



ESP Eclipse-I CTM, LTD EC-1000VB & LTD EC-400AT/MG

£1,395, £899 & £649

ESP ECLIPSE-I CTM

PRICE: £1,359 (inc case)

ORIGIN: Japan

TYPE: Single-cutaway, solidbody electric

BODY: Mahogany with maple top

NECK: Three-piece mahogany, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75-inch)

NUT/WIDTH: Bone, 43mm

FINGERBOARD: Ebony

FRETS: 22, extra jumbo

HARDWARE: Gotoh tune-o-matic-style bridge and stud tailpiece, Sperzel locking tuners, all gold

STRING SPACING,

BRIDGE: 52.5mm

ELECTRICS: EMG-81 (bridge), EMG-60 (neck), two volumes, two tones, three-way toggle pickup selector

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.4/7.5

OPTIONS: The Eclipse-II (with Seymour Duncan SH-4 and SH-1n pickups and/or flamed maple cap) also costs £1,359

LEFT HANDERS: Yes. £POA

FINISHES: Satin vintage black, gloss black (as reviewed), trans deep purple, gloss white, satin vintage white

Selection
01795 419460

www.espguitars.com

Single-cuts rule UK? The style and popularity of the classic design remains unsullied by 21st century upgrades, as this trio of ESPs prove... by Simon Bradley

We pride ourselves on featuring as many names as possible within our reviews section each issue and we're pretty certain that you appreciate us doing so. However, judging by the high numbers of letters and telephone queries, not to mention Dr Robert's bulging postbag, the vast majority of guitars owned out there bear the names of either Fender or Gibson. Ibanez is a distant third with the likes of Yamaha, ESP and others also regularly mentioned: this is based just on the correspondence we receive, remember.

The point is that classic designs will remain popular irrespective of any trends identified by third parties, so, when we heard that the new ESP Eclipse I in black represented over 30 per cent of that company's entire production, we felt we had to grab hold of one to see if it could ever be a Gibson Les Paul-beater.

To balance proceedings we've also got hold of a more affordable EC-400 in a classic colour and have revisited the ever-impressive EC-1000 we initially reviewed back in 2002.

Before we begin, we should point out some naming misnomers that would otherwise confuse you should you visit ESP's US site. In a nutshell, the guitar that's called Eclipse I CTM in Europe, Japan and other territories is, in the US only, referred to as the Eclipse II: what's more, the spec includes three controls (the same as those loaded on to the LTD EC-1000VB).

The easiest distinction if you live outside the US is that Eclipses with solid colours are denoted as Is, while Eclipse IIs offer transparent finishes

ESP ECLIPSE-I CTM	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** The vibe and top-notch performance will take some beating

■ **WE DISLIKED** It's a shame about the messy nut

with flamed maple tops. All this doesn't affect how good the guitars actually are, but if a job's worth doing...

Eclipse-I CTM

What further distinguishes the CTM from others in the range is its nod towards a specific design, that of the Gibson Les Paul Custom. The solid mahogany body is a far skinnier affair than the Kalamazoo classic, but bears hallmarks such as triple pinstripe body and headstock binding, gold-plated hardware and, in this case, a sumptuous gloss black finish.

As we've pointed out, the control panel comprises independent volume and tone pots for each pickup, which is far more in keeping with the Gibson ideal albeit slightly less streamlined than ESP's more familiar three-button layout. There's also the hidden advantage of a larger control cavity that allows room for the battery for the pickups: the EC-1000 requires a separate rear-mounted routing.

Although Duncans are an option (see Spec Check), this version bristles with a pairing of active EMG humbuckers – an 81 in the bridge and rhythm-friendly 60 in the neck position – controlled in the usual manner by a shoulder-mounted three-way toggle.



The Eclipse controls provide tone and volume pots for each pickup

A rather untidily glued bone nut supersedes the Earvana available elsewhere and this area of the three-piece mahogany neck is, as usual, fortified with a subtle rear volute stamped with the ESP logo.

We're fans of restrained yet effective touches such as the truss rod cover cut into the same flag shape as both the headstock and 'board inlays, with the 22 jumbo frets and a suitably low action making for a happy playing experience. Of course, the slim neck is unlike those of most Les Paul Customs we've come across, but as this is a thoroughly modern instrument we're very happy with how it plays.

SOUNDS: EMG-equipped Les Pauls lead us to think of a certain Zakk Wylde, but the Eclipse I is, should you desire, capable of a much wider palette of tones than you'd think.

The slimmer construction ensures that the EMGs don't overplay their



ESP LTD EC-400AT	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
■ WE LIKED An outstanding neck to go with a solid collection of tones	
■ WE DISLIKED The sloppy application of the gold in places	

hand by pushing proceedings too far into the red, but with the gain set to around half on our old Boogie Mk VI, the signal hike instantly offers a very smooth overdrive.

We'd think twice before playing standard metal and rock rhythm with the neck pickup of our Les Paul simply as things would mush up too much for any clarity to remain. No such worries with the neck EMG-60 and although the tone possesses additional warmth, there's plenty of cut too.

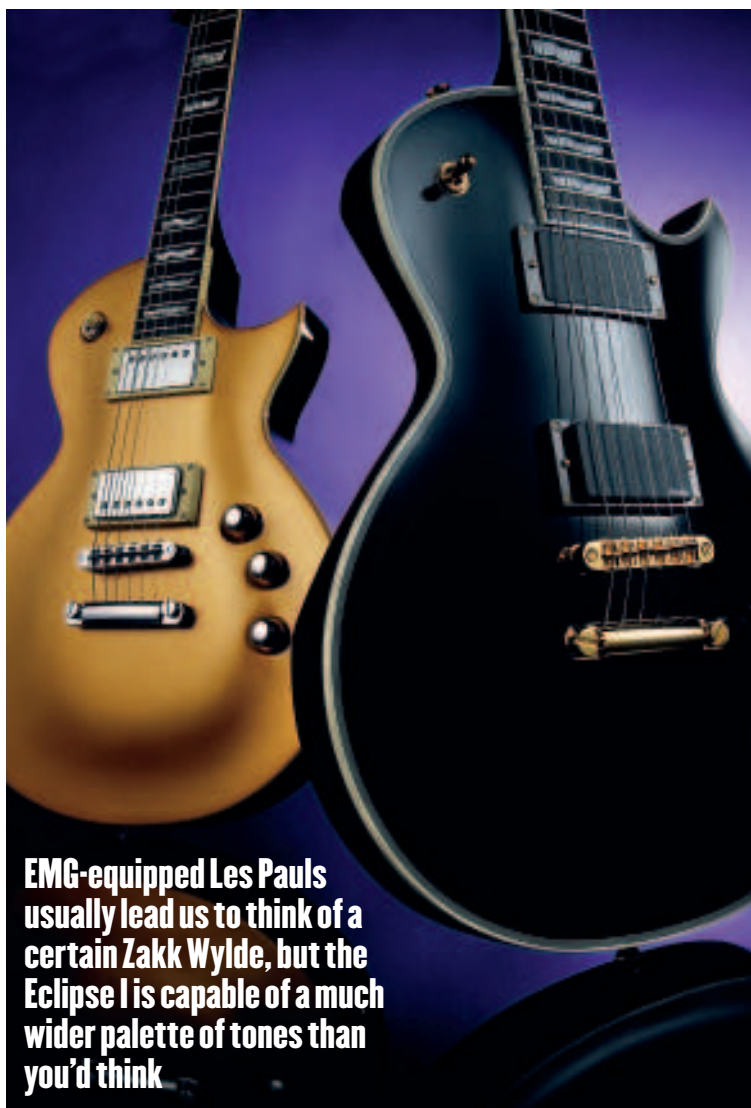
Clearly the performance is a little flat although adequate for most situations, and with a lick of overdrive the focused tone remains tight whilst filling up around the middle.

EC-400AT/MG

Of the more affordable LTD EC guitars, the mean and moody factor is in place with the ultra-black EC-500 and dusky versions of the EC-400. As you'd expect, EMG pickups raise their rocking heads here too, as does a choice of the hotter of Seymour Duncan's humbuckers. There's the nonsense pairing of a Custom 5 in the bridge and a Jazz, which has a higher output than its name would have you believe, in the neck position.

Nothing alludes more efficiently to Gibson than a gold finish to any single-cut, and ESP's version (called metallic gold) is no different. In fact this version of the EC-400 is closer in vibe to the classic Les Paul as it features a pair of covered Seymour Duncan humbuckers: a JB in the bridge accompanied by a '59 at the neck.

Gibson originally found applying the



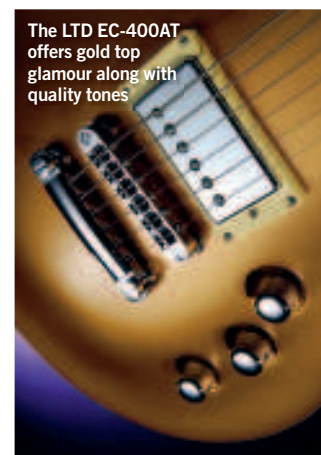
EMG-equipped Les Pauls usually lead us to think of a certain Zakk Wylde, but the Eclipse I is capable of a much wider palette of tones than you'd think

gold finish (a coat of clear lacquer infused with a crushed metal powder) quite difficult and the edging of this guitar here is a little untidy in places. That said, ESP seems to have opted for a slightly darker hue than Gibson would have used originally but it's a close resemblance and, as is always the case, would look stunning under stage lights.

There's no maple top here, simply a solid mahogany body that's a full 9mm thicker than that of the Eclipse-I.

The panel design here reverts back to ESP's own, forgoing the usual rhomboid control arrangement in place of a semi-circular layout comprising two volumes and a master tone: the three-way toggle resides in its familiar location and all

The LTD EC-400AT offers gold top glamour along with quality tones



ESP LTD EC-400AT/MG

As ESP Eclipse-I CTM except...

PRICE: £649

ORIGIN: Korea

NUT/WIDTH: Earvana, 42mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood

HARDWARE: Tune-o-matic-style bridge, stud tailpiece, Grover tuners, all chrome

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm

ELECTRICS: Seymour Duncan SH-4 JB (bridge) and SH-1n '59 (neck), two volumes, one tones, three-way toggle pickup selector

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.9/8.5

OPTIONS: A good choice of models: EC-500 (£699), EC-400 with EMGs (£699) or Seymour Duncans (£649), EC-200QM (£499), EC-100QM (£349) and EC-50 (£249). Check the ESP site for all specs

LEFT-HANDERS: Call

FINISHES: Depending on the model and associated spec: metallic gold (as reviewed), Olympic white, see-thru black cherry, black, vintage sunburst

PHOTOGRAPHY: JOBY SESSIONS



ESP LTD EC-1000VB £899

We first looked at LTD's Deluxe series way back in issue 228, in which a trio of the models took centre stage. Amongst their number was a black EC-1000 bound and inlaid with abalone, and although we gave it a whopping four-and-a-half star review we were a tad concerned that the 'more sparkle than an oyster's graveyard' vibe might put some players off.

Here, then, we're taking the chance to give the version that boasts a matt finish and a vintage-style binding the once over: it's certainly worth mentioning at the outset that, since 2002, the retail price has dropped £300...

As with the majority of the entire EC range, the control panel lacks separate tone pots, leaving the remaining three slightly indented controls sited in an ergonomically satisfying semi-circle.

Although the option that boasts a flamed-maple top and a duo of Duncan humbuckers betrays far more adequately the Kalamazoo vibe, the darker feel of the VB option is cemented by EMG pickups and perfectly off-set by gold hardware, all the way from the TonePros bridge array to the locking Schaller M6 tuners.

Of the three guitars here, it's this example's neck that possesses the most contemporary feel – wide and thin, in other words – and the big frets, Earvana nut and low action ensure it's a dream to get to grips with.

SOUNDS: In comparison with the Eclipse-ICTM the EC-1000VB is, to our ears, very slightly less topky. We're obviously not talking Telecaster twang here but the bridge pickup and central position on the three-way toggle was more akin to what we'd perceive to be a fuller-throated Les Paul roar.

Of course, at ultra-high amp gains the noiseless signal hike that is the EMG trademark allows the guitar to open out and give a huge rock and metal tone. What's more, the playing experience and tuning stability gives you total confidence to try – and for the most parts pull off – difficult chord passages and phrases.

Clean the guitar is just like a Les Paul: there's nothing wrong with the tone but proceedings are so much better with some gain and that's certainly the case here. The tone is full enough for most applications, with a useable jazz warmth to be found via the neck EMG-60.

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

→ four controls are slightly indented into the top.

If the thought of wielding a moody black ESP doesn't appeal, the good news here is that, to go along with the Gibson vibe, the three-piece mahogany neck has by far the most vintage feel of all guitars here. Instead of a flattened D, the feel here is far more in keeping with the slim taper of the Les Paul Classic, with nicely rounded edges, 22 hefty yet well-finished frets and plenty of wood to grab hold of.

SOUNDS: The Duncan JB was born to be slapped into the bridge position of a mahogany-based single-cut and the tone of any of the myriad Les Paul-totin' stars can be recreated with the EC-400. With what we'd describe as a classic rock tone – think Slash or Jimmy Page, the latter complete with a Tube

Screamer – and the beautifully balanced tone is perfect for fat chords and cutting solos.

Clarity isn't affected the higher the wick is wound, and although EMGs are the overwhelmingly popular contemporary choice for full-on

crushing metal tone, Seymour Duncan is unlikely to let you down.

However, we reckon it's fair to assume that this EC-400 will find itself in the hands of more restrained players and for bluesy grunts, rocking groans and jazzy

murmurs, we couldn't catch the guitar out in any way.

We discovered that the lower output of the neck-based '59 actually gives a more percussive, middly tone that we remembered from the mini humbuckers loaded into Les Paul Deluxe of yore; some of which were Goldtops. Almost Strat-y in nature at

For bluesy grunts, rocking groans and jazzy murmurs, we couldn't catch the EC-400AT/MG out in any way



The Eclipse-I CTM features gold Sperzel locking tuners

times, the versatility of this instrument is assured.


Verdict

The market has proven how popular these guitars already are and, having spent much time with these three, it's easy for us to see why.

If the non-draughtsmen amongst us were to attempt a fantasy redesign of the Les Paul Custom, we reckon that most of us would come up with the Eclipse-I CTM and kudos must be given to ESP for producing such a cool guitar. Don't be concerned with the pair of EMG pickups as the skinny mahogany and maple body offsets the active power to produce a more than manageable tone. That's not to say that it's doesn't rock like a mutha, but blues and indie players will get a great deal from it too.

At £899, the EC-1000VB (see boxout) is fantastic value, and that's before you go into a shop with your begging bowl and tear-stained hanky at the ready. The vintage-styling is stylish and subtle, while the EMGs perform very well, never overdoing things unless required to do so, and the matt finish makes this a real player.

The EC-400 is a far more reserved entity, with its metallic gold hue backed up with an inspired pairing of Seymour Duncan humbuckers to offer a genuine alternative to Gibson and Epiphone, especially if your penchant is more towards blues and classic rock than blood-and-guts metal.

In short, these are three reasons why ESP Eclipse and EC models have acquired 'hot cakes' status: grab one and see what the fuss is all about. A Les Paul-beater? Close... very close... 

ESP Eclipse-I CTM

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

ESP LTD EC-400AT/MG

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

The rivals

ECLIPSE-I CTM

Gibson Les Paul '57 Custom VOS £4,180
Gibson Les Paul Classic Custom £2,700
PRS Singlecut £2,229

The Custom, a product of Gibson's custom division, is definitely an LP to aspire to. As close to the original spec as possible, and available in either two or three-pickup configuration, this proves why the Custom blew players away all those years ago. Although not quite scaling the heights of its older brother, the Classic Custom is still a wonderful guitar. The vibe of the ebony black livery and gold hardware will never lose its appeal, and the spec is topped by a pair of open-coiled '57 Classic 'buckers. Check issue 274 for the full PRS/Les Paul skinny, but there's no getting away from the fact that the (soon to be discontinued) Singlecut is one helluva guitar. Look out for PRS's new SC 250 and SC 245 models in 2007.

The rivals

LTD EC-400AT/MG

Schecter Tempest Classic GT £499
Epiphone 1956 Les Paul Goldtop £599
Vintage V100GT £239

Epiphone's version of the classic Goldtop includes two cream soapbar P-90s alongside the familiar livery. Although the Tempest is an off-set double-cut, the vintage gold finish, through-body stringing and vintage-style neck ensures its inclusion here. Best of all is that the modest price also includes a pair of Seymour Duncan '59 humbuckers.

The vast improvement in the Vintage range over recent years has moved the name right into the spotlight and, if you're on an inflexible budget, you can do a great deal worse. The gold topped version of the V1000 throws two stacked Wilkinson soapbar pickups into the mix for added authenticity.