

GIBSON ROBBY KRIEGER SG VOS & LES PAUL JUNIOR SATIN £2,399 & £1,399
ELECTRICS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVE CAUDERY



Gibson Robby Krieger SG VOS & Les Paul Junior Satin £2,399 & £599

Two extremes of Gibson-ism – a top-end SG inspired by The Doors' Robby Krieger and a credit crunch-friendly Les Paul Junior *by Dave Burruck*

Gibson is enjoying a well-earned renaissance of late. We've seen a recent rise in quality and a release programme that even for the informed (us, apparently) is hard to keep up with. High profile instruments such as the Dark Fire and the Robot have garnered huge publicity, but Gibson Custom's 'Inspired by' series has equally caught our eye with its latest addition – the Robby Krieger SG. At the lower end of the pyramid, however, guitars seem to come and go with alarming frequency and

are rarely trumpeted. For instance, this Les Paul Junior is the start-up USA-made Gibson solidbody at the time of writing. With nearly £2,000 separating them, we thought they'd make for an interesting comparison.

Robby Krieger SG

Krieger's Inspired by model is a very close cousin to the regular Gibson Custom SG Standard reissue (available with or without vibrato). Krieger's version, aside from being limited to 100 pieces in this Vintage Original Spec

(VOS) version and a further 50 fully-aged pieces (with an eye-watering £1,600 price jump), has some fairly minor differences. The Krieger uses '57 Classic humbuckers, not Burstbuckers, and we have the later period, larger, full-face scratchplate as opposed to the standard model's smaller version. We get three 'witch hat' control knobs and one black bonnet knob (neck pickup volume) that like numerous features of the guitar – finish aside – are convincingly aged.

So the silver caps have faded legends, the toggle switch cap is deep nicotine yellow and the legends are rubbed from its black plastic collar. The scratchplate is, well, scratched, the ABR-1 tune-o-matic looks nicely grubby, while the nickel covers of the '57 classic 'buckers are quite heavily tarnished. The long Lyre Maestro vibrato's elegantly engraved tailplate looks suitably grubby too, and

even the more contemporary Dunlop Straplok strap buttons are slightly rusted. Only the nickel-plated tuners look new, although they're suitably 'vintage' in style.

The finish, however, although a sort of halfway house between gloss and satin, isn't dinged or worn. This VOS treatment is really classy – the guitar looks (and feels) old, but isn't faked to look like it's been abused for 30 years. Certainly if you're put off by high gloss sheen, but want to add your own dings and belt-buckle wear, this is the finish to go for. And with it being nitro-cellulose, it'll age relatively quickly too.

Gibson states that the neck is, "a hybrid neck profile modelled after the neck on a '61 SG Standard owned by a close friend [of Krieger's] and the neck on his personal '67 SG Standard." In the hand it feels a little bigger than you might expect, especially in the higher positions, with a noticeably flat-backed 'D' shape that's 20mm deep at the first fret, filling out to around 23mm at the 12th fret and 25mm at the 15th, before it ramps up to the square heel. In all honesty, some extra girth isn't going to harm either the acoustic tone or longevity – the SG's neck joins the body just past the 19th fret, giving it a much longer unsupported length than you'd find on a Les Paul, for example.

Sounds

The acoustic response isn't that loud, but nicely open and



The Krieger SG sports '57 Classic humbuckers and a full-face scratchplate

The VOS treatment is really classy – the guitar looks old, but isn't faked to look like it's been abused for 30 years >



The Rivals

Robby Krieger SG

PRS's **Mira** (£1,749) was purposely designed to sit in the SG camp, with its 24-fret neck, all-mahogany construction and twin 245 humbuckers. ESP's new **Viper Racing Strip** (£1,649) is a close cousin of the SG, with a distinct, slightly offset body. It's also more 'rock' with 24 frets, dual chrome-covered EMG active humbuckers and natty new stripe finish. **Vintage's** Icon series **VS6 Fool** (£799) may be a copy, but its unique impressionistic paint job just needs a psychedelic light show and you're away!

Les Paul Junior Satin

A good option to test is **PRS's SE One** (£499) – Korean-made, but ultra-lightweight and an ideal base for upgrading. **Nik Huber's Junior** (from £2,000) uses korina or mahogany and a more Tele-inspired outline, but is the boutique Junior-style guitar of choice. **Gordon-Smith's GS-1.60** (from £434) is UK-made and all mahogany with choice of 'bucker or P-90 – plenty of gigs in that one.

resonant. Plugged in it captures a beautiful classic rock/blues vibe, with a little more 'air' from the vibrato, which makes it hard to put down. There's a tightness to the low-end that gives it a taut and wired tone with more than a little punkiness. The '57 Classics certainly drop us in PAF ballpark – much smoother than



The Junior features a vintage-style 'Lightning Bar' compensated wrapover bridge

This new one gets close to the classic Junior's stomping ground as a great balls to the wall rock/blues machine

the LP Junior, but still with cut and clarity at the bridge, and then soupier and focused at the neck. Both volumes have quite long tapers, so you have to pull them down quite a way to get more single-coily funk from the mixed position. There's also a pull switch on the bridge tone control (which oddly isn't mentioned in Gibson's specs) and this gives that thin out-of-phase tone for some really nasty fuzz/distortion voices.

Once the strings settle in, the vibrato holds its tuning well – it's a little stiffer feeling than a Bigsby, but with similar minimal travel that's just perfect for shimmers. The neck actually feels really good, especially in the higher

registers, and you'll notice the frets sit over the edge binding like a re-fret – all good.

But it's when you crank up the power amp section that you're treated to the classic SG voices – there's Townshend's taut riffage, Allman's tight but juicy slide (the SG geometry is ideal for slide, due to total access along the whole 'board), not to mention Angus Young and many more. But again that vibrato adds its own magic, or at least character. It not only feels old, it sounds it too. Very hard to put down.

Les Paul Junior

Since it was first introduced way back in 1954, the Les Paul Junior has been in and out of

the Gibson catalogue on numerous occasions and has been missing from Gibson's production range, certainly in this more vintage-like spec, for some time.

This new Junior celebrates the original single-cut stylings seen before it changed to the more familiar double-cut in 1958. It isn't meant to be an exact replica (you'll find examples of this from the Custom Shop priced at over a grand more) but it's still a £599 USA-made Gibson. The 45mm body, which contrasts the SG's thinner 33.5mm thickness, is a two-piece slab of mahogany, with a tighter edge radius than the original. The neck is one-piece mahogany and, unlike the original model's neck, which fitted into the body leaving a thin edge in the treble cutaway, this one – like the Les Paul Standard – is flush and indicates a different style of joint. Quoted as having a "rounded" profile, the neck is a very comfortable full 'C' shape – 20.5mm at the first fret, 22.5mm at the 12th. Only a ridge where the fingerboard edge has been masked during finishing slightly ruins the fun. As you'd expect at this price point, there's no binding on the Junior, so the 12-inch radiused 'board – a light brown rosewood with acrylic dots and 22 medium frets with slightly sharp ends – is dead simple.

As seen before on guitars such as the Melody Maker, the satin finish is left quite open-grained – it's a simpler sunburst than the yellow-centred original (it's also not cellulose), more like a Cremona sunburst, but it captures the old vibe nicely and is clearly very thin.

The wrapover stud bridge has intonation ridges (as seen on later period guitars, although



The SG's hardware is nicely aged but the finish hasn't been relic'd

here it's correctly intonated for a wound third) unlike the plain humped design of the original. Tuners are the more modern individual white-buttoned units, not three-on-strip as per the original. The crucial ingredient is the dog-ear P-90, plus just volume and tone (with black bonnet knobs). What more do you need?

Sounds

Does £599 of USA Gibson cut the mustard? Most definitely. There's plenty of cut from the pickup and a fair bit of poke too – cleaner on-the-edge-of-gain sounds need some high-end taming from either guitar or amp, but you're right there in a brash fifties/sixties style – so the garage door is open. Up the gain and there's always a sweet spot where a good Junior – and this one is okay – achieves a perfect balance of power, juice, smoothness and clarity. The volume control is again quite slow in its taper, unlike this writer's original '57 Junior, which cleans up much more easily. It sounds a little thinner too with the volume reduced, but it's the ring and good neck shape that create the fun, even with some higher-gain, more modern rock-type amp tones. So long as you can control the hum, squeal and feedback, it's a unique sound and this new one gets close – certainly close enough at this price – to the classic Junior's stomping ground as a great balls-to-the-wall rock/blues machine.

Verdict

Limited edition guitars – especially artist models – are increasingly hideously expensive. This Robby Krieger SG isn't a lot more than the standard model and the combination of its aged parts,

VOS finish, different neck shape and added pickup phase switch give it added appeal along, of course, with its small run kudos. It's also a very good classic-style SG – you'd certainly pay a lot more for the real thing.

This new Les Paul Junior might have a few rough edges (literally in the case of the neck) but it more than captures the vibe of the real thing. With a great neck shape, good weight and gutsy, if somewhat brasher than the original, P-90 performance. If you're into raw rock power, whatever the genre, it's a great and affordable place to kick off. **G**

The bottom line

Robby Krieger SG VOS

We like: Vintage vibe; price; sounds; everything!

We dislike: Nothing, aside from the original design idiosyncrasies, such as the cramped controls

Guitarist says: More proof that Gibson Custom makes some of the finest new 'old' guitars around. Add in the limited edition appeal and the Doors connection and yes, we want one

Les Paul Junior Satin

We like: Price; strong original Junior flavour; weight and neck shape

We dislike: Some poor fret/neck finishing but little else

Guitarist says: A sub-£600 USA-made Gibson electric will be a big draw for many and this Junior doesn't disappoint. A great way to experience the raw power of the real thing



Guitarist CHOICE

Gibson Robby Krieger SG VOS

PRICE: £2,399 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Double-cutaway, 'Inspired by' solidbody electric

BODY: One-piece mahogany

NECK: One-piece mahogany, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 624mm (24.6-inch)

NUT/WIDTH: Corian/42.5mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with acrylic trapezoid inlays and 305mm (12-inch) radius

FRETS: 22, medium

HARDWARE: ABR-1 tune-o-matic bridge; long Lyre Maestro vibrato; Kluson-style vintage tuners

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm

ELECTRICS: Two Gibson '57 Classic humbuckers with aged nickel covers; three-way toggle pickup selector; volume and tone controls for each pickup (pull/push phase switch on bridge tone)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.6/8

OPTIONS: A fully aged version is available – limited to 50 pieces – and costs £3,999

RANGE OPTIONS: Quite a few really – the Gibson Custom SG Standard with Maestro VOS costs £2,299; the Gibson production SG Standard is £1,099 and the signature Angus Young SG is £1,899

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Nitro-cellulose Heritage Cherry VOS (as reviewed)

Gibson MI

0207 167 2144

www.gibson.com

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Gibson Les Paul Junior Satin

PRICE: £599 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: Mahogany

NECK: One-piece mahogany, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 624mm (24.6-inch)

NUT/WIDTH: Corian/42.7mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with acrylic dot inlays and 305mm (12-inch) radius

FRETS: 22, medium

HARDWARE: 'Lightning Bar' compensated wrapover bridge; vintage white button vintage-style tuners

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm

ELECTRICS: Single Gibson P-90 single-coil pickup with volume and tone controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.9/8.5

OPTIONS: Finish only (the satin white version has an ebony fingerboard)

RANGE OPTIONS: The Gibson Custom 1957 Les Paul Junior Single VOS costs £1,699; the Gibson production Billy Joe Armstrong Les Paul Junior is £999

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Satin white, satin cherry, satin vintage (as reviewed)

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



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The SG has been Krieger's main stage guitar since his time with The Doors

Still Riding That Storm

Dave Burrluck talks guitars and The Doors with the man behind Gibson's latest signature SG

History may well throw most of the light on Jim Morrison, but Robby Krieger's timeless, often left-field guitaring – not to mention co-writing – played a massive role for The Doors in their brief but explosive career from their formation in 1965 to Morrison's death in 1971 and their eventual split in 1973.

Krieger's weapon of choice through most of that journey was the Gibson SG. "It was kind of an accident," Krieger tells us from a Nashville hotel. "I'd seen Chuck Berry play one night back in the days when he was great. Up until that time I was really just playing flamenco guitar and folk music, stuff like that. I hadn't really got into the electric guitar, but I saw Chuck and thought I had to get into electric. So I went down to this music shop, a place called Ace Loans in Santa Monica. It was actually a pawnshop, but he specialised in guitars, and I saw this red guitar – I thought it looked like Chuck's [laughs] even though, of course, it wasn't. Chuck had his ES-335

semi-hollow but [to me] it looked close enough. It was also the cheapest guitar they had. It was the SG Special with P-90s – this was 1964."

Krieger joined The Doors while still new to the electric guitar – "I'd only been playing electric for about a year" – but he was enthralled by the SG. "I liked how it looked. I liked the two horns, they looked like a devil's pitchfork, you know? And I said, Man, look at all the frets on that, you can get up really high on it. And it sounded good – I got this great old Magnatone amp with two 12-inch speakers – it just sounded great through that. Anyway, that was the guitar I used on the first Doors album. That original one got stolen, unfortunately, but I bought many others after that," and that includes the 1967 SG Standard on which the 'Inspired by' model is based. "I got that one about 12 years ago and it's become my main SG. It was just a lucky find. My roadie, Marco Moir, was in this guitar shop and he said I should check

it out. I did and liked it, and I've been using it ever since."

Some internet types have bemoaned Krieger's/Gibson's choice of model, reckoning it should have been based on that original P-90 Special. "The P-90s were kind of a cheaper model back in those days. I think every other SG I've bought since that one has had humbuckers. I recently got another SG with P-90s that I use for slide mainly, but there's the feedback thing. I like both sounds, but I guess I'm more comfortable with the humbuckers." While Krieger now uses an SG for slide work, they weren't his studio guitars. "On the [Doors] recordings I never used an SG. I had – I still have – a 'Black Beauty' Les Paul and also an old Silvertone that I used for slide. Yeah, the SG is good for slide, but I didn't use it back then because I'd need different tunings, so I needed different guitars."

Despite the times and out-there image of The Doors, certainly in their latter days, Krieger's amp and effects

choice was pretty conservative. "I rented a couple of Fender Twins [for the first Doors album], and for the large proportion of the other Doors albums I'm using a Twin. I tried to stay away from effects, except for the standard distortion and wah. To me there are certain pedals that date a song. Paul Rothchild, who was our producer, always tried to talk me out of using anything too crazy."

Famously, The Doors recorded with a bassist, but managed without one live. Of the many bassists used on the albums it was Lonnie Mack who played bass on the hard rock classic, Roadhouse Blues. "Lonnie wasn't playing at that time. He was actually selling Bibles and a friend of ours invited him to work at Elektra [The Doors' record company]. We were recording and we said we need a bass player, why don't we ask Lonnie – maybe he can play bass? He said, Well I'm a guitar player, not a bass player, but we got him to try out and the bass is so good on that song. So, every time I'd see him after that I'd say, Hey, this is the bass player Lonnie Mack and he'd moan, I'm not a bass player I'm a guitar player, dammit!"

For more info on Robby Krieger and The Doors visit www.robbykrieger.com and www.thedoors.com