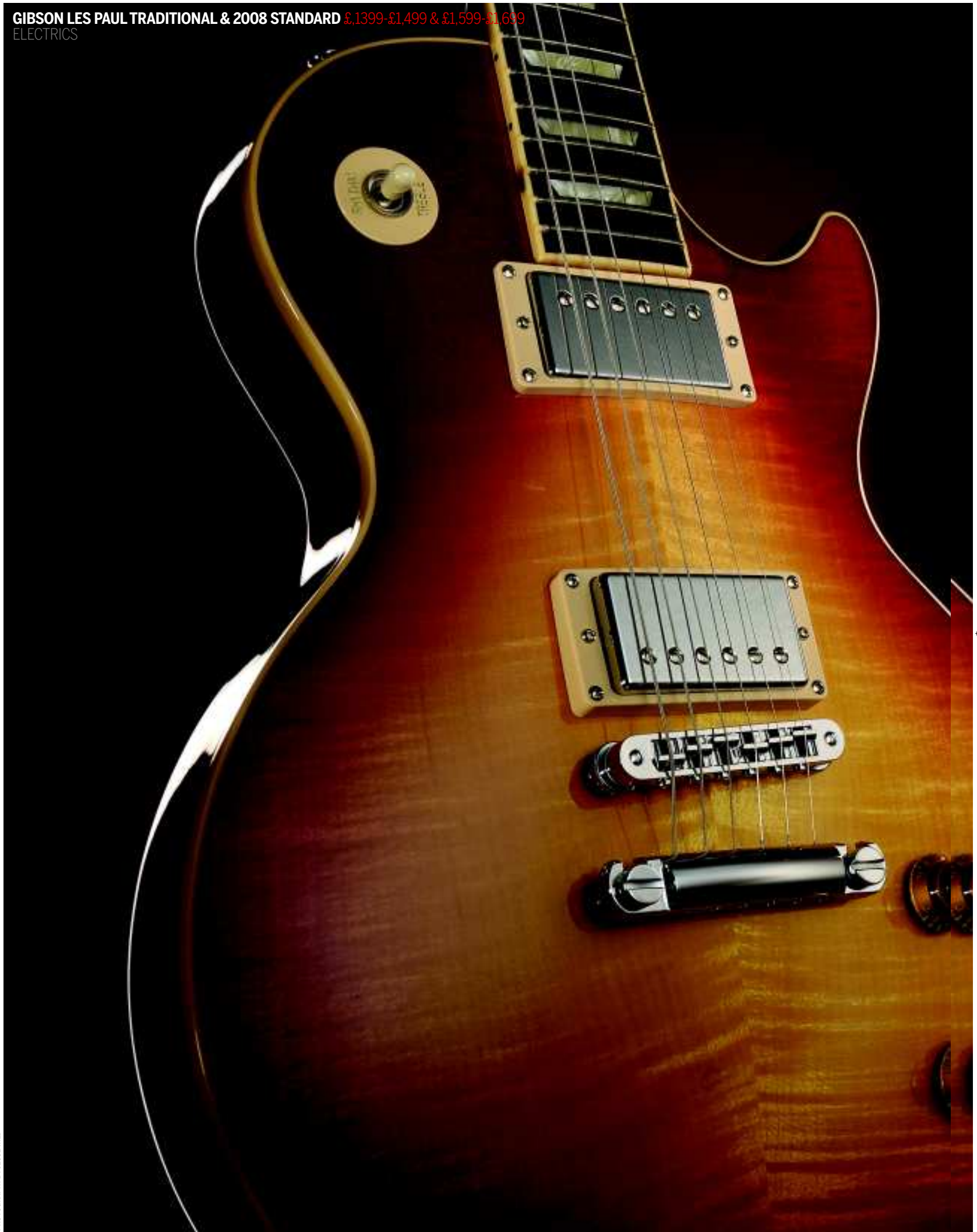


**GIBSON LES PAUL TRADITIONAL & 2008 STANDARD** £1,399-£1,499 & £1,599-£1,699  
ELECTRICS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSE WILD

GIBSON LES PAUL TRADITIONAL & 2008 STANDARD £1,399-£1,499 & £1,599-£1,699  
ELECTRICS



# RAISING THE STANDARD

1958 brought us the sunburst Les Paul Standard.  
Fifty years on, Gibson is still tweaking the recipe  
*by Dave Burrluck*



# Gibson Les Paul Traditional & 2008 Standard

£1,399-£1,499 & £1,599-£1,699

## What we want to know

- 1 Do we need more Les Pauls?**

There's always room for one in your collection, isn't there? These two new-for-2008 models don't chase a late fifties vibe: the Traditional looks back to the Standard of the past two decades and the 2008 Standard looks forward.
- 2 Gibson is using the Plek machine to set-up its guitars, correct?**

Yes, on certain models. It's a complex computer-driven set-up process that allows very fine control over, in Gibson's case, fret height and shape and nut cutting. Last month's ES-339 was Plek'd, as are the 2008 Standard and Traditional on review here. For more info <http://cms.plek.com>
- 3 Who's gonna play these?**

With its weight-relieved (not chambered) body and '57 Classics the Traditional is a great Les Paul for creamy thick-toned rock. The 2008 Standard is chambered and features BurstBucker Pros for an edgier, older-style Les Paul tone. You choose.

It's 50 years since Gibson unveiled the sunburst Les Paul Standard, kicking off the journey of an initially far-from-popular instrument. Now, along with Fender's Stratocaster, it's become the world's most popular and recognisable electric guitar. Like Fender, Gibson has various historically accurate reissues available, but has also chosen in 2008 to release a new Standard, and introduce a new Traditional model. The former spices up the classic recipe, the latter pays homage to the modern Les Paul manufactured during the past couple of decades.

With outwardly similar vibes, a hidden difference lies within the bodies. The Traditional is primarily all-solid with what Gibson calls weight-relieving holes, introduced to keep a cap on the increasingly weighty mahogany available to mass production guitar companies. "Back in the early 1980s, when Gibson started weight-relieving the Les Paul models, there was not a specific rhyme or reason to the weight-relief holes," says Frank Johns of Gibson USA, and it's this method that's used on the Traditional. The new Standard advertises an enlarged neck tenon plus a properly chambered body to, again, trim weight and add resonance. "We wanted to focus on a more scientific approach to weight-relieving our guitars, to

update the design to give it more of a purpose with both tone and weight in mind." Time to open the cases then...

## Les Paul Traditional

Running your eyes and hands over this one you're reminded – if necessary – just what a great design the Les Paul is. There's a timeless quality to its simplistic rounded outline, which makes subsequent attempts at 'inspired by' single-cuts look lumpy and, well, just 'wrong'. Pulling it out of its case, however, you're reminded of the bulk and weight. With a max body depth of 60mm, and a rim depth of 50mm, the rise of the gently carved violin-like top is quite subtle and less pronounced than many other brands' single-cuts. The 18mm thick maple top is two-piece, as usual, with a subtle downward flaming enhanced by the old-looking mid-brown to golden amber sunbursting. Of course, there's no back contouring, it's flat, with a smaller-than-Fender edge radius and single cream bound top edge. The scraping of the binding, to

remove the red-hued lacquer used to enrich the mahogany of the back and neck, is clean but not 100 per cent precise. The binding itself on both body and neck looks a little thick, certainly thicker than vintage, but visually ties in the cream pickup surrounds and pickguard nicely.

Although the mahogany body is centre-joined, the neck is one piece save for the headstock-widening wings. Classed as a 1959 profile it's big and round though, unlike the Melody Maker reviewed elsewhere in this issue, it's extremely well shaped on the shoulders – it really doesn't feel overly clubby in the hand. As per vintage spec the iconic headstock is back angled 17 degrees putting a lot of pressure on getting the string grooves in the nut smooth and snag-free, which they are. The TonePros/Kluson tuners combine vintage appearance (save for the more modern locking mechanisms on the face of the headstock) with a more stable string post and higher gear ratio. They're smooth and precise without feeling over tight or too sloppy. The fretwork on the rather dry and dirty brown rosewood 'board, with its lacklustre and again rather dirty-looking pearloid inlays, is good, though the fret profile is still a little too square for our liking and those binding nibs are not as well shaped as the Memphis Custom Shop ES-339 we recently evaluated. But it's all part of the quite distinct feel of the modern

The [Traditional's] combination of the two '57 Classics and the standard Gibson control harness creates the expected full-fat creamy tones that many modern Les Paul owners will know as home



Les Paul and, like that ES-339 (and the 2008 Standard here), the Traditional has been Plek'd – although unlike the 2008 Standard there's no sticker on the bridge pickup or any visual clue. But overall set-up is again pretty good – something we haven't always been able to say about standard production Les Pauls in recent years.

The same goes for the nitro-cellulose finishing, which although it avoids the mirror-like dipped in glass sheen of, say, PRS, is still high-glossed. In various places though, such as the back and headstock edges, it is far from flat. Again, it looks so much sharper and less 'can't be bothered' than so many production 'Pauls of recent years.



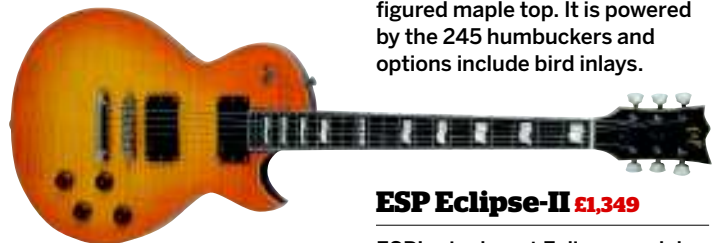
The Traditional retains the classic look of snot-green-buttoned Kluson tuners

### The Rivals



#### PRS SC245 £2,295

Originally called the Singlecut, it split into two models: the modern rock SC250 and the more vintage LP-alike SC245, which uses a smaller 622mm (24.5-inch) scale length with a chambered mahogany body and figured maple top. It is powered by the 245 humbuckers and options include bird inlays.



#### ESP Eclipse-II £1,349

ESP's single-cut Eclipse model accounts for over a third of all ESP/LTDs made. The Japanese made Eclipse-II comes in an aged honey 'burst finish with 628mm (24.75-inch) scale, a thinner depth neck than the Gibson and 22 extra jumbo frets. It's powered by Seymour Duncan JB and '59 covered 'buckers.



#### Fret-King's Eclat Standard £999

Fret-King is one of the many brands conceived by Trev Wilkinson. The Fret-King Blue Label range Eclat Standard is UK-designed and made in Korea. Close in style to the Les Paul it features 628mm scale and dual Fret-King PAF-alikes plus a rotary Vari-coil humbucker-to-single-coil control.





The nickel-plated covers on the '57 Classic humbuckers will tarnish with age. Some people don't like that, so do be aware



2008: Gold-plated pots and locking jack

We doubt any player will feel too short-changed though, not least because so many of us simply prefer an older-style nitro-cellulose finish and really aren't bothered by any mirror imperfections. A guitar is made to be played, right?

Powering is pretty standard with dual '57 Classic humbuckers under shiny nickel-plated covers that match the Nashville-style tune-o-matic bridge and stud tailpiece. The strap buttons are typically small Gibson fare and the output jack is mounted on a perfectly robust, chromed metal square plate.

### 2008 Standard

If the Traditional is, by design, backward looking, the new 2008 Standard looks forward with numerous changes that would seem to be aimed to bring it in line with, most obviously, more modern brands like PRS and ESP. Whether it's the advertised chambering of this model or simply slightly lighter mahogany, or both, the 2008 is a little lighter and seems a little more alive as you tap your knuckles on its body. Overall construction is very similar, although here the body back is one-piece and the maple top slightly less figured. Without

The 2008 sounds livelier and a little more dynamic compared to the Traditional's almost compressed voice

the pickguard it also looks a little leaner and less fussy. Again the 'board and inlays seem dry and dirty but, if anything, the frets have a slighter better, more rounded profile. Set-up is again equally good (the guitar arrived with a 'Plek'd' sticker on the bridge pickup) including the nut, although we suspect opinion might be split over the tuners – one of the numerous changes to the 'standard' formula that we see here. These are Grover locking types with chromed tulip buttons, not the more classic plastic of the traditional's Klusons. The lock is achieved very easily with a large rear thumbwheel, which clamps the string in its post hole. Like the tuners, the tune-o-matic and stud tailpiece lock to their posts. They are TonePros parts and, while the claim of increased sustain may be hard to confirm, they certainly won't fall off when you take all the strings off.

Compared to the Traditional the main changes here are in the neck shape and the electrics. Gibson advertises an 'asymmetrical' neck profile that's quite rare, especially on production electrics – the only other one that sticks in the mind is the profile used on the original Music Man Eddie Van Halen signature. Here the bass-side is more 'D' shaped and the treble

side is more of a 'C' with a shallower shoulder. It's slightly less deep (20.5mm at the first fret, 22.73 at the 12th) than the Traditional that, while similar at the first (21.28mm), fills out to 25.5mm by the 12th.

Pickups move to the BurstBucker Pro 1 at neck and BurstBucker Pro 2 at the bridge and Bourne gold-plated pots visible through a smoked translucent control cover; also different is the Neutrik locking output jack tidily inset into the guitar's rim. Remove the electrics backplate and things all looks rather high tech: the four square pots are soldered onto a Gibson logo'd PCB; the pickups connect to the PCB with clearly marked solder-less push-in connects; likewise the outputs to the toggle switch.

### Sounds

Rarely do even two identical guitars end up sounding identical, but where we have differences in construction and electronics, as here, these two Les Pauls sound really very different. The Traditional should be familiar to any reader who's owned a standard production Les Paul over the past couple of decades. The combination of the two '57 Classics and the standard Gibson

### Pickup differences

Often overlooked in favour of retro-fit brands Gibson's humbuckers, loaded on the majority of the company's guitars, are quite simply some of the most recognisable-sounding out there. Based generally on Gibson's classic PAFs there are three categories of vintage-y humbuckers: '57 Classics (as fitted to the Traditional), BurstBuckers and BurstBucker Pros as loaded on the 2008 Standard.

The '57 Classic and the slightly hotter '57 Classic Plus (typically used in bridge position) use Alnico II magnets and vintage-style construction but, unlike most original PAFs, the two coils are wax potted to reduce high volume squeal and microphonics.

The coils are matched in terms of winds/output, generally believed to impart a smoother response. In terms of output, again they're pretty much in the vintage area – ours measured 7.93k ohms (bridge), 7.64k ohms (neck).

BurstBucker Pros (typically a 1 at neck and 2 at bridge) differ with mismatched coils (as per many original PAFs) which technically reduces the hum-cancelling performance and is generally believed to contribute a little more 'edge' to the tonality. The coils are wax-potted but the pickups both use stronger Alnico V magnets, which Gibson believes add "sting and punch". DC resistance of our samples measured 7.83k ohms (bridge), 7.35k ohms (neck).

control harness creates the expected full-fat creamy tones that many modern LP owners will know as home. There's a good balance to the outputs, a smooth nose to the note power, but not in a 'hot' overly mid-heavy or undynamic way. Yet it's perhaps not the best set-up if you're used to using your volumes and tones to constantly colour your sound. With the volumes reduced, especially in the mixed pickup position, things get a little cloudy and almost too soft, lacking some definition. Conversely, though, add in some gain and it's hard not to like the archetypal thickness and strength of the sounds.

The 2008, while offering what seems like a slew of modern updates actually sounds older. What we mean here is that, certainly on the bridge pickup, which actually sounds a little hotter than the Trad's '57 Classic, we have more edge and spark to the sound; it clears up nicely too and you can really get older Les Paul voices – more classic blues (Peter Green) than modern rock (Slash), if you like. The neck pickup is very sweet and tuneful, again though there's a little more definition to the sound but it's lower in output compared to the bridge pickup and seems less balanced than the Traditional – a set-up you might prefer, of course, but we found it a little too unbalanced before we started messing with pickup heights. The mix, however, results in more clarity – pull down both volumes and there's more single-coil like clarity than the Traditional.

Playability-wise both feel like modern production Gibsons. Those frets still feel a little intrusive initially, and while the 2008's slightly slimmer neck feel will have its fans, the Trad's neck feels very familiar.

Resonance-wise, bearing in mind the different weight-relief/chambering, they are harder to distinguish – especially with different pickups. What we will say is that the 2008 sounds livelier and a little more dynamic compared to the Traditional's almost compressed voice – how much of that is to do with the body construction, the actual wood stock and the pickup differences is hard to judge.

### Verdict

Like Fender, Gibson's main business is providing us with

umpteen versions of its classic guitars: they may be historically accurate or signature versions or look a little to the future (as with the 2008) or revisit a not entirely historic, but still very popular, subsequent version as with the Traditional. We certainly have no problem with that and, barring a few minor quibbles, we have no problem with either of these guitars – especially with this year's trim prices and their palpably sharper construction.

Whether it's the creamier Traditional or slightly edgier, older sounding 2008 Standard that'll suit you, is really down to what you want from a 'Paul. To be honest we'd give either house-room, although even with the unusual but very comfortable new neck profile it was, sound-wise, the 2008 that did it for this writer. You may prefer the Traditional. What we will say is that if Gibson keeps up this improved, detailed construction, a few more boutique-y other-brand single-cuts will begin to look rather costly. **G**

### The Bottom Line

#### Gibson Les Paul Traditional

**We like:** Sharper than usual build and set-up; well-known modern LP sounds; price

**We dislike:** Frets still need more profiling; over thick binding

**Guitarist says:** Let's face it, the Gibson Les Paul is the single-cut we all want to play and, at the current price/quality, the Traditional with its classic modern LP tones is certainly ready to rock

#### Gibson Les Paul 2008 Standard

**We like:** Sharper than usual build and set-up; more vintage-y old LP tones; price

**We dislike:** The neck profile may divide opinion (only because we love the '59 profile so much) and ditto LP Traditional

**Guitarist says:** With its added features the 2008 Standard moves into a more boutique area but remains very well priced and quite old-school



### Gibson Les Paul Traditional

**PRICE:** £1,399-£1,499 (inc case)

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Single-cutaway, arched-top solidbody electric

**BODY:** Weight-relieved mahogany with carved maple top

**NECK:** Mahogany, '50s rounded profile, glued-in

**SCALE LENGTH:** 628mm (24.75-inch)

**NUT/WIDTH:** White synthetic/43.4mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Bound rosewood, pearloid trapezoid inlays, 305mm (12-inch) radius

**FRETS:** 22, medium

**HARDWARE:** Nashville-style tune-o-matic bridge, stud tailpiece, TonePros/Kluson tuners

**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 51mm

**ELECTRICS:** Gibson '57 Classic at neck, '57 Classic Plus at bridge humbuckers, three-way toggle pickup selector switch, volume and tone for each pickup

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 4.3/9.5

**OPTIONS:** Expect slight price differences within the band indicated and also due to higher-grade 'Plus Top' versions

**RANGE OPTIONS:** There's no shortage of Les Pauls to choose from: from the Studio (approx £769-£849) up to the HD.6X Pro Digital (£POA) there's one for every pocket

**LEFT-HANDERS:** Yes, available in ebony plain top, heritage cherry sunburst 'Plus Top'

**FINISHES:** Heritage cherry sunburst, desert burst, honey burst, iced tea, light burst. Ebony and Goldtop cost approx £100 less

**Gibson Musical Instruments**

**00800 444 27661**

**www.gibson.com**

### Test results

**Build quality** ★★★★★  
**Playability** ★★★★★  
**Sound** ★★★★★  
**Value for money** ★★★★★

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★



### Gibson Les Paul 2008 Standard

**PRICE:** £1,599-£1,699 (inc case)

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Single-cutaway, arched-top solidbody electric

**BODY:** Chambered Mahogany with carved maple top

**NECK:** Mahogany, asymmetrical profile, glued-in

**SCALE LENGTH:** 628mm (24.75-inch)

**NUT/WIDTH:** White synthetic/43.4mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Bound rosewood, pearloid trapezoid inlays, 305mm (12-inch) radius

**FRETS:** 22, medium

**HARDWARE:** TonePros locking Nashville-style tune-o-matic bridge and stud tailpiece, Grover locking tuners, Dunlop strap-loks

**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 52.5mm

**ELECTRICS:** Gibson BurstBucker Pro 1 at neck, BurstBucker Pro 2 at bridge, three-way toggle pickup selector switch, volume and tone for each pickup (Bourne gold-plated pots), Neutrik locking output jack

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 4.1/9

**OPTIONS:** As Traditional

**RANGE OPTIONS:** See Traditional

**LEFT-HANDERS:** Yes, available in ebony plain top, heritage cherry sunburst 'plus top'

**FINISHES:** Heritage cherry sunburst, desert burst, honey burst, iced tea, light burst. Ebony and Goldtop cost approx £100 less

### Test results

**Build quality** ★★★★★  
**Playability** ★★★★★  
**Sound** ★★★★★  
**Value for money** ★★★★★

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★