

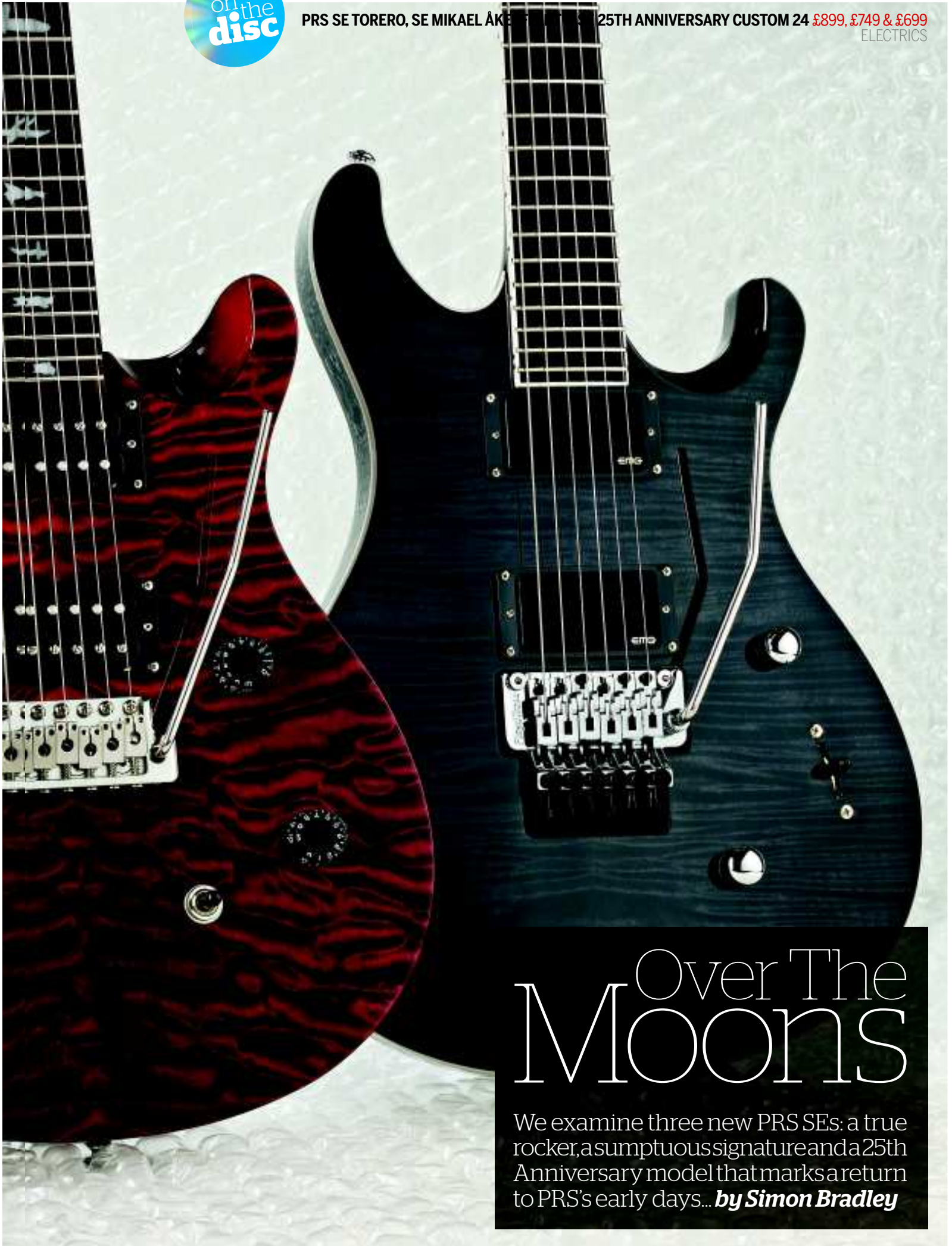
PRs SE TORERO, SE MIKAEL ÅKERFELDT & SE 25TH ANNIVERSARY SYSTEM 24 £899, £749 & £699
ELECTRICS



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PRS SE TORERO, SE MIKAEL ÅKEFORS 25TH ANNIVERSARY CUSTOM 24 £899, £749 & £699
ELECTRICS



Over The MOONS

We examine three new PRS SEs: a true rocker, a sumptuous signature and a 25th Anniversary model that marks a return to PRS's early days... **by Simon Bradley**



PRS SE Torero, SE Mikael Åkerfeldt & SE 25th Anniversary Custom 24

£899, £749 & £699

One advantage of the through-neck design is it allows for a virtually heelless join to the body, as here, and the ebony 'board features neither bird nor moon inlays, adding kudos to its rock credentials.

Sounds

Floating Floyd Rose bridges are often accused – fairly in some cases – of lightening a guitar's inherent tone due to its minimal contact with the body – Eddie Van Halen sets his vibratos flush to his guitars to counteract this very aspect. With the Torero, however, the through-neck goes some way to offsetting the effect while still allowing upward movement of the vibrato. It also means that the pickups are mounted directly on to the neck wood and tippy, though the bridge

Buying a USA-made PRS is a hefty financial outlay that's beyond the means of many. Yes, you have to pay a premium for a high-quality American instrument, but the current exchange rate hasn't been kind to us either – the full retail price of the Custom 24 is over £3,000 nowadays. Ouch.

With that in mind, many players – ourselves included – have been watching the new designs emerging from the Korean-built SE – or Student Edition – range with great interest. Although not in the same class as their US siblings as far as luxury goes, similar levels of build are applied to give us a taste of the PRS playing experience without the four-figure price tag. To prove the point we've taken the wraps off three new SEs.

SE Torero

The first of our trio represents a departure for PRS: it features active EMG pickups, a Floyd Rose vibrato and a few other features that are different to the usual PRS recipe.

"The Torero was always going to be a big splash," explains SE business unit manager, Doug Shive. "It's the first [PRS] to feature EMGs, a

Floyd and a through-neck, and if that's the type of guitar you're going to do, you have to use a 25.5-inch (648mm) scale. Essentially the guitar will be similar to a lot of other people's, but where we win is with the attention to detail, playability and overall aesthetics."

The Fender scale length is certainly unusual for the company, with only the undeniably Fullerton-flavoured 305 from the USA range measuring up to anything other than the more customary PRS scale of 635mm (25-inch) or the slightly longer 641mm (25.25-inch), as used on the 513.

The provision of EMGs and a Floyd is a much more significant departure and one that has been instigated by continued requests from artists. The vibrato is from Floyd's 1000 Series and, to all intents and purposes, is an Asian equivalent to the units produced by Schaller. The pickups, meanwhile, are the popular EMG 81/85 set, controlled by a three-way lever selector and single volume and tone pots. There's a battery cavity on the body's rear with a screwed-down top plate rather than the more convenient and commonplace quick-flip lid.

PRS has used the Custom 24 body shape as a template, with the Torero demonstrating a reduced carve at the lower cutaway and a shallow yet very welcome forearm contour. The body's mahogany wings and maple through-neck are topped with a maple cap and a veneer of flamed maple. It's been nicely top-bound in white too.



The Torero's EMG pickups and Floyd Rose vibrato are a big departure for PRS



EMG unavoidably can be, there's more than enough balance to give a heavy rock tone plenty of girth. At lower gain settings we did have to adjust the amp's EQ to neutralise the treble's overly brittle nature, although using the selector's central position did provide a usable P-90-style tone for more subtle passages.

Active EMGs are predisposed to give the ultimate in pristine clean sounds (with virtually zero hum pick up), with all three settings performing well through our stock Fender Hot Rod Deluxe in this regard. The neck position here was a nice

surprise, giving a tone akin to a cross between a PAF's heat and the chunk of a Tele's neck single-coil.

The Floyd stays in tune admirably and, all in all, the Torero is an impressive instrument that plays really nicely. In fact, it wouldn't surprise us at all if PRS decides to venture further into the murky world of double-locking vibratos and active pickups.

PRS SE Mikael Åkerfeldt

Åkerfeldt is part of Swedish metal band Opeth and has been a PRS user for years, favouring a

custom Modern Eagle and SC250, the latter loaded with Tremonti pickups.

"I can't even say it's like a dream," he told *Guitarist* recently. "I didn't think there was a chance in hell that anyone would even give me a guitar, let alone get a signature model."

"It's a pretty decked out and beautiful guitar," offers Shive. "A 24-fret Singlecut was an odd request; I don't really know too many [other companies] doing them." All previous PRS Singlecuts feature just the 22 frets but, that difference aside, the body shape and vibe of the guitar is an otherwise very familiar one.

Pickups comprise SE incarnations of the HFS humbucker, based around a ceramic magnet, in the bridge and Vintage Bass in the neck,

rather than the standard 'PRS Designed' units fitted, for example, to the Standard SE Singlecut. These are manufactured under license in Korea and, according to Shive, are exactly the same in spec as the USA-made pickups aside from offering single, rather than four-conductor wiring.

At present the guitar is available in just a tortoiseshell finish, a subtle chocolate brown hue that looks great against the gold hardware, and the flamed maple veneer that crowns the maple top features PRS's hallmark natural edge 'binding' and a decal of the band's 'O' logo just behind the PRS vibrato. It's certainly an attractive guitar, which lands just the right side of the garish fence.

The wide-fat neck profile was equally inspired by early so-called baseball Fender necks of the early 1960s and, as Paul Reed Smith describes it, a "well-carved old Les Paul-type neck". Here the concept is given a personal touch that befits a signature model in that the neck's finish of each example is hand-sanded to match as closely as possible the feel Åkerfeldt's own instrument. On closer examination, purists may consider the end result a little rough and ready, as sanding marks are clearly visible along the neck's length. However, and more importantly, the finish is perfectly smooth to the touch and gives a virtually frictionless feel, different from the high gloss of the other guitars. Apparently, just the top clear coat is removed during the process, leaving the finish intact – this is the nicest player of the three guitars here.

The Mikael Åkerfeldt is certainly an attractive guitar, which resides on the right side of the 'garish' fence

The rivals

Schecter's workhorse, the **C-1 Custom** (from £679), is available in trans black cherry finish and comes loaded with dual Seymour Duncan pickups and includes either a hardtail or Floyd Rose bridge. The **Ibanez ART600** (£599) is an excellent single-cut with vintage overtones, or alternatively if you require a vibrato, the new **Epiphone Les Paul Plus Top Pro F/X** (£499), resplendent with a Floyd Rose Special, is well worth a closer look. **ESP's LTD M-300FM** (£589) mixes a set flamed top with an EMG 81 pickup set and a Floyd Rose Special double-locking bridge.



The Mikael Åkerfeldt signature sports the Opeth logo on the body



Sounds

Åkerfeldt and Opeth continually use one of the fattest recorded metal tones of all and, to that end we began our sound tests with a suitably high-gain blast courtesy of the Engl Powerball II, reviewed on p106 in this issue.

If you spend the majority of your time using guitars with conventional scale lengths, getting to grips with the 25-inch scale offered by the majority of the PRS catalogue can take a minute but, with dollops of gain, the tone is round and woody, with impressive string separation.

The bridge HFS is hot enough to give anything from southern fried twang to a full-bore beige (ie not quite brown) sound, which is great for rock rhythm. Extreme settings remain warm almost regardless of the gain levels and, yes, it's adept at recreating the Opeth wall of sound too.

The guitar is totally balanced, feels lighter on the shoulder joint than a more conventional single-cut and, as we've said, certainly has a striking look. What's more, it plays very well in anger too.

SE 25th Anniversary Custom 24

The most affordable of this trio is the model that takes its name from what remains the company's best-selling American model, although the SE version has little in common with the production guitars from 1985. The idea is to revisit the established heritage rather than to simply present a more formal reissue.

It has a slab body with subtle belly and lower cutaway contours, and in place of the

original's sweet switch and rotary five-pickup selector is a simple three-way toggle and single volume and tone pots. That said, one facet that is an authentic mid-eighties feature is the choice of finishes – it's the only guitar available in royal blue, vintage yellow or scarlet red, just like the very first production Customs.

“Oddly this is the only historic-style reissue,” says Shive of this year's 25th Anniversary models. “We're actually phasing out those three finishes on the core (USA) line so if you want those colours you'll have to get an SE now.”

Another facet is arguably the most significant part of the guitar's spec; the provision of a flock of classic bird inlays fluttering down the rosewood board. Now replaced on the USA line with the contemporary hollow bird design, this is an effective step that reiterates the model's vibe of being something special.

This reviewer's first PRS experience was with a late-eighties Custom 24 in finished whale blue, and even though the SE features a quilted maple veneer on its mahogany body rather than a solid top of flamed maple, the depth of colour here is almost as impressive.

Along with its vibrato, the electronics comprise the same pickup pairing as that fitted to the Åkerfeldt, albeit with standard rather than gold-plated polepieces.

Sounds

If you consider the great music that has been played on Gibson and Fender products, you get an idea of the choppy waters the original Custom was launched into and what tonal bases

players would reasonably have expected such a hybrid design to cover. This SE version doesn't offer us any single-coil tones, but it is arguably the most tonally versatile of the three here, dealing adroitly with a number of classic sounds we tried the guitar out with.

At lower gains we obtained a good impression of AC/DC's ultra-fat rhythm tone and, with our Fender combo, a lovely

twang to more bluesy settings. Classic rock, hard rock and even metal, this guitar deals with pretty much everything, and although we needed to give the vibrato a slight tweak to suit our personal requirements, this is a workhorse electric if ever there was one.

Verdict

Here then is a trio of very impressive guitars that each


The 25th Anniversary SE is arguably the most tonally versatile of the three, dealing adroitly with a number of classic tones we tried it out with



The 25th Anniversary model comes in three soon-to-disappear finishes

has its own agenda; all are well-made, comfortable to play and tonally versatile. Whether you wish to play metal on the Torero's smooth neck, classic rock on the striking Åkerfeldt or blues on the versatile Custom 24, you'll be well catered for in these areas and a lot more besides.

It's difficult to pick just one guitar from the three as our favourite, but we did find ourselves reaching for the Opeth man's signature model more often than not simply due to the luxurious feel of its hand-sanded neck. It looks great too, and be assured that the mix of gold hardware and tortoise finish looks great in the flesh.

You may not have considered a PRS guitar thus far, but these new SE models deserve attention from any serious rock guitarist. 

The bottom line

SE Torero

We like: The full tone; clean fingerboard; good set-up

We dislike: Just the screwed-down battery cavity lid

Guitarist says: This is more than a mere EMG-powered rock machine – the through-neck construction gives it many more excellent voices

SE Mikael Åkerfeldt

We like: Great neck; opulent looks; good weight

We dislike: The 'O' decal may put non-fans off

Guitarist says: This is a signature model that anyone could use. It looks great and what a neck!

SE 25th Anniversary Custom 24

We liked: Choice of original finishes; impressive tonal performance

We dislike: The lack of a forearm contour proves to be a bit annoying

Guitarist says: This nod to PRS's past provides one of the most versatile electrics at this price point we've played for some time



PRS SE Torero

PRICE: £899 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Korea
TYPE: Double-cutaway, solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany with bound maple cap and flamed maple veneer
NECK: Maple, wide-thin profile, through-body
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5-inch)
NUT/WIDTH: Locking/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound ebony, 356mm (14-inches)
FRETS: 24, jumbo
HARDWARE: Floyd Rose 1000 Series double-locking vibrato, PRS-logo'd tuners, all chrome-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54mm
ELECTRICS: EMG-81 (bridge), EMG-85 (neck) humbuckers, volume, tone and three-way lever selector
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4.1/9
RANGE OPTIONS: The new version of Cradle Of Filth guitarist Paul Allender's SE signature (£799) comes loaded with an EMG 81/89 set
FINISHES: Black cherry, grey black (as reviewed)
Headline Music
01223 874301
www.prsguitars.com

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



PRS SE Mikael Åkerfeldt

PRICE: £749 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Korea
TYPE: Single-cutaway, signature solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany with maple cap and flamed maple veneer plus Opeth logo
NECK: Maple, wide-fat profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25-inch)
NUT/WIDTH: Lubricated/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, pearloid bird inlays, 254mm (10-inch) radius
FRETS: 24, jumbo
HARDWARE: PRS-designed vibrato, PRS-logo'd tuners, all gold-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53mm
ELECTRICS: PRS SE HFS Treble (bridge) and SE Vintage Bass (neck) humbuckers, volume, tone and three-way toggle selector
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.9/8.5
RANGE OPTIONS: Other SE signature models include the Nick Catanese (also £749), Tremonti (£599), Orianthi (£699), Zack Myers (£699) and Mike Mushok baritone (£899). The SE Singlecut and SE Singlecut Trem both cost £599, and the straightforward SE One is just £499
FINISHES: Tortoiseshell (as reviewed)

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



PRS SE 25th Anniversary Custom 24

PRICE: £699 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Korea
TYPE: Double-cutaway, solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany with maple cap and flamed maple veneer
NECK: Maple, wide-thin profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25-inch)
NUT/WIDTH: Lubricated/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, pearloid bird inlays, 254mm (10-inch) radius
FRETS: 24, jumbo
HARDWARE: PRS-designed vibrato, PRS-logo'd tuners, all chrome-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53mm
ELECTRICS: PRS SE HFS (bridge), SE Vintage Bass (neck) humbuckers, volume, tone and three-way toggle selector
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.4/7.5
RANGE OPTIONS: Selected highlights include the SE Custom (£599), SE Custom Semi-Hollow (£699) and SE Custom Semi-Hollow Soapbar (£699). Prices for the USA Custom 24 begin at £3,095 and at £3,299 for the 25th Anniversary Custom 24
FINISHES: Royal blue, vintage yellow or scarlet red (as reviewed)

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★