



## Gibson Les Paul Axcess Standard £2,499

A streamlined version of the classic electric that mixes fifties chic with 'modern' features *by Simon Bradley*

**W**ith this new model, Gibson could well have come up with what will prove to be the most versatile Les Paul since the first Jimmy Page Signature. By far the most obvious addition is the Floyd Rose double-locking vibrato, a revolutionary design that helped Eddie Van Halen redefine modern rock guitar. Due to a 'normal' Les Paul's carved top, neck pitch and bridge/tailpiece arrangement, retrofitting such a system is a frightful job – thank goodness Gibson Custom has done it very well here.

The mahogany body with flamed maple cap looks normal enough, but it features what Gibson calls a 'weight-relieved' design. Unlike chambering which is carried out solely for tonal reasons (to change the resonance of an instrument), 'weight-relieving' is intended simply to reduce the amount of mahogany used, and thus the guitar's weight. That, along with 6mm less body thickness between the Axcess and a traditional Standard, this equates to a substantial reduction in weight – around one to two pounds lighter, depending on instrument.

There's also significant body shaping, comprising both a

belly contour and, most importantly, a considerably reduced heel to aid upper fret-access. We noticed that has made cradling the guitar closely

while playing sitting down much more comfortable compared to a LP Standard.

Electrics comprise a pair of Burstbucker pickups, the

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slightly under-wound 1 in the bridge and the hotter, more rounded 2 in the neck position. Both are designed to reproduce

### The Rivals

The **PRS Mark Tremonti Signature model** (£2,995) is based around high-output 'buckers and PRS's very in-tune vibrato system/locking tuners. A more subtle yet still excellent high-end USA guitar is the **Taylor T3/B** (from £2,679), complete with Bigsby wobble-stick. For those on a budget, Richie Sambora's **ESP LTD SA-2** (£599) offers plenty of rock guts alongside a Floyd Rose vibrato.



The simple coil-split switch opens up a world of new tonal possibilities



The unusual backplate is a result of the Access packing a Floyd Rose vibrato

The bridge pickup ticks all the boxes. It's fat yet breathy and possesses a lighter tonality that really cuts through

that classic vintage-favoured PAF tone and are controlled in the standard way, save for the provision of a coil-split on the treble pickup's tone pot. It's a master split that isolates the inner coils of both humbuckers.

The Floyd vibrato allows for an extremely low action and the neck profile – wide and thin rather than meaty and clubby – seems more of a sixties rather than a fifties ilk. A familiar R4 nut keeps things locked down, and a sextet of Gibson Klusons complete the picture.

### Sounds

In theory, a decreased amount of mahogany plus a bridge rout

that takes wood straight from the guitar's 'heart' should equate to a reduced tone but, to our ears, this really isn't the case. In fact, these factors ensure that the sometimes overly mushy push of a Les Paul is given a lighter edge.

With a Marshall-driven crunch, the bridge pickup ticks all the boxes. It's fat yet breathy and, as we said, possesses a lighter tonality that really cuts through. The hotter neck pickup adds more guts, yet still presents an efficient string separation and gives a good and fruity Slash-y neck tone.

It's interesting that a simple coil-split can vastly increase a

Les Paul's tonal palette and, with a smoother blues-style drive, the coil-split middle position resembles a boosted Strat's central coil – all body and restrained sparkle – while for super clean sounds, the split tones benefit from the associated lack of mahogany push to give tones that are full yet distinct.

Set stiffly as it is here, the Floyd Rose vibrato feels solid and substantial (they can be unnervingly flighty). Cool undulations are as simple to perform as outrageous dives. And shredding is certainly made a whole lot easier thanks to the reduced heel.

The only niggle is that the coil-split pot can be a little tricky to pull up – a push/push knob would be better, but you soon get used to it.

### Verdict

Flying in the face of our preconceptions, the Les Paul Access is a truly gorgeous guitar that perfectly mixes Gibson's heritage with a number of features designed for the modern player. If a Floyd's not for you, the guitar is also available with a stop-tail configuration and the reduced body mass makes it an easier guitar to get to grips with than a Standard.

Gibson's suggested/retail prices aren't quite as removed from reality as they once were, but even at full whack this seems like fair value. The traditionalists won't like it for certain, but whammy abusing rockers will find its charms hard to resist. **G**

### The Bottom Line

**We like:** The new features – lighter weight, improved access, coil-splits and, yes, the Floyd Rose!

**We dislike:** The coil-split pot can be a little tricky to grasp at times

**Guitarist Says:** Don't let the Floyd put you off – this is a great blues and rock guitar with added versatility courtesy of a simple coil-split. The contouring takes the playing experience to a new level. Available without a Floyd if you so wish



### Gibson Les Paul Access Standard

**PRICE:** £2,499 (inc hard case)

**ORIGIN:** USA

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

**BODY:** Mahogany with carved maple top

**NECK:** One-piece mahogany, glued-in

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

**NUT/WIDTH:** Floyd Rose R4 locking/43mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood

**FRETS:** 22, jumbo

**HARDWARE:** Original Floyd Rose double-locking vibrato, Gibson Kluson Deluxe tuners

**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 54mm

**ELECTRICS:** Gibson Burstbucker 1 (bridge) and Burstbucker 2 (neck), two volume, two tone (with one master coil-split switch)

**WEIGHT (kg/lbs):** 3.45/7.6

**OPTIONS:** Available with tune-o-matic/stud tailpiece and same body styling (£2,299). Also check the Traditional (£1,699) and 2008 LP Standard (£1,899)

**LEFT-HANDERS:** No

**FINISHES:** Iced Tea Burst (as reviewed), Gun Metal grey

**Gibson MI**

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### Test results

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

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★