


VS

Words: Ed Mitchell

**PRS SE CUSTOM
SEMI-HOLLOW VS
HAGSTROM DEUCE F**

Getting a great semi-acoustic tone doesn't mean carting around a big-bodied guitar. Here are two electrics with hidden depths...



THERE are a bunch of reasons why a manufacturer would choose to chamber the body of an electric guitar. For one thing, scooping out a load of wood from a solid-body instrument keeps the weight down. You don't need a degree in tricky sums to figure out the benefits of that. Gibson and Fender have used chambering over the years for this very reason, Gibson on various Les Paul models and Fender for the iconic Telecaster Thinline of the late 60s and early 70s.

Weight issues aside, the greatest result of all this six-string liposuction is a sweet semi-acoustic tone with bags of resonance. It's a bit like having the tonal

benefits of a Gibson ES-335-style semi without that guitar's imposing dimensions, which brings us neatly to the compact contenders in this contest.

Thanks to fantastic build quality and playability, the PRS SE Custom Semi-Hollow (£699) has pretty much owned the mid-range chambered semi-acoustic market since its launch a couple of years ago. That dominance could be set for a major knock thanks to the arrival of the new Hagstrom Deuce F (£536). What we have here are two guitars with similar specs but, as you'll soon find out, very different tonal characteristics. Of course, only one can claim a semi-hollow victory here.

**PRS SE CUSTOM
SEMI-HOLLOW** **£699**

The darling of the mid-range semi-hollows continues to impress

LIKE the Hagstrom Deuce F, the PRS SE Custom Semi-Hollow has a chambered mahogany back topped with a slice of maple. In the SE Custom's case, its top is finished off with a flame maple veneer to make it look extra pretty. The eye candy quota is boosted by a Rickenbacker-style 'cat's eye' f-hole, a flock of birds across the fingerboard inlays and a finish that makes this guitar look as though it's been dipped in honey.

Speaking of the runny, sticky stuff, the neck on this guitar is the bee's knees. Our SE has the PRS 'Wide Fat' profile that fills your palm with plenty of wood yet still feels fast enough for any playing speed. While the SE doesn't have any body contouring, there's a generous scoop at the treble-side cutaway that offers unhindered access to all 22 perfectly dressed frets.

In contrast to the over-engineered job on the Hagstrom Deuce F, the SE Custom anchors its strings on a simple, fixed-intonation wraparound bridge/tailpiece. If the lack of intonation adjustment freaks you out a bit, it will be reassuring to know that PRS uses this style of bridge on some of its US-built guitars, such as the McCarty. Besides, the intonation is great on our SE all the way up the fingerboard.

While the Hagstrom Deuce F is generally well finished, the PRS SE takes it up a notch and then some. No joke, this PRS is absolutely flawless. In fact, the only niggle

we have is with the control layout. The volume control is within easy reach when you need to use it, and while the tone is a bit far away, it's not enough to cause any real problems. It's the pickup selector we're griping about. Look where it is. Your hand has to make a fair old excursion to reach the switch if you want to flick it quickly while playing.

Plugging in, the PRS has a bright airy tone that works really well for clean rhythm playing. The bridge pickup is well defined without being shrill, and engaging both humbuckers is just the thing for clean blues and rockabilly. Neck pickup solo is the go-to setting for jazzy stuff. The SE is a bit lightweight for metal; it doesn't have anywhere near the brutality of the Deuce F. That said, it's a great overdriven blues and rock machine.

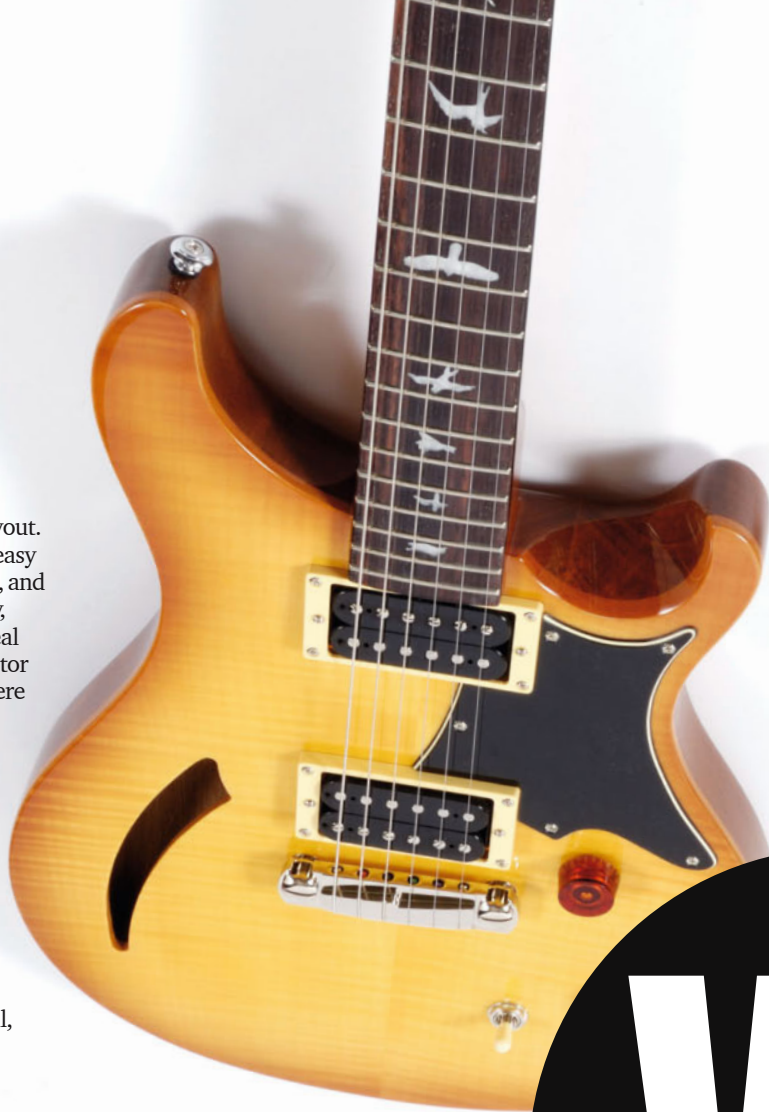
If you're fishing for a beautifully put together, almost perfect all-rounder, then the PRS SE Custom Semi-Hollow ticks those boxes big time.

Shop around and you'll find most dealers pushing them out at around £639 with a padded PRS gigbag. File that under a great deal. But before you reach for your mouse, take a look at what the competition has to offer.

AT A GLANCE

- BODY:** Maple top, flame maple veneer top, mahogany back and sides
- NECK:** Maple, set-in
- FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood, bird inlays
- FRETS:** 22 medium
- SCALE:** 25"
- PICKUPS:** 2x PRS SE humbuckers
- CONTROLS:** 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector
- HARDWARE:** Nickel
- LEFT-HANDED:** No
- FINISH:** Vintage Natural (shown), Scarlet Red
- CONTACT:** Headline Music Ltd 01223 874301 prsguitars.com

SUMMARY	FEATURES	SCORE
SOUND QUALITY		★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY		★★★★
BUILD QUALITY		★★★★
PLAYABILITY		★★★★
OVERALL RATING		★★★★★



No chance of back pain with PRS's lightweight semi



HAGSTROM DEUCE F **£536**

Introducing a heavyweight contender –
in more ways than one...

IT MIGHT

have a chambered body but the Hagstrom Deuce F is still a seriously heavy guitar. This 3.85kg monster is a full 1.3kg weightier than the PRS.

That may seem like a deal breaker, but don't be hasty: this brute might just win you over yet.

Playability is on a par with the PRS. Hagstrom employs an ultra-stiff trussrod system that allows it to fit slim profile necks that don't compromise tuning stability.

Like all Hagstrom guitars, the Deuce F features a 'Resinator' fingerboard. This is a composite material that offers a feel and tone similar to ebony. The 'board is studded with 22 well-seated, well-dressed frets. The Deuce's Custom 58 humbuckers are each wired to a dedicated volume and push/pull tone control. Pull the tone knobs and each 'bucker splits for singlecoil sounds; push it to activate humbucker mode. The only problem is with the Gibson-style 'bell' knobs: they're tough to pull. You have to dig the meat of your fingers under the skirts of the knobs to shift them, and even our heavily calloused claws found that a bit uncomfortable after a few attempts. Fatter knobs would make coil splitting easier.

Maybe it's the oversized headstock, the body chambers, the 10mm-thick maple top or the stiff neck, but the Deuce F

pumps out an incredible amount of sustain. It could also be the over-engineered tailpiece that sees each string threaded through its own tone block, which is then anchored to the guitar's body via a thick slab of Perspex. It works brilliantly, even if it looks a bit bonkers. Luckily, the whole thing is covered by a chrome plate.

Plugging the Deuce F in is a revelation. Stomp on the filth with the bridge humbucker engaged for a fantastic aggressive tone; a thrilling combination of edge and beef that kills for metal and punk. While it can't match the SE Custom's bright rhythm jangle, the Deuce F still cleans up well. The neck humbucker also excels for jazz chords and weeping, bluesy lead tones.

The PRS SE Custom Semi-Hollow is a cracking piece of kit. From jangly chords to classic blues and rock, it cuts the mustard with style. The Hagstrom Deuce F is a different beast, and while it's a bit on the heavy side and isn't as well-finished as the PRS, it's the

pick of the litter for us thanks to its incredible tone and sustain. It's one of the best affordable rock guitars we've ever tested. If your spine can take it, give it a whirl.

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Mahogany, carved

maple top

NECK: Mahogany, set-in

FINGERBOARD: Resinator,

block inlays

FRETS: 22 medium

SCALE: 25 1/2"

PICKUPS: 2x Custom 58

humbuckers

CONTROLS: 2x volume,

2x tone with push/pull

coil-split function,

3-way pickup selector

HARDWARE: Chrome

LEFT-HANDED: Tobacco

Sunburst only (€570)

FINISH: Tobacco Sunburst

(shown), Black Gloss, White

Gloss, Cardinal Red, Vintage

Emerald Stone

CONTACT: Rosetti Ltd 01376

550033 hagstromguitars.eu

FEATURES	
SUMMARY	SOUND QUALITY
	VALUE FOR MONEY
	BUILD QUALITY
	PLAYABILITY
	OVERALL RATING



The Deuce F's extra heft means more sustain