



PHOTOGRAPHY NEIL GODWIN

The rivals

Gibson SG Special £TBC
Ibanez Artist AR300

£399

Eastwood Airline Town & Country \$799

Despite the high guide prices quoted by distributors Rosetti, there are some great deals on USA Gibsons at the moment and we've found new SG Specials, from retailers who advertise in the mag, as low as £549. The Ibanez AR300 is inspired by the company's original seventies model and features a set neck and a pair of humbuckers. Available from www.myrareguitars.com, this new Eastwood Airline model is inspired by Jack White's Raconteurs guitar, features a mahogany body, Bigsby vibrato and is perfect for retro rocking.

Gretsch G5135 Electromatic Corvette £499

An often-overlooked early-sixties solidbody gets an Electromatic makeover... by Chris Vinnicombe

Gretsch launched the Corvette solidbody line in the early sixties in an attempt to compete with Gibson and Fender's burgeoning sales in that area. Although the original models never quite took off in the way company chiefs hoped, if you can track one down these days you may well find yourself a bargain amidst a rapidly escalating vintage market. Part of the appeal of this new Electromatic model will be that you just don't see many people playing them, and in an industry with a glut of copies and copyists, this ought to be a big plus for a lot of guitarists.

The earliest Corvette models featured an uncontoured slab body before SG-style chamfers were

introduced, while on some examples the rear strap button was set into an indent in the outline and later models featured a curious four-and-two-a-side headstock arrangement. This new Electromatic interpretation seems largely to preserve its 1963 double-pickup configuration, but thankfully the clunky old flat-arm Burns vibrato that came as standard has been usurped by a licensed Bigsby B50 unit. In combination with an anchored tune-o-matic-style bridge and the three-piece quarter sawn solid mahogany body – not chambered like Gretsch Jets – this results in one of the most stable, smooth vibrato arrangements you are likely to find on any guitar with a Gretsch badge.

Unlike the original model's HiLoTron pickups, the G5135 circa 2007 comes equipped with a pair of new MegaTron humbuckers; essentially hotter FilterTron-style units. The neck pickup's advanced position should also ensure a tonal palette with a little more zing than some. The neck itself is glued in, and although the join looks a little fragile in terms of the sheer lack of wood involved, it feels solid enough and there is no undue movement. It's nice to see authentic features like the G-Arrow knobs and locking strap buttons retained as it helps the guitar feel more like a bona fide Gretsch and less like an entry-level sub brand.

Subjected to an acoustic strum, the guitar is balanced and responsive. The



GRETSCH G5135 ELECTROMATIC CORVETTE

PRICE: £499
ORIGIN: Korea
TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Mahogany, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 625mm (24.6-inch)
NUT/WIDTH: White synthetic/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 21, medium
HARDWARE: Chrome-plated Bigsby licensed B50 vibrato tailpiece, anchored Adjusto-matic bridge, vintage-style tuners and strap-retainer buttons

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53mm
ELECTRICS: Two MegaTron humbucking pickups, three-way toggle pickup selector switch, neck pickup volume, bridge pickup volume, master tone

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.2/7.0
RANGE OPTIONS: The Electromatic series provides Gretsch fans with great value takes on several classic models along with more original designs. The range starts with the single-pickup G5210 Junior Jet priced at £199
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Burgundy only
Fender GBI
01342 331700
www.gretschguitars.com

GRETSCH G5135	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** Stable Bigsby set up; loads of attitude and bite
 ■ **WE DISLIKED** It would have been nice to see a gig bag included

It's nice to see authentic features like the G-Arrow knobs and locking strap buttons retained as it helps the guitar feel more like a bona fide Gretsch

Corvette's neck is a slimmer profile than many of its baseball bat-equipped forerunners, which may give the model more mainstream appeal. Although the accompanying literature claims that there are 22 frets, we definitely counted 21 sections of fretwire on the jumbo side of medium with no sharp or protruding ends. Upper-fret access is superb due to that neck join, and our only criticism is that although the gloss urethane finish is perfectly applied on this example, we can't help feeling that this is something of a missed opportunity as the G5135 would be the perfect instrument for a worn satin finish.

SOUNDS: Although the guitar shares an obvious kinship with the Gibson SG in terms of its construction, an initial blast through a crunchy valve combo reveals a brasher, more abrasive tonality from the MegaTron pickups

than you would expect from PAF-style humbuckers, and it is perfect for aggressive punk and alternative rock riffing, rewarding a hard pick attack. As far as Gibson reference points are concerned, the sound is closer to the P-90 grind of a sixties SG Special, although there's enough of that distinct Gretsch character to allow you get into convincing Malcolm Young territory.

With the gain rolled back a little, there's less bass and lower mid response from the MegaTrons than your average humbucker and more high-end definition, which lends itself perfectly to shimmering Bigsby wobbles and works well in combination with either a little slapback or longer delay times for spacier leftfield soundscapes. One of the major pluses is that while there is no shortage of high-end from the MegaTron units, it is detailed and musical tone rather than shrill and harsh.

Verdict

The Electromatic Corvette is a great little retro rock guitar that performs admirably in a wide variety of sonic fields from spiky indie-rock to AC/DC-style chordal riffs and even rockabilly. We wouldn't choose it for warm jazz, chunky metal riffing or smooth Santana-esque lead runs, but the general aesthetic identity of the instrument really gives that away before you've even plugged it in. It's great to see a less mainstream model from a major manufacturer's back catalogue getting a reissue, let's hope that others follow suit. **G**

Gretsch G5135 Electromatic Corvette

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★