a basic ES-335 if you like.


VIDEO EXCLUSIVE!
Watch Ally discuss her personal guitar journey, plus a rig tour including her custom decorated Les Paul
http://bit.ly/guitaristextra



THE Guitarist INTERVIEW

ALLY VENABLE

The new face of Texas blues on her psychedelic Les Paul, tearing it up with Buddy Guy, and why unhealthy competition has no place on the music scene

Words David Mead & Henry Yates **Photography** Phil Barker

Has there ever been a starrier blues love-in than the 90th birthday concert for Buddy Guy in October? Flanking the Chairman of the Board at New York's Radio City Music Hall was a pan-generational starburst of notables: give it up for Samantha Fish, Susan Tedeschi, Joe Bonamassa, Jimmie Vaughan, John Mayer, Derek Trucks, Billy Gibbons, Eric Gales and Gary Clark Jr (Eric Clapton was down to play, but cancelled due to illness).

Amid these mid- and late-career legends, meanwhile, the most heartening vital sign for the genre's future health was 27-year-old Ally Venable, taking centre stage to holler James Taylor's *Steamroller*, pulling licks from a Les Paul whose finish looked like a Santana album sleeve dreamt up on the brown acid.

It's unmistakably the same Gibson that the Texan brought along to *Guitarist*'s photoshoot during her September UK tour. And although there are a hundred potential jump-offs for a chat with the whipsmart Venable – from her apprenticeship at the knee of Guy himself to her forthcoming album with Kenny Wayne Shepherd – we can't resist starting with that eye-popping paint job.

Can you tell us more about the story behind that incredible guitar?

"So this is just a standard Les Paul. A few years back, I played – and I still play – the Limited Colours Edition series from the 90s that Gibson did, and I have a magenta Les Paul. But I broke that on tour and I needed a new guitar, like, really quickly. So Gibson sent me this. It's actually got a nice Cherry Red front, so that's how it originally came. But I just felt like it needed something more.

"So I came across this wonderful girl on Instagram. Her name is Emilie Rosati, and she does these amazing art pieces on guitars. I started following her and we got connected, and I told her some spiritual things that had happened to me recently, and this was her take on that experience. So there's olive branches. There's a double-edged sword. There's a dove. There's the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Like, every time I look at the guitar, there's always something new I come to find on it."

Have you made any other modifications?

"No, I haven't. With guitars, if it feels and sounds good already when I pick it up and start playing, I don't really like to do too much modifying. I just

"When I first started playing guitar, I'd play anywhere: crawfish stands, grocery stores, the side of the street..."

learn how to work with them. I try to become one with the guitar or whatever, y'know? That sounds cheesy, but when I find something I like, I don't want to mess with it.

"So these are just the stock pickups. I would like to put in some Seymour Duncans eventually. When I get home, I think that's my next add-on. But the setup's still the same as when I got it. I like the action. I use Ernie Ball strings, 10s, and it's already road-worn – I've clipped the knobs, but that just gives it more character. I think naturally reliced guitars are really beautiful because it tells a story."

To take you back to the start, how did the guitar come into your life?

"Well, I started singing when I first could talk, and playing guitar when I was about 12. Guitar was just something to accompany my singing. But what got me into playing blues was discovering Stevie Ray Vaughan. Soon after that,



1

Ally's Les Paul began life in a Cherry Red finish, but was personalised with artwork by Emilie Rosati, based on recent spiritual happenings in Ally's life



2



3

I learnt who Albert King was, then Buddy Guy, Jimi Hendrix, BB King. I've been so welcomed into the genre, and my goal is to introduce people to the blues, like Stevie's music did for me. I'm just so grateful I can tour the world, inspiring people with music I've written in my bedroom."

You grew up in Texas, which is known for its blues. Did you find that once you got out there that there was a lot of competition?

"I guess there's competition if you make it a competition, y'know? For me, it's been very welcoming, especially with the people I've worked with along the way, like Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Joe Bonamassa and Buddy Guy. I love playing with players that are better than me, too, because that helps me learn. Y'know, I don't think music should be competitive. If you make it a competition, it will be a competition, and then you lose yourself as an artist and why you picked up the guitar in the first place."

1. Ally's choice of amp for the live stage is a Marshall 1959 Modified – basically a 'Plexi' 100-watter with a master volume control to tame its scorching output

2. The Les Paul's artwork extends to the truss rod cover and, although the rest of the guitar is unmodded, Ally is considering fitting some Seymour Duncan pickups at some point in the future

3. You can hear Ally demo her simple but effective pedalboard in the exclusive video that accompanies this interview

"If you make music a competition, you lose yourself as an artist and why you picked up the guitar in the first place"

When did you put your first band together?

"When I first started playing guitar, I'd play anywhere I could think of. I would play at crawfish stands around East Texas. I'd play at grocery stores. I'd play on the side of the street. I'd play on flatbed trailers, at motorcycle rallies, pasture parties, school – anywhere I could, y'know, just to get my hands on my guitar and be in front of people. Like, I was down to do it. I just love being on stage. I feel like that's where I'm the most comfortable."

What was it like going into the studio to make your first album?

"Well, it's exciting because you have all these ideas, but you've never been in the studio before and you're trying to figure out how everything works. Like, 'How does this mic pick up the amp?' and all these different plug-ins you can try to relay what's in your head, to make it come out and manifest in reality. There's so many things you're exposed to, all at one time. And I'm still learning, too, how to get out what's in here [taps head]."

You mentioned Kenny Wayne Shepherd. How did you come into his orbit?

"Well, I connected with Kenny at a festival in Nevada. He was headlining and I was playing an opening slot during the day. We had just got done soundchecking and he came through the backstage and recognised me because I'd put out a cover of his cover of a Bessie Smith song called *Backwater Blues*. I just loved his version. And I didn't think they were gonna play it on the radio. But Kenny came up and he's like, 'Hey, are you that girl they're playing on BB King's Bluesville?' I was like, 'Yeah, that's me – and I'm pretty sure you know where I got that song from.'

"We just became friends there and then. He's like, 'I'm gonna come see you play.' Y'know, I didn't think anything of it. Like, sometimes people are nice. They're like, 'Oh yeah, I'll come see you.' But Kenny actually did. I was playing and I saw his blond hair on the side of the stage, and I was like, 'Oh my gosh, he's here watching us!' I hope to be that for somebody in the future."

How about Joe Bonamassa and Buddy Guy?

"Joe, I met on one of his blues cruises. My friend Mike Zito introduced us, and Joe's also been very supportive. And Buddy, I met opening for him.

I mean, I hope when I'm 90 years old, I'm a firecracker on stage like him [laughs]. And then, to have a song with him [*Texas Louisiana*] is crazy, too. One of my very first shows was a Buddy Guy show; my mom surprised me with tickets when I was 15 years old. That night, he saw me in the front row and gave me one of his picks, which was kinda chipped off. I still have it. Little did I know I'd be touring and making music with him, celebrating him at Radio City Music Hall with all these crazy-amazing guitar players. I would never have thought that would be my life, but I'm coming to realise that everything is full circle."

What are your plans for the next few months?
"After we finish these tour dates, I'll be going to the studio in Nashville. I'm working on an album with Kenny right now. It's almost finished, I just have to add a few little touches. We sat down at the beginning of the year and wrote 13 songs together, and they're really personal to me. Hopefully it's coming out next year. But I don't want to rush anything. I feel like, in the past, I may have rushed a few things just to get it out. They were still good works. But I'm just being very patient with this one."



An S-Type guitar, made by Texan luthier Jimmy Wallace, accompanies Ally on stage for those songs that "just need a single coil" sound to them



5



6

Back to gear, what attracted you to Les Pauls in the first place?
"Well, I just love the bite and grit, and the way Les Pauls can cut through an amp, as well as how they feel. There's definitely different approaches to playing a Les Paul versus a Strat, which I do play, too. There's just some songs that need a single coil. Sonically and the way you approach it, I guess, is what determines what I choose to play on specific songs. But I just really like a Les Paul ripping through a big Marshall stack."

Talk us through your pedalboard.
"I use this in the studio as well as on the road. So I have this 1969 Vox wah that I love so much. When you think of a Hendrix vibe, I feel like it really hones in on that. I have an MXR Carbon Copy and I keep that where it's just a slight delay – not a slapback, just one or two repeats, and it just kind of casually delays after the note. So it just has a nice decay and just enough space to allow the ear to hear the repeated note.

4. The battleworn Jimmy Wallace guitar was delivered to Ally unreliced – the wear you see has happened during years of intense gigging

5. After touring with Buddy Guy for two and a half years, Ally asked the blues legend to sign the headstock of her guitar

6. Ally's next recording project is a songwriting collaboration with blueser Kenny Wayne Shepherd, and should see the light of day sometime next year

"All of the relicing you see is just done by me on the road. All of my blood, sweat and tears literally are on this guitar"

"Probably my favourite pedal is the King Of Tone by Analog Man. It's the cream of the crop. That's the best pedal I think I have on my 'board. I could plug this thing into really any amp – like, if I'm going to a jam or sitting in or just playing at home through different amps – and that will always be my safe space in the pedal world. I see them as almost like a Tube Screamer, but times 1,000. Each side has its own unique sound, but sometimes if you want to get crazy, you can just click 'em on together and go for it.

"A close second is this Midnight Vibe Uni-Vibe [style pedal] by Rick Weaver. There's two different voicings: chorus and vibrato. But I like the chorus sound. I have the level at about 8.5, then the intensity of the vibe sound cutting through at about 7, and the mix is about 3. It has a nice drone-like vibe, like when you think of Hendrix, or even a David Gilmour-type sound. Definitely Robin Trower vibes with that pedal. And then I have a Boss tuner."

You've also got a Strat-style guitar with you today...
"I received this [Sierra model] from my good friend Jimmy Wallace. He makes guitars in Garland, Texas, and I've been playing this one for a while. All of the relicing you see is just done by me on the road. All of my blood, sweat and tears literally are on this guitar. And I took off the backplate to expose the springs, to just have more sustain. I feel like when you remove that, it just amplifies the sound a little bit more."

Can you explain the autograph on that guitar?
"I'd been touring with Buddy Guy for two and a half years, and all that time I didn't ask him to sign anything because I was just so immersed in being around him and watching his shows – all of it was pretty crazy. But we were just talking in the hallway before he went on and I was like, 'Buddy, do you think you could sign my guitar 'cos you're one of the reasons I play?' He's like, 'Yeah, where do you want me to sign?' I was like, 'Wherever you want!' So he just chose to sign it up here, and it's something I'll always cherish and look at while I'm on stage to inspire me." G



Ally's latest album, *Money & Power*, is available now on Ruf Records GmbH

https://allyvenableband.com

MODERN ELECTRICS

The shape of things to come is, it turns out, the shape of things as they were – almost. For while familiar shapes and sounds still dominate how electric guitars are made, look closer and you'll see evolutionary progression (and the odd genuine leap forward) everywhere in the best modern guitar design, where the wheel has been not reinvented but rebuilt better...

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Lucy Robinson & Matt Lincoln


KIESEL
MASTER 1
VOLUME 2
MASTER 2
TREBLE
BASS
CUT
INTENSITY

MODERN LOVE

Once it was thought that the future of electric guitar design would be led by tech – but the real evolution of the instrument is happening to its very DNA, not bolt-on gimmickry. We join expert luthiers from makers large and small to find out how the electric guitar is undergoing a quiet revolution – and it's being led by you, the player, not technology

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Matt Lincoln

For some guitar players, the truth is simple and monolithic: the 1950s solidbody electric pioneers got it right first time. Yet while there are undoubtedly vintage guitars out there that justify the legend, it's important to understand that a lot has moved on since then, too.

"There's a bit of a myth about the sort of craftsmanship involved in vintage guitars. And obviously there are good ones, but there's a lot of bad ones as well," says luthier Seth Baccus. Seth says that during his time running retailer Manson's Guitars, he bought and sold a fair amount of vintage classics, and not all lived up to the hype.

"There's a lot of Friday afternooners and that kind of thing," Seth says. "That's why the neck shapes vary so much. There wasn't really any consistency, you know? I mean, we often talk about a 60s Strat neck shape and it's like, well, what does that mean? They're so different, they vary so much. Whereas the level of consistency of craftsmanship these days is head and shoulders above that. Even how a neck fits in a neck pocket... generally, on a nice quality guitar built now, that will be far better-fitting than it might have been on an original 50s Strat."

Nonetheless, the sounds made by those early electrics defined what rock 'n' roll sounds like, making it almost impossible to ignore the template they set, even if you want to advance the state of the art.

"When I started thinking about designing my own guitars, I wanted to keep some of the magic of the vintage guitars but iron out the creases of things that they just missed," Baccus says. "I think Strats are a really good example – because you could argue that, on one side, Leo absolutely nailed it first time – incredible design work, especially from someone who wasn't a guitar player. But then at the same time, they're also one of the most easily improved guitars because there's a couple things about them that were sort of baked in from day one that just don't really work properly. So, for example, if you work on vintage Strats, it's quite a common thing that the strings are falling off the edge of the fingerboard. And if you have any sort of bevel on the fret ends and you play with vibrato they can become quite unplayable. And that's just because the width of the neck doesn't match the string spacing on the bridge. It's such a simple thing, but it makes such an enormous difference.



Seth Baccus, founder and luthier, Seth Baccus Guitars
www.sethbaccus.com

"The level of consistency of craftsmanship these days is head and shoulders above that [of 50s and 60s guitars]" ***SETH BACCUS***

"Then there's more comfort and aesthetic things like the heel design. Instead of having a big sort of clunky square heel when I designed the Abyss model or any of my guitars, actually, they all have a really comfortable access, all the way up to the top and give your hand somewhere nice to sit and pivot, if you know what I mean. So it's those kinds of things."

And therein lies the real bullseye of modern electric guitar design. Not to stuff guitars full of gimmicks, for nothing ages faster than





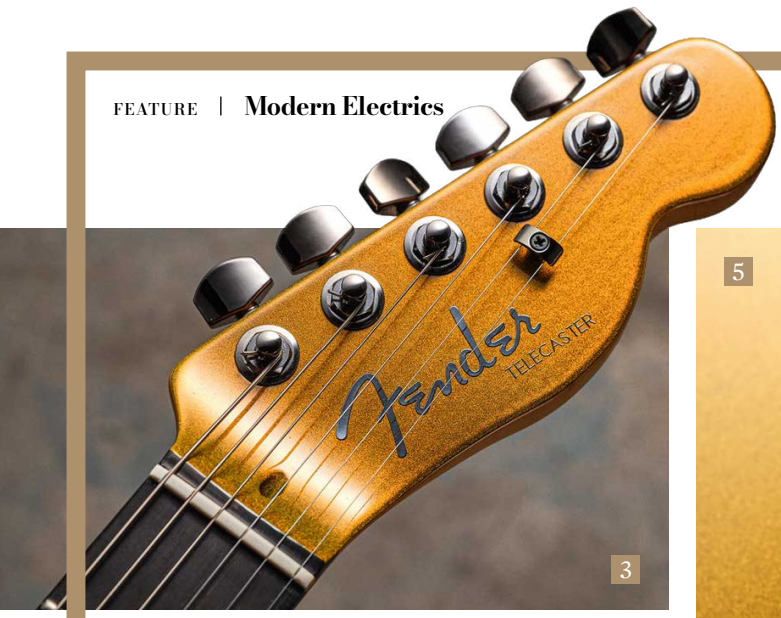
1. Though it borrows styling cues from vintage Fenders, features such as the sculpted heel and baked maple neck reflect advances in ergonomics and lutherie materials

2. Elegant use of curves to craft harmonious yet original outlines is a real obsession for Seth Baccus, reflected here in the well-proportioned headstock shape

PHOTO COURTESY OF SETHBACCUS



The Argonaut model from Seth Baccus is emblematic of the modern boutique electric. As these guitars are largely built to order, the spec, styling and tones can go in any direction you want, from vintage surf to metal



3


4


5

today's cutting edge tech – anyone remember the Gibson Dark Fire with its robot tuners and onboard integration for Guitar Rig? Instead, the deeper work of the modern luthier is to refine and evolve the most basic function of the guitar: to connect the hands, ears and musical imagination of the player with the instrument seamlessly and effortlessly. Justin Norvell, chief product officer for Guitars & Basses at Fender, agrees.

"We always talk about allowing the guitar to get out of the way enough that someone's not going, 'Oh... that thing like hit my hand again,' or whatever. So now we're reapproaching the guitar in its most basic, simplest form, and we're just looking at some of the big things like bridges, saddles, nuts, neck shapes, pickups and so on with a purity of mission to not have more parlour-trick kind of innovations. We've done things in the past where we had the electronics cards that you could switch out in the back of the guitar and it was cool. It was like, 'Here's a treble bleed. Here's blending in the neck pickup...' But, again, guitar players are looking less for gimmicks and more for stability of build and usefulness. And so we're really not about new for new's sake, but the new for a purpose.

3. The headstock and the logo may be familiar, but the 10- to 14-inch compound radius of the 75th Anniversary American Ultra II Telecaster hints at its many other progressive features

4. The heavily knurled knobs may be somewhat traditional, but they hide extra S-1 switching options, while the angled pickup selector offers improved ergonomics

5. Individually intonation-adjustable saddles have been used for the 75th Anniversary American Ultra II Telecaster, but they're made of solid brass to retain some of the Tele's traditional ringing bite



Justin Norvell, chief product officer for Guitars & Basses at Fender
www.fender.com

"I think some of our most recent innovations are very straightforward, very commonsensical," he continues. "So with the Silent Strat we just came out with – as you know, there have been noiseless pickups, dummy coils, all kinds of things over the years – we really feel that we've perfected what that is, and the ability to be able to change your pickups to whatever you want and still have that [noise-cancelling] coil [embedded in the guitar itself] is amazing. Or take our new American Professional guitars, which have new bridges and saddles that allow the screws to come down, so it's not uncomfortable on your hand. I mean, this isn't cold fusion! I'm not having to do equations to achieve most of this. But they are quality-of-life, playability enhancers."

FINESSED FEATURES

Seth Baccus agrees that, perversely, the most relevant advances guitar makers can make in 2026 lie in finessing the fundamentals.

"Ergonomics and balance are like right at the top of the list. I always do a test on a mock-up [of a new guitar design] – if it's on a strap, I basically want the guitar to hang exactly in playing position, whether you're touching the guitar or not. And that's really easily achievable if you think about it at the right stage. It's really just to do with the weight, the size of the horns, where the strap button placement is and so on, so you don't get neck-dive or the opposite. So balance ergonomics – how it sits against your body, how it sits on your lap if you're playing sitting down – are all really important. Again, ideally you want to be able to kind of almost let go of the guitar and it just sits on your lap and doesn't go anywhere."

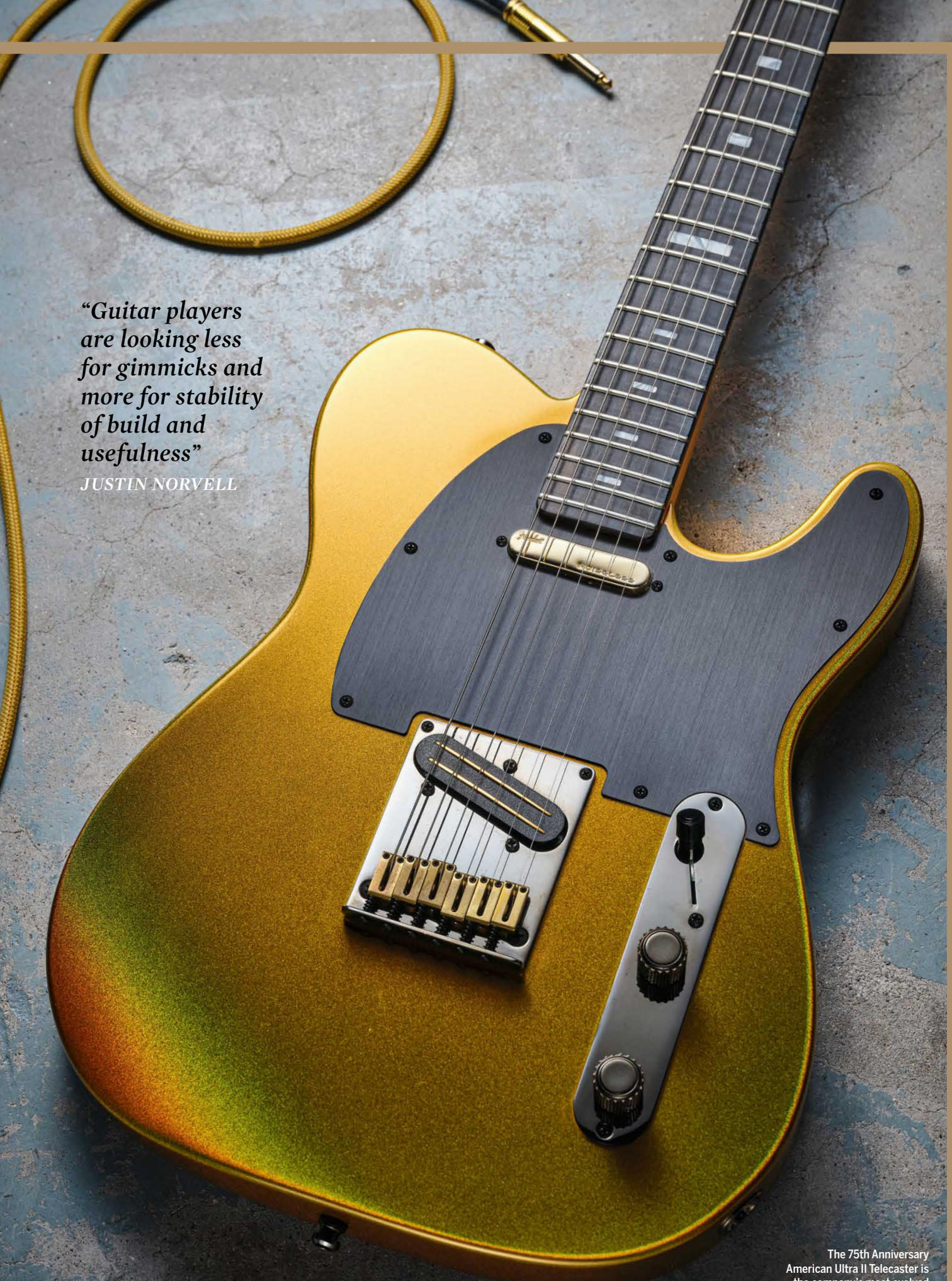
Player comfort might seem like one of those second-order 'nice to have' attributes of a guitar, compared with pickup performance or tuning stability, but in fact the things guitar makers do to make players more physically comfortable reveal as much about where guitar is at today than anything to do with tone, as Doug Sparkes, director of Gordon Smith Guitars explains.

"The biggest change we've noticed in the last probably four or five years is that, now, the question we are asked more than any other is, 'How light can you make the guitar?' It's gone from this thing where [it was believed that] the heavier a Les Paul was the better it would sound. But now, and I hate to say it, a significant part of the guitar community is getting older.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FENDER

"Guitar players are looking less for gimmicks and more for stability of build and usefulness"

JUSTIN NORVELL



The 75th Anniversary American Ultra II Telecaster is the company's most evolved take on Leo's timeless classic. Everything from the bridge design to the pickups has been refined for 2026

So weight is much more of an issue. So therefore, the tonewoods that we use have changed to lighter options. We're using a lot more obeche, a lot more okoume, a lot more paulonia, those sorts of woods.

"We're still using traditional mahoganies and whatever," Doug continues, "but we probably use obeche more than any other tone wood purely because of its weight. It's a great tone wood, with a lovely straight ribbon grain... but it's lightweight and that's what people like. So lightweight, small bodies and comfort [are prioritised in electric guitar design now], also because I think more players are playing sat down, now, too – so the guitar is not just for hanging on a strap and standing at the front of a band with. It's got to be comfortable when you're sitting at home playing it in your music room, or whatever. So we've [developed] guitars with more rear carve and rear shaping.

"There is one other thing that we're finding that is coming up, which is requests for wider nut widths. We've just done a 48mm version of our Griffin for a local farmer who's got hands like tractor shovels."

THE MUSIC OF TIME

Trends in music influence the physical form that guitars take, too. Back in the early 50s so-called 'fretless wonder' instruments were designed to appeal to agile jazz players, moving extended chords rapidly up and down the neck – and the last thing they needed was fat frets like speed bumps slowing that up. Fast forward a few years, however, and the blues-rock revolution was looking for the opposite – frets big enough to allow bends that didn't choke out.



Doug Sparkes, director at Gordon Smith Guitars **gordonsmithguitars.com**

"Customers come to us with an increasingly informed opinion – they have more information at their fingertips" ***DOUG SPARKES***

Moving forward to the present, the quest for crisply articulated gain sounds is where the focus of much contemporary guitar design lies.

"I think we understand a little bit more about energy transfer of the string, which makes a really big difference at high gain," Seth Baccus reflects. "That also comes down to the materials of the hardware.

So on my Merkaba model, for example, I generally use the Hipshot fixed bridge, which is an industry standard, modern-style fixed bridge, and it has a nice thick baseplate and very high-quality saddles. Those details are important because the higher the gain, the more you want the guitar to maintain the clarity and separation of the strings. Whereas a lot of vintage Les Paul guys don't want that.

"There are hardware manufacturers who make vintage-replica bridges, and they use exactly the same old zinc alloy that they used back in the day, which actually sounds quite dull compared with a modern ABM bridge milled out of solid brass. There's no doubt that the ABM is a higher-quality part [than the vintage bridges], but it does sound very different. So it kind of depends on what you're going for.

"The other thing I think with modern guitars and high gain that's really overlooked quite often is pickup placement – exactly how far the bridge pickup is from the bridge, for example, makes a really big difference as to how tight or muddy the bass is, or how snappy the treble is – all that kind of thing."

PHOTO COURTESY OF DOUG SPARKES



6



7

6. Seen here for the first time, the new Grande II sits at the more traditional end of Gordon Smith's offerings, with a reduced body size compared with the original Grande model

7. Built in Britain, Gordon Smith's evolved electrics are a far cry from the much-loved but idiosyncratic and sometimes awkward designs of the 1960s domestic guitar industry



The looks are classic, but even a cursory glance at the Gordon Smith Grande II reveals the kind of incremental improvements to ease of use that define the modern electric, such as the spoke-wheel truss rod adjustment point at the end of the neck



they know what they want because they have more information at their fingertips these days. It's not always correct information, but they come with a much clearer idea of what they want. So that's where Gordon Smith scores because the majority of the business we do in the UK is still built [to order] for the end user, and that's probably where we've developed a bit of an edge in recent years. We can say, 'You don't need to buy a guitar off the shelf when you come to us.'"

While it's true that high-end, boutique makers such as Baccus Guitars have always offered this kind of made-to-order experience, what's newer in the current market is seeing that configurability comes down from the realms of the custom shop into more mainstream price brackets – not only at Gordon Smith Guitars but also at Fender, who now allows buyers to custom-configure its mainstream electrics with relatively modest upcharges from its Mod Shop. The options may be more limited than in the Custom Shop proper, but the popularity of the service reflects how diverse playing styles have become and how consumer expectations are now oriented towards more personalised needs. At the end of the day, however, the task of building and selling guitars always swings back around what use we can get out of them, musically, Justin Norvell says.

"Tone is subjective as hell, but whether it's a good, soulful clean tone or urgent and heavy, it's that thing that everybody's seeking. We just try to cover as many bases as possible because it's good to make a lot of guitars, it's good to sell guitars, but really we're trying to make things for people to make music with," Norvell states. "Like, imagine we're a paintbrush company and we could talk about horse hair, and we could talk about the wood [the brush is made of]. But in the end, it's what's someone going to do with it – and is it going to kind of take them where they need to go or perform the way we want to?" G

8. At the far end of the modernity spectrum, extended-range instruments such as this Ernie Ball Kaizen 7 represent what the Ibanez JEM did in the 90s – a guitar built to help players reach the edge of the envelope in terms of modern playing technique

Doug Sparkes at Gordon Smith agrees that the spectrum of requirements when it comes to gain means that he's winding a much wider range of pickup styles for his electrics than ever before.

"We still have that classic sort of icy Gordon Smith punk-rock humbucker, which is still wound to John [Smith]'s old recipe and that goes in things like the GS1 Heritage. But we have a much wider range of pickups, from heavy-wound stuff in the Geist to warm, lower-wind pickups in some of the other guitars that we're making, like the Grande, for example. So there's definitely a wider range of pickups available. Is that particularly a 'modern' thing or is it just that endless pursuit of tone that keeps us all in business? I don't know."

PERSONAL CHOICE

Whatever the vagaries of fashion, however, one trend is clear and consistent. Players are better informed about gear than ever before and, with that, comes the desire to tailor guitars. For makers like Gordon Smith, who crafts most of its guitars to order for customers who spec them out from scratch, this is both good news and the way of the future.

"Customers come to us now with an increasingly informed opinion – they've done their research and

"In the end, it's what's someone going to do with it – and is it going to kind of take them where they need to go?" *JUSTIN NORVELL*

SUITS YOU

Finessed features on classic platforms used to be the preserve of the boutique builder, but today mainstream brands are offering much the same. So are they still relevant?

Words Neville Marten

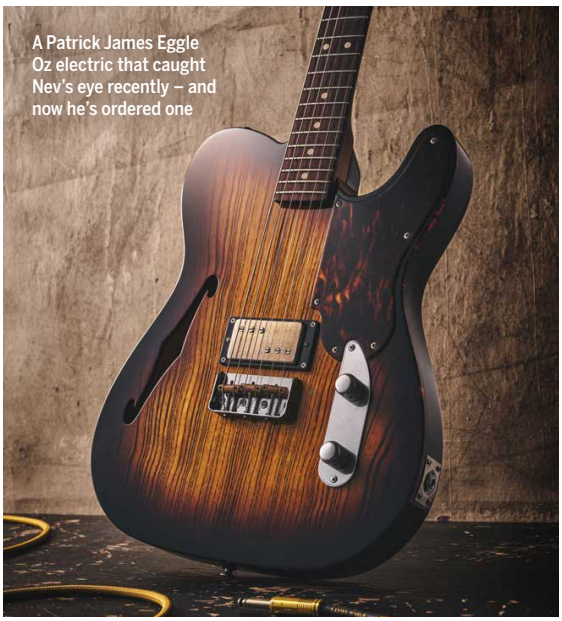
You could describe my relationship with boutique instruments as akin to that of riding a see-saw. I'm either up or I'm down, and only rarely in that state of equilibrium, sitting happily in the middle. But that's exactly where I find myself today.

We all know that the instruments we initially lust after are those played by our heroes. So if Steve Vai is the man, it's Ibanez all the way. Brian Setzer? It has to be an orange Gretsch. My six-string crushes were Les Paul, ES-335, Strat and Tele, after all the 60s heroes you really don't need me to trot out. And those were indeed my first proper purchases.

There have always been what we now term 'boutique' guitars and amps. Instruments made in far smaller numbers than the big manufacturers, allowing them to lavish more time, superior materials and product individuality than the factories, which had financial constraints and specific models to adhere to. Paul Bigsby made guitars completely by hand for the likes of Merle Travis and Hank Williams' guitarist Bob McNett, but his six-a-side headstock and string-through-body anchoring directly influenced Leo Fender. Or Ray Butts, who built Scotty Moore's amp that we hear on all those early Elvis tracks.

Now we have Mesa/Boogie, the original modern boutique amp maker, and Matchless, Lazy J, Carr, Divided By 13 and a trillion others. What about Stromberg and D'Angelico, who perhaps surpassed even Gibson's magnificent L-5 and Super 400? In today's acoustic world we have Santa Cruz, Bourgeois, Aitkin, Froggy Bottom, and hordes of others. Or Tyler, Grosh, Huber, Novo, Powers, Seth Bacchus, Martyn Booth, and literally hundreds of low–volume electric builders.

Here, I'll focus on my own dealings with this market, from the early 80s when Dave Gladden (who built Nik Kershaw's early guitars) supplied me with neck and body blanks for guitars I was 'building' for myself and others; to 1989 when I commissioned my PRS Signature; to the guitar that Patrick James Eggle is currently creating for me.



A Patrick James Eggle Oz electric that caught Nev's eye recently – and now he's ordered one

"The supreme build quality and playability of [boutique guitars] kicked the complacent opposition into life" NEVILLE MARTEN



A 1989 PRS that Nev spec'd out with Paul Reed Smith himself and that served him well for years

In 1989 I sat down with Paul Reed Smith and spec'd out my perfect guitar. I went for a heavily flamed vintage sunburst top, gold parts, Brazilian rosewood fingerboard, vibrato, hand-signed headstock. As classic as a modern, superlative-quality 'boutique' builder (which PRS still was) could supply.

When the guitar arrived it was my absolute pride and joy, the only instrument I played for years. But I started hankering after real Fender and Gibson sounds, rather than the facsimiles my Signature provided. I was also affected by the 'accountant' vibe that was attaching to PRS and Boogie (my exact rig!). I tried again more recently with a Custom 22 in River Blue with a stunning flamed maple neck and startling figured top. It was spectacular but didn't feel right for me.

What we *must* say about PRS, and indeed Taylor, is that their supreme build quality and playability kicked the complacent opposition into life. Ironically, they now have their own 'boutique' departments in the form of 'custom shops' – although Fender's CS is actually a larger concern than Music Man, Rickenbacker, Collings, Suhr, Tom Anderson, and many other great companies. And Gibson's Custom department equals or surpasses the output of Heritage, the firm that occupies its old premises in Kalamazoo.

But back to my personal journey. For years I'd been promising Pat Eggle that I'd buy one of his guitars. And while reviewing the Oz Carved Top in issue 534 I checked out Dave Burrluck's article on the single-pickup Oz he'd reviewed last October. I took one look at it, picked up the phone and asked Pat to build me exactly that. I can't wait to get it.

Remember Dave Gladden? Dave built me a single-pickup T-Type body that I turned into a really nice guitar for a friend, and a Les Paul Junior body for me. It was stupendous, and I'm hoping the new Oz will fulfil its long lost dreams.

I've also just got my old 'custom built for me' Cornford Carrera amp back. So you see, I'm no boutique luddite. I bought a Mesa/Boogie MK2 in 1980 (I still own a Boogie combo), a Matchless DC30 in 1994 and several thereafter, a Two-Rock in the early 2000s, an original aluminium-neck Kramer in the 80s, and several Collings acoustics. However, today my guitars are mostly from the 'boutique' divisions of Fender and Gibson. And if that's a giant cop-out, what can I say? G

RETRO REIMAGINED

Models with an old-school bent yet all the modern conveniences under the hood

Words Connor Flys



PHOTO: WWW.SHERGOLDGUITARS.COM

SHERGOLD TELSTAR STANDARD ST14 £379

The relaunch of the cult British brand turned heads, and while this more recent Telstar design bears little relation to Shergold's 70s and 80s Joy Division-approved heyday, it's interesting in its own right. The retro Cabronita-inspired design from the drawing board of Patrick James Eggle has both an offset waist and a Firebird-esque raised centre, plus it's a thoroughly modern, well-thought-out instrument underneath. And just look at that price!
www.shergoldguitars.com



EASTMAN FULLERTONE SC'52 £899

Eastman's build quality and design is consistently impressive, and the prices are highly competitive for the calibre of instrument. This FullerTone range, designed by Custom Shop head honcho Otto d'Ambrosio, features a deep-mounted 24-fret neck anchored by just two bolts. The SC'52 is Tele-inspired but far from a copy – its funky design is complemented by high-quality hardware, while the roasted black limba body makes it light and resonant.
www.eastmanguitars.com



DUESENBERG STARPLAYER CBR £2,199

The German brand's likeable Art Deco-inspired retro vibe is a distinctive one indeed, and this Starplayer features revised and slightly thicker-walled chambered construction, and a versatile combination of bridge humbucker and neck P-90. Dialling up the flexibility, the CBR's secret weapon is a five-way pickup selector offering a couple of interesting extra sounds. If you've grown weary of trad Les Pauls, this shakes up that old design in a meaningful way.
www.duesenberg.de/en



GRETSCH ELECTROMATIC BLACK LIMBA CVT £549

Gretsch's recent reboot of its lesser-spotted solidbody Corvette has spawned a number of variants, this one sculpted from the fabled tropical hardwood black limba. For a very reasonable outlay, the CVT packs in a pair of Twin Six 'buckers with a treble bleed on the volume control, making it that bit more usable when dialled back. Add a Graph Tech nut and adjustable wrap-around bridge for a cool retro guitar with plenty of useful contemporary features.
www.gretschguitars.com



GORDON SMITH GATSBY FROM £1,399

The revitalised Gordon Smith brand goes from strength to strength, with the offset Gatsby providing a nicely built, slimmed-down Jazzmaster alternative that should appeal to those who find Fender's offsets too unwieldy. British-built and equipped as standard with a pair of Gordon Smith's own P-90s and a stylistically appropriate vibrato tailpiece, it's a stylish, smooth-playing guitar with a wide variety of bespoke options; you can really make it your own.
www.gordonsmithguitars.com



FENDER AMERICAN ULTRA LUXE VINTAGE 50s TELECASTER FROM £2,829

The name is so long that it has a sub-plot in the middle. 'Ultra Luxe' means you're getting the comfort-contoured, compound-radius best of the best from Fender's series-production range, while 'Vintage' is represented by the nitro finish and traditionally voiced pickups. A fine example of a classic-looking Fender with all the accoutrements of modern pro-quality guitars.
www.fender.com

FLEXIBLE FRIENDS

These are modern guitars with feature-rich versatility, for true tonal freedom

Words Connor Flys



FENDER ACOUSTASONIC PLAYER JAZZMASTER FROM £1,039

A true halfway house between acoustic and electric, Fender's Acoustasonic range has become a notable success – and this Jazzmaster expands the concept further, with a magnetic humbucker. As well as Fishman-powered acoustic tones, harder-edged, more convincing electric sounds are available here, combined with fantastic playability that'll put electric players at ease.
www.fender.com



CREAM T CROSSFIRE STANDARD HH £1,799

Technically, it's quite difficult to achieve more flexibility than hot-swapping entire pickups on the fly, and the approach taken by Cream T makes this very simple. Built in the UK by the same facility responsible for PJD's excellent instruments, this offset uses the company's 'Guitar-X' magnetic mounting technology, allowing the pickups to be easily removed through the back of the body and immediately replaced – and you don't even need to unplug.
www.creamtcustomshop.com



MANSON GUITAR WORKS ORYX VI £2,999

One of the UK's most established boutique guitar brands, Manson has a notable history of pushing the boundaries of technical feasibility. The Oryx model was developed with superstar metal producer Adam 'Nolly' Getgood, and is equipped with a clever six-way pickup selector for an expanded palette of sounds from Nolly's signature Bare Knuckle Polymath humbuckers. It's a real precision instrument for modern tones.
https://mansonguitarworks.com



PRS SE HOLLOWBODY II PIEZO £1,349

The thinline SE Hollowbody is bigger-bodied than many PRS fans will be used to, approaching ES-335 territory. For a semi-acoustic, though, that size makes for a richer and more expansive electric tone. And as it's fully hollow, the LR Baggs piezo system's acoustic sounds become all the more convincing. All together, it's a rather elegant solution for high-quality electric and acoustic sounds rolled into a single, very playable instrument.
www.prsguitars.com



YAMAHA PACIFICA SC PROFESSIONAL PACP11SM £2,150

A lot of money for a Pacifica? Well, the range was developed as a Fender-killer aimed at pros by Yamaha's California R&D in the 90s – only later becoming a budget favourite. This Japanese-built Pro returns to the Pacifica's roots: well-considered design, flexibility and quality. Its woods are treated for enhanced resonance, and proprietary pickups are developed with Rupert Neve Designs.
https://uk.yamaha.com



FENDER JACK WHITE TRIPLECASTER TELECASTER £3,849

Never let it be said that Jack White does things by halves. A simple Tele slab becomes a feature-laden behemoth in the Triplecaster: a Bigsby-equipped, chambered-body guitar where each of the pickups is of a different type – bridge 'bucker, P-90 in the middle and Wide Range at the neck. It's expensive, excessive and certainly an acquired taste, but perhaps that's the point.
www.fender.com

HIGH PERFORMANCE

Advanced features help the agile modern player execute their virtuosity with ease and flair

Words Stuart Williams



CORT/MANSON MBM-2H SUSTAINIAC £899

High-performance doesn't always need to mean high price, as expertly demonstrated by this Cort/Manson Meta Series Matt Bellamy signature. It's a toolbox of sound-shaping utilities: kill switch, Sustainiac Stealth Pro pickup for endless sustain/pseudo-feedback effects, plus Manson's own bridge humbucker to deliver biting rock tone. It's the affordable performance guitar for those who want to experiment sonically, as well as technically.
www.cortguitars.com



STERLING BY MUSIC MAN KAIZEN 7 £1,099

The brainchild of contemporary shred hero Tosin Abassi, this seven-string is the Sterling version of his US-made Music Man model and, as such, does away with the fanned frets, making this a softer launch if you're dabbling with the low B for the first time. It boasts a fantastic spec: roasted maple neck, nyatoh body, Steinberger gearless tuners and Sterling two-point vibrato. Everything about it feels modern, right down to the matt-purple finish.
https://intl.sterlingbymusicman.com



JACKSON PRO PLUS SERIES SIGNATURE SLEEP TOKEN IV MONARKH SC £1,949

We're all familiar with the Bass VI, but what if Jackson reimagined an aggro counterpart? You'd get this new single-cut, tuned an octave below standard for IV from metal sensations Sleep Token. It's fitted with an Evertune bridge, a compound 305mm to 406.4mm (12- to 16-inch) radius pale moon ebony 'board and Fishman Fluence Open Core 'buckers. An intriguing modern electric.
www.jacksonguitars.com



IBANEZ Q54W £959

It's impossible to talk about performance guitars without mentioning the Japanese giant of the genre. Ibanez's Q54W delivers a combo of roasted maple and bubinga, styled into a Wizard III profile for tried-and-tested shred familiarity. It's packing a versatile HSS pickup configuration, 24 stainless-steel frets, Ibanez's Mono-Tune bridge, and the dyna-MIX9/Alter switch offers myriad combinations. Headless is back, and Ibanez is helping lead the way.
www.ibanez.com



EPIPHONE PROPHECY LES PAUL £1,249

Forget about 'Bursts: the Epiphone Prophecy series takes the Les Paul into all-new territories. Modern features such as the HyperGlide neck profile, Ultra Modern weight relief, 24 stainless-steel frets and (gulp) a 648mm (25.5-inch) scale are just the start. Fishman Fluence pickups offer three voices via push-pull coil-splitting, and the strings even terminate with Epi's LockTone Modern through-body tailpiece. And get a load of that matt finish!
www.epiphone.com



.STRANDBERG* BODEN N2 ORIGINAL £2,222

.strandberg*'s designs bring the foundation laid by Steinberger et al into the 21st century with more player-based features than you can shake a headstock at. The EndurNeck profile feels like nothing else, while the body allows for multiple playing positions. 24 stainless-steel frets sit on a roasted birdseye maple 'board, and the EGS hardware/full-contact bridge system is the perfect platform for Fishman's POWR:D pickups to work their magic.
https://strandbergguitars.com

PHOTO: WWW.IBANEZ.COM

MODERN CLASSIC

Polished all-rounders with contemporary finesse and a comfortable playing experience

Words Stuart Williams



CHARVEL RICK GRAHAM DK24 £1,399

Rick Graham needs a guitar capable of matching his precision, and the DK24 delivers, with a graphite-reinforced, caramelised maple neck and 'board (with a compound 305mm to 406.4mm/12- to 16-inch radius), a Gotoh 510 vibrato and locking tuners. Pickups are Rick's signature Bare Knuckle set, packing a premium ceramic punch from the splittable humbucker, and dynamic, vintage warmth from the neck and middle position. Best get practising!
www.charvel.com



PJD CUSTOM SHOP ST JOHN CLASSIC £2,199

PJD has had a whirlwind rise to success, thanks in part to Leigh Dovey's commitment to creating instruments that meld vintage aesthetics with modern playability – and with the UK-made Custom Shop St John Classic, PJD takes on an offset. The chambered swamp ash body (f-hole optional) is finished in open-grain satin nitro and houses a pair of PJD's own pickups: a Nacho P90 (neck) and Scam '59 humbucker (bridge) for a versatile, beefy pairing.
www.pjdguitars.com



PRS SILVER SKY £2,499

John Mayer's design needs no introduction, but we'll remind you that it's referred to as his "idealised" version of a single-coil guitar. Yes, it's a modern classic yet it features a very vintage 184mm (7.25-inch) 'board radius, and is packed with performance specs, such as PRS locking tuners and a drop-only flush-mounted Gen III vibrato designed to increase the signal-to-noise ratio of the 635JM pickups, which offer big, round, scooped chime-y clarity.
www.prsguitars.com



EVH WOLFGANG SPECIAL STRIPED £1,549

Eddie knew what he wanted in every part of his rig, and that's reflected in the guitars that bear his name. The classic Wolfgang outline is delivered with forensic attention to detail here, with Floyd Rose, D-Tuna, body-end spoke wheel and kill switch – even the pots are selected for friction where needed and fluidity where not. The two Wolfgang humbuckers take care of all the firepower you'll need, and it's beaten to resemble Eddie's 2015 tour guitar.
www.evhgear.com



FENDER AMERICAN ULTRA II STRAT HSS £2,309

If you want a genuine Strat, but you're less motivated by period-correct features and auto-inspired colours, look to Fender's Ultra II line. This Strat packs a quarter-sawn maple neck, 254mm to 355.6mm (10- to 14-inch) compound radius 'board (with rolled edges), and tapered heel for comfortable upper-fret access. It's just as refined for tone, too, with Noiseless single coils and a Haymaker 'bucker, itself splittable via the S-1 switch.
www.fender.com



GODIN LERXST LIMELIGHT £5,149

The Lerxst Limelight is one of the best high-performance S-types we've featured in recent years. Based on Alex Lifeson's Sportscaster custom created around the release of 1981's *Moving Pictures*, it marries a swamp ash body with maple bolt-on neck. Electronics are courtesy of Mojotone's custom-wound single coils and a dual-blade bridge 'bucker. The icing on the cake is the Vega-Trem, offering super-smooth and incredibly reliable stability.
https://lerxstamps.com

HEAVY BY DESIGN

PRS has long appealed to heavier players, but its new Tekton range marks the first time the company has built an entire platform around them. We meet the team behind the new series, which PRS says is "purpose-built to deliver precision, character, range and clarity"

Words Charlie Wilkins

The new Tekton series takes PRS into territory the company has never explored quite this deliberately. Heavy players have used PRS guitars for years, but this new USA-made family isn't a Custom 24 with a few metal-friendly appointments bolted on; it's a fresh design aimed at the players who want thinner necks, flatter fingerboards, stainless-steel frets and pickups that hold together under punishing gain.

There are four versions from the outset – fixed-bridge, vibrato, Floyd Rose and seven-string models – and the idea is to give modern metal and progressive guitarists a genuine choice, rather than a one-off specialist instrument.

We speak with director of New Products Engineering, Rob Carhart, and Artist Relations & Development's Rich Hannon about how the guitars took shape, what changed once working players got their hands on the prototypes, and why PRS sees Tekton as the start of something bigger.





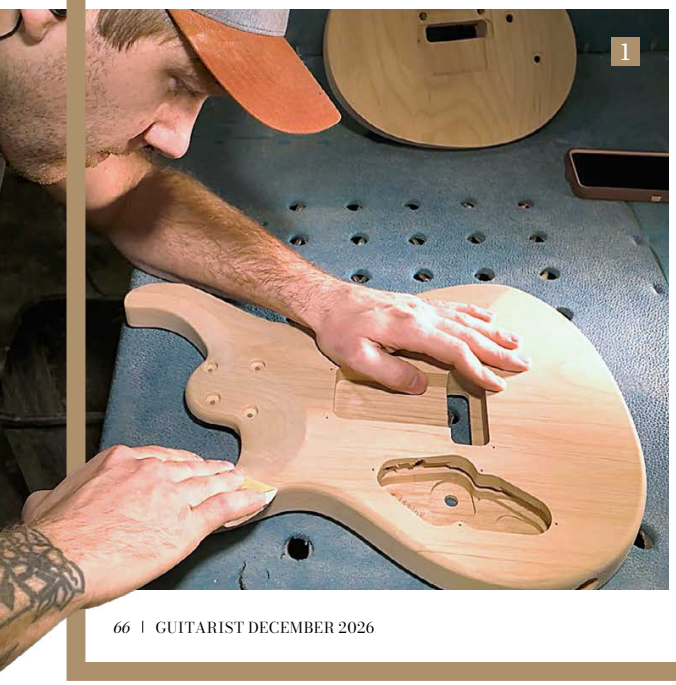
Rob Carhart (top) and Rich Hannon of PRS
www.prsguitars.com

1. A PRS employee carefully shapes the slender contours of a Tekton electric

2. Light in weight but heavy in tonal impact, the Tekton is built to deliver high-gain power

Heavy and progressive players have been in the PRS orbit for years, but the Tekton feels more intentional than anything that came before it. Why build a new platform now?
Rob Carhart: "We felt the company was at a point where we weren't locked into specific platforms and it gave us the chance to explore features we simply didn't offer across our product line. These kinds of guitars have been around for decades, but we kept hearing from people who wanted flatter fingerboards, thinner necks, stainless-steel frets and different pickups. Paul comes from a traditional guitar-building background, but he's always been open to new ideas. The timing felt right, and we felt we could do our own version of this kind of guitar to the standard people expect from PRS."

"We invited artists, producers and other people who specialise in heavier music to try out eight to 10 prototypes" RICH HANNON



What did the development process look like once you moved beyond the initial design stage?
Rich Hannon: "We made around eight to 10 prototypes, brought them to a soundstage in Nashville and invited artists, producers and other people who specialise in heavier music to come and play them. We had about 18 or 20 people in the room trying them out. The feedback and responses told us we were heading in the right direction. We took their comments back to Rob's team and kept refining things.

"It was important to hear from people who make their living playing these kinds of instruments, not just people inside PRS. Paul also welcomes suggestions from the people building these guitars. If someone from final assembly has played Floyd Rose guitars his whole life, we want to hear what he thinks about setting up that bridge."

There are plenty of modern metal guitars already. How did you keep the Tekton from becoming just another checklist guitar?
Rob: "There were five or six things we felt had to be there: a thin, fast neck that still felt good in the hand, easy access to the higher frets, the 16-inch fingerboard radius, stainless-steel frets, a lightweight body, and pickups that stayed clear under heavy gain. But we also wanted as much of the guitar as possible to be our own design. Paul has always felt strongly about that. He doesn't want something that feels like a parts guitar. It's a different instrument from a Custom 24, but we still wanted it to feel like a PRS."

The neck is particularly slim. How far could you push the carve before it stopped feeling comfortable?
Rob: "Paul got very involved in refining the carve. He worked on the shoulders and the shape to make it more comfortable. I'm a thick-neck guy myself, so that mattered to me. It also has our dual-action truss rod and two Hormigo strength rods running down the neck. Hormigo is a very stiff wood, and we feel it helps with stability and contributes to the sound. With a thinner neck and body there are always trade-offs, so we took those things into account when developing the pickups as well."

Most traditional PRS core guitars have a 10-inch fingerboard radius. Why go to 16 inches here, and what's different about the string spacing?
Rob: "The flatter radius was something we kept hearing about from these players, and it was one of the main features we wanted.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PRS GUITARS



PHOTO BY MATT LINCOLN

We also tried different string-spacing arrangements on the prototypes. What players preferred was our usual width at the nut but with wider 'hybrid' spacing at the bridge, like you find on the Silver Sky or Fiore. It gives you a little more room between the strings at the picking hand. We even made new pickup bobbins so the polepieces line up with that spacing. It was a case of trying different combinations and listening to what the players liked."

Even small details such as the inlays and controls went through changes. What came out of that feedback?
Rob: "We tried prototypes with birds, dots and even no fingerboard inlays. We wanted the finished guitar to look elegant but a little different from what people expect when they see a PRS, so we ended up with simpler, more utilitarian markers. We also included Luminlay side dots because they make it easier to see where you are on a dark stage. The position of the volume and tone controls and the three-way switch changed during development, too. On a guitar with a tremolo, you don't want the controls getting in the way of the arm."

"There were probably seven or eight major retooling areas altogether. It was a big project for the whole factory" ROB CARHART

3. Volume and control knobs had to be positioned to permit full expressive use of the vibrato system

4. A locking trem version was a must for the gain-focused Tekton range – but there are non-locking and fixed-bridge versions, too



Did building the Tekton force you to rethink the manufacturing process?
Rob: "Yes, we had new tooling across the board. There were fixtures for milling the bodies and necks, new tooling for the 16-inch radius, and new processes for working with stainless-steel frets. That wire is much harder than traditional nickel-silver fretwire, so you need different abrasives for levelling and finishing it. We also needed new pickup-winding tooling because the bobbins have different geometry. Some bridge components and the nut are specific to this guitar, too. There were probably seven or eight major retooling areas altogether. It was a big project for the whole factory."

With the new Stylus pickups, were you chasing high output or trying to keep definition when the gain and tunings get extreme?
Rob: "Clarity was the big thing. We wanted something that wouldn't get muddy with a lot of gain or lower tunings. Our electronics team worked with Paul on a pickup that had a flatter response than a vintage-style humbucker. We listened to them through an Archon with the gain way up. I wanted to hit a chord and still hear the individual notes, instead of everything turning to mush."
Rich: "A lot of these players use digital amp modellers now, and pickups can drive those differently from a tube amp. You need enough output to be aggressive without hitting the front-end too hard. And the clean sounds had to be genuinely usable. A producer who's been using both the six- and seven-string prototypes told me he loved the clean sound with the coils split. That's the kind of feedback we wanted to hear."

Why develop your own passive pickups instead of fitting one of the established active systems many metal players already use?
Rob: "We did talk about that. An active system needs a preamp and a battery, and those things add cost, particularly when you're building guitars in the USA. We also felt that, with the work we've done on pickups over the years, we could develop a passive design ourselves that delivered what we needed. Paul has always wanted our guitars to use as many components designed by PRS as possible. That doesn't mean we would never use an active system in the future, but for this launch we wanted the Stylus to be our own pickup."

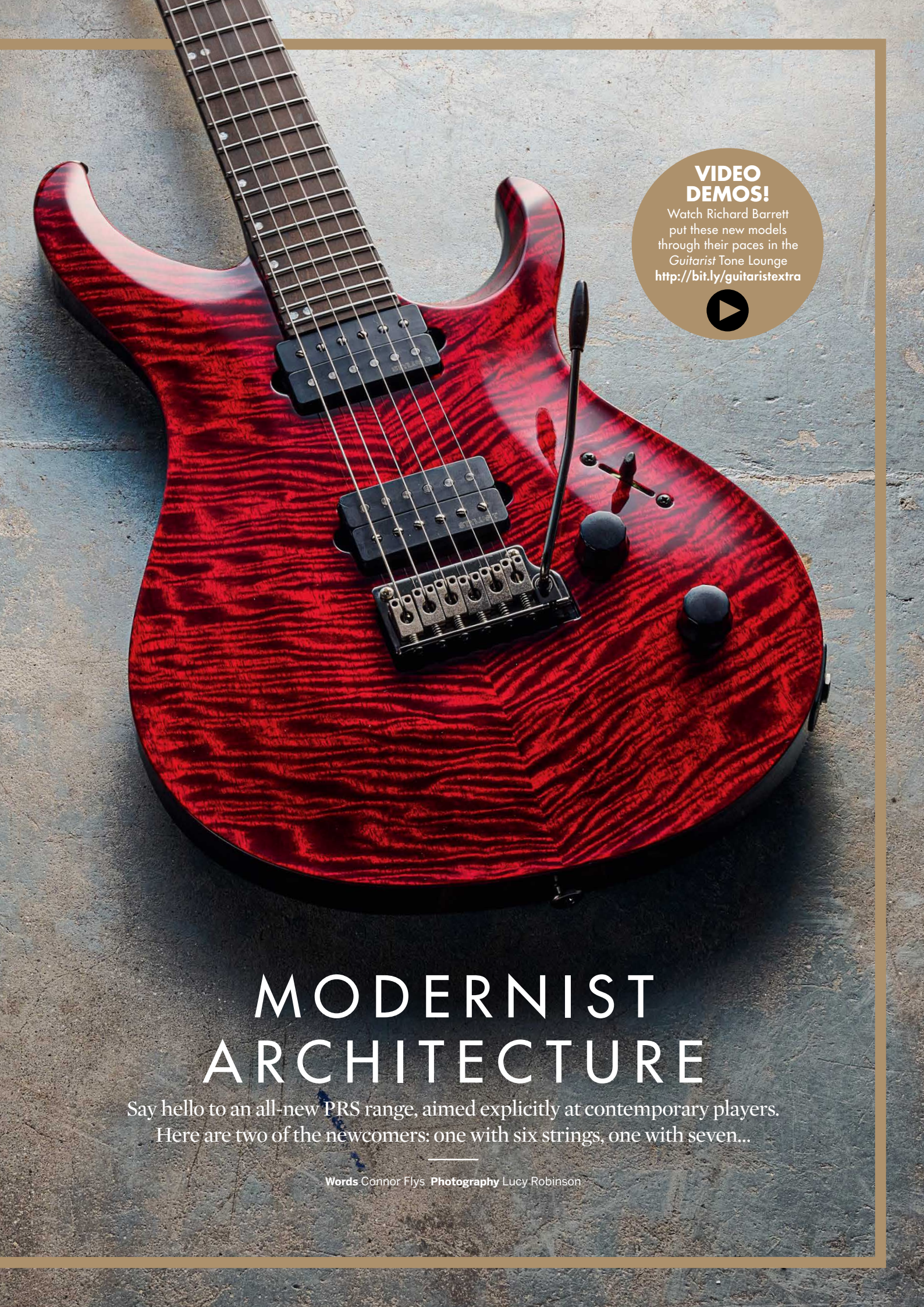
For a guitar aimed at modern metal players, mango is an unexpected choice for the top. Was that about sound or appearance?
Rob: "First it had to sound good. That's always the test. Mango also machines well, it's stable and it's available. Visually, the figuring can be incredible, and it varies dramatically from one top to the next. Some of it almost looks like snakeskin. It checked the boxes tonally and practically, as well as visually. The hardtail, two-point trem and seven-string [models] use mahogany bodies with mango tops; the Floyd Rose version has a solid alder body."
Rich: "It's sustainable, too. I've seen mango tops on these guitars that look like something you'd expect on one of our much more expensive Private Stock guitars."

The Tekton launches as a four-model family, including a seven-string. Was that the plan from the start?
Rob: "Very early on, our head of sales, Jim Cullen, wanted us to think of it as a family, rather than a single guitar. The seven-string market isn't as big as the six-string market, but we felt it was important to make a really usable seven-string under the PRS name. Then there was the hardtail six-string, the two-point trem and, given the kind of players we were talking about, we felt we had to offer a Floyd Rose version. Launching all four sends a message that we're serious about these guitars."
Rich: "A lot of these players know PRS but look elsewhere because we haven't offered this type of guitar. It was a party we weren't invited to, so we decided to invite ourselves. And once you've established the platform, you can look at different pickup configurations, fingerboard materials, bridge options and tops. It's a stepping stone for more products in the years ahead." G
www.prsguitars.com

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PRS GUITARS


ARCHON
50
POWER





VIDEO DEMOS!
Watch Richard Barrett put these new models through their paces in the *Guitarist* Tone Lounge
http://bit.ly/guitaristextra

MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE

Say hello to an all-new PRS range, aimed explicitly at contemporary players. Here are two of the newcomers: one with six strings, one with seven...

Words Connor Flys **Photography** Lucy Robinson



PRS TEKTON T & PRS TEKTON SVN

£2,899 & £2,999

CONTACT **PRS Guitars** PHONE **01223 874301** WEB **www.prsguitars.com**

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

1 Aren't PRS guitars already aimed at modern players?
You could certainly argue so, but the Tektons really aim to bring things bang up to date. The pickups are specifically designed to complement modern digital rigs, and the ergonomics have been significantly reworked, too.

2 And the top is made of mango wood? What's that all about?
It's already an established choice for various other musical instruments. After the trees' long and productive fruit-bearing lives are behind them, the mature wood is harvested and put to further use. It's sustainable – and often beautifully figured, as here.

3 Is there one with a locking vibrato, too?
Yes – and the Tekton 'Floyd' is a bit different from the others. It's an alder body without that mango top, and only comes in solid colours, including some nice bright 80s hues.

Designing a guitar for modern, technically minded musicians can make or break an instrument manufacturer's credibility. Some companies choose to skilfully update a classic blueprint with useful changes, but some ill-advisedly pack in gimmicks and divisive styling, without considering what players actually want.

PRS, however, needed to take a different tack from the start. Even its very first model, the Custom 24, remains immensely desirable among contemporary guitarists – decades since it was designed. So a more explicitly modern addition to the range might look like over-egging the pudding; it needs to stand apart usefully from the Custom, or it mightn't be worth the risk.

The company has risen to the challenge, resulting in the new Tekton range – and PRS describes this launch as "planting a flag for a whole new family of guitars". So, if these models succeed, you can surely expect to see more where they've come from.

PRS says the Tektons are aimed squarely at "the most discerning,



1. All models have 24-fret ebony fingerboards with a 406.4mm (16-inch) radius, and they all feature stainless-steel fretwire, too – de rigueur for many a modern guitar, and you can bet that it would have been cause for complaint if it were left off



2

technical players", designed specifically for contemporary musical styles and cutting-edge gear setups. We're meeting two of the four new models here – the six-string, vibrato-equipped Tekton T, and the seven-string Tekton SVN (with the fixed-bridge Tekton and the Tekton 'Floyd' completing the range) – to see what's what.

The Tekton shape is a slimmed-down, sharpened combination of the tried-and-tested Custom 24 and the offset Vela. To our eyes, it's a remarkably successful design. It still looks very much like a PRS but is modernised appropriately. It's purposeful and elegant, and wouldn't look out of place on a modern metal stage, and yet it isn't necessarily going to frighten away those with more classic tastes, either.

For three out of the four models, the body wood is mahogany (the exception being the alder-bodied Tekton 'Floyd'). On both examples we're testing, the back and sides are painted a glossy metallic grey, with abundant contouring and a slim, sculpted bolt-on neck joint – worlds away from the oversized heel of a Custom 24, and more reminiscent of something like Ibanez's All Access Neck Joint.

2. For the Stylus humbucker design, PRS's sonic goal was "aggressive but clear" and "good together and on their own... as humbuckers or split". Each model gets a three-way switch, and a push-pull tone control that splits the coils

Both these models also feature a 'Shallow Violin'-carved mango wood top, a timber that PRS is fond of currently; the Tektons aren't its only models sporting mango tops. It's a high-quality wood and sustainable, too – and we'd love to hear anyone try to argue that it doesn't cut it visually.

The six-string Tektons move away from the trademark 635mm (25-inch) PRS scale length – it's 648mm (25.5 inches) here instead. Given that the target demographic may well be using lower tunings, this makes sense. It's hardly a massive change, of course, but even a little extra length keeps the strings tighter if you're tuning down. The SVN, however, goes further; the scale here is 673mm (26.5 inches), useful for seven-string as it allows that low B to stay clearer and tighter, especially if you plan on dropping it down to A or beyond.



3

The Tekton T's neck profile is a sheer delight for the technically minded guitarist... The D-shaped carve feels nicely supportive

3. The basis of the Tekton shape is actually the vintage-inspired PRS Vela but with lots of tweaks. The end result is the thinnest body and neck design that the company has ever put into series production



4

THE RIVALS

The Tekton's pricing isn't far from Mayones territory, with the Polish luthier's Duvell (from £2,699) and Aquila (from £2,999) ranges available with six or seven strings – incredibly well-regarded in the modern rock and metal sphere. ESP's Japanese-built E-II Horizon (from £2,799) and M-II (from £2,199) models can be had in numerous configurations, too, worth considering if you prefer a neck-through instrument. Meanwhile, Fender's American Ultra range (from £1,999) offers the classic Strat and Tele blueprints with a healthy slug of modern-day convenience and playability. Finally, it's very hard to ignore the Japanese-built, six- and seven-string Ibanez Prestige RG, AZ and S models, whose entry point sits only around £1,299 – staggering value for money.

Hardware-wise, the solidity that one expects from PRS is here in abundance. The Tekton T utilises the company's venerable two-point vibrato, while the SVN model boasts a substantial-feeling string-through hardtail. Both models get a set of PRS 'Phase III' lightweight locking tuners.

The Tekton range debuts a new pickup for PRS, too. Each model employs two Alnico V-powered, modern-voiced Stylus humbuckers. It was decreed that these pickups should sound just as good with a digital setup as they do with a valve amp. Which means a balanced frequency response and a little less output – in theory, giving clarity and punch without sacrificing too much character.

FEEL & SOUNDS

These are claimed to be the slimmest bodies and necks that PRS has ever put into production, and both guitars are wonderfully lightweight. Even the Tekton SVN, despite the extra wood involved in making it a longer-scale seven-string, is very similar in weight to the Tekton T. And while neither is the last word in acoustic 'zing', both feel resonant and lively enough unplugged.

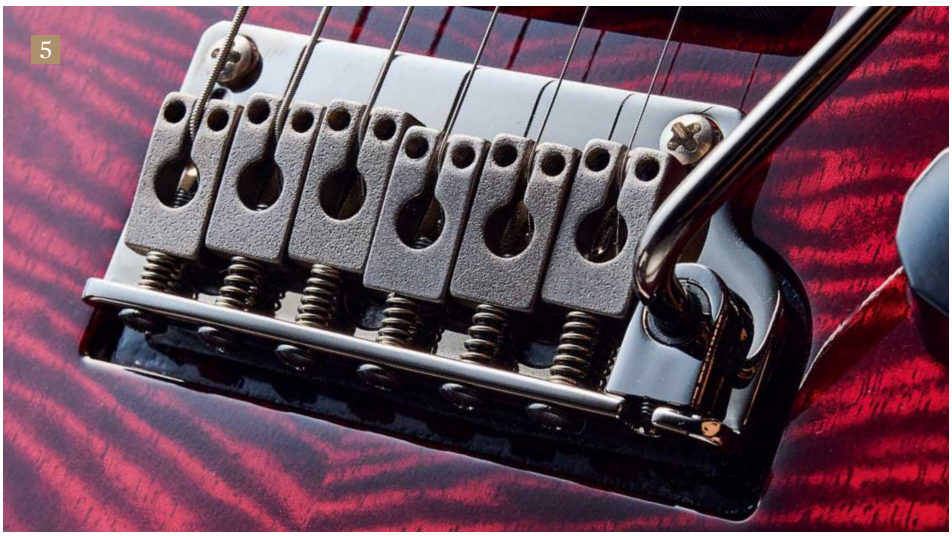
The contoured back and subtly offset shape allows them to sit very comfortably against the player's torso. If there's a gripe to be had about the ergonomics, it would be that the carved top creates a hard edge to the body where it meets the picking arm; it's just not as comfortable as a more traditional Strat-style forearm contour. It's the one area of the Tekton's design that seems to place form before function – they're on a commendably equal footing everywhere else.

The Tekton T's neck profile, though, is a sheer delight for the technically minded guitarist. PRS describes this reinforced neck design as "thin yet substantial", which does get the point across. It's not an Ibanez Wizard-esque cocktail stick, but shredders will still be happy here. The D-shaped carve feels nicely supportive, whether your hand is positioned for wide bends and vibrato, or for fast scale runs. As you'd hope for the price, the finishing and fretwork are superb, too.

The Tekton SVN, meanwhile, handles its extra string and extra inch of scale length with aplomb. As seven-string necks go, it's up there with the most comfortable

4. The Tekton name comes from Ancient Greek; according to PRS, it means "artisan or craftsman, in particular a woodworker, carpenter or builder". So now you know!

5. The PRS two-point floating vibrato is a tried-and-tested piece of hardware. It's great for expressive phrasing, but if silly noises are your bag, it can gargle and shriek with the best of 'em, too



5



6

we've tried. The shoulders feel just slightly less pronounced; the resultant perception is of a shallower profile, despite the quoted depth measurements being identical. It's a wonderfully accommodating seven, which otherwise feels very similar to its sibling – the neck seems barely any bigger, and you'll fly up and down the fretboard (all models come with a flattish 406.4mm/16-inch radius) with all the same abandon.

If, like this writer, you've ever struggled to gel with the ergonomics of more traditional PRS models, you'll likely find the Tekton range to be a dramatic improvement.

Now, it's time to see if these Stylus pickups make good on PRS's claims. We fired up a contemporary digital rig (a small pedalboard designed to run direct, built around a Line 6 HX Stomp) and cycled through some varied settings, majoring on more modern sounds, as that's the idea. And right away these pickups are exceedingly well judged, with crisp, clear delivery that lets your carefully dialled tones shine through. The output doesn't overpower a clean sound and helps to keep higher gain tight and defined, with great string separation. It's exactly what you'd want from a modern two-humbucker guitar and sounds highly accomplished for anything from function band sets to tracking modern metal riffs.

6. The proprietary Stylus humbuckers are present in SVN format on the seven-string, where the coil-split really comes into its own

The split-coil sounds are excellent, too, with more than enough punch and a useful change in character that opens up even more versatility – from tight, defined single-coil rock tones to glassy cleans. It's especially good for the SVN, where the split lends the low notes a formidable, wiry snarl. Whether split or full, though, the seven-string Stylus humbuckers combine with the longer scale to create a tight, percussive and balanced sound that's ideal for technical drop-tuned metal riffs, of course, but far from a one-trick pony.

The seven-string Stylus humbuckers combine with the longer scale to create a tight, percussive and balanced sound

And if you're a digital sceptic with a penchant for old-fashioned iron, you'll be pleased to know that both sound just as great through our big Laney VH100R.



7

7. This Bloodstone Red Tekton T has a satin black-painted neck, which might seem an unusual choice given that it doesn't strictly match any of the other finishes on the guitar. But the smoothness and comfort are beyond argument



8. The SVN's extended 673mm (26.5-inch) scale is ideal for lower tunings. The extra length makes the high strings marginally less forgiving for bends and vibrato, but for many seven-string players, that's a trade-off that's well worth making

VERDICT

Price-wise, the Tekton range will sit near the other USA-built, bolt-on PRS range – the CE series. And it's an ideal alternative for those seeking a more overtly modern guitar. The new Stylus pickups fit their brief admirably, with superbly balanced, defined tones, while the ergonomics are surely the best of any PRS model yet. It's versatile, too: a guitar that truly will work for a multitude of styles. Even the seven-string doesn't have to be a metal guitar if you don't need it to be.

The ergonomics are surely the best of any PRS model yet. It's versatile, too: a guitar that truly will work for a multitude of styles

Far from a mere phoned-in rework of an existing model, the Tekton is all-new – and feels it. It's been put together with real care and attention to what today's guitarists need. So if you've been waiting for a progressive, contemporary reimagining of the PRS blueprint, here it is. G



PRS TEKTON T

PRICE: £2,899
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: 6-string solidbody electric guitar
BODY: Mahogany, with figured mango top
NECK: Maple, satin nitrocellulose finish
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: PRS composite/42.8mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, offset dot inlays, 406.4mm (16") radius
FRETS: 24
HARDWARE: Smoked black, PRS 2-point vibrato, PRS Phase III locking tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 56mm
ELECTRICS: PRS Stylus bridge and neck humbuckers, 3-way pickup selector, Volume and push-pull Tone control (for coil-split)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.96/6.5
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Fixed-bridge Tekton (£2,899), Tekton 'Floyd' (£2,999), Tekton SVN seven-string (see right)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Gloss nitrocellulose Bloodstone Red (as reviewed), Slate Blue, Imperial Topaz, Black Tourmaline, Violet Tourmaline, Fuchsia Aura

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Very well-considered, well-resolved design with serious aesthetic appeal; slim and lightweight, with a great neck; excellent new pickup design

CONS Only the slightly uncomfortable body edge where it meets the forearm



PRS TEKTON SVN

PRICE: £2,999
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: 7-string, solidbody electric guitar
BODY: Mahogany, with figured mango top
NECK: Maple, satin nitrocellulose finish
SCALE LENGTH: 673mm (26.5")
NUT/WIDTH: PRS composite/48.4mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, offset dot inlays, 406.4mm (16") radius
FRETS: 24
HARDWARE: Smoked black, PRS hardtail bridge, PRS Phase III locking tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 64mm
ELECTRICS: PRS Stylus SVN bridge and neck humbuckers, 3-way pickup selector, volume and push-pull tone control (for coil-split)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3/6.6
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: See left
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Gloss nitrocellulose Black Tourmaline (as reviewed), Slate Blue, Imperial Topaz, Violet Tourmaline, Bloodstone Red, Fuchsia Aura

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS All the plus points of the T (left) but with the added bonus of a tight, growling seventh string; the pickups' strong split-coil mode really comes into its own for the low notes

CONS Ditto the Tekton T







More Than Just a Strap

Every RightOn! strap is handmade in Spain from the finest materials, but that's only part of the story. Each one is crafted with thoughtful details that are hard to find elsewhere: embedded pickholders, the exclusive adjustment system, and high-quality latex padding that feels wonderfully comfortable, even after hours of playing. RightOn! also produce a whole collection of 100% vegan, eco-friendly straps, so there's something for everyone.

Proudly Distributed by Strings & Things



VIDEO EXCLUSIVE!
Steve Hackett and Steve Rothery on why joining forces on guitar opened up huge potential
http://bit.ly/guitaristextra

UNCHARTED WATERS

A decade in the making, Steve Hackett and Steve Rothery's first joint album, *The Roaring Waves*, journeys all over the map. "We'll have the prog police hammering at our door," they tell us. "But what the hell!"

Words David Mead & Henry Yates **Photography** Phil Barker

We all know that time is elastic in progressive rock. But even by the standards of two musicians whose longest works with Genesis and Marillion topped 20 minutes, Steve Hackett and Steve Rothery have taken the scenic route to their first collaborative album.

Mooted at least a decade ago – but on the table since their first meeting at the Marquee Studios in 1983 – *The Roaring Waves* was worth the final push over summer, with these silverbacks of British prog wordlessly painting salty tales of seafaring adventure, while settling on a guitar sound that lets each of their distinct styles shine.

1. The two Steves first met as long ago as 1983, agreeing then and there that they should one day collaborate on an album. Finally, in 2026, the project came to fruition in the form of *The Roaring Waves*

"There wasn't one person responsible for a masterplan. It was like a musical dialogue and so much fun" **STEVE ROTHERY**

Why did the *The Roaring Waves* take so long to materialise in the end?
Steve Rothery: "Well, we've been a bit busy with other things!"
Steve Hackett: "He's been one of the busiest guys in showbiz, and so have I."
Rothery: "But if you add up all the time we've actually worked on it, it's probably only about four months at the most."
Hackett: "A lot happened in the last two months when we knuckled down, didn't it?"
Rothery: "Yeah. We could see the light at the end of the tunnel, and it was flat down on the accelerator. We both nearly killed ourselves trying to do it!"

How did the album's long production time affect the writing of the songs?
Rothery: "It just naturally evolved at different stages in the process. One of our first sessions, where four of the seven ideas came from, was just two days at Marillion's studio, The Racket Club. I'd put up some drum rhythms on a laptop and we'd just play along. A lot of great ideas came, so they became the raw material and it gradually took shape from the chaos."
Hackett: "It's a very different approach to the background I came from with Genesis, where there was this big emphasis on composition. This was more a case of a musical conversation where we were responding to each other. We didn't have too many preconceived ideas. Sometimes, it was just a riff or a rhythm. And I didn't mind taking the supporting role at times, doing atmospherics, rather than having to come up with an opus. It was like: 'Over to you.'"
Rothery: "There wasn't one person responsible for a masterplan. It was like a musical dialogue and so much fun. I mean, to hear Steve play harmonica as well. On *Pacific Coast Highway*, we thought, 'We're going to have the prog police hammering at our door over this.' But what the hell!"

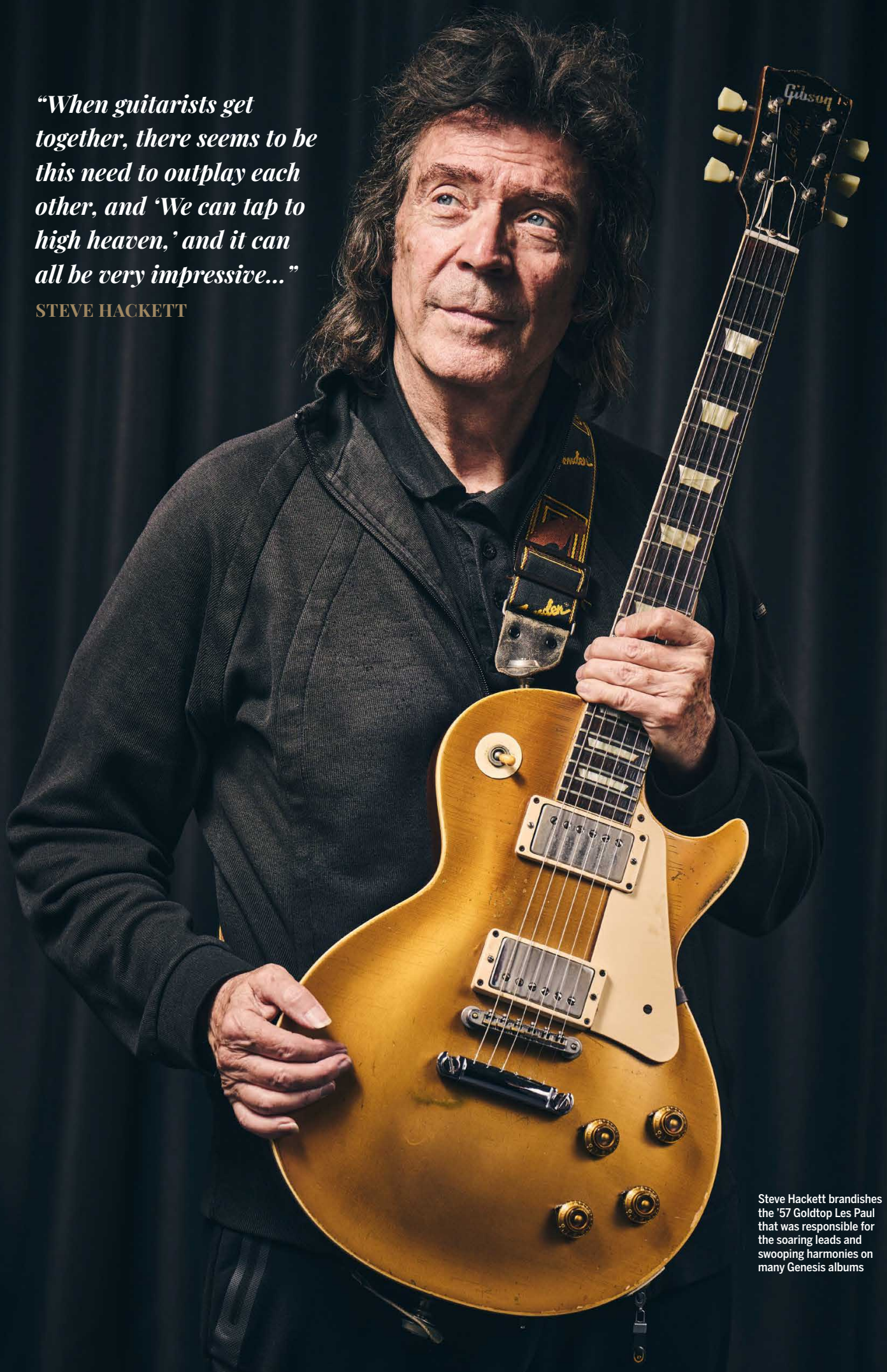
Were you a Genesis fan, Steve?
Rothery: "A huge fan. I had the *Genesis Live* album [1973] when I was 16. My three great inspirations, actually, were Steve, David Gilmour and Andy Latimer from Camel. What was interesting is that during the later stages of this record, we all – as in our wives, who are both called Jo – went up to Whitby in North Yorkshire, where I grew up, and stayed at this funky little hotel on Westcliff called La Rosa. And it was quite surreal to be walking those streets with a person



PHOTO BY ANNE-MARIE FORKER

"When guitarists get together, there seems to be this need to outplay each other, and 'We can tap to high heaven,' and it can all be very impressive..."

STEVE HACKETT



Steve Hackett brandishes the '57 Goldtop Les Paul that was responsible for the soaring leads and swooping harmonies on many Genesis albums

who was my inspiration, God, probably 46 years before. But it helped focus our energies on the whole nautical concept of the record."

Hackett: "The seafaring imagery was something we both were drawn to, with Steve growing up around Whitby, and for me I was growing up in Pimlico with the Thames and Pink Floyd's future album cover [Battersea Power Station] as my bedroom window view – without the pink pig."

What gear did you use on this new album?

Rothery: "When we did the session at The Racket Club, Steve played through a Friedman BE-50 and Two-Rock Bloomfield Drive, and I had my usual. It's a Pitcher – which is like a Dumble clone – and my Marillion rack, which is a Groove Tubes Trio, and more pedals than you can shake a stick at. I've got a Jack Dent Raven and I used various other Blade [S-styles]. And you had your Burny, didn't you?"

Hackett: "Yes, I've got a few of those, and I found it worked for this album. The idea of not always overdriving and turning it up to 11 as much as just kissing the string slightly, letting each note emanate and get bigger. I think it worked with the melodic style we were conjuring with. When guitarists get together, especially our American brethren, there seems to be this need to outplay each other, and 'We can tap to high heaven,' and it can all be very impressive... But our model was more like early Fleetwood Mac on *Albatross*, where they're underplaying deliberately to create a kind of a tone poem."



2. The initial sessions for *The Roaring Waves* took place at Marillion's studio, The Racket Club, near Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire

You both have that very melodic, highly sustained guitar tone. But can you talk about how you individually achieve that?

Rothery: "Steve's a master at the Fernandes Sustainer. I tend to be more straightforward, either with a very overdriven channel on my Groove Tubes Trio or sometimes an EBow. I've got a stack of amplifiers now in my garage studio, which grew significantly during the making of this record. That's one of the reasons I call my guitar podcast *Tonehenge*, because it's literally a stack of amplifiers all into an amp switcher, into a Fryette Power Station, so I can switch between all the different amps to the 4x12 I'm using – and just a load of different pedals.

"I've got a stack of amps – 'Tonehenge' – in my studio, which grew significantly during the making of this record" **STEVE ROTHERY**

"I used an Eventide H90 a lot on this new record. I love that for those unusual textures you don't get from any other pedal. I actually play a Les Paul more on this record than I've ever played in the past, just because I wanted the sustain without necessarily being as overdriven as I traditionally have been. I grew up listening to Santana and that endless sustain, and I was always trying to recreate that in the early days with an Electro-Harmonix Big Muff, and later a Boss DS-1 turned up flat-out. So that ultra-sustaining thing has always been a big part of my approach. But I wanted more variety, maybe, with this record."

How about your own distinctive tone, Steve [Hackett]?

Hackett: "In terms of amps, most of the time at home, I use an Engl and I've been using those live for some time. I've been through Roland Jazz Chorus amps and Marshalls, but in the main I stick with the Engl. I've done a bit of work with Brian May over the years on projects, so I've got a copy of his Red Special, and I find that interesting because it's got the ability to go in and out of phase with the three single coils. They're Baldwin/Burns, old things – but sound very good.

"But I've never found one guitar that did it all. The Les Paul I'm proudly displaying here: that was the first time I really heard guitars sounding absolutely wonderful. Seeing Eric Clapton play one, the young Peter Green and Jeff Beck – that was truly impressive. But you did have to crank it up, or be near the amp head, to be able to feed back.

"Luckily, these days, because of the Fernandes situation, there's no tyranny of volume. If you want feedback, it's from the guitar itself, so it's very accurate feedback. And at the flick of a switch, it'll go to the harmonic. It's a shame they've gone out of business, especially as so many salubrious pals use them, not just British but American guitarists, too. You mentioned Andy Latimer. There was something I heard that he'd done. I said, 'Oh, really nice sound.' He said, 'Yeah, that was a Fernandes.'"

Speaking of the Les Paul you've brought, is that '57 from the Genesis era?

Hackett: "Yes, I played it on most of the Genesis things back in the day. They gave me a hard time



"[On 'Pacific Coast Highway'] we wanted something that encapsulated that feeling of driving. You can imagine us in the old VW camper bus"

STEVE ROTHERY

With the completion and release of the new album, the duo is already looking ahead to another joint project – with the possibility of some accompanying live dates

when I brought it through customs. I'd paid $800 for it and I had a bill of sale. But they said, 'Oh, isn't that rather cheap for one of those?' And I thought, 'Are the bastards going to take it off me or what?' But it's still here. My God, you know when you're young and you're begging, borrowing and stealing to get hold of anything like this, up and down the shops on Charing Cross Road, looking at guitars and amps you couldn't afford? I used to think anyone who's got a Les Paul and a Marshall stack had made it already. Like, if you've got that equipment..."

Rothery: "You've got the sound of rock 'n' roll."

Hackett: "You are that magician. Now go out and do that thing. Simple days."

How about the guitar you've brought with you, Steve [Rothery]?

Rothery: "This is one I had made by Shabat Guitars over in LA to my specification because I wanted a maple neck. I wanted the two Lindy Fralin Vintage pickups – I don't know what he put in the humbucker position. But it's also got a Vega-Trem, which I love, and a Blade mid-boost like my main Blade guitars, so it's very versatile. Lovely instrument. My first purposely made guitar to my specification."

Do you use that live with Marillion?

Rothery: "No, purely in the studio. I might use it on tour in the future, but my main Blade is my go-to for more recent stuff, and I've got a Squier Stratocaster with EMG SAs and a Kahler, which was used for all the Marillion stuff up until 1999. But you know, guitarists are alike – you always want just one more guitar. And an understanding partner."

There are surprises on the album, like the closing boogie of *Pacific Coast Highway*...

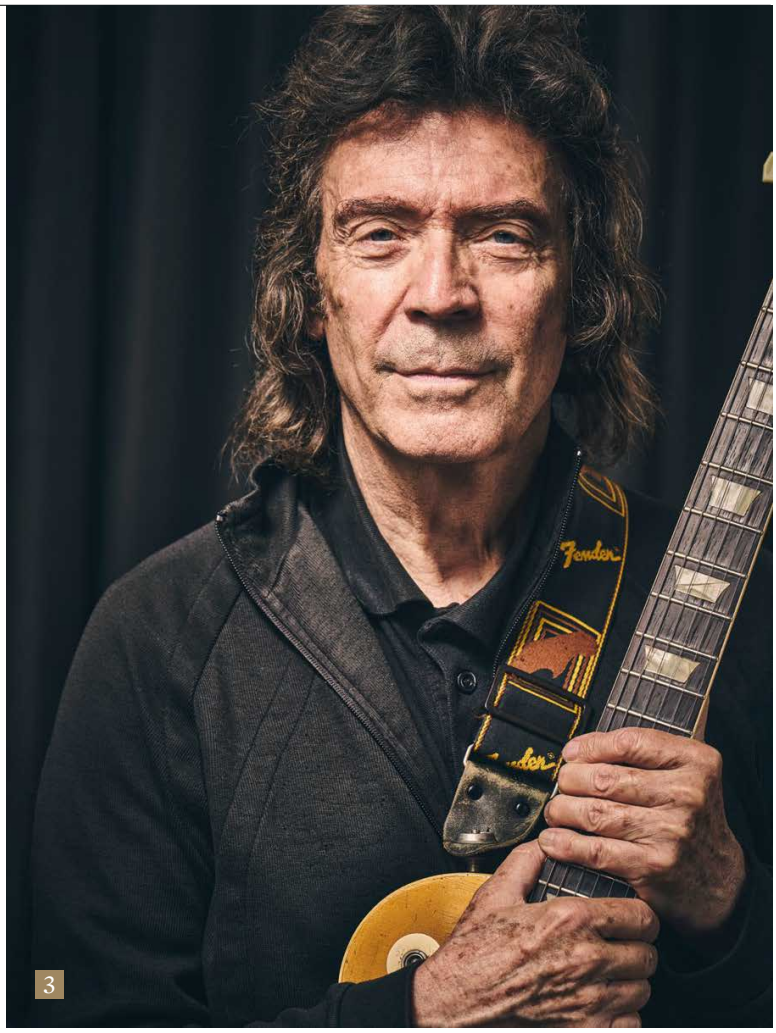
Rothery: "It was a California road movie-type idea. I've driven that road several times, and it's one of my favourite parts of North America. San Francisco, Monterey, Carmel, Big Sur... such a beautiful part of the world. So we wanted something that encapsulated that feeling of driving. You can imagine us in the old VW camper bus. It was a lot of fun to do, especially the police chase section, with your siren guitar."

Hackett: "Yes, Fernandes guitars are good at doing sirens. What one is trying to do is conjure a scene, and I think that with the song titles and the overall seafaring concept of the album, you get an idea of where we're coming from."

Rothery: "It's the whole cinematic aspect. When you're writing instrumental music, you have to paint pictures with your music because you don't have lyrics to tell the story."

Can you tell us about anything about individual upcoming projects?

Rothery: "We're three-quarters of the way through the new Marillion album, which we hope to mix in December. We're currently touring. And I'm hoping to finish my space-themed instrumental album, *Revontulet*, which I've been working on probably for longer than I've been working with Steve on this. One of the tracks, Steve actually plays on. So that's been a long time percolating. You can't rush these things, as I like to say."



3. Steve Hackett's forthcoming projects include working with world music artists as well as continuing his own prog-related solo albums

Hackett: "I've been working on a number of projects, some of which are nearing completion. I've also been working with the Hungarian band Djabe. I tend to show up on their things and I've played with various world musicians they've introduced me to. One of the guys, Malik Mansurov plays the tar. He's like a cross between Ravi Shankar and John McLaughlin. He's a tremendous virtuoso. I spent a day recording him many years ago, and I've used snippets on lots of projects, and he'll be on an album I'm currently working on. So, yeah, a frightening amount of things!"

"I used to think anyone who had a Les Paul and Marshall stack had made it already. You're that magician" **STEVE HACKETT**

Finally, what are the chances of another joint album from you two?

Rothery: "It would be a job fitting it in with our lives at the moment. Maybe there'll be an opportunity at some point. And maybe after that [second] album, it would make sense to tour. But who knows?"



The Roaring Waves from Steve Hackett and Steve Rothery is out now on InsideOutMusic
www.hackettsongs.com
www.steverothery.com

YNGWIE MALMSTEEN

Think about the world's fastest guitar players and Yngwie Malmsteen is a name that will always be in the conversation. This year he returns with his latest neoclassical opus, and one of the most emotionally charged compositions of his career to date

Words Amit Sharma



PHOTO BY TERJE DOKKEN/ GONZALES PHOTO/ ALAMY

Since emerging from Stockholm in the early 80s, Yngwie J Malmsteen has become one of the most potent forces in rock guitar, pushing the limits of what can be humanly achieved with a humble Fender Stratocaster. Much like other crème de la crème players that have graced the world's stages, from Jimi Hendrix to Ritchie Blackmore and Stevie Ray Vaughan, Malmsteen's arrival was followed by waves and waves of copycats (and many a student failing to outdo their master).

This year he returns with his latest solo effort, *Hell Or High Water*, nine tracks of neoclassical brilliance that combine his love for roaring Marshalls and vintage heavy metal with breathtaking symphonic finesse. In true Malmsteen fashion, it's an unapologetic reimagination of Paganini, Mozart and Bach-style orchestrations all through Malmsteen's trusty fretboard, elevated by a perfect storm of technique and feel. The release also features some of the musician's strongest vocal performances to date, too, on tracks such as *Now Or Never*, *He Is (Living A Lie)* and *Eye For An Eye*.

Now, over four decades into his career, Malmsteen remains every bit as musically ferocious and thrilling as the prodigious young buck that blazed a trail of instrumental guitar. "This album is less riff-based than my past ones," he tells *Guitarist*, as he sits surrounded by guitars, violins, statues of classical greats and outboard gear in his home studio. "These days I feel like I'm more aware of the value of composition itself. If things were reversed and this album came out early on, I think it would have stood up even more than the albums that launched my career. But I try not to think too much. It's more about creating music that's honest for this moment in time. If seven years ago I wanted to make a blues album, great, but this is what I want to do now. It's not about comparisons or looking for differences. It's about good music."

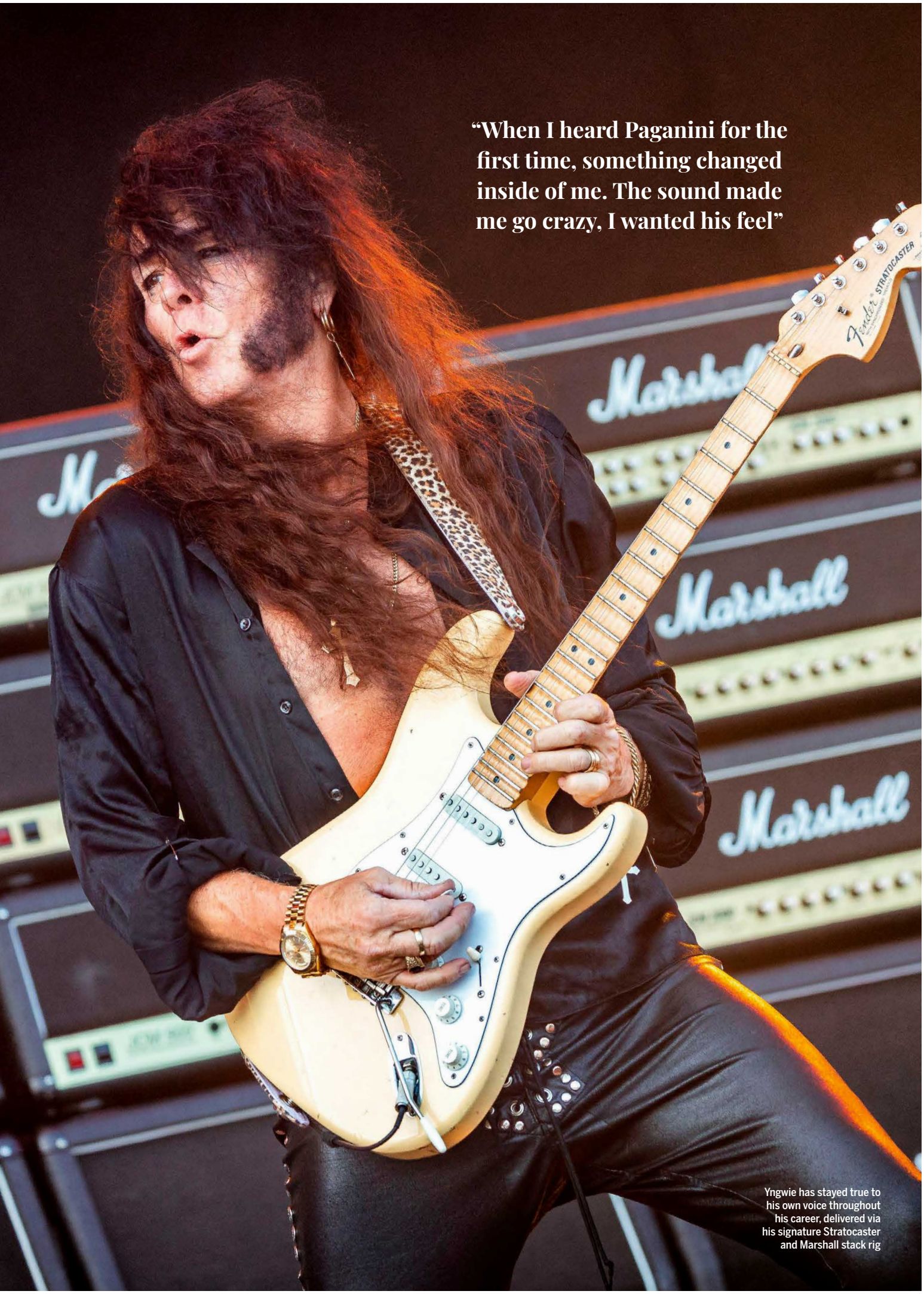
A lot of artists bend to the will of the world around them. But you have been incredibly steadfast over the years, relying on gut instinct to find your way.

"When I was starting out in Sweden, it was like living in the void. There was no TV, no radio, absolutely nothing. You had to use your imagination. People would tell me I couldn't make a living playing guitar. Nowadays, there's stuff everywhere on your cell phone or the screens in front of you. I don't know how or why, but I had this vision that came straight into my head. It wasn't about becoming rich or famous or getting girls. Only expression mattered. When I heard Paganini for the first time, something changed inside of me."

And that was your lightning bolt moment?

"I was only 12, but right then I decided I was going to apply violin techniques to electric guitar, which you basically can't do. It's like saying you are going to drive a car with only one wheel. A violin is tiny and tuned to 5ths. There's no picking, you have to use a bow and it's legato central. But the sound of Paganini made me go crazy, I wanted to have his feel.

"When I turned 18, reality came knocking on the door and I knew I had to do something. All the tapes went out and I got offered these gigs in America. Once I got there, I was smart enough to realise that I had to play the game. If you didn't have a hit song on the radio or MTV, you were fucked. You would be



"When I heard Paganini for the first time, something changed inside of me. The sound made me go crazy, I wanted his feel"

Yngwie has stayed true to his own voice throughout his career, delivered via his signature Stratocaster and Marshall stack rig



PHOTOS BY RICK GOULD

eating out of a garbage can in between playing your solos. I wasn't dumb, but I wasn't going to sell out, either. So I started out very uncompromising, then I became a little more fluid because you have to play the game to win the game.

"But I'm back to where I started. I don't play games with anybody. I'd never write a song like *Heaven Tonight* now. It's not a shitty song, but it's just not what I do."

"I'd never write a song like *Heaven Tonight* [from the late 80s] now. It's not a shitty song, but it's just not what I do"

***Father* is understandably the most emotive track on the album, paying tribute to your dad who passed away not long ago. You articulate the sadness beautifully.**

"I try to put sincerity into everything. Because if you don't believe in it fully, why do it? That melody came to me and I knew I would use it in his honour. He was a wonderful man. He was very old, he had a long and good life, which is bizarre because he was drinking, smoking and lived through all these wars. The guy was a bit of a nut, you know? But God bless, he was special. This whole album is dedicated to him."

Slower playing can often really pull on the heartstrings. This is something Gary Moore always seemed to understand.

"Of course. I actually think my favourite thing about Gary Moore was his slower and more expressive side. I was never really into his shreddy stuff, but people would play me his slower songs like *Parisienne Walkways* at parties and I thought he sounded great."

***Beyond Zeta Reticuli* references a wide binary star system that's 39 light years away from Earth. It is also alleged to be the home of alien beings.**

"There are certain individuals who went deep on the alien thing. People like Philip Corso, with the reverse engineering of alien technology, and [Area 51 whistleblower] Bob Lazar. The universe is so infinite, so it would be pretty small-minded to think we are the only sign of intelligent life across all galaxies. I can't say for sure, but there have been a lot of significant things that lean towards signs of other intelligent beings. And I believe there has to be more than one type of extra-terrestrial, there can't just be one. Apparently, they had [an alien] in captivity – he lived until 1952 and told us he came from Zeta Reticuli."

You have one of the world's most impressive Strat collections. Talk us through some of the oldest and most rare.

"Well, in terms of the oldest, I have one of the first five Strats ever made. It's from March 1954, the very first month Strats went into production. They didn't even have the machines to build them until October that year, so there's no serial number. It's in my favourite cream finish. I did a video for Fender's 70th anniversary a few years ago where I showed it. I also have Strats from other early years like 1955, 1956 and so on. There's a 1963 Shoreline Gold sat right next to me, but I don't really use those guitars any more."

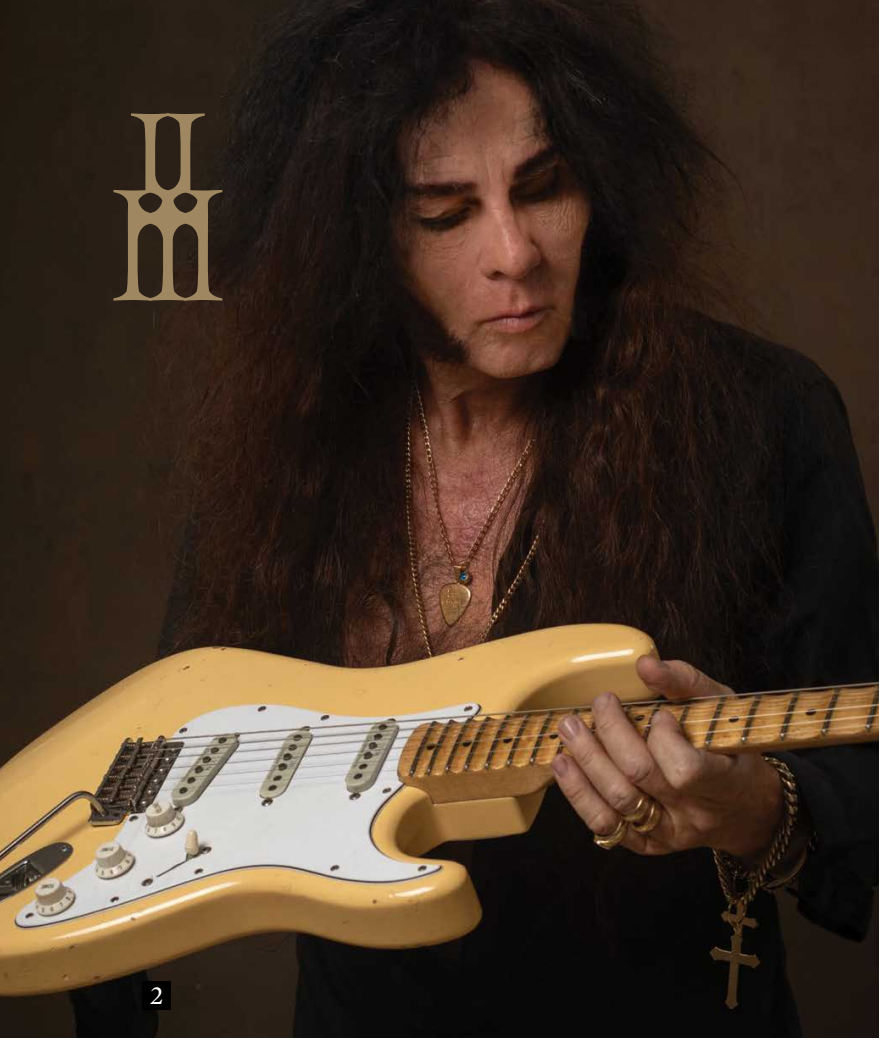
Do you scallop the vintage ones?

"I will do that to some of them [laughs]. There's a 1956 that I've been using for years, that one is scalloped, and the same goes for the Shoreline Gold I mentioned earlier. I have a 1968 Strat with a maple cap, which is pretty rare, and I had that one scalloped. I have a 1967, that's the very first maple-cap Strat ever made and only one of that year – so it's basically one of one – and I even had that scalloped."

1. Put together from over 80 songs recorded in his home studio, the final nine tracks that became *Hell Or High Water* are dedicated to Yngwie's late father



Yngwie's enviable Strat collection includes models from the first year of production onwards. And, perhaps controversially, he's scalloped the fretboards of many of them!



2

PHOTO BY RICK GOULD

“They say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. [But] it’s more important to find yourself”

In your experience, what were the best years for Strat production?
“You can’t say one year was the best. You can find an amazing 1974 guitar as well as a shitty 1958. Guitars aren’t the same. What I can tell you is that from 1954 to 1959 they were all maple necks. And then for the next nine years they switched to rosewood, and after that they did both. From 1968 to 1970, they didn’t have the skunk stripe on the back. One thing people don’t know is that Leo Fender stayed in the factory until 1975 to keep an eye on things. That might be why the guitars in the late 70s went downhill. There was less quality control and the guitars got heavy, but you can still find good ones.”

And what would you say about the best Marshalls?
“I have a few 1959 Super Leads and some Mk II 50-watt Super Leads with the big box, which I used for many years. Before 1968, I don’t really think the amps had been completed. Everything between 1968 and 1974 seems to be the best, those are my favourite ‘Plexis’. And I have to say, the reissues are fantastic; the ones I’ve tried sound great.”

You’re also known to collect vintage Gibsons. There’s even footage of you playing a 1959 ’Burst.
“I own a 1958 Flying V, plus old 335s and stuff like that. There are some old Les Pauls in my collection. Even though I don’t use them much, it’s nice to have them lying around.

“The one Gibson I come back to a lot is the Flying V. I really like those guitars. There’s one I have from the 60s that has three Strat pickups, a whammy bar and a scalloped neck. It’s pretty cool. That ’59 I played was okay. Les Pauls can vary in terms of neck thickness, but they have a certain feel. I find the balance and weight of those guitars a bit strange, you almost have to hold them a certain way.”

All trailblazers have an army of people following in their footsteps, trying to keep up. Did you ever look at other players and think, ‘I recognise that lick’?
“Not actively, I wouldn’t do that. But I’ve heard of certain players, of course. There are some cats out there who have taken a lot of influence. I would feel kinda weird about myself if my style was such a blatant copy of someone else. It must be embarrassing, a bit like telling everyone you wrote this book called *Pet Graveyard* about resurrection near an Indian burial ground. And when people ask, ‘Wow, that’s cool, but isn’t that a Stephen King book?’ you say ‘No, mine is called *Pet Graveyard*!’ You would be laughed out of the room. That’s the problem I have with copycats. It doesn’t bother me personally, but obviously they’ve put a lot of work into it, so maybe it’s a waste of time? Then again, they say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. It’s more important to find yourself. At the end of the day, everyone can learn how to typewrite fast, but not everybody can write a great book.”

Ritchie Blackmore is one of the electric guitar players who interested you early on. How did you feel about him rejoining Deep Purple on stage in August?
“I saw the headlines. Did you know I once played *Smoke On The Water* on stage with Deep Purple in Japan? I’ve jammed with Ian Gillan in the past, we played a Swedish event in 1990. But in 2009, I did a tour with Deep Purple and they asked me to come up for the encore. Guess who was in town that night? Jon Lord! So it was Jon, Ian Paice, Roger Glover, Ian Gillan and me.

“But anyways, back to your question, I saw Blackmore had gotten back on stage with them. Obviously, it was fantastic news. They shouldn’t have waited that long to reunite like that. It warmed the heart to see them together. It was cool news to wake up to. The first album I got when I was eight was *Fireball*.”

This year is also the 40th anniversary of your third album, *Trilogy*, which remains a fan-favourite after all these years.
“My debut was important because I had written it while I was young, living in Sweden. Whereas *Trilogy* was all brand-new stuff after I’d come to America. I was completely immersed in the songwriting and production processes. The debut was more easygoing, more like party time in comparison. I didn’t have one single outside influence while making *Trilogy*. Nothing, not even one drum fill, was in the back of my mind. And I’m still playing *You Don’t Remember, I’ll Never Forget* every night, the same goes for *Trilogy Suite Op: 5*. I am proud of that record. It still means a lot to me.” G



Yngwie Malmsteen’s new album, *Hell Or High Water*, is released on 13 November via Music Theories Recordings
www.yngwiemalmsteen.com

2. The new album sees Yngwie travel full circle: “I started out [my career] very uncompromising, then I became a little more fluid because you have to play the game to win the game. But [now] I’m back to where I started,” he says. “I don’t play games with anybody”

Guitarist

OFFICIAL APPAREL STORE



PREMIUM GARMENTS FOR PICKERS

ONLY £27.99

Guitarist ESTABLISHED 1984

Wear your passion for six-strings with pride, with our new line of Guitarist-branded premium cotton tees – available in a range of cool colours and classic designs

https://store.loudersound.com/collections/guitarist

QUALITY MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS
★ Original ★
HISTORIC HARDWARE
100% GUARANTEED
★★★

WHATEVER YOU WANT

Bonhams' posthumous auction of Rick Parfitt's Status Quo gear is a treasure trove – we take a deep-dive into the hottest lots, including the famed No 1 Telecaster

Words Henry Yates & Jamie Dickson **Photography** Olly Curtis

"It's funny how life brings you full circle," reflects the renowned repairman, engineer, tech and journalist Huw Price. Rewind a few decades and the Welshman was hammering out Status Quo's *Caroline* in a youthful covers band. Back in the present day, the 61-year-old found himself invited to Bonhams auction house to prepare the guitars of the British rock band's late rhythm man, Rick Parfitt, for the much-anticipated sale of pop-culture treasures held this month.

"I used to play Rick's guitar parts in that band," Price remembers. "So it felt pretty special to be playing his actual No 1 Tele, all those years later. That was a real shiver-down-the-spine moment. I mean, it's clearly the guitar he's most readily identified with."

Even if we've never actually attended one, the auction is such a fixture of film and TV that we assume we understand the process. In reality, the clack of the gavel is merely the crescendo in an orchestra of behind-the-scenes activity, from establishing an item's provenance to setting valuation and arranging transportation and secure storage.

Unlike the scenario of the seller who shows up with a supposedly Hendrix-owned Strat, there was no need to prove this was Parfitt's gear. "Rick's estate has looked after these guitars and amps for the past decade," says Claire Tole-Moir, head of the Popular Culture & Science department at Bonhams. "They now feel the time is right for them to find new homes where they can be cherished by fellow fans and collectors."

Price's role was to spend two day s with Parfitt's collection, authenticating, assessing condition, testing playability, checking electronics, fettling and carrying out minor repairs – while taking care not to 'correct' the quirks that add to the storytelling aspect. "The brief was to be minimally invasive," he explains. "I certainly wasn't going to repair any paintwork or say, 'Oh, this guitar could do with a refret.' That's not the gig. The main point of interest is that these are Rick Parfitt's guitars, and the brief was very much to keep them as original as possible. Including the strings."

Rocked All Over The World

Anyone who has seen Parfitt's No 1 – and you can't exactly miss it, given the guitar's starring role in Quo folklore, including 1985's curtain-raising set at Live Aid – will know that attempting to restore this Tele to mint condition is a fool's errand. Bought in Glasgow in the mid-70s, with the £80 asking price forked over in instalments ("Rick said in one interview it had more than paid itself off," laughs Tole-Moir), the guitarist once claimed "you can hit it as hard as you like and you won't put it out of tune".

Inspecting the Tele today, it seems the Quo man tested that theory almost to destruction. "It's unbelievably weathered," says Price. "It's got Rory Gallagher levels of wear. The top of the body, Rick has worn to a gentle chamfer in the forearm area. It's also extremely worn on the top edge at the back. A lot of sweat has gone into the wood and the fibres have swollen and shrunk, so there's an uneven texture. I suspect that Rick wasn't precious about his instruments. I mean, he may have had an affection for them, but these were not cosseted guitars. These were tools of the trade for a professional working musician."

The No 1's finish alone warrants its own feature, continues Price of the historic coats of paint, chips and touch-ups. "It's an ash body, fairly light, a really nice weight. But multiple, multiple refinishes. You can see the layers. I suspect it was initially stained yellow. Then there's a clear sealer coat, probably Fullerplast. Then there's a coat of white, with a coat of probably cellulose on top, which has yellowed up to a dirty blonde. Then somebody painted it a really dark blue.

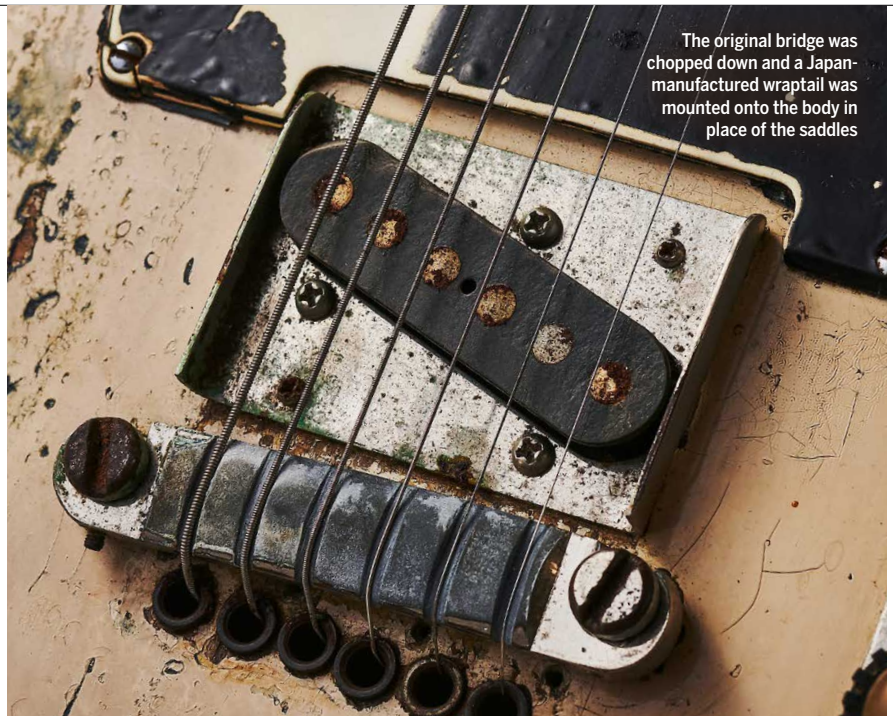
"And then," he continues, "the finish we all associate with Rick is a kind of off-white that's been applied over the top. It's not nitrocellulose, it's some kind of enamel finish. The pickguard looks to be the original three-ply off-white 'guard that's been painted with a black enamel, but Rick

"Rick's Tele is one of the defining visual symbols of Status Quo"

CLAIRE TOLE-MOIR



There has been much speculation about the age of Rick Parfitt's favourite Telecaster, but the surviving original features and serial number are consistent with the February 1966 neck date



The original bridge was chopped down and a Japan-manufactured wraptail was mounted onto the body in place of the saddles

has basically worn through the enamel. As I recall, the tuners are Kluson-style replacements, and the chrome plating has completely worn off the control knobs to reveal the brass underneath. So there are all these different layers to that Tele. If you look around the neck heel, and also in the neck pocket, you can actually still see the original finish."

The neck also helped to skewer an enduring misconception, explains Price. "There's a lot of misinformation about this Tele. All kinds of years are ascribed to it. It's been called a '59 or '60, and it clearly isn't that. I can tell you for sure, the date stamp on the neck is February '66. I'd say it's very typical of the era. Not an especially fat neck, but a bit of heft, more than you get in the early 60s. It's a C profile with soft shoulders, very familiar, with an even depth all the way along. And the fact it was configured for a strong-armed rhythm player meant it actually felt more like a really nicely set-up acoustic. Rick called it his Range Rover, and it's not going to fret out or go out of tune. It was by far and away the nicest one of his guitars to play. You can see why he liked it."

When Price dug deeper, however, Parfitt's No 1 revealed itself as anything but factory-spec. "With regard to the controls, the only original bit was the tone capacitor. Both potentiometers had been changed. And the tone control wasn't actually connected at all, it was out of the circuit. The pickup switch was replaced, but that wasn't in-circuit, either. And with the neck pickup, the wires just had heat-shrink put over the ends, and it wasn't hooked up to anything. That neck pickup cover had also lost all its plating and was wedged in due to shrinkage of the pickguard material. Hence we were unable to verify its originality. So, basically, the electronics are just a bridge pickup to a volume control, and then shielded cable connected to the output jack."

For authenticity's sake, Price didn't hook up any of those dead components, instead turning his attention to the unit that drove Quo's roaring sound. "The bridge pickup was non-original, but Rick had obviously played it for a long time because it was quite rusty. It's actually a Seymour Duncan STL-3 and it looks to me like the slugs are the wider diameter than standard. The amount of sweat on the hardware and pickup itself suggests to me he probably went through numerous pickups over the years and they just did running repairs. They just grabbed another pickup and stuck it in, you know?"

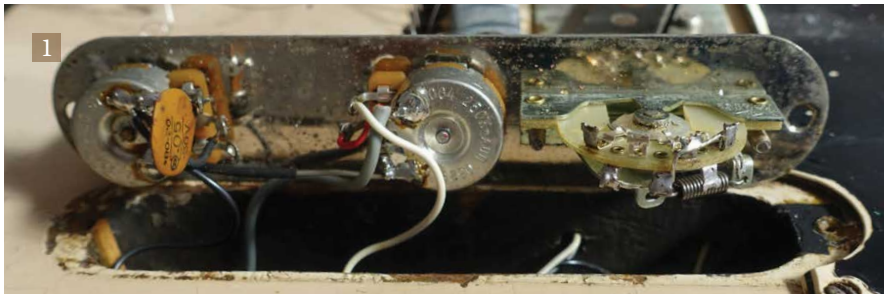
"It's got Rory Gallagher levels of wear... These were tools of the trade, not cosseted guitars"

HUW PRICE

But even Price can't rationalise the butchery of the Tele's hardware (which, of course, only adds to its appeal for fans). "The original bridge was chopped down with the rear half removed. What's left of the bridge plate is merely the mounting for the pickup, with two screw holes added to fix what remained of the plate to the body.

"And then, the major modification is that they put in Les Paul Junior-style bridge posts and a wraptail bridge," he adds. "And the wraptail bridge is not some wonderful vintage Gibson-type bridge. It's from a Japanese copy. It's got 'TV Made In Japan' on the bottom. Because the geometry of a Tele doesn't work with a wraptail, the way they got around that was to file deep grooves into it, to lower the action so it was actually playable. They put six more ferrules on the front of the body so the strings came through the body then passed over this wraptail bridge."

For a moment, Price sounds happily baffled: "I have absolutely no idea why Rick swapped the bridge. But I think Francis Rossi's Tele had the same treatment at some point. I don't know whether some tech said, 'I've got a good idea,' and they just went with it. Most people, if they mess with a Tele bridge, they put on individual saddles because they're having problems with intonation.





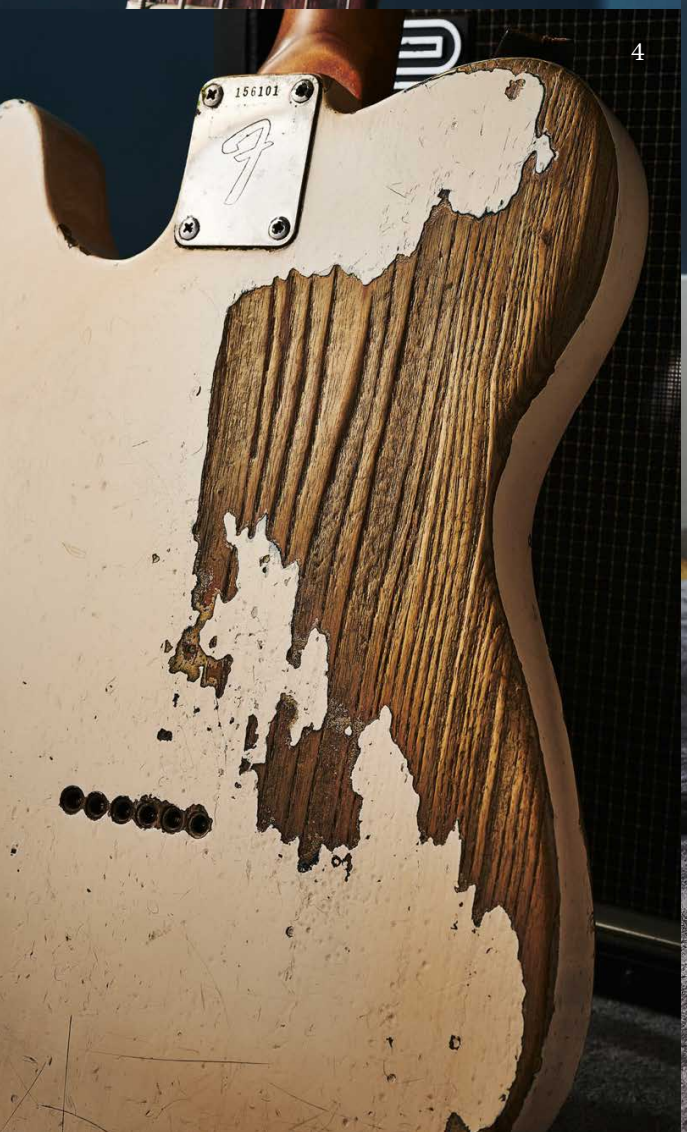
PHOTOS BY HUW PRICE

1. Only the tone capacitor survives from the original wiring, and the tone control, switch and neck pickup are out of circuit

2. The bridge pickup has been replaced by a Seymour Duncan STL-3 Quarter Pound and, judging by the rusty slugs, Rick had used it for a long time



3



4

5



3. Nothing survives of the original decal, and the tuners are vintage-style replacements, but the neck profile is quintessentially mid-60s

4. Judging by the heavily worn body, this Telecaster will forever carry Rick Parfitt's DNA in its sweat-soaked ash fibres

5. Although widely regarded as a 'blackguard' Telecaster, the pickguard is most likely the white three-ply original with a coat of black paint

If anything – because the wraptail is not intonatable at all – I'd say the intonation was worse than it was beforehand."

Despite that, testing the '66 through a portable amp revealed a "really nice, resonant tone, more muted and woody than the classic Tele twang", remembers Price. But there was no time to jam through the catalogue of Quo riffs, with Bonhams set to auction a total of 12 guitars and four amps, and each instrument requiring a checkover.

"It's a case of quality over quantity," stresses Tole-Moir of the relatively streamlined collection (for comparison, Johnny Marr auctioned almost 100 guitars at Christie's in September). "From Gibson Melody Makers to a Rickenbacker and even a Dobro resonator, this is a considered collection with a clear sense of purpose. Rick knew what worked for him and stayed true to it."

Also Under The Hammer

While Parfitt's No 1 is undoubtedly top of the lots, there are others that turn the head. Also likely to warm up the bidding is a natural-finish 1960 Fender Esquire, used since its acquisition in 1977 for open-tuned tracks like *Rain* and *Mystery Song*, with a capo at the 2nd fret. "That one is lovely," nods Price. "It was originally white or white blonde and it still has the original single-ply pickguard. There wasn't any evidence of a neck pickup having been fitted, which is quite unusual."

Another hot property is a '63 Gibson SG Junior. "Rick owned more than one SG and, according to his tech Lloyd Gilbert, often used one to play *Dirty Water*, but this was the guitar he kept throughout – it's even engraved with 'RP' to the reverse of the body," explains Tole-Moir. For his part, Price was impressed by the SG's condition: "It's in really nice shape. The control wiring had been messed with, but the pickup was original. I think he had three SG Juniors in total. The volume control wasn't working on one of them, but it was basically just that the grounding solder joint had gone, so I just did a tiny bit of soldering work on that and got it up and running."

Some of Parfitt's favourite amps will go under the hammer, too. The most curious is a heavily modded Marshall (Price: "It has no preamp tubes – I think they basically just used it as a power amp"). But the more significant sale for Quo fans is the Roland JC-120 dated to the late 70s or early 80s. "According to Lloyd Gilbert," says Tole-Moir, "the world-famous intro for *Whatever You Want* was recorded on this amp without any pedals, just using the chorus sound. It also has 'RP' in red stencilling to the top of the cabinet."

Right now, the market for celebrity-owned guitars is booming (Marr's auction more than tripled its pre-sale estimates). Is Parfitt's posthumous sale in the same super-league? Tole-Moir believes so: "Status Quo are perhaps not always given the same critical prestige as The Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin or The Who, but they're absolutely deserving of a place in the story of British rock music. Far more than a guitar, Rick's Tele became an integral part of his identity as a musician. Along with Francis Rossi's green Telecaster – which Bonhams sold in 2019 – it's one of the defining visual symbols of Status Quo."

And while Price stresses that his role lies in nuts and bolts – not marketing or money – he's quietly confident. "I think some pretty serious collectors of rock 'n' roll memorabilia will be very interested. It might be specifically British buyers because Quo were never big in the States. They're a quintessentially British rock 'n' roll band. And I suspect – and perhaps hope – that Rick's guitars will stay here. That'd be a nice thing..." G



Rick owned a few SG Juniors and, besides a changed tone pot, this one is largely original and in excellent all-round condition

"This is a considered collection with a clear sense of purpose. Rick knew what worked for him"

CLAIRE TOLE-MOIR

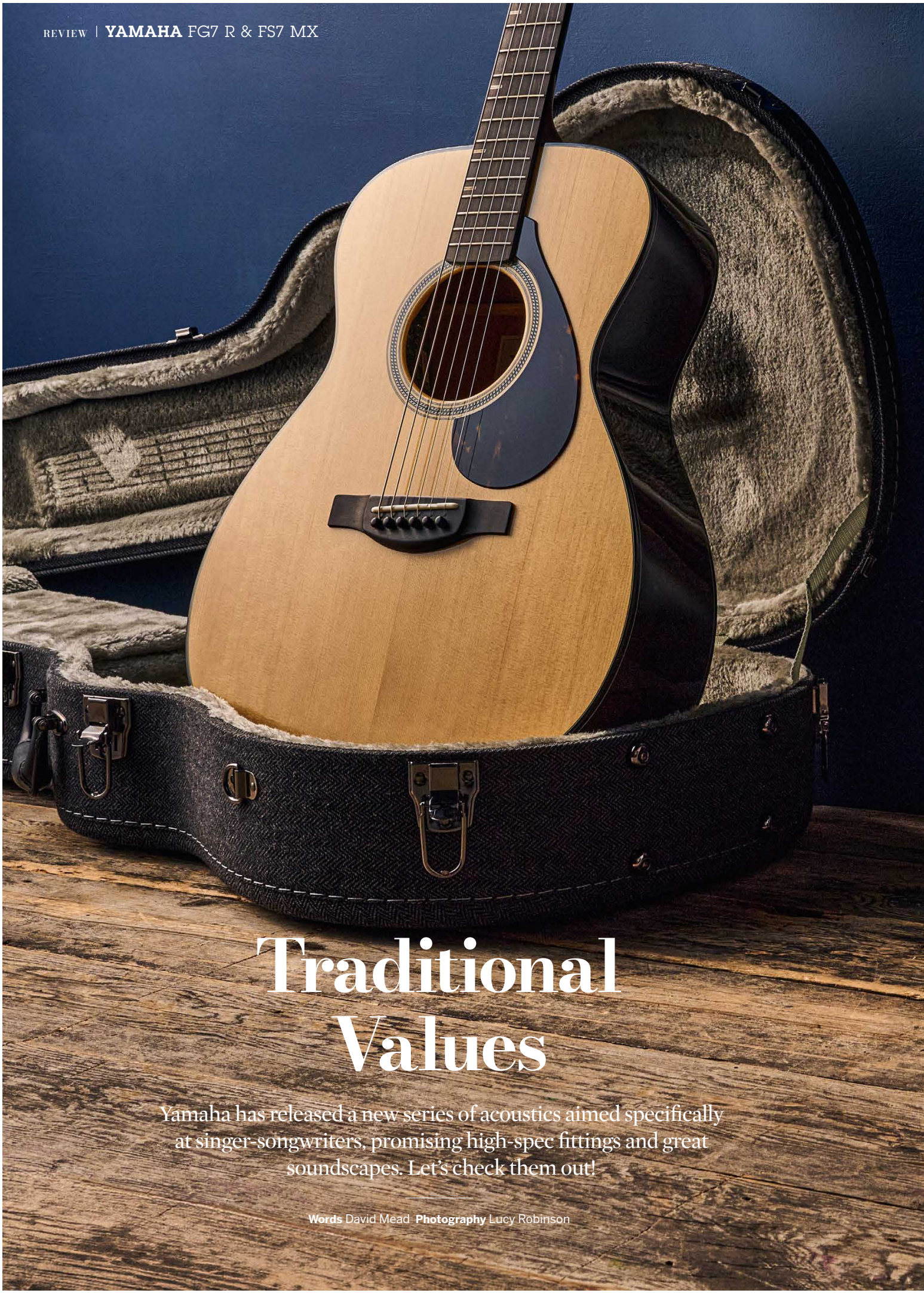
Bonhams' Rock, Pop & Film: Featuring The Rick Parfitt Collection runs from 16 to 26 November www.bonhams.com
For more on Huw Price's work, see https://huwpriceguitar.com

"There's no evidence of a neck pickup having been fitted [on the Esquire], which is quite unusual"

HUW PRICE



Most likely a 1960, this Esquire has been completely rewired and fitted with a Seymour Duncan STL-3 and a six-saddle bridge



Traditional Values

Yamaha has released a new series of acoustics aimed specifically at singer-songwriters, promising high-spec fittings and great soundscapes. Let's check them out!

Words David Mead **Photography** Lucy Robinson





YAMAHA FG7 R & FS7 MX £1,883 & £2,225

CONTACT **Yamaha** PHONE **01908 366700** WEB **uk.yamaha.com**

What You Need To Know

1 What's new about the F series?
Yamaha says it's a series designed with singer-songwriters in mind and has been crafted "with the same design philosophy as our flagship FG/FS9". In other words, high-end, full-spec, all-solid wood instruments that have been reimagined for 21st century strummers.

2 Haven't we seen FGs before?
Indeed, we have. The original FG Series was launched by Yamaha back in the mid-1960s and became a reliable staple in the acoustic market of yesteryear. These guitars, however, are something altogether different.

3 What's the lowdown on the Atmosfeel pickup?
Yamaha's Atmosfeel pickup system comprises a piezo in the bridge for bass frequencies, a mic to look after the midrange, and a special sensor for high frequencies. The preamp controls allow you to blend the three to your own preference.

Yamaha is a company that you could say is known for its quiet innovation. Its teams have been responsible for some remarkable steps forward in guitar design over the years. But the thing is, they rarely ever shout about it. Take, for instance, the AG Stomp preamp and microphone modeller that came out in 2001. It was years ahead of what we know as modelling today, but it became a best-kept secret among acoustic guitar players. Then there was the Silent Guitar range and, more recently, the TransAcoustic line with built-in reverb, delay and looping. We could go on, but you get the general idea.

So around three years ago when the brand released its top-of-range FG/FS9 Series acoustics, there was no flag-waving, no fanfares, and yet the range really did take acoustic guitar building into modern times, while keeping a firm hold on the traditions of the craft at the same time. The FG/FS9 guitars were simplicity itself; they gave the guitarist the choice between concert or dreadnought body sizes, mahogany or rosewood for the back and sides, all sporting an Adirondack spruce



1. Among the traditional Japanese building techniques on both guitars are the Kumiki-inspired fret markers



top. And you could choose whether you had a pickup system preinstalled or not. That particular series was in a price range that hovered around the £4k mark.

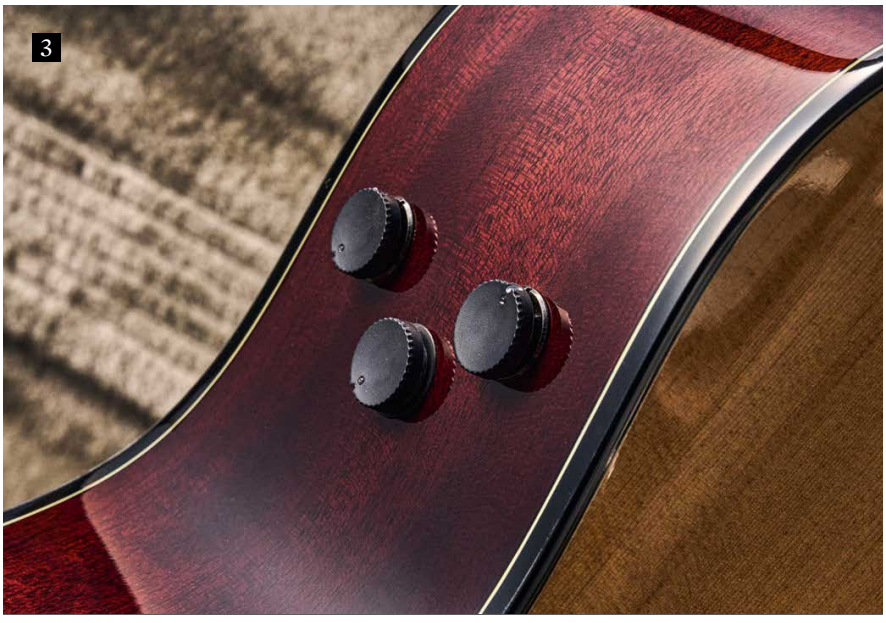
Three years later we have the FG/FS7 Series with very similar thinking behind the individual models but at the lower price point of £1,800 to £2,400. There are eight models in the 7 Series, once again offering the player a choice of body size, mahogany or rosewood, pickup or no pickup and so just about all basic needs are catered for. If you're a living room player who enjoys smaller bodies with rosewood for the back and sides but who doesn't need a pickup, you'd go for the FS7 R. If you're a singer-songwriter who plays gigs and likes the firepower a mahogany-backed dreadnought has to offer, then the FG7 MX is calling your name. Okay, so they all come with a natural finish and there are no cutaway models, but the basics are all present and correct.

Another thing to consider is that Yamaha has brought its decades of experience at building acoustic guitars to bear and has taken a very serious look at what the player needs from an acoustic guitar. So The FG/FS Series has reinforced backs for greater projection, scalloped bracing individual to each body size, and soft V neck profiles that sit in the hand like they've always belonged there. And so on.

The models we have for review today are the FG7 R – that's a dreadnought with rosewood back and sides and no pickup. And our other model is the FS7 MX – a concert-sized guitar with mahogany back and sides and an Atmosfeel pickup (of which, more later). So let's consider them one at a time.

2. Both models feature a Sitka spruce top and ebony bridge with a bone saddle. Note the stylish braided rope effect of the guitar's traditional 'Shimenawa' rosette

3. The controls for the Atmosfeel FS7's pickup system comprise three rotaries: on the left is Mic Blend, and on the right is Bass EQ, with Master Volume in the centre



A great deal of thought has gone into the aesthetic with touches that reflect Japanese heritage



4. The dreadnought-sized FG acoustics originated in Yamaha's catalogue during the mid-60s, but our FG7 R has been revised and updated for the 21st century

Yamaha FG7 R

We should point out that both guitars come in very swish hard cases with attractive grey tweed covering, and while they are something to pause over and admire, we wouldn't want to venture out in a rainstorm with one as they don't look particularly weatherproof. A minor gripe, however, and the same thing could be said about Fender's tweed cases, after all.

As we've said, the choice of back and side timber on this dreadnought model is Indian rosewood with its characteristic grain pattern showing through the guitar's dark stain. The top is Sitka spruce, which we're told has scalloped X-bracing under the hood.

All very traditional, of course, and while we're on the subject, there are some touches here and there on both models that reflect their Japanese heritage. For starters, the inner labels are made from washi paper, which is handmade with its origins in the seventh century. Then there are the fretboard markers that reflect the Japanese art of Kumiki – centuries old woodworking – and the rosette is designed after Shimenawa hand-braided rope styles. So you can tell that a great deal of thought has gone into the overall aesthetic of this series.

Coming back down to more basic matters, the dovetail-jointed one-piece neck is made from African mahogany and has what Yamaha refers to as a "soft V" profile. At the top there are Gotoh Cosmic Black tuners, a 44mm bone nut and an ebony fingerboard with 20 fairly narrow frets. At the opposite end of the string

5. Both instruments come with one-piece mahogany necks with what Yamaha refers to as a "soft V" profile

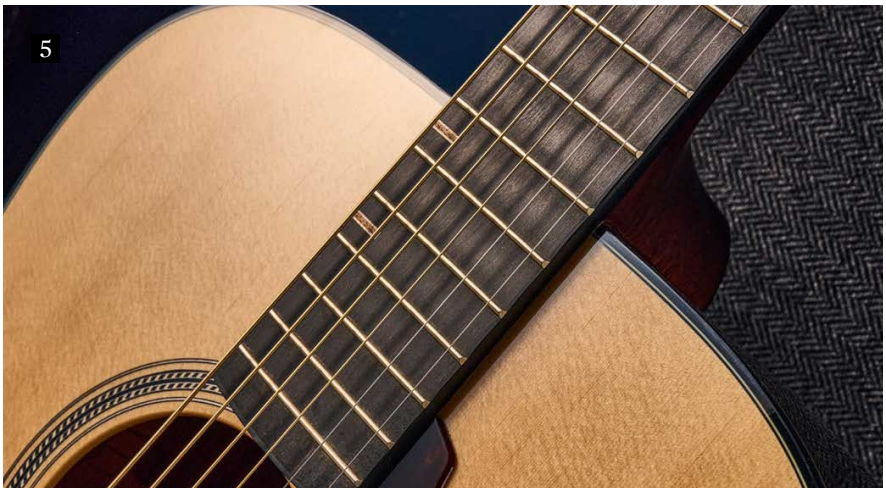
6. Another attractive feature is the body size designation on the heel caps of both guitars

THE RIVALS

If your budget orbits around the £2k mark, then there is quite a lot of choice to be had in today's market. Taylor's 314ce (around £2,299) is a cutaway Grand Auditorium – and we were very impressed when we reviewed its 324ce sibling back in issue 536. If Martin is more your kind of thing, the all-mahogany folk size 000-17 (£2,399) might fit the bill. The Gibson L-00 (£2,199) is a small body workhorse, or how about the eternal J-45, if a dread takes your fancy? There are a lot of models to choose from and we loved the Century Series J-45 (£2,149) when we looked at it in issue 538. There's the J-45 Special (£1,699) to consider, too.

But if the big brands don't do it for you, a Google search on names like Furch, Eastman, Epiphone and Cort will reveal plenty of comparable instruments in this price range.







length there is an ebony bridge with a compensated bone saddle.

As one would expect from Yamaha, workmanship is sublime throughout, but we'll have to wait a little to see if this instrument sounds as good as it looks while we take a look at its smaller-bodied concert-sized sibling.

Yamaha FS7 MX

As we've already said, the FS7 shares much the same spec as the FG as far as fixtures and fittings are concerned. It's a different body shape, of course, which Yamaha refers to as "concert", but to us it sits very much in the same postcode as an OM or 000. Then there's the fact that we're looking at mahogany for the back and sides, and there's also a slight contrast in scale length. While the FG sits at 650mm (25 9/16 inches), the FS measures up at 634mm (25 inches) and so you might say that the former is 'Fender-ish', while the latter is 'Gibson-ish'. It might only be a 16mm deviation, but we all know how much it can change the feel of a guitar.

The FS also comes fitted with Yamaha's Atmosfeel pickup system, with its three preamp controls on the upper bout, which will come fully into play when we move on to sound-testing both instruments.

The Sitka spruce top on the FS does appear to be a four-piece affair, as opposed to the more traditional bookmatched two-piece on the FG. While this might be surprising, it must be noted that both Martin and Taylor have experimented with four-piece tops in the past, stating that it makes little or no difference to the sound. We'll keep an open mind and let our ears decide.

Feel & Sounds

Switching back to the FG7, the soft V profile of the neck offers the left hand a comfortable ride. It's more chunky than some Yamahas we've played in the past, but it's not been overdone. The string action sits in the Goldilocks zone of being neither too high nor too low – some fingerstylists may prefer it lower, but that is a relatively easy fix for a trained tech.

> The first few probing cowboy chords of the FG7 provided quite a surprise: this guitar is tonefully loud

The first few probing cowboy chords provided quite a surprise: this guitar is loud. Yamaha says that it's worked hard to produce a full and robust tone from this series, and whatever the boffins have done has paid off. Not only is it loud, it's tonefully loud, if you see what we mean. All frequencies are fully present with very strong bass and bright, singing trebles in abundance. We did notice a bit of a dead spot on the D string's 2nd fret on our test sample – the note E at around 165Hz – but it's only just noticeable and didn't become a problem during the time we spent with the guitar.

Fingerstyle is crystal clear, too, and so, if Yamaha has targeted the singer-songwriter market with this instrument, all ends are pretty much covered. It's certainly a guitar we wouldn't think twice about taking on a gig.

We did wonder if the surprising amount of volume from the FG would be a feature on its little brother, too, and were delighted to find that the



7. Looking through the FS 7's soundhole it's possible to see the complex circuit board underneath the Atmosfeel pickup system's controls

8. The telltale grain pattern of the FG's Indian rosewood back is just visible through its dark stain

FS can fully account for itself in that department. Naturally, the smaller body size means that the overall output is reduced and is a little more demure. But, like its larger sibling, everything you need is fully present and correct. Summing up, you could say that any quality dreadnought played side by side with an OM is going to produce similar results. Furthermore, the four-piece top doesn't seem to have any drawbacks whatsoever and so all is well there.

The Atmosfeel pickup/preamp system is governed by three controls: Mic Blend (going from full piezo at one end to full mic at the other), Bass EQ and Master Volume. Put through our Boss Katana-50 EX on the Acoustic setting, we found the guitar's preamp really instinctive



The sound is characterful, full and vibrant, [with] practically faultless workmanship for which the brand is famous



9. Tuning on both models is taken care of by a set of antique-inspired open-backed Gotoh SXN510s that combine style and function

and easy to use, and settled for the piezo to mic mix set around 60:40 per cent and the bass at just under halfway. Simplicity itself, which is precisely what you need in a live setting. The sound is very faithful to the raw acoustic output, too.

Verdict

From what we've seen and heard, the FG/FS7 Series is another success for Yamaha. It offers straightforward choice – different body woods, whether a pickup is fitted or not – in two of the acoustic market's most popular body sizes. Then there's the sound, which is basically everything you could ask for: characterful, full and vibrant, all wrapped up in the practically faultless workmanship for which the brand is famous. Which one would we pick to accompany us on our next acoustic gig? It would have to be the dread because of its spirited tone and volume. Results may vary, though, so go and test drive the FG/FS Series. We think you'll be as charmed as we were. G



YAMAHA FG7 R

PRICE: £1,883 (inc hard case)
ORIGIN: Japan
TYPE: Dreadnought
TOP: Sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Indian rosewood
MAX RIM DEPTH: 125mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 412mm
NECK: African mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 650mm
TUNERS: Gotoh SXN510 Cosmo Black
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/44mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony with bone saddle/55mm
ELECTRICS: N/A
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.17/4.8
OPTIONS: Woods/pickup configuration (see below)
RANGE OPTIONS: The FG Range comes in various body wood and pickup configurations, including FG7 M (mahogany back and sides, no pickup, £1,883), FG7 MX (mahogany back and sides plus Atmosfeel pickup, £2,225) and the FG7 RX (rosewood back and sides with Atmosfeel pickup, £2,225)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Gloss body, satin neck

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Thoughtfully designed package complete with monstrous volume and tone

CONS The dead spot and slightly high action for fingerstylists – but we're nit-picking



YAMAHA FS7 MX

PRICE: £2,225 (inc hard case)
ORIGIN: Japan
TYPE: Concert
TOP: Sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Mahogany
MAX RIM DEPTH: 115mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 380mm
NECK: African mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 634mm
TUNERS: Gotoh SXN510 Cosmo Black
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/44mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony with bone saddle/55mm
ELECTRICS: Atmosfeel (under-saddle pickup plus contact sensor and mic)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.95/4.3
OPTIONS: Woods/pickup configuration (see below)
RANGE OPTIONS: The FS Range comes in various body wood and pickup configurations, including FS7 M (mahogany back and sides, no pickup, £1,883), the FS7 R (rosewood back and sides, no pickup, £1,883), and the FS7 RX (rosewood back and sides with Atmosfeel pickup, £2,225)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Gloss body, satin neck

8/10

PROS Neat and petite model with a great set of tones and easy playability, plus a sympathetic pickup system

CONS The four-piece top may deter traditionalists



Expand Your Horizons

Boss puts all the effects you need – and some you didn't know you needed – in a format that's small enough to fit on any pedalboard

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Lucy Robinson



BOSS EX-4 EFFECTS EXPANDER £299

CONTACT **Roland UK** WEB **www.boss.info**

What You Need To Know

1 Effects Expander – what does that actually mean?
Boss describes the EX-4 as a "compact effects processor that expands the capabilities of any pedalboard". And it does so via a choice of loads of different effects.

2 How many effects, exactly?
120! These onboard effects cover most eventualities and include drives, distortions, modulation effects, delays, reverbs and many more.

3 Can I use more than one effect at a time?
Yes, a preset is built from a chain of four effects that can be used simultaneously. You can also footswitch between presets or switch individual effects within a preset.

There are myriad choices when it comes to putting a pedalboard together. Dedicated pedals that do one specific task are, in most cases, the basic foundation to build upon – for instance, many of us will have a favourite drive pedal that will be deemed an essential component, plus maybe a particular flavour of delay or modulation to be called up again and again over the course of a gig. Beyond the single-use staples, though, there are the types of pedals that can undertake more than one task and are chosen to add extra sonic flexibility, and then multi-effects pedals give you access to certain effects that perhaps won't be used quite as often but will be there when needed.

The EX-4 is exactly the latter type of pedal – and Boss is spot-on in naming it an 'Effects Expander.' A selection of 120 Boss effects can be called upon at will, and are shoehorned into a pedal that could easily slot into any pedalboard setup.



The two large knobs have both turn and push functions: the Select knob moves the cursor in the display, and the Type/Value knob changes the value at the cursor position or the effect type of the effect block

The 128 factory presets range from recreating everyday basic rigs, to the more esoteric realm of airy ambient pads

In Use

While you could use the pedal for a single effect at a time, its architecture allows you to use up to four simultaneously, including four instances of the same effect if desired. Those four effects can be arranged in a choice of five different chains – two serial and three parallel – for a flexible range of tonal blends. This signal path is edited and built up inside a user memory, and the EX-4 houses an ample 128 of those where you can create and save your own sonic options, plus 128 factory presets that give you a practical range ready for instant use.

The pedal has two inputs and two outputs, so it can be used in full stereo or with the four-cable method where you can have some effects in front of your amp and others in its effect loop. It can also be used, of course, as a standard mono item in your signal chain. Using it in mono frees up the second input and output to be used as a send and return, which means it integrates external pedals into the EX-4's internal signal flow where they can be placed at any point in the chain of four effects chain blocks.

There's no computer-based librarian and editor for the EX-4, so it's all hands-on stuff. But, fortunately, the editing is pretty straightforward. Boss has made things very intuitive with a clear and colourful 60mm (2.4-inch) display, two larger encoders, and three small encoder knobs









1. Gear Suite can come into play when you're editing an individual effect. A press on the button brings up a list of recommended settings for that effect that can be instantly loaded. You can also save your own favourite settings

2. Below the touchscreen, these three knobs can be turned to change the parameter values, or pressed to select items, according to the screen display directly above each one

relating to parameters displayed above them. Selecting effects type for the four blocks and their place in the chain is carried out in a few moves, and dedicated effects buttons for each effects block bring its associated parameters into the window. You can set up effects from scratch, but you can also call on Gear Suite, which lets you select from a number of preset recommended settings for each effect type – a quick way of getting to some usable sounds without having to make detailed adjustments to each effect's parameters.

The twin footswitches can be assigned to a bunch of different features, but by default they can be toggled (with a press on both switches simultaneously) between Manual and Memory modes. Memory mode sees the footswitches scrolling through and loading the Memories, while Manual mode works with whatever Memory is loaded and assigns the footswitches to turn two designated effects blocks on and off. You can choose either FX1 and FX2, or FX3 and FX4. This gives you the option of using the pedal like two individual stompboxes (with the other two effects blocks either always-on or disabled). Alternatively, if you add a double footswitch, such as the Boss FS-7, and assign it to the other blocks you can then think of it as four individual effects pedals. If you wanted to use external footswitches, however, you'd have to forgo using an expression pedal because there is only one socket, although there is full MIDI capability should you wish to integrate with switching systems, other MIDI pedals and external clocking devices.

The 128 factory presets offer a comprehensive overview of what the EX-4 is capable of and range from recreating everyday basic rigs with drive, modulation, delay and reverb, for example,

3. The four FX buttons relate to the effects blocks in the chain (FX1 through FX4) and light up in a colour-coded manner to reflect the effect type. A quick press turns the blocks on or off, while a long press brings up that block's parameters on the screen for editing

4. The footswitches can be custom-configured to suit your performance needs, with assignments that include effect block on/off, memory up/down, master bypass, tap tempo, individual parameter control and more. A colour LED system surrounds the footswitches, making it easy to identify the current footswitch functions

THE RIVALS

The Eventide H9 Harmonizer Gen 2 (£599) is the same size but costs twice as much and only allows one effect at a time, although you can assign a different effect to each of its two footswitches and it does have a wide range of esoteric sounds. Elsewhere, the Line 6 HX One (£229) has over 250 Helix family effects to be used one at a time, and the much smaller TC Electronic Plethora X1 – which comes in at the lower price point of £99 – also allows one effect at a time. With a larger footprint, the Fractal Audio VP-4 (£772) provides four simultaneous effects with individual footswitching.



4

through various other practical effects combinations to the more esoteric realm of airy ambient pads. Getting down to the basic single effects, though, there are all of the usual quality modulation types, delays and reverbs you'd find in one of the larger Boss floor processors, alongside compressors, various wah types, octavers and pitch shifters. You'll also find one-offs like ring mod, acoustic and sitar simulations, and specific Boss effects such as the Slow Gear and Slicer, although there's no room here for the Dimension C or Tera Echo. Drive/distortion/fuzz sounds are well catered for, not just with modelled versions of Boss Compact pedals but also their interpretations of all the main flavours (Tube Screamer, Klon, Fuzz Face and so on) – responsive and playable with practical tonal adjustments available.

The range of effects all with flexible parameter adjustment, five different routing options, and independent global EQ for overall sound shaping delivers plenty of scope for building a range of four-effect pedalboards to suit your exact requirements, or to get creative and combine those building blocks for some inspirational composite sounds.

All those effects you'd like to have but can't justify a dedicated pedal for are here in a practical, reasonably priced unit

Verdict

Boss has really hit the spot with the EX-4 by putting so much flexibility into a pedal of this size. That footprint is the crucial factor here as, while there are plenty of multi-effects pedals around, this one can slot easily into any pedalboard and, with 300mA current draw, is likely able to be powered by your existing nine-volt power distributor.

All those effects you'd like to have but can't justify a dedicated pedal for are here in a practical, reasonably priced unit that won't swamp your 'board. For some players, then, it will truly be an expander to supplement an existing 'board and maybe even replace a few pedals. But for anyone new to pedals or others who may wish to take a minimalist approach, it is quite capable of being the sole pedal in front of an amp or amp modeller. G



BOSS EX-4 EFFECTS EXPANDER

PRICE: £299
ORIGIN: Malaysia
TYPE: Multi-effects pedal
FEATURES: 120 effects types, 128 user memories, 128 preset memories
CONTROLS: 5x Encoders, Gear Suite button, Menu/Exit button, FX buttons (1. 2. 3. 4), footswitches 1 & 2
CONNECTIONS: Standard inputs L/Mono, R (Return), standard outputs L/Mono, R (Send), CTL/Exp pedal input, MIDI In, MIDI Out, USB
POWER: Supplied 9V PSA-s adaptor (unit current draw: 300mA)
DIMENSIONS: 117 (w) x 138 (d) x 65mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Compact size; ease of use; wide range of effects types; five different signal chain paths; up to four effects simultaneously; send and return loop; footswitching flexibility

CONS No facility to have expression pedal and external footswitches simultaneously; some favourite Boss effects are absent; no software editor

Subscribehere

SUBSCRIBE TODAY
& SAVE UP TO 37%!*

Guitarist

+NEW DIGITAL ACCESS
TO 150+ ISSUES WHEN YOU SUBSCRIBE TO PRINT!**



SUBSCRIBE AND ENJOY THESE BENEFITS

SUBSCRIBE FOR 6 MONTHS AND SAVE 45%*

- **FREE DELIVERY** STRAIGHT TO YOUR DOOR OR DEVICE
- **SAVE MONEY** ON THE COVER PRICE
- **NEVER MISS AN ISSUE**
- **MANAGE YOUR SUBSCRIPTION** ONLINE VIA OUR DEDICATED SELF-SERVICE SITE



PRINT & DIGITAL

£24.99 EVERY 6 MONTHS



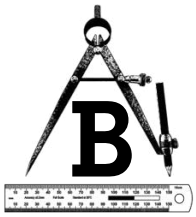
DIGITAL ONLY

£22.49 EVERY 6 MONTHS

CHOOSE FROM 3 WAYS TO SUBSCRIBE

www.magazinesdirect.com/GUI/DQ24L
or call 0330 333 1113 and quote 'DQ24L'
or scan the QR code here! >>>>>>>>>

Terms & conditions: Offer closes 31 January 2027. Direct Debit offer open to new UK subscribers only. *Savings based on cover price. The price is guaranteed for the first 6 months, and we will notify you in advance of any price changes. The full subscription rate is for 12 months (13 issues) and includes postage and packaging. **Access to the digital library ends with your subscription. Payment is non-refundable after the 14-day cancellation period, unless exceptional circumstances apply. For full terms and conditions, visit www.magazinesdirect.com/page/terms-and-conditions. For enquiries, please call +44 (0) 330 333 1113. Lines are open Monday-Friday 8:30am-7pm UK Time (excluding Bank Holidays) or email help@magazinesdirect.com. Calls to 0330 numbers will be charged at no more than the national landline call, and may be included in your phone provider's call bundle.



« BLUEPRINT »

DRESSED TO DISTRESS

How do you bring a Custom Shop favourite within reach of more players without losing its character? Phil Collen reveals the thinking behind his new Jackson signature PC1-E

Words Charlie Wilkins **Photography** Jackson Guitars

For Def Leppard's Phil Collen, there's nothing quite like the feel of a well-played guitar. One of his natural-finish Jackson PC1 models has seen so much action that it looks like it's been reliced – and he wouldn't have it any other way. In fact, he loves guitars that look and feel like old friends, with the kind of character that only comes from years of playing.

This philosophy helped inspire Jackson's new Pro Series Signature PC1-E, a more affordable take on the guitar that has been Collen's signature instrument for more than three decades. But bringing the PC1 into a new price range meant making some changes, and the challenge was figuring out where to draw the line. For Collen, it wasn't simply a matter of recreating the look of his Custom Shop guitars; the new model still had to deliver the feel, response and versatility that he's come to expect from a PC1, while offering something that more players could get their hands on.

Having spent time on the road with an early prototype, Collen joins us to talk through the development of the new Pro Series PC1-E production model (which streets at £1,699), the decisions that shaped it, and what makes this latest version of his signature guitar stand out.

Up until now, your PC1 signature guitars have all been Custom Shop models. What was the inspiration behind developing this new version?

"People have been asking for a more affordable PC1 for a long time. The Custom Shop guitars are amazing, but not everyone can afford one. So we wanted to do something that would bring the price down without losing what makes the PC1 special. This one is made in Ensenada, Mexico, and we've done things a little differently. We got rid of the maple top, so it's all mahogany, and we're using a different Floyd Rose that's not quite as expensive but still works great. We've still got DiMarzio pickups, the Sustainer neck pickup and that whole Les Paul-meets-Strat thing. And it feels great straight out of the box. I could literally take one and play a whole show with it."

When you were developing the PC1-E, what were the features you absolutely wanted to keep and where were you willing to make compromises?

"Well, the main thing was keeping everything that makes the PC1 what it is. I love having the DiMarzio X2N humbucker in the bridge because it gives you all that power and sustain, but you can also split it and get these really beautiful single-coil sounds. And, obviously, the Sustainer is a huge part of it. I use that all the time, so I definitely wanted to keep that. I didn't want to lose any of the sounds or versatility. That was really the important thing."

You toured with an early PC1-E prototype. Were many changes made as you road-tested it?

"The first thing we did was change the neck. I love a big, fat neck, so we put one on my prototype. That made a huge difference to me, although the production model has a much slimmer neck. After that there were just small things. I think one of the Sustainer switches was installed the wrong way. We kept going back and sorting out details like that, but otherwise they really nailed it. It's still a PC1, just a bit different to look at."

The PC1-E has a heavily distressed black finish. Where did the idea for this relicing come from?

"I love reliced guitars. They feel worn in and comfortable straight away. I have a natural-finished PC1 that I got new a few years ago and now it looks as though someone's taken a hammer to it, but that's just from me playing it. When I went to visit the factory in Ensenada, I played a distressed Charvel that I loved, and I thought, 'Let's do that with the PC1.' The first prototype came through in black and it looked great straight away."



Jackson's new Pro Series Signature PC1-E retains Phil's non-negotiables from his US-made Custom Shop PC1, with savvy tweaks to bring the production model to a more affordable price point

"It feels great straight out of the box. I could literally take one and play a whole show with it"



1. Phil's must-have PC1 Sustainer Driver remains, with a high-output DiMarzio X2N at the bridge and Sugar Chakra in the middle position

2. Phil put the PC1-E prototypes through their paces on the road

3. The reverse headstock features Jackson die-cast locking tuners, with gold hardware throughout





The PC1-E also does away with the Custom Shop model's maple top. How does that change fit with what you wanted from this guitar?
"A beautiful maple top is great, but you don't need that look on a guitar that's meant to appear worn and battered. Losing it also brings the cost down. I love the mahogany body, and the baked neck. When I went to Ensenada, they gave me a reliced Charvel to use for a show. I'd never played it before, but they put heavier strings on it and I went straight on stage. It felt like an old friend. That's the feeling I wanted from this guitar. I've had a PC1-E out on tour and it's actually my favourite guitar for the moment."

You chose a DiMarzio high-output X2N for the bridge instead of the Super 3 used in the other PC1 models. What makes it useful beyond hard-rock sounds?
"It's the most powerful pickup DiMarzio makes and I love the power and sustain you get from it. But everyone thinks, 'Oh, it's just a metal pickup,' but it really isn't. There are some real subtleties to it. Turn the volume down and it cleans up beautifully. If you hit it hard, it responds hard, but if you play gently, it responds to that, too. And with the push-pull control, you can split the humbucker and get this great single-coil sound. I've been recording some new Def Leppard stuff with it and you'd swear it was a Telecaster. Then you push the control back in and you've got all that power from the X2N again. It's incredibly versatile."

How does the bridge pickup's push-pull coil-split work with the guitar's other pickup combinations?
"My first PC1-E prototype didn't have the push-pull control, but the later ones did. My other PC1 sounds so much like a Strat or Tele that people can't believe it. The Sustainer in the neck position also works as a pickup, and you've got the DiMarzio Sugar Chakra in the middle. With the five-way switch, you can blend those pickups and get some really beautiful tones. Then, when you want something more aggressive, you've got all that power from the X2N in the bridge. So there's a lot of versatility there, which is something I really love about these guitars."

> "The X2N is the most powerful pickup DiMarzio makes. It's not just a metal pickup, it's incredibly versatile"

How did the DiMarzio Sugar Chakra pickup in the middle position earn its place on the new model?
"I've used the Sugar Chakra in other guitars, including a Tele and a Strat. During the G3 tour we were experimenting with one in a Strat and tweaking it as we went along. It's a DiMarzio rail-style single coil, but, to me, it responds a bit like a Super Distortion and I really liked that. The Sugar Chakra gives you another character in the middle position, and it works well with the other pickup combinations."

The neck-position Sustainer has been a big part of the PC1 for years. How did you first get into using one?
"I used an EBow on *Hysteria* and *Adrenalize*, and while it was great, having to hold it against the strings could be a bit of a chore. The first Sustainer I tried was on a Strat-shaped Hamer, and that thing just screamed! When we were developing the original PC1, I was working with Grover Jackson and my guitar tech at the time, Stan Schiller. Stan said, 'You wouldn't need the EBow any more. You could just switch this thing on.' So we incorporated it into the PC1 right from the beginning, back in the early-to-mid 90s. I use it all the time, especially the setting that gives you those really high, screaming harmonics. I absolutely love that sound."



3

The PC1-E comes equipped with a Floyd Rose 1000 Series vibrato. How does that compare to what you use on your Custom Shop PC1 guitars?
"It's a bit less expensive, but it works amazingly well. That's actually what I've got on my own PC1-E. But I do tend to put titanium blocks and saddles on my guitars; that's just a personal preference. I also prefer chrome or nickel hardware over black. I know that sounds strange, but I can actually hear and feel a difference. I once did a blindfold test with Fender, and I could tell them apart. Everyone has their own preferences with that kind of stuff, but, for me, it's really about how the guitar feels when you're playing it. That's the important thing."

The PC1-E comes strung with nines from the factory, but you use much heavier 13-gauge strings on your own guitars. How did you end up going with such a heavy gauge?
"Yeah, I use 13s to 54s now. Back on Def Leppard's *Pyromania* tour, Gary Moore was opening for us. I went into his dressing room and saw the famous Peter Green Les Paul. I said, 'Is that the Peter Green Les Paul?' and Gary said, 'Yeah, do you want to play it?' So he picked up another guitar and we jammed for about an hour. He had 10s on the Les Paul – I was used to playing nines, but I loved the feel. After a while I moved up to 11s, then 12s and eventually 13s. I've probably been using 13s for about 10 years now. Your fingers get stronger, and I like being able to really lay into the guitar."

With Def Leppard now using amp modellers and in-ear monitors, how do you get those long, screaming feedback notes?
"I don't need an amp nearby to make the guitar feedback. I can do it all with the Sustainer. I can be at the end of a ramp at Wembley Stadium or SoFi Stadium, away from everybody else and still have the guitar screaming. It's a brilliant toy, but it's also a tool."

Now that you've had a chance to put the PC1-E through its paces, do you feel Jackson has captured everything you love about the original PC1?
"Absolutely! I love my Custom Shop PC1s and they're beautiful guitars, but a lot of people wanted something at a lower price, and the PC1-E holds its own. With this one you've still got the sounds and features that make it a PC1, including the Sustainer and all those pickup combinations. It sounds and feels great straight out of the box. It's really a fantastic guitar." G
www.jacksonguitars.com



The Inside Job

Jackson VP of Product, Jon Romanowski, on how the PC1-E went from an ambitious idea to a road-tested production guitar

What got the PC1-E project moving?
"People had been asking for a lower-priced PC1 for years, but none of our earlier ideas really excited Phil. Then he visited our Ensenada, Mexico, factory in spring 2025 and saw what we could do there. We sat down with Phil and his tech to work out which specifications mattered and how to make this guitar different from the USA Custom Shop model."

What did you have to preserve?
"The Sustainer was key. The DiMarzio X2N and Sugar Chakra pickup combination was important, too, along with the recessed Floyd Rose and the basic PC1 design. He likes mahogany, so we kept that. But we didn't want to build a cheap copy of the USA guitar. The distressed black finish and reverse headstock helped give this version its own identity."

Where could you bring the cost down without losing that feel?
"We left off the maple cap and used a mahogany body, a more affordable Floyd Rose and a flat-sawn maple neck. The distressed finish also saves some of the polishing work. Those changes add up. We kept the caramelised neck and graphite reinforcement for stability. The production model has a more conventional profile based on his Custom Shop PC1 spec."

How closely did Phil test the prototype models?
"We brought two guitars to him on tour: one with the huge neck he prefers, and another closer to the production version. His tech put 13s on and Phil played it for the first four songs that night. We left the guitars with him for several more weeks. He gave us feedback and we tightened up details, including the wiring. Ultimately, he makes the final call."

What proved most difficult when production began?
"The biggest challenge was scaling up production with the Sustainer, which meant additional quality-control checks. Wiring harnesses for the Custom Shop PC1 were made by hand, but that wasn't practical for hundreds of production guitars, so we found a local supplier."

BOUGHT & SOLD

J MASCIS

The Dinosaur Jr guitarist and 90s alt-rock hero talks offset neck-swapping, chasing Orange amps and why multi-effects units don't push his buttons

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

"I bought a '65 Fender Jazzmaster at Slimy Bob's Guitar Ripoff in Connecticut. I liked it because I could afford it [laughs]. And I like that it had Grover tuners, and the neck had a worn-down feel like a baseball bat. I don't have it any more... I sold it."

What was the last guitar you bought, and why?

"I bought a Zemaitis guitar, just because I love the Faces and Ronnie Wood. I've always liked the way they looked and sounded. I saw one, and it definitely has a little bit of the Faces' sound. I got it after we finished recording [latest Dinosaur Jr album, *There Near*], just after the first show of our summer tour. I tried it at soundcheck, but it didn't really work for the song I was thinking of using it for, so I haven't used it live. But if I want that fuzzy Ronnie Wood sound, I might pick it up."

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

"I got a Lake Placid Blue Fender Jaguar with a matching headstock. It's a '66 and I paid, like, $200. Maybe that was my best deal. I got it at Rogue Music in New York, I used to go there a lot. I still have that guitar."

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

"Oh, wow. Yeah... that happens. I don't know, I bought this multi-effects thing, just to try it out. I thought, 'Oh, how bad could it be?' Well, I was immediately bummed out when I tried to use it. I just didn't like the sound or the interface because I couldn't figure it out. It had these knobs and stuff – but I thought I could just step on it and it would sound cool. I tried it for maybe five minutes and just didn't get any sounds that I liked. I may try to send that back... unless I get inspired."



J Mascis' Marshall stacks have been a long-time part of his rig, and they're currently joined by a 100-watt HiWatt and black-panel Fender Twin on the road

PHOTO BY GEORGE FAIRBAIRN

J'S GO-TO RIG

"I'm using this refinished Burgundy Mist Fender Jazzmaster. I always thought it was a '63, but it must be a '62 because it's a slab 'board. And then I have a Jazzmaster that I put together – it's a '64 that had an A[-size] neck and then I bought a '59 neck and sold the A neck. It's blue, so I put a flowery blue pickguard on it. Those are my two mains. I have a few that have different necks. I guess that's what everyone always used to like about Fenders, you know, that you could just swap the neck to something else if you don't like it. I also have a Thinline Fender Tele from the Custom Shop that I recently put a Jazzmaster whammy on. It's pretty awesome and I've been like, 'Why didn't I ever do this before?'

"For pedals, my main sounds are the [Tube Works] Real Tube, which is my clean sound, then I've just got the Big Muff for my distorted sound. I just add different fuzzes onto the Big Muff for whatever I want to do, so it's mostly layering, but I also have an Electric Mistress and some sort of wah pedal.

"I've had the same amp setup for a while now: a [Marshall] Super PA 100-Watt 'Plexi' and a Super Bass 100-Watt 'Plexi', and a Hiwatt DR103 and Fender [black-panel] Twin. I play through all four of those. But in the studio I use a Mesa/Boogie 100-watt and a JCM800. And I always have an old Vox AC15 and a Fender Tweed Bandmaster, and I use a Fender Tweed Deluxe a lot, too."



It's not just Jazzmasters that J loves. He has a penchant for the modular nature of Leo's designs, swapping necks and hardware between his Fender guitars

PHOTO BY JORDI VIDAL/ REDFERNS

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

"There's so many other guitars coming down the pike, you know? I do have ones that have gotten stolen but not sold. I had a '59 Jazzmaster and a second one, which was a '62, and both were stolen. It was after a gig and somebody followed us to a hotel and then jacked the trailer and took some stuff. I never saw them again... but I think I could recognise them, even if they were refinished."

What's your best buying tip for anyone looking for their ultimate guitar?

"I guess, just try it. See if it speaks to you. That's the best way to do it. That's why it's hard to buy stuff online – you just can't tell. There could be 10 guitars that are supposed to be the same, but only one of them you'll really like. So I guess you'll just know when you pick it up. Don't ignore that feeling. If it makes you want to play it, play something different or just feels cool, go for it. I'm personally a sucker for jumbo frets, so any old guitar with those, I think, is awesome."

> "I bought this multi-effects thing [and] was immediately bummed out when I tried to use it"

When was the last time you stopped and looked in a guitar shop window, or browsed online, and what were you looking at?

"Oh, jeez. Well, it's easy to just look up what I've been looking at, right? [laughing, J pulls up his Reverb search history on his computer] I saw some late-60s Orange heads on Reverb. I actually bought one in Berlin recently but haven't even tried it... it's still in Berlin. I'm obsessed with the old *Beat-Club* videos and that's what they had. Like, Free, Black Sabbath and MC5 would be playing through those Orange heads, you know, the old ones. So I always wanted to get one that looked like that. Oh, and I was also looking at a blue sparkle '63 Strat that's been refinished. That looks cool... but it's a bit pricey."

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?

"I'd rather have a really good amp for a gig. For recording, I guess it depends on how bad the guitar is. But you need a good amp because even if you have a great guitar, if the amp is bad, you won't be able to hear it. And there are definitely lots of bad tones... I hear them all the time. I know them when I hear them. I just don't like them."

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

"I guess humbuckers, just because I've gotten so addicted to noiseless pickups and the lack of noise live. And I've found some humbuckers that kind of sound like single coils, so I'd probably go with that. I'm not a big traditional humbucker person, though I've heard some of the Eric Johnson DiMarzio ones that sound like a Filter'Tron, so I guess I like humbuckers that don't sound like humbuckers [laughs]." **[AD]**



There Near, the new album from Dinosaur Jr, is available now via Jagjaguwar

www.jmascis.com

The MOD SQUAD

ACOUSTIC GLOW-UP

Suspecting this Cort slot-head had all the makings of a great guitar, Huw Price decided to see how much better it could be

If you read my colleague David Mead's review of Cort's AP550M OBPK parlour acoustic in the previous issue, you probably formed the impression he was quite taken with it. Even so, he commented: "We can't help thinking that a bone nut and saddle would up the ante even more." Rather than leave things hanging, we contacted Cort for permission to make a few upgrades – which was duly granted, and so I was good to go.

David established that the nut and saddle were both Polyphenylene Sulfide (PPS), a high-performance engineering thermoplastic that is commonly used in factory guitar-making. David also suggested trying some different bridge pins and upgrading the tuners for a more vintage aesthetic to complement the guitar's rootsy and bluesy vibe.

I've been sourcing guitar parts from Allparts UK for more years than I care to remember. Allparts stocks a wide variety of acoustic saddles, nuts and bridge pins in a variety of materials. Some are designed as drop-in replacements, while others are 'blanks' that require some additional work to make them fit and optimise performance. When ordering guitar parts, always measure the stock parts so you can be sure the replacements will fit. Digital callipers are relatively affordable and they will ensure you don't end up buying a 2.7mm thick bridge saddle, rather than a 3mm saddle, or bridge pins that won't fit into the existing holes.

Before starting work, I set up a Violet Garnet large capsule condenser microphone and recorded the guitar in stock form. Without altering the microphone position or adjusting the preamp, I made further recordings after each modification. This allowed me to go back and hear the effect of each change and compare the recordings with my written notes.



We were able to source all the parts we needed for the upgrades from Allparts UK

PHOTOS BY HUW PRICE

Pin Sharp

So long as the diameter and taper matches the stock bridge pins in your guitar, swapping them over is a simple DIY job. Allparts supplied three sets in brass, camel bone and boxwood to replace the plastic factory items. Needless to say, they all improved the look, but I was astonished by the sonic difference each one made.

Brass pins made the originals sound anaemic by bolstering the midrange, refining the treble and improving clarity

> "Swapping the PPS saddle for bone opened up the tone and almost eliminated low-mid boxiness"

while softening the bass and transient attack. The bone pins preserved more of the Cort's natural character but opened up the high frequencies, boosted the overall level and provided more bass depth and punch. With the boxwood pins, the Cort's parlour-style low-mid woodiness was enhanced, while the lowest notes lost power and the treble had less sparkle than with brass and bone.

All three types of pin were an improvement over the plastic ones in different ways. Their overall effect is akin to the judicious application of equalisation and compression when mixing, and I feel they would all excel in different guitars depending on what you're hoping to achieve. It was a close run thing between the refining effect of brass and the exuberance of bone, but bone ended up winning.

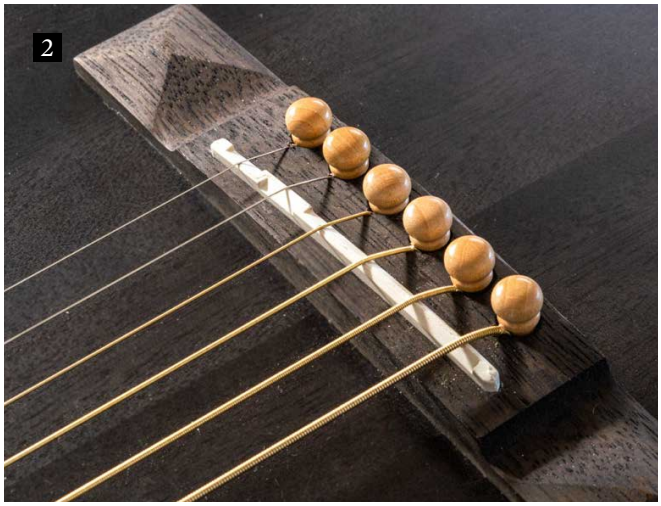
Saddle Saw

Acoustic bridge saddles are sometimes tough to extract, but the Cort's was loose in the bridge slot and rocked slightly without strings to press it down. I had noticed it was a bit gappy when I was



David Mead writes: "When I reviewed this little Cort last issue I knew it was something rather special. Playing it after Huw's upgrades I can hear more separation between the strings, plus a more prominent growl to the basses and noticeably sweeter, singing trebles. It's definitely louder, too!"

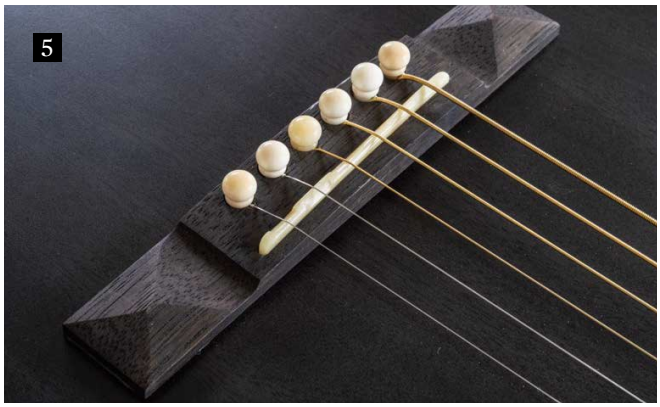














1. The pin extractor in this string winder made swapping to brass pins quick and easy

2. The boxwood pins accentuated the parlour guitar qualities but narrowed the frequency range

3. After taking a couple of millimetres off each end, the compensated bone saddle slotted straight in

figuring out which saddle to order from Allparts, so I was careful to order one that was a tad thicker. Allparts didn't have a 72mm long compensated bone bridge in stock, so the one I requested was 76mm and I had to saw the ends off to make it fit. I left a bit extra and then filed and sanded round overs onto the ends until the saddle dropped into the slot.

The fretboard radius was 16 inches, but the factory saddle's radius was closer to 10 inches. I used double-sided tape to fix some 180-grit paper onto my 16-inch radius block, marked the top of the new saddle with pencil and then sanded it until the pencil marks had disappeared. Ideally, the saddle radius might be closer to 18 inches, but I figured this was a better starting point than 10 inches.

Before tuning the guitar once again, I reinstalled the plastic pins so I could make a direct comparison with the PPS saddle. I could tell from the waveform that the Cort was louder with the bone saddle, but the most striking thing was the way it opened up the tone and almost eliminated low-mid boxiness. Bass notes were better defined and the low-E string had more depth and power. With the bone pins reinstated, bass depth and power increased further and the treble sounded less brittle and more refined.

4. 180-grit paper attached to a 16-inch radius block was used to finesse the saddle radius

5. Bone pins won the shootout and, after intonation adjustments, the saddle was buffed up with chrome polish

6. Once the glue residue was removed, the bone nut blank was an almost perfect fit

PHOTOS BY HUW PRICE







Having checked that there was scope for improvement, I used a file to finesse the compensation contouring and soften the sharp corners. The saddle was then sanded up to 1,200-grit and buffed to a shine with chrome polish. The luckiest part was that there was no need to adjust the action, but had I needed to lower it I would have sanded the bottom of the saddle, not the top.

Nut Job

After carefully scoring around the paint line with a scalpel, I carefully tapped out the plastic factory nut and scraped the glue residue off the wood. I'd forgotten to request a nut blank from Allparts, but an Armstrong Music 'Gibson' nut blank that I had in stock was a near perfect fit. I just needed to remove about 0.5mm at each end before superglueing it in place.

Cutting nut slots requires special files and lots of practice, so it might be best to leave this modification to your tech. Nut material will only affect the tone of open strings, but we tend to play more open strings on acoustic than electric, and I noticed further refinement in the treble and even more bass solidity. Installing a bone nut is definitely a worthwhile modification.

Gearing Up

The stock tuners worked perfectly, but I found the juxtaposition of the classical-style patterned plate and plastic 'kidney' buttons jarring on the eye. Again, I experienced good luck because Grover Sta-Tite tuner posts were a great fit for the holes in the headstock. To achieve a perfect fit, I needed to countersink the holes slightly and fill a couple of screw holes on each side with black Milliput. I can't claim that the Grovers improved the tone, but they do feel fantastic and add considerably to the 'Dust Bowl' vibe. I finished up the project with a set of Elixir 12-gauge phosphor bronze strings and made one last recording.

The end result was wildly different from the original, with extra clarity, volume and dynamics. Bass was deeper and punchier, and the treble sounded less, well, plasticky. It was very much the same guitar, just a far better version of it. G

Our thanks to Allparts UK for supplying us with the following: Brass bridge pins (BP-0221-008); Boxwood bridge pins (BP-2853-000); Camel bone bridge pins (BP-2854-000); Unbleached compensated bone saddle (BS-0254-0U0); and Grover Sta-Tite tuners for slot head (TK-7919-001) https://allparts.uk.com

"The end result was wildly different from the original, with extra clarity, volume and dynamics"

7. Of all the mods, changing the nut had the least sonic impact, but it was still worthwhile

8. The post holes needed to be countersunk for the Grover Sta-Tite tuners to sit flush on the headstock

9. Upgrading the tuners was an indulgence, but they look wonderful and feel very smooth



Huw Price's Nutty Gritty

After an overdue refret, comparison with another mid-50s model reveals some secrets

1955 Gibson Les Paul Special (Part 3)

Deadlines are like the dietary supplements my wife makes me take these days – I don't particularly like them, but I know they're good for me. So when my friend Alex Price (no relation) suggested meeting up to compare our Les Paul Specials, I set myself a deadline to make mine playable beforehand. That meant getting the refret finished up and making a final decision about keeping or replacing the nut.

Alex's 1956 Les Paul Special is also in need of restoration, but our situations are completely opposite. Whereas mine is a stripped husk retaining about 90 per cent of the original parts, Alex owns a near-perfect husk with the original TV finish but none of its original parts. For me, this was a fantastic opportunity to examine an original TV finish up close and figure out a strategy to replicate it. But first, it was refret time.

Down To The Wire

Besides writing for *Guitarist*, much of my professional life is spent refretting guitars. Years ago, I might have been a bit sniffy about players who wanted jumbo frets in their vintage guitars, but these days I make no judgements. So long as the wire tangs can be made to fit without over-sawing the slots or forcing the neck into a back bow, I think it's very much a decision for individual owners.

I had no intention of putting jumbo frets in the Special, but I was convinced that a little extra height and width would improve the playability and tone. I'm quite keen on Jescar 50085 wire on vintage Fenders because it has a shallow tang that's a perfect fit for veneer fretboards. The extra height also provides plenty of scope for creating a pseudo-compound radius during the levelling process that allows for lower action and easier bends.

But the Special's fret slots were quite deep and I figured it might be wise to choose a wire with a bit more of a tang to secure the frets in the slots. Since the Special's fretboard radius was 10 inches, there wouldn't be any need for a 'bender's dress' or a fall away above the body join, so I wasn't too concerned about having the extra height.

In the end I decided on Jescar 45085 wire, which measures 0.045-inch tall and 0.085-inch wide. For reference, the original wire measured 0.02-inch tall and 0.07-inch wide. That might not seem like a big difference, but when it comes to fretwire, it's like night and day.

Banging On

When installing frets in a bound fretboard there are a three choices: square off the fret ends and rebuild the nibs with binding slurry; extend the frets over the binding; or trim the frets to the exact width of the binding. I decided the fretboard binding was too thin for faux nibs to stick to, and fretwire extending over the binding isn't a look I particularly like. I'll only do that when the fretboard is narrow relative to the string spacing and I need to maximise the surface area to prevent the E strings from slipping off. For the Special I opted to cut each fret to length so it would fit between the fretboard binding with only a tiny lip over.

This approach is a lot more time-consuming and demands a high degree of accuracy. I use digital callipers, but probably not in the way they are intended to be used. With the jaws set to the required width, I take a piece of fretwire that has been cut slightly over length and squared off at one end. The callipers jaws have sharp points, and with one side pressed against the fret's squared end, I use the other point to score the top of the fret.

> Don't rush to judge because most guitars improve dramatically over the first 24 hours under string tension

Once the tang has been shortened at each end and the fret is cut and filed back to the scored line, it should be the perfect length and ready for installation. I have no set method of installing frets and prefer to adapt my approach to suit whatever guitar I'm working on. Sometimes I bang them in from the top, and if it's a vintage Fender, I might tap them in from the side. I have also pressed them in using a radius caul in a clamp. But whenever possible, I'll use an arbour press.

In this case I needed to keep the fret aligned, so I very carefully positioned each length of wire and placed a 9.5-inch radius caul on top. Hammering the caul, rather than a small area of fret, prevents the fret from distorting and distributes the

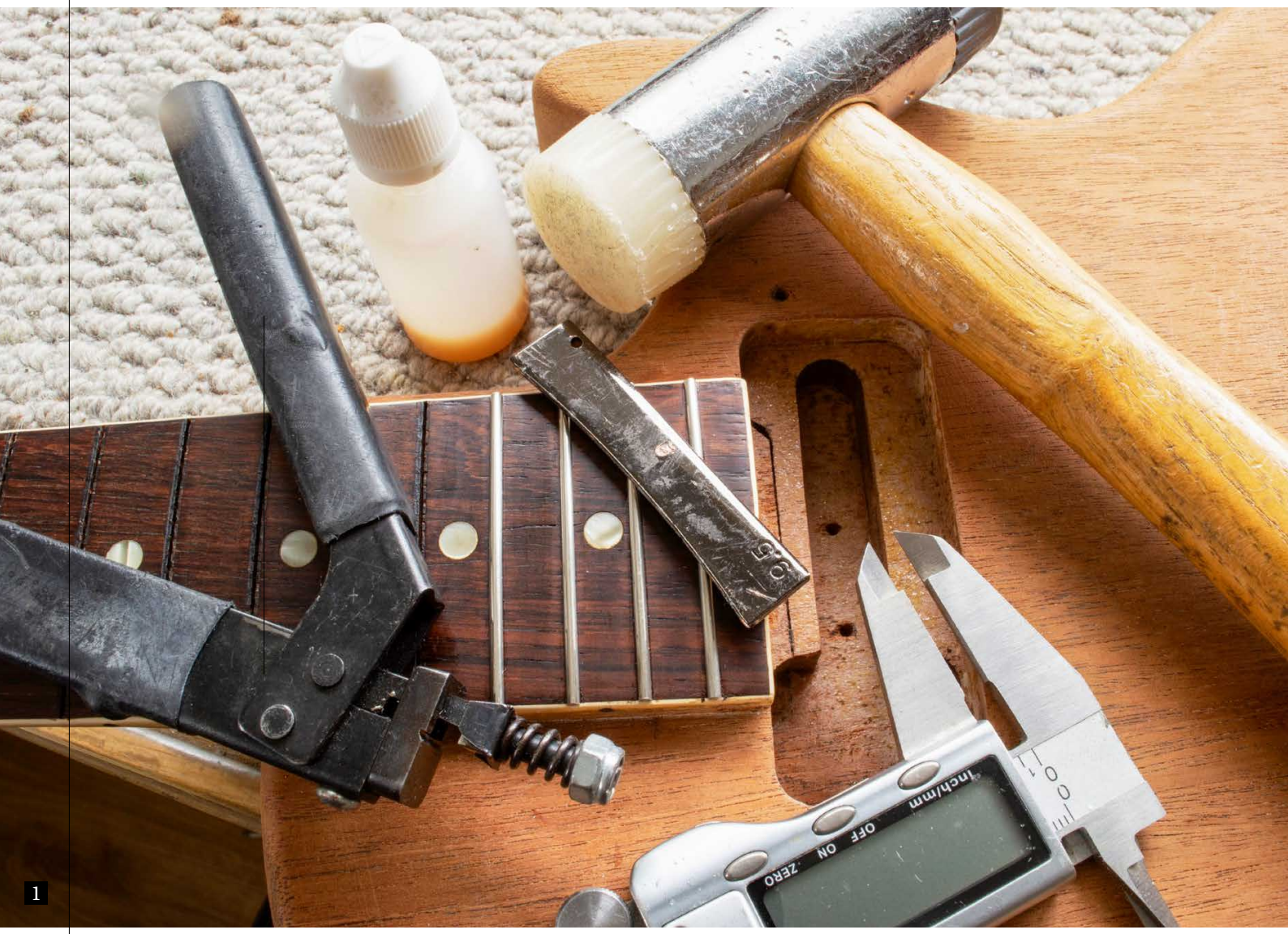


Rather than take the frets over the binding, they are cut to the exact width of the fretboard

PHOTOS BY HUW PRICE



Huw uses his friend's 1956 Les Paul Special (back) to compare original features prior his own model's refinish



1

1. After nipping back the tangs at each end, fish glue is forced into the slots, and the frets are tapped in with a 9.5-inch radius caul

2. With tape applied to protect the tops of the frets and binding, it's time to bevel and round over the fret ends

force so the fret moves down into the slot uniformly. I finished up using a 12-inch radius caul to ensure the centre section of the fret was properly seated, and wiped away any glue squeeze-out using pieces of dampened kitchen paper.

I usually bevel frets freehand, but on this occasion I used my Chris Alsop bevelling tool loaded with a diamond file. I protected the binding with tape and covered the frets with masking tape to prevent the dust from scratching them up. When they were almost done, I removed the protective tape and finished up with 800-grit paper on a flat sanding block.

After rounding over the ends, the frets were levelled, crowned and polished in the usual way, but since this isn't meant to be a fretting tutorial, I won't go into greater detail. Once I was finished, I was able to pop the tuners and bridge back on and tune up.

Hammering the radius caul, rather than a small area of fret, prevents the fret from distorting and distributes the force

As expected, the nut slots were all too low because they had been cut to work with far lower fretwire. Most vintage-guitar restorations arrive at a point where a decision must be made about trying to retain the original nut by shimming it or replacing it. In this case I was able to make it work by superglueing some mahogany veneer to the bottom, which is the option that I usually prefer.

Back To Life

Whenever I assemble a guitar for the first time – or reassemble one after years of disuse – I try to be mindful of some advice given to me by the renowned guitar builder and restorer Dave King. He warned against rushing to judgment because most guitars improve dramatically over the first 24 hours under string tension.

This Les Paul Special had been languishing in a case for six years, and I was initially underwhelmed when I got it playing again. But the following morning it was a guitar transformed. I could feel way more resonance transferring through the body, and the sustain was dramatically improved.

3. After bevelling and polishing, the new frets feel smooth and look a bit like factory frets with the binding nibs worn away

4. A 0.5mm mahogany shim compensates for the taller frets and allows the original nylon nut to be retained

5. With longer bushings, the top of the post is about 1mm further forward than the base, but it's a big improvement

6. This late '55/early '56 Special retains its original 'wheat' finish, and the area shielded by the pickguard looks 'like new'

7. The white basecoat applied prior to the grain filler can be seen where the yellowed top coats have worn away





2



3



4



5

Overall, it sounded more 'joined up' and musical. And while I can't offer any sort of rational or science-based explanation, I can state that in my experience this is almost always the case. On a side note, albeit an important one, the one-inch St Helens bushings have almost eliminated the forward-leaning bridge post issue.

It was also interesting to compare neck profiles because I tend to associate 50s Juniors and Specials with full, rounded necks. Mine is deep but has a fairly pronounced V most of the way up to the body join and, while I prefer it, I'd always harboured a nagging suspicion it had been reshaped at some point. The neck on Alex's Special turned out to be a virtual a clone of mine, so I'm pleased to conclude it was shaped that way in the Kalamazoo factory.

Finish Analysis

Lots of theories have been proposed regarding the colour and name of Gibson's TV finish, but the one that had always made most sense to me is the 'can't beat them, join them' hypothesis. The 'them' in question was Fender, and following the success of the Broadcaster/Telecaster, the top guys at Gibson probably decided they needed a more affordable solidbody to compete.

There are three key similarities between those early T-types and the TV Junior and Special models. The single-cut bodies were all made from flat planks of timber and black pickguards contrasted with translucent yellow/blonde finishes that allowed some of the wood grain to show through.

The methods used by both companies to achieve those finishes was very similar and any differences in the outcome are mostly attributable to the types of wood that were used – ash for Fender, and mahogany for Gibson. Both woods required grain filler, but Fender applied neutral filler before spraying a white base coat, while Gibson applied white lacquer before the grain filler.

Close examination of Alex's Special revealed Gibson's grain filler was a brownish mustard colour, and there were two thin but distinct lacquer layers. Whether the layer covering the white was originally tinted yellow is hard to say. Judging by the area under the pickguard I'd say it was, but it also darkened over decades with exposure to UV light. This lighter 'wheat' version of TV Yellow is going to be challenging but fun to replicate. G

www.huwpriceguitar.com



6



7



David Davidson's Vintage Icons

This unusual pair of Gibson ES-330s was factory fitted with humbuckers, rather than P-90s

1964 & 1965 Gibson ES-330s



This may appear to be a pair of ES-335s, but there's something different about the neck join and the tuners...

"This month we have a pair of ES-330s and both have humbuckers, rather than P-90s. The Tobacco Sunburst is a 1964 and the Cherry is from 1965. The construction is completely standard in every way except they were both factory routed for humbucking pickups. This makes for a fun feedback festival as you can well imagine.

"They're both very original guitars and I don't know how many Gibson made like this. These are the only ones I've ever seen, and I bought them as a pair from a dealer friend a few years back because I thought they were really cool. The pickups are all unopened Patent Number humbuckers.

"The '64's metal hardware is all nickel-plated and, although the Cherry is a '65, all its hardware is nickel-plated, too. Gibson changed to chrome hardware that year so it must have been made very early in 1965, and the serial number confirms this. You occasionally see 1965 Gibsons with a mixture of nickel and chrome parts, but most have chrome.

> "With Gibson, it was pretty easy to place a special order. I even have an ES-330 made without f-holes"

"Both guitars have the 'transitional' nut width where Gibson had started slimming the necks down, but it was barely noticeable. The neck profiles are fairly typical for 1964 and feel kind of like a '64 ES-335. The profile was just starting to get bigger again after they got past the blade necks. The orange label inside the '64 is another interesting feature because only ES-330s from that year had them. The '65 doesn't – it has a white export label instead.

"With Gibson, it was pretty easy to place a special order. They definitely had a custom area on the third floor, and there are filing cabinets full of blueprints for one-off guitars that they made. There's also a lot of documentation covering custom one-off guitars and small production runs for music stores, and I even have an ES-330 that was made without f-holes. Somebody must have ordered ES-330s with humbucking pickups, and although I've only seen these two, I can't say that there aren't others out there.



Although very rare, customers could order an ES-330 with humbuckers, rather than P-90s

"Gibson had some problems shipping to the UK in the early 60s, so you had many more Rivieras and Casinos than we did, and we had more ES-330s. I sell a lot of ES-330s to the UK and Europe. They are somewhat affordable, compared with many other Gibson models, and they do sound really good. I think that a lot of players and collectors in the US want ES-335s, and when they do go for a P-90 guitar, it's more likely to be a Junior or Special.

"The early ES-330s with black plastic and nickel-plated covers are the most sought after, and cherry or sunburst finishes are equally desirable. Many have had Bigsbys mounted, and those made as Bigsby guitars in the factory would usually have a Bigsby stamp on the tag. I don't think it devalues them because there's always a place for a Bigsby guitar in any collection.

"For a while in the early 90s, I felt like I was buying a student model Gibson almost every week. All the original owners were getting rid of them because they were maybe moving to Florida, and there were a lot of 330s, 125s and 225s coming in. There was a period when I could keep 10 or 12 ES-330s in stock all the time, but now it's more like three or four.

"My very first electric guitar was an ES-330. I can't remember the year, but it was sunburst with black plastic covers, so it was pre-'63, and I got it from a tag sale when I was nine. My father pushed the guy to give me a better price and it was $40 with a hardshell case. I used to shove socks and foam inside the body to keep it from feeding back and, before long, the guitar weighed a ton and still fed back.

"I wanted to play like Jeff Beck, but I couldn't do it with one of those things squealing in my ear. I had to find one spot where it didn't feed back and stay very still. It's more like a 'woo' than a high-pitched squeal and, wherever you go, it's going to follow you around. Of course, I wanted a Stratocaster really badly, but I couldn't afford one. When I was 12 I eventually traded my ES-330 for a Burgundy Mist non-slab '62 Jaguar with a matching headstock, but I have very fond memories of being in my bedroom as a kid with that ES-330, my Sam Ash amplifier and a Big Muff." **[HP]**

Vintage guitar veteran David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York
www.wellstrungguitars.com / info@wellstrungguitars.com / 001 (516) 221-0563

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAIGE DAVIDSON / 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



'Beano' Blues

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Knaggs SSC & Marshall JTM45 MkII Reissue
Difficulty ★★★☆☆ | 10 mins per example

SOME 60 YEARS AFTER John Mayall's famed *Blues Breakers With Eric Clapton* (aka the 'Beano' album) was recorded, Eric's performances remain a high watermark, undeniably pivotal in the development of modern solo guitar playing. However, it must be acknowledged that Eric in turn was inspired by players such as Freddy King, Muddy Waters, Buddy Guy and BB King among others. It was apparently a picture of Freddy King holding a Gibson Les Paul on the cover of his album *Let's Hide Away And Dance Away* that inspired Eric to seek out one for himself – a guitar that later became known as the 'Beano 'Burst', the guitar heard throughout the 'Beano' album and the inspiration for these examples.

At this brisk tempo, a 12-bar solo would have felt a bit too brief, so I went with 24 bars. This was improvised with Eric in mind, not trying to slavishly copy his playing but hopefully to come from a mindset recalling that mid-60s period, before these ideas became so mainstream. We don't have room for the full 24-bar solo in these pages, so I've picked out the phrases I believe are the most helpful and/or interesting. See the captions for more detail on this.

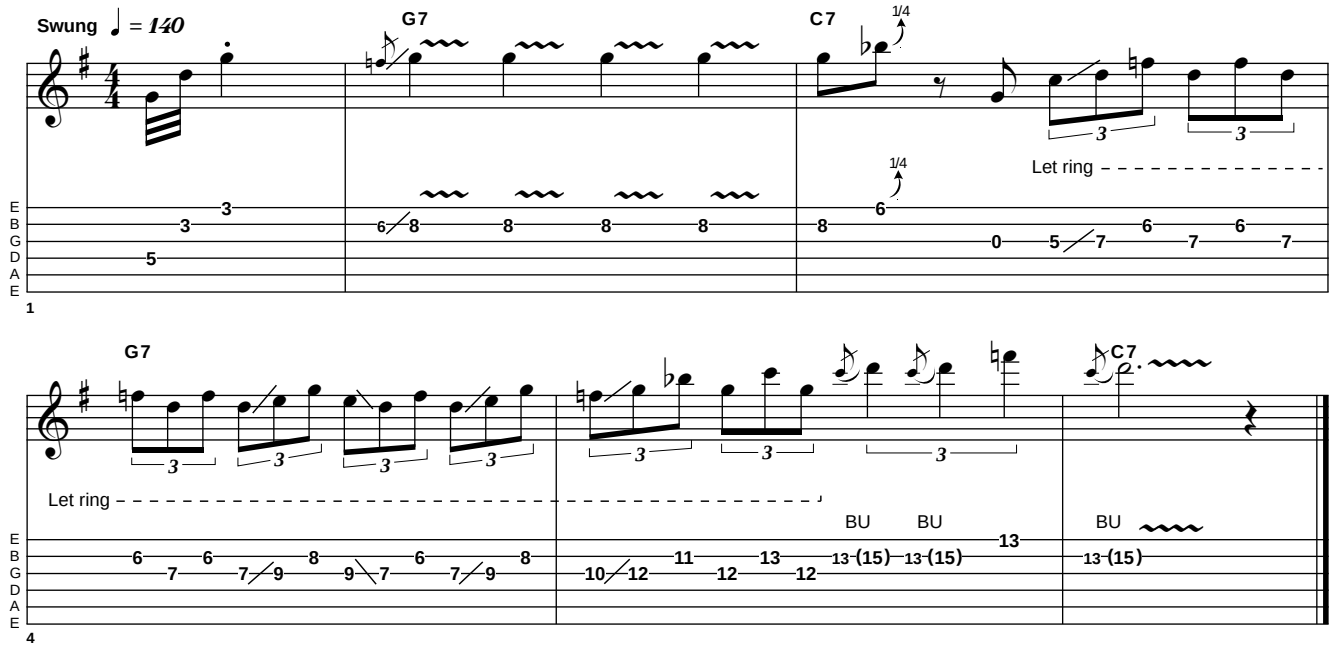
If you want to work out the remaining phrases, this shouldn't present too much of a challenge with the assistance of the video (which can be slowed down if needed). However, it might be more beneficial to see what you can come up with to fill the gaps, with the knowledge that you can refer to the ideas in the video if needed. As mentioned earlier, these examples are intended as a platform for your own experimentation, rather than a full blown study of EC's playing. Hope you enjoy and see you next time!



Richard Barrett's album, *Colours*, (complete with backing tracks) is available now to stream or buy from Amazon Music

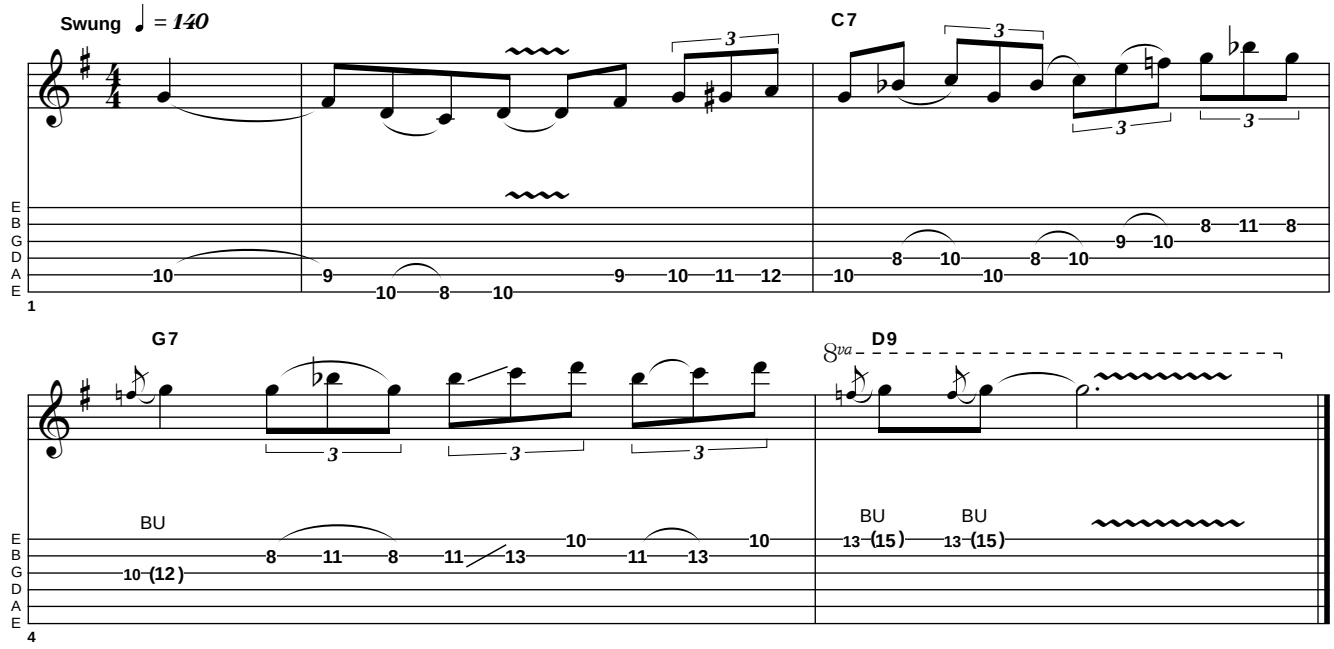
Example 1

WE START WITH A RAKE to that first staccato G in the pick-up bar. It isn't too important what the notes in the rake are – it's all about that G at the end. After a bar or so of repeated G (with a little vibrato), we slide around some doublestops. Let these ring and add a little vibrato if possible. This all ends up with the crotchet triplet and held D going into the C7 chord, implying a C9.



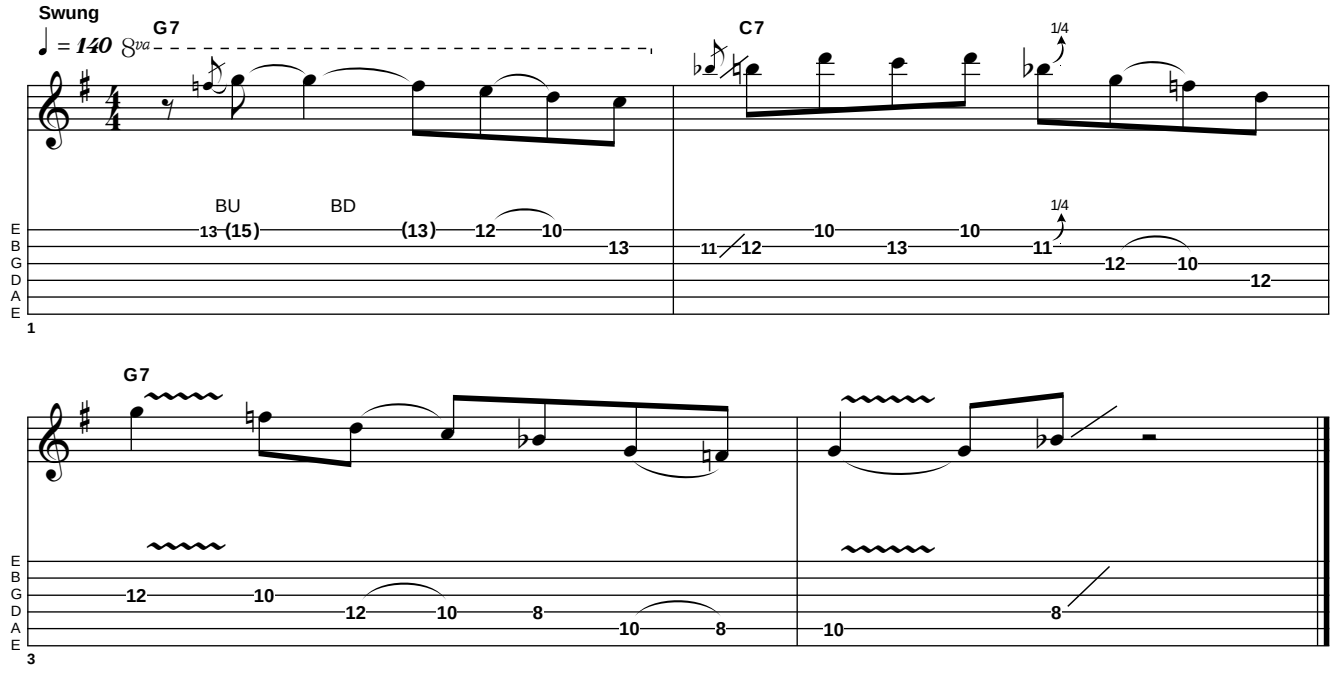
Example 2

HAVING ESTABLISHED THE MAJOR PENTATONIC VIBE with Example 1, I wanted to highlight bars 9 to 12 from the first half of the solo. This shifts around positions using a mixture of arpeggio fragments (bar 1), leading to a chromatic ascending line heading into bar 2, which features a C7 arpeggio with an added E, giving a brief hint of C7sus4. The final two bars show the shift in position executed with a slide, then repeating this same three-note triplet in the new position with a hammer-on before that final bend to G.



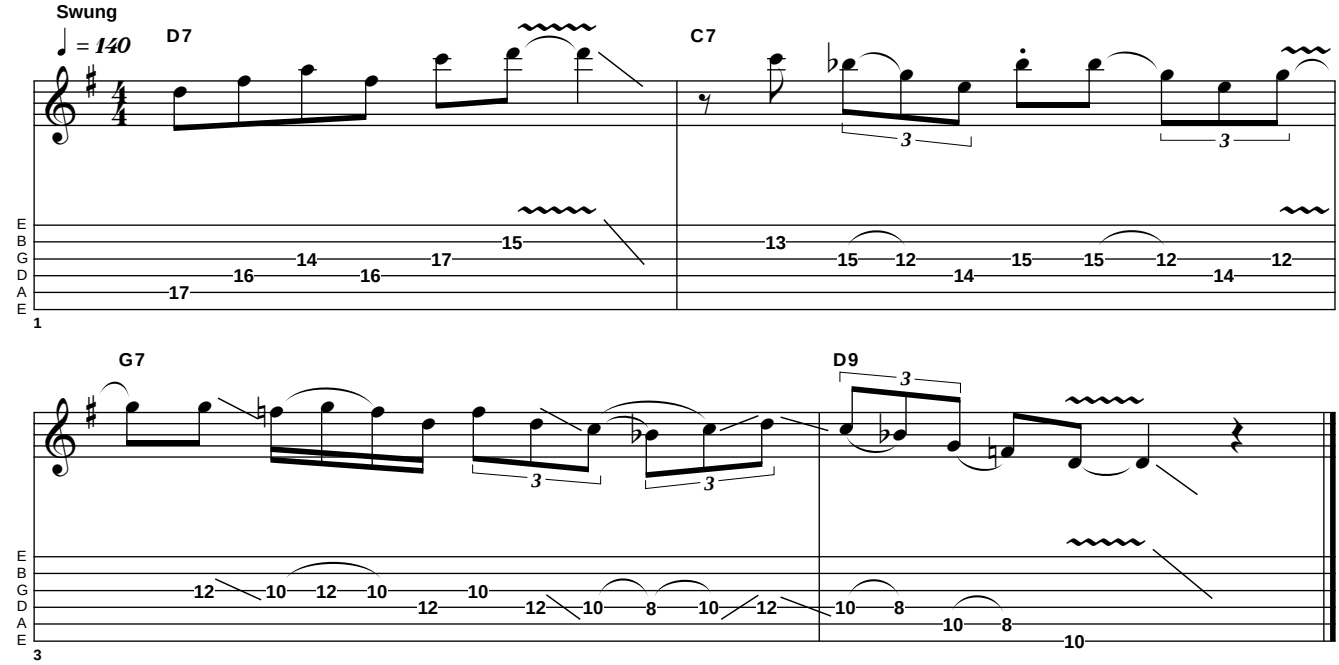
Example 3

LAUNCHING INTO THE SECOND ROUND, this phrase covers bars 13 to 16. The picking hand also catches the second string on that first bend, adding a bit of extra texture. This wasn't deliberate, but it does enhance what could be a thin-sounding note. No vibrato on this! The following descending line carries through to some play between B♭ and B, giving a slightly jazzier feel, as opposed to a straight G major pentatonic lick. Nothing wrong with pentatonics, though, as the second two bars demonstrate.



Example 4

THIS FINAL EXAMPLE covers bars 20 to 24. D7 and C7 arpeggio ideas feature over the respective chords in the first two bars – you'll see the shape used basically slides down two frets. A mixture of hammer-ons, pull-offs and slides helps articulate the final phrase, based around the G minor pentatonic, which seems to fit quite nicely, in spite of the G major chord in the backing track! This leads down to that final D.



Hear It Here

JOHN MAYALL & THE BLUESBREAKERS

BLUES BREAKERS WITH ERIC CLAPTON



We have to start with the 'Beano' album from 1966, as Eric's playing inspired the example solo. First check out *Hide Away*, a cover of the Freddy King instrumental, then the pentatonic riff of *Steppin' Out* (which almost certainly inspired Deep Purple's *Lazy* on *Machine Head*). Finally, listen to *Have You Heard*, which showcases Eric tearing it up with an unapologetically brash tone from the bridge pickup of the 'Beano' 'Burst' Les Paul.

ALBERT COLLINS

TRUCKIN' WITH ALBERT COLLINS



Stepping out of Eric Clapton world for a moment (pun intended), this gem from 1969 features Albert on fine form. Admittedly, Collins did play in a non-standard tuning (F C F A♭ C F) and often with a capo at the 5th or 7th fret, but there are still lots of great ideas that we can take and apply to regular tuning in our own playing. Check out *Frosty*, *Frostbite* and *Thaw Out* – not necessarily in that order. No wonder he was called The Iceman!

BB KING & ERIC CLAPTON

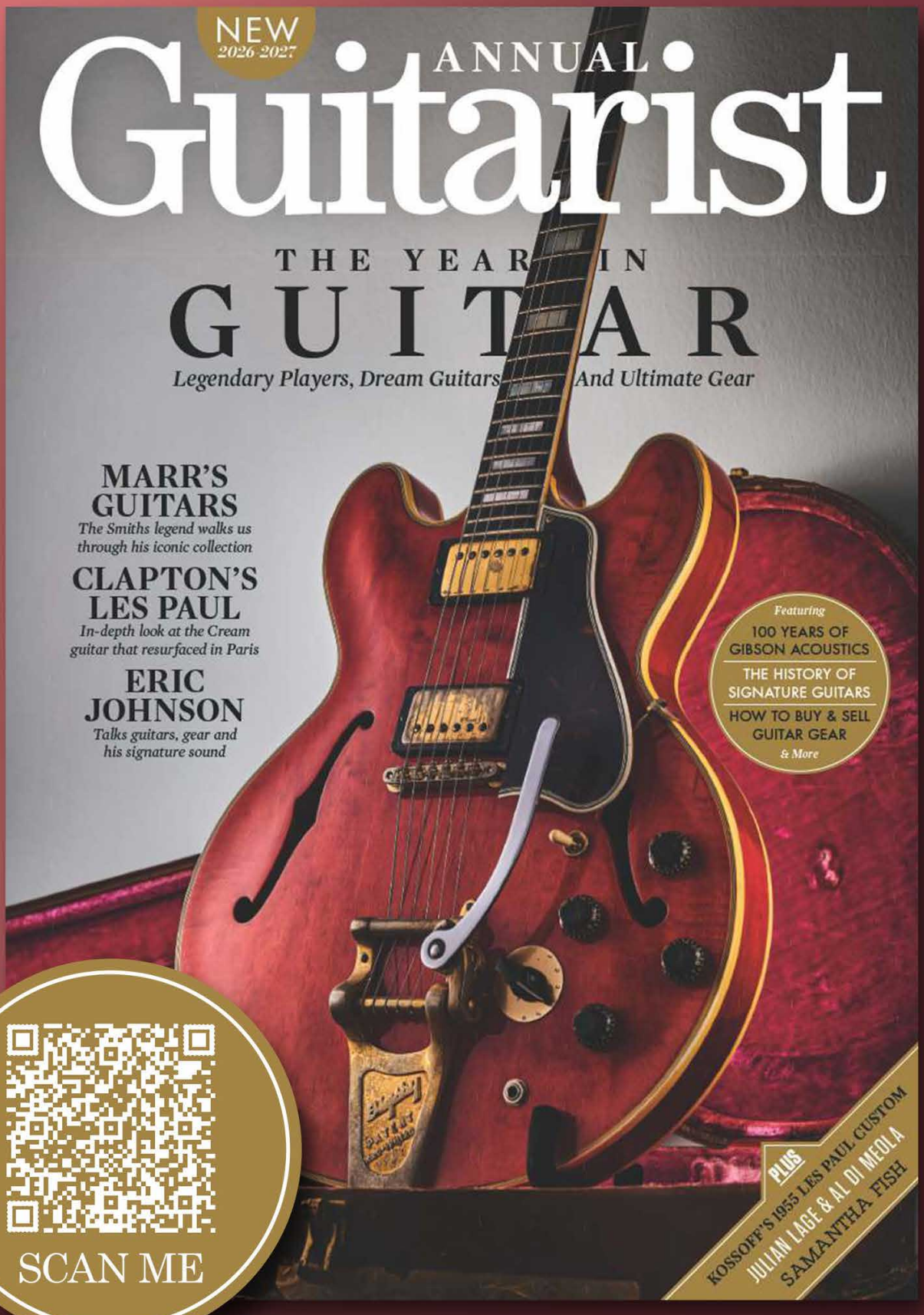
RIDING WITH THE KING



Listening through Eric's later solo material, he seems more concerned with songwriting; he doesn't really need to prove himself at this stage, after all. However, this album from 2000 with BB King showcases a return to the kind of playing that made his name. Check out the title track, then *Three O'Clock Blues*. Finally, Eric's phrasing on *Days Of Old* will remind many listeners of his playing on the 'Beano' album. It's easy to tell apart from BB's (also unique) phrasing.

This year's essential read

for any guitar player or collector



SCAN ME

magazinesdirect.com/gui2027

Guitarist

Next month



GEAR OF THE YEAR 2026

It's time to look back over the past 12 months and pick the gear that wins the laurels

MARSHALL SV20H JMH HEAD

A 20-watt amp with the tones of a Hendrix 'Plexi'? Sounds like a great idea to us!

THERE BE DRAGONS

The history of the highly ornate mythical beasts from PRS's catalogue

Next issue on sale 11 December 2026



SUBSCRIBE TO OUR DIGITAL EDITION AND SAVE!

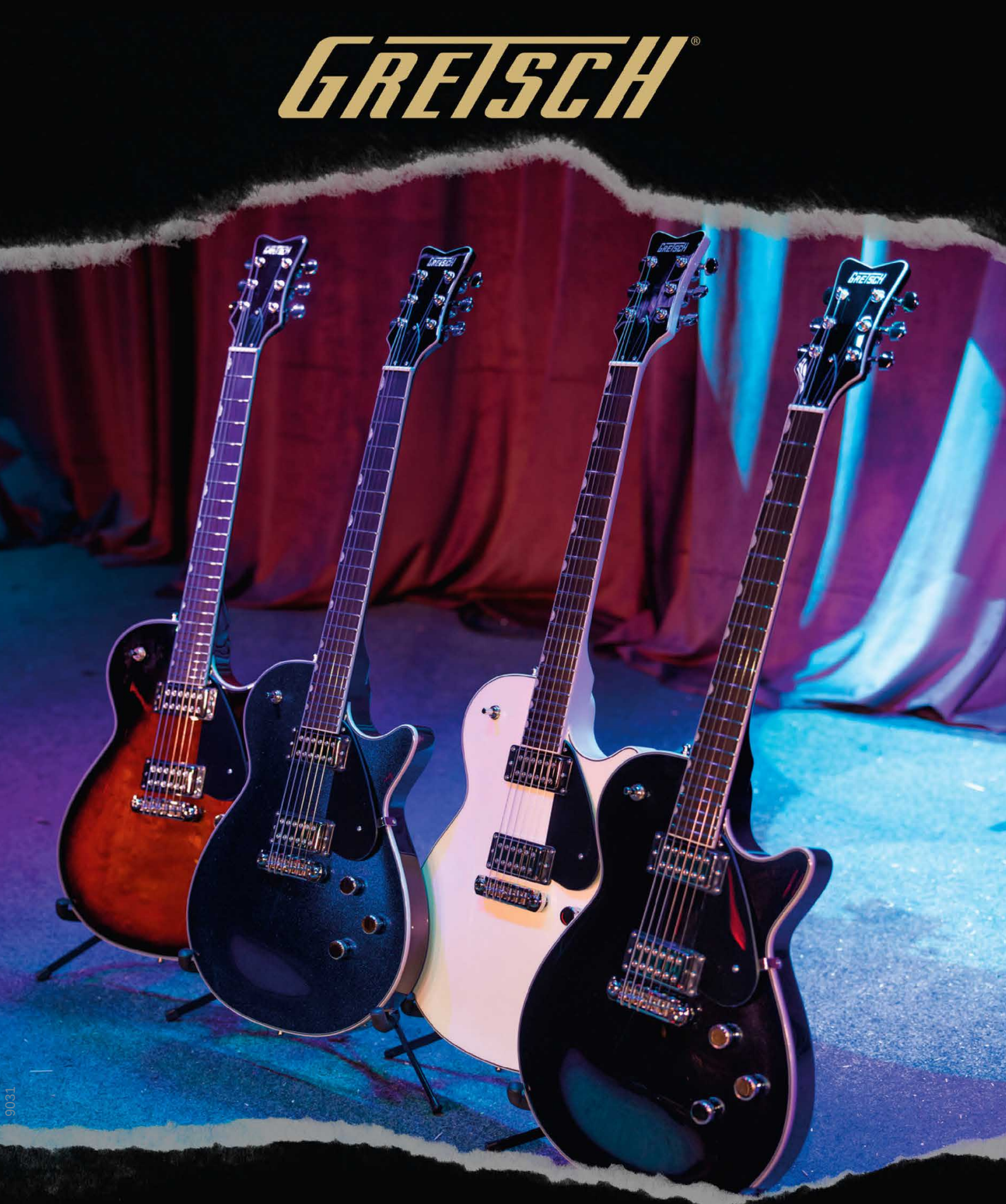
Want instant access to Guitarist?

Go digital from just £3.46 an issue!

www.magazinesdirect.com/GUI


lowden
GUITARS
lowden
GA-100
lowden
lowdenguitars.com
Passion in every note, excellence in every detail.

GRETSCH®



ELECTROMATIC PREMIER JET™

LEARN MORE AT GRETSCHGUITARS.COM

©2026 FENDER MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS CORPORATION.
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

9031

9000