

PRS SE  
Singlecut

Spear  
SHL1Q Evil  
Monkey

Group Test

## Singlecut electrics under £500

It's singles night here at TG Towers and there are four beauties baying for our attention. But which one of these mid-price cutaway stunners should you take home to meet your bandmates?

WORDS **HENRY YATES** PHOTOGRAPHY **AMANDA THOMAS**



Flip the page to  
find out which one  
won our Group  
Test head-to-head

Hagstrom  
Super Swede

Epiphone  
Prophecy  
Les Paul EX

**T**he singlecut format was born from mankind's innate need to show off. If you were a sharp-suited gunslinger in the juke joints of the 30s, looking to impress a gaggle of pre-war hotties with your prowess, you had a problem: it was impossible to get your fretting hand beyond the neck joint. Thus, the pleasures that we take for granted – like pinching a harmonic at the 24th fret and pulling a 'sex face' – were prohibited, and instead the guitarists of the age spent their nights clunking in the low register at the edge of the spotlight.

At the end of that decade, Gibson finally responded to the calls of a guitar fraternity that was tired of watching the trumpet player get laid. The firm had already mass-produced the first cutaway US model in the form of the Style O, but it was the launch of the L-5 and Super 400 in 1939, complete with venetian

cutaways, that really pointed the way for the industry. Then Gibson did it again, with the 1952 debut of the Les Paul setting the benchmark by which all modern singlecuts are measured.

The doublecut brigade might push the envelope further, but in 2008, the number of singlecuts on the market proves the simplicity of this style is as magnetic as ever. For this Group Test, TG wanted to find out exactly what we can get in the mid-price bracket.

### Single cream

Think of a singlecut and the Gibson Les Paul will inevitably spring to mind. It's not that we didn't want to feature one, it's more that at upwards of two grand, we didn't think it was

a realistic choice for most working musicians in these credit-crunching times. Instead, we gave ourselves a generous price ceiling of £500 and set about cruising the market for a quartet of worthy contenders.

Just because we can't stretch to a Gibson doesn't mean we can't have an LP vibe, so our first move was to collar the Prophecy EX (£469) from entry-level replicators Epiphone. Our thoughts then turned to the work of Scandinavian legends Hagstrom, and the much-feted Super Swede (£419), before we pushed our budget to breaking point with the PRS SE Singlecut (£499). Finally, we're hoping the Spear SHL1Q Evil Monkey (£379) will make us go ape. ■

**"IN 2008, THE NUMBER OF SINGLECUTS ON THE MARKET PROVES THAT THIS STYLE IS AS MAGNETIC AS EVER"**

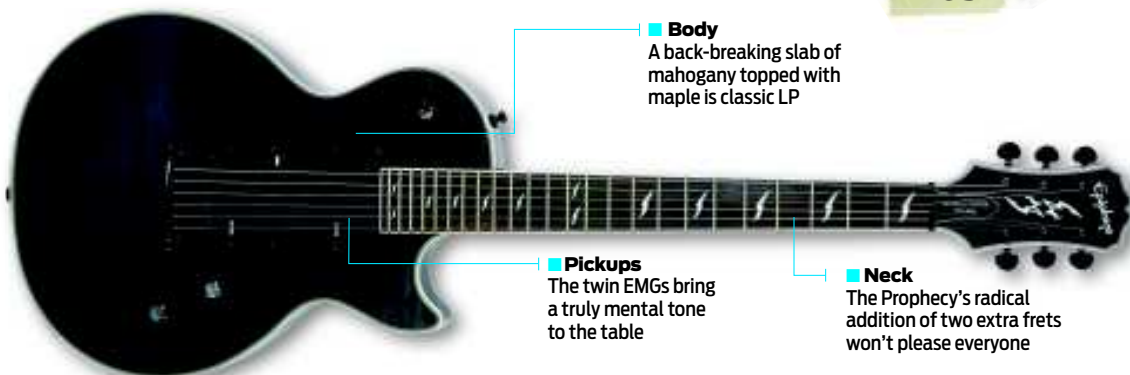




## Epiphone Prophecy Les Paul EX

Old log, new tricks

£469



**Body**  
A back-breaking slab of mahogany topped with maple is classic LP

**Pickups**  
The twin EMGs bring a truly mental tone to the table

**Neck**  
The Prophecy's radical addition of two extra frets won't please everyone

### At a glance

#### Epiphone Prophecy Les Paul EX

**BODY:** Solid mahogany with quilt maple top  
**NECK:** Mahogany, set  
**FINGERBOARD:** Ebony, with 'blade' inlays  
**SCALE:** 24.75"  
**PICKUPS:** 1x EMG 85 (neck), 1x EMG 81 (bridge)  
**CONTROLS:** 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector  
**HARDWARE:** Black  
**FINISH:** Midnight Ebony  
**CONTACT:** Gibson Europe 00800 44427661  
**WEB:** www.gibson.com

**E**piphone has a dilemma: how do you give the Les Paul a face-lift without bugging up its major selling points? The boys reckon the new Prophecy EX is the answer, touting it as "tradition meets innovation".

**The sizzle:** It's an LP, but not as we know it. Epiphone clearly wants a slice of the shred pie, furnishing this axe with 24 frets (two more than standard), a SpeedTaper neck with go-faster D-profile, aggressive blade inlays



and EMG active humbuckers. That's the 'innovation' part; the 'tradition' comes from a bound mahogany body, sumptuous maple top and set mahogany neck. And no, you won't find this model in a Gibson format.

**We say:** Like all LPs, the Prophecy is absurdly heavy; not ideal for shredders, but the weight is offset by a neck that plays noticeably faster than standard. The best news is that a familiar 24.75-inch scale means the expressive bends that are integral to LP performance are still at your fingertips. Purists will froth, but if you're open-minded, you'll have fun.

Those same purists will argue that LPs have to feature PAFs (or their equivalent), and it's true these EMGs cost you

some of the buttery character of a standard LP when you play clean. Here's the flip side: crank the Prophecy and the thickest, darkest, most aggressive tone in the group spills forth, cementing the impression that this axe will delight players who worship Zakk Wylde, but bemuse those whose tastes are more textbook.

### SUMMARY

**For:** Fast feel, mental tone

**Against:** The purists won't be happy

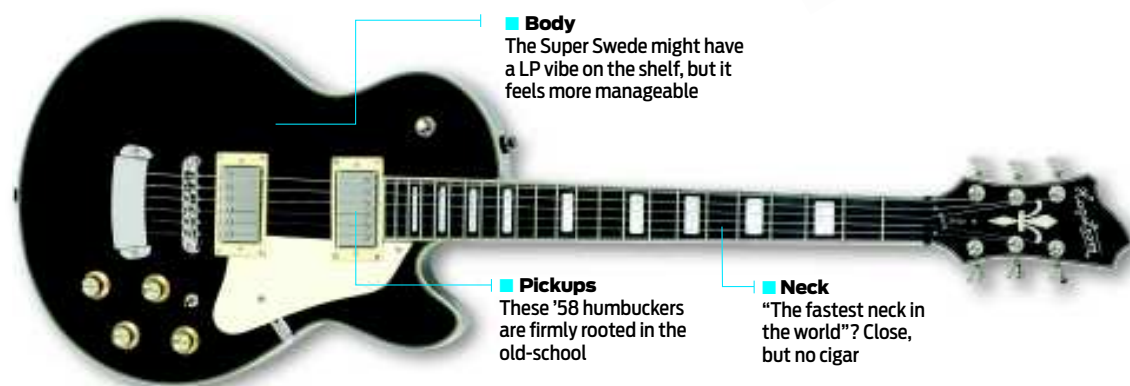
★★★★☆

**TG says:** Pick up the 'Phone

## Hagstrom Super Swede

£419

Animal, vegetable or miracle?



**Body**  
The Super Swede might have a LP vibe on the shelf, but it feels more manageable

**Pickups**  
These '58 humbuckers are firmly rooted in the old-school

**Neck**  
"The fastest neck in the world"? Close, but no cigar

### At a glance

#### Hagstrom Super Swede

**BODY:** Mahogany with carved maple top  
**NECK:** Mahogany, set  
**FRETBOARD:** Resinator fretboard, pearl block inlays  
**PICKUPS:** 2x Hagstrom Custom '58 humbuckers  
**SCALE:** 25.5"  
**HARDWARE:** Chrome  
**CONTROLS:** 2x volume, 2x tone, 3-way pickup selector, coil tap switch  
**FINISH:** Black [pictured], Vintage Sunburst  
**CONTACT:** Hagstrom UK&I 08701 436736  
**WEB:** www.hagstrom-guitars.co.uk

**F**ounded in 1958, Hagstrom fell victim to the Japanese copy boom of the 80s, but came back from the dead last year with a new line of electrics based on the old classics.

**The sizzle:** Traditional looks conceal some tantalising features here. There's the H-Expander trussrod, whose distribution of tension supposedly makes the neck play like shit off a shovel. Then



there's the resinator fretboard, a homogenous wood composite that Hagstrom reckons gives the "benefits of premium ebony with greater consistency and speed". The block stop tailpiece purports

to boost sustain, while a coil tap can split the '58 humbuckers.

**We say:** Despite its LP vibe, the Super Swede is neither as heavy nor as big in any direction. We'd question Hagstrom's claims this is the world's fastest neck, but it's no slouch, has a low action that works well with single-note runs, and copes well when you push beyond Jimmy Page tempo.

Hats off to Hagstrom for including a coil tap, but the Super Swede is most convincing

when you let the 'buckers do their 'thick and fat' thing. The tone mirrors the looks, with real organic warmth when you play the blues at the neck, a creamy roar when you flip to the bridge and huge sustain across the board. LP traditionalists might even prefer it to the Epiphone.

### SUMMARY

**For:** Vintage looks, classic tone

**Against:** Some extravagant claims

★★★★☆

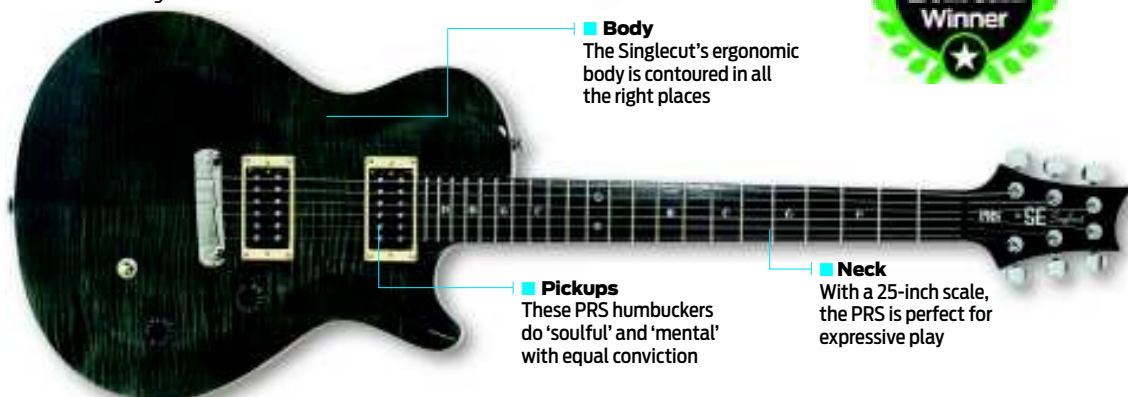
**TG says:** It's no Swedish meatball

## "PRS' ENTRY-LEVEL SE RANGE HAS A STAGGERING PRICE TO PERFORMANCE RATIO"

SINGLECUT ELECTRICS UNDER £500 **★ GROUP TEST**

### PRS SE Singlecut £499

PRS, I love you



■ **Body**  
The Singlecut's ergonomic body is contoured in all the right places

■ **Pickups**  
These PRS humbuckers do 'soulful' and 'mental' with equal conviction

■ **Neck**  
With a 25-inch scale, the PRS is perfect for expressive play

#### At a glance

##### PRS SE Singlecut

**BODY:** Solid mahogany with maple top  
**NECK:** Mahogany, set  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood with moon inlays  
**SCALE:** 25"  
**PICKUPS:** 2x PRS humbuckers  
**CONTROLS:** 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector  
**HARDWARE:** Chrome  
**FINISH:** Gray Black [pictured], Blue Matteo, Tobacco Sunburst, Black  
**CONTACT:** Headline Music 01223 874301  
**WEB:** www.headlinemusic.co.uk

**U**nless you actually are Carlos Santana, the closest you'll get to a 'real' PRS is licking the guitar shop window. Stop doing that and consider the entry-level SE range, whose staggering ratio of price to performance is the stuff of legend.

**The sizzle:** PRS is synonymous with luxury, and most of it filters down to the SE range. We've got a classic combination of mahogany body and maple top, complemented by PRS



humbuckers and a set mahogany neck with a rosewood board that's furnished with 'moon' inlays. There are longer spec sheets in this test, but PRS has always been about performance, not bells and whistles.

**We say:** The Singlecut had one hand on the gold within minutes. Physically, this guitar is a tonic to the bloaters that dominate the singlecut market: it's slim and ergonomic, balances perfectly and puts you utterly in control. That impression is consolidated by the gorgeous neck, which offers a wide carve that fills the palm to perfection, alongside a unique 25-inch scale that makes for expressive bends and vibrato.

TG set out on this test looking for a singlecut that could deliver soul when clean but go suitably

mental under heavy gain, and we found the best exponent in the PRS Singlecut. Riffing on the neck 'bucker is a winner for creamy blues solos, but flipping to the bridge under distortion unlocks a thrillingly angry tone that brings spit and sawdust to your lead work. Yes, it's the most expensive – but it's also the best.

#### SUMMARY

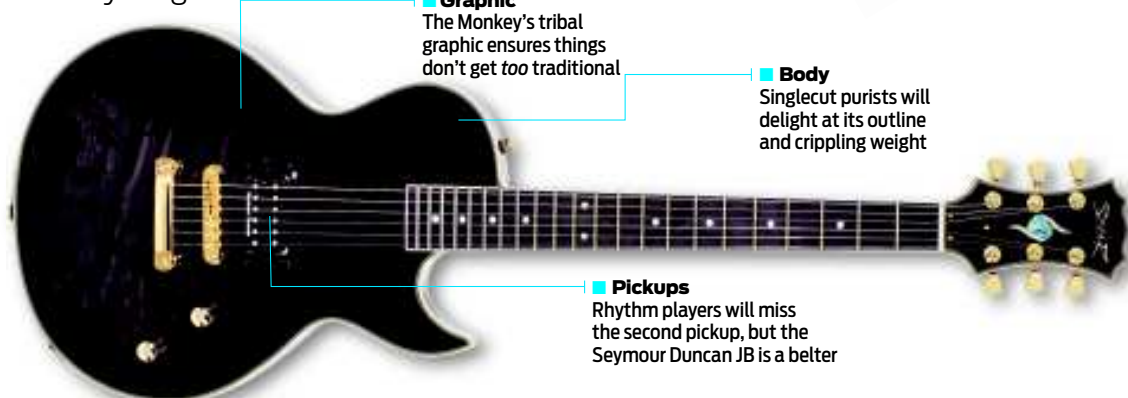
**For:** Quality, playability, rounded tone  
**Against:** It's the most expensive

★★★★★

**TG says:** Best way to spend £499

### Spear SHL1Q Evil Monkey £379

Monkey magic?



■ **Graphic**  
The Monkey's tribal graphic ensures things don't get *too* traditional

■ **Body**  
Singlecut purists will delight at its outline and crippling weight

■ **Pickups**  
Rhythm players will miss the second pickup, but the Seymour Duncan JB is a belter

#### At a glance

##### Spear SHL1Q Evil Monkey

**BODY:** Mahogany with quilted maple top  
**NECK:** Mahogany, 3-ply, set  
**FINGERBOARD:** Artificial ebony with dot inlays  
**SCALE:** 24.75"  
**PICKUPS:** 1x Seymour Duncan JB  
**CONTROLS:** 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector  
**HARDWARE:** Gold  
**FINISH:** Dark Red  
**CONTACT:** Black i Distribution 01236 861261  
**WEB:** www.spearguitar.com

**S**pear has been trading since 2005, so it's tempting to cast it as the plucky young contender of the test. But is the Evil Monkey just aping the old classics?

**The sizzle:** The Evil Monkey is a compelling fusion of vintage and modern, with the mahogany body and quilted maple top tipping a hat to tradition, but the graphic and standalone Seymour Duncan JB humbucker making us want to thrash it in a punk



garage band. The absence of a neck item has shaved pounds off the price (Spear reckons most rock players sit on the bridge anyway), but TG was concerned it might cost us sonic versatility.

**We say:** If you want a traditional singlecut feel, you'll love the Monkey's monstrous weight, satisfying neck and slab-like dimensions. It's not an obvious choice for noodling, but if you're a player in the Slash tradition and want to peel off tasty bends and chunky mid-tempo solos, give it a spin. Bulletproof and finished with attention to detail, it doesn't feel like a £379 electric.

That said, if you play a lot of rhythm and want to flesh out your band's sound, the lack of

neck 'bucker means you'll need an amp with good bass response to counteract it. So it's a good thing the Seymour Duncan JB at the bridge is a cracker, turning in a ferocious bite that combines with the endless sustain for an amazing lead tone. Not quite the king of the jungle, but *very* close.

#### SUMMARY

**For:** Value, classic feel, biting tone  
**Against:** The lack of a neck 'bucker

★★★★★

**TG says:** It's almost the top banana