



LTD Alexi-600

Jackson RR24

Group Test

V-shaped guitars around a grand!

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Gibson Flying V, TG lines up four 'V' electrics, dusts down our stage moves and cranks the Marshall stack. But which one of these pointy axes will hit the V-spot?

WORDS **HENRY YATES**



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

Dean Dave
Mustaine
VMNT1

Gibson V-
Factor X

They're *that* shape. You can't ignore them. You can't help but look cool when you're holding them. And that's the whole point. Since the launch of the Gibson Flying V in 1958, the V body format has been the automatic choice of the spotlight-hungry showboater, the ball-hogging virtuoso and the fleet-fingered egomaniac. Check out the roll call of V fanatics: Hendrix, Mustaine, Rhoads, Schenker, Kravitz, Laiho... Not many sausage-fingered introverts among that lot.

V guitars haven't always been so popular. Or maybe people haven't always been so arrogant. Either way, it's worth remembering that the Flying V was widely ridiculed upon its launch, shelved within a year – and only reissued when Hendrix gave the model a shot in the arm in the late-60s. Now, at last, it seems the world has caught up with this ahead-of-its-time format, with the 2008 market

bursting with toasting-fork-shaped electrics at every price point.

Gibson's Flying V has just turned 50, so there's a certain pressure on TG to hand it the Group Test gold medal as a formality. But that's not how we do things. With Dave Mustaine's new Dean Vehement series bringing the V concept boldly into the modern age, and Jackson and LTD raising the bar elsewhere, Gibson's elder statesman will have to fight dirty for a place on the podium.

Flicking the Vs

TG didn't have trouble finding V electrics for our shortlist. Narrowing the mountain of prospective axes down to four proved tougher.

Essentially, we've got the same problem faced by the Chelsea coach. They're all just so damn good...

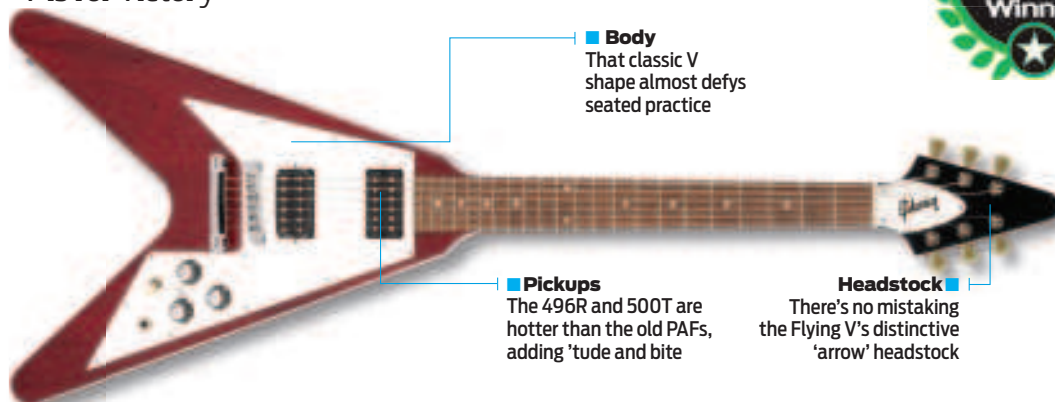
Down to business then. The new boy on the block is Dean's Dave Mustaine VMNT1 (£799), a thrasher's wet dream that looks every bit as unfriendly as the man who designed it. The Megadeth man might be the biggest name, but he isn't necessarily the baddest. We've also primed the LTD Alexi-600 (£1,099) – a Korean version of the ESP rocked by Children Of Bodom's Alexi Laiho – and thrown old-school metallers a bone with Jackson's Randy Rhoads 24 (£899). If the Gibson V-Factor X (£850) thinks it can coast to victory on reputation, it might have a surprise coming...

"SINCE THE LAUNCH OF THE GIBSON FLYING V IN 1958, THE V BODY FORMAT'S BEEN THE CHOICE OF THE SHOWBOATER"



Gibson V-Factor X £850

V is for victory



Body
That classic V shape almost defies seated practice

Pickups
The 496R and 500T are hotter than the old PAFs, adding 'tude and bite

Headstock
There's no mistaking the Flying V's distinctive 'arrow' headstock



At a glance

Gibson V-Factor X

BODY: Solid mahogany, with four-ply pickguard
NECK: Mahogany, set
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, with dot inlays
SCALE: 24 3/4"
PICKUPS: 1x 496R humbucker (neck), 1x 500T humbucker (bridge)
CONTROLS: 2x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Chrome
FINISH: Cherry [pictured], Ebony, Classic White
CONTACT: Gibson 00800 44427661
WEB: www.gibson.com

Back in 1957, Leo Fender started telling anyone who'd listen that Gibson was stodgy and never had any new ideas. Gibson boss Ted McCarty took that as fighting talk, and promptly built the Flying V.

The sizzle: Don't be fooled by the suncream-sounding new name. The V-Factor X is essentially a 1967 Flying V, with some of that model's more antiquated features ironed out for the new millennium. Critically,



the iconic mahogany body and arrow headstock of yore remain, while the replacing of the original PAFs with 496R (neck) and 500T (bridge) humbuckers suggests this old log has learned some new tricks.

We say: 50 years on, the Flying V has lost none of its power to divide. TG is firmly in the 'classic' camp: we love the gonzo looks, the no-nonsense hardware and the 50s/60s hybrid neck profile. At the same time, it's quite heavy and very cumbersome, isn't easy to play sitting down, and it doesn't fit in some guitar stands.

Luckily, plugging the V-Factor X into a Marshall is enough to make such quibbles evaporate. Under moderate distortion, the neck pickup has monster depth but retains sufficient bite for your

blues solos to slice through the mix. Over at the bridge, you've got a powerhouse sneer that sustains for ages and gobbles up lead work. There's mahogany warmth across the spectrum, perfect weight distribution, and it makes you approximately 54 per cent more attractive to the opposite sex. It's still the daddy.

SUMMARY

For: It's a bona fide legend

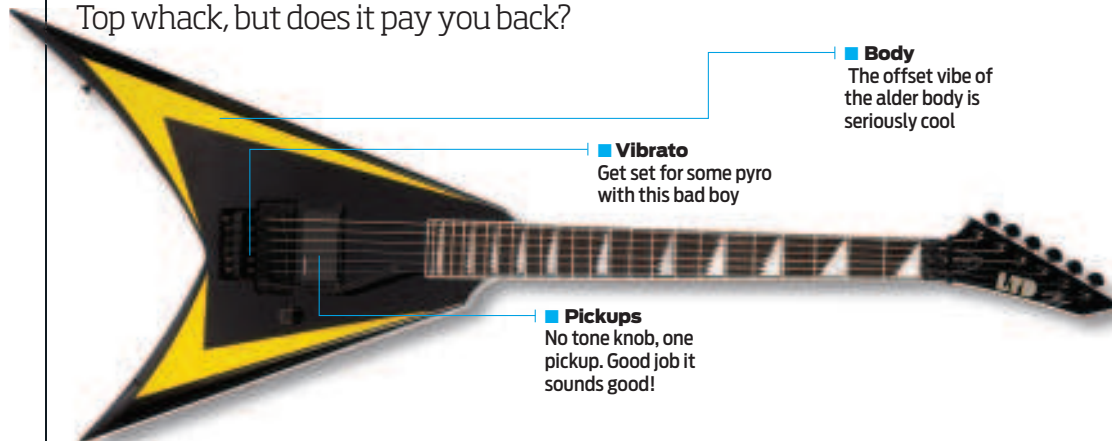
Against: It's kinda impractical

★★★★★

TG says: Flicks the Vs at its rivals

LTD Alexi-600 £1,099

Top whack, but does it pay you back?



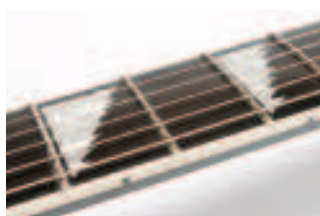
Body
The offset vibe of the alder body is seriously cool

Vibrato
Get set for some pyro with this bad boy

Pickups
No tone knob, one pickup. Good job it sounds good!

Children Of Bodom's Alexi Laiho reckons his ESP signature model "fucking rocks". So it should do for £3,299. If you don't mind settling for the Korean-built LTD equivalent, you'll shave two-thirds off the price.

The sizzle: Laiho admits the offset styling owes a visual debt to Jackson's Randy Rhoads range, but this is more than an expensive copy. We've also got an alder body, a three-piece



maple thru-neck, with a solitary passive EMG humbucker at the bridge and a genuine Floyd Rose. Throw in the saw inlays and all the calling cards of a classic metal axe are in place.

We say: The first thing to strike TG is how much ESP spec has made the transition to the LTD version. We sense that Laiho doesn't want to shaft his younger fans, and it's consolidated by the 600's physical performance. If you've got the chops, this is your playground, with a fast two-octave board that deals in legato, tapping... anything apart from ham-fisted open chords.

You could argue that there should be more sonic options on a £1,099 electric, and the H-4

bridge item is pretty cutting, but we'd counter that this natural tendency towards top-end bite is why the Alexi-600 is so good at relaying the speedy and precise techniques you'd want from it.

This is a formidable guitar, great for technicians but perhaps a bit much for beginners.

SUMMARY

For: Stellar spec, sharp performance

Against: Expensive, overtly metal

★★★★★

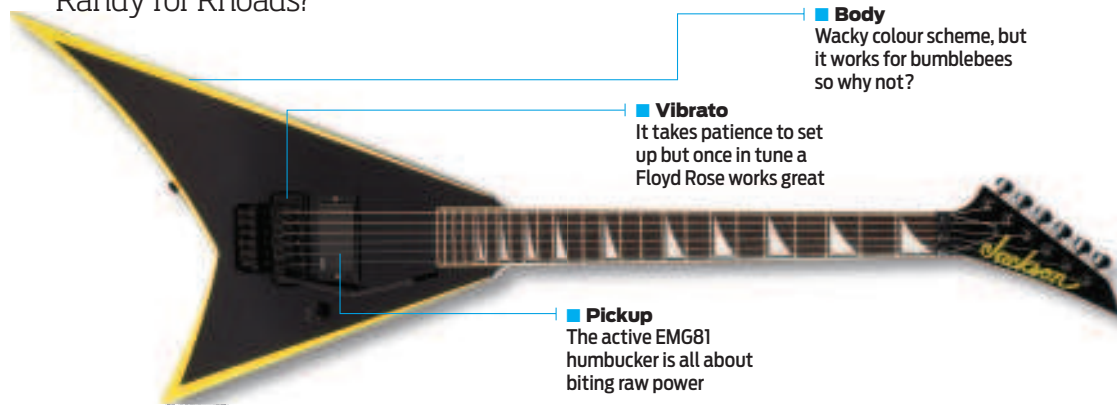
TG says: Showboaters will love it

"THE POWER OF THE VMNT1'S HUMBUCKERS WILL HAVE YOU REACHING FOR YOUR WALLET"

V-SHAPED GUITARS AROUND A GRAND ★ GROUP TEST

Jackson RR24 £899

Randy for Rhoads?



■ **Body**
Wacky colour scheme, but it works for bumblebees so why not?

■ **Vibrato**
It takes patience to set up but once in tune a Floyd Rose works great

■ **Pickup**
The active EMG81 humbucker is all about biting raw power

One of the last things Randy Rhoads did before *that* plane crash was collaborate with Grover Jackson on a radical new 'V'. With eight variants now on Jackson's books, we hope he's getting the royalties up there.

The sizzle: While not strictly a V, the RR24 sneaks into the group by virtue of being arguably the most iconic metal axe ever. Spec'ed somewhere between the US and entry-level models, there's plenty going on beneath



the surface here, from the offset alder body and two-octave maple thru-neck, to the double-locked Floyd Rose trem and active EMG81 humbucker. Don't like the colour scheme? There's a white version available too.

We say: Jacksons are rightly revered for their speed, and the RR24 won't do that reputation any harm thanks to a compound 14 to 16-inch radius board that flattens as you climb the frets. Physically, you'll get far more out of the RR24 when you throw shred techniques at it; this baby excels at neo-classical finger-twisting riffs and tapped solos.

The RR24's configuration of one pickup and no tone control means it ain't exactly adaptable. The EMG81 is a stellar pickup, but it doesn't really do mellow,

and you'll find yourself doodling with the amp dials if you want anything approaching warmth. But stop complaining, hit the gain and start soloing – and you'll realise that you can't beat the 81 for pin-sharp clarity under serious filth. This is a shred guitar. Use it for shredding and you can't go wrong.

SUMMARY

For: Iconic styling and seething tone

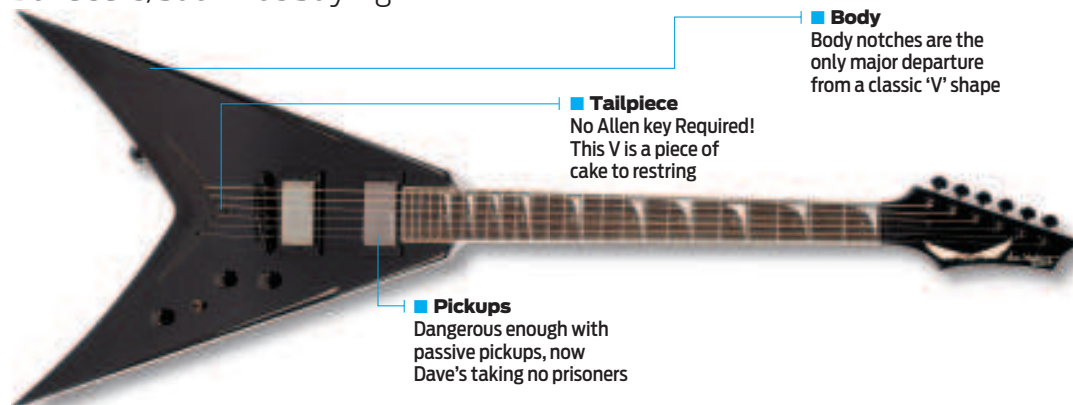
Against: Limited tweaking potential

★★★★★

TG says: Randy would be proud

Dean Dave Mustaine VMNT1 £799

Dave sells, but who's buying?



■ **Body**
Body notches are the only major departure from a classic 'V' shape

■ **Tailpiece**
No Allen key Required! This V is a piece of cake to restring

■ **Pickups**
Dangerous enough with passive pickups, now Dave's taking no prisoners

Dave Mustaine reckons his Vehement series "could be played by someone who doesn't like Megadeth". Don't expect to see James Hetfield in the queue...

The sizzle: At £799, the VMNT1 is less ridiculous than the £3,439 US model but more aspirational than the £269 entry-level axe. The spec is among the meatiest in the group, with lashings of mahogany embellished with twin active LiveWire humbuckers.



We say: TG questions whether the VMNT1 is a wild departure from existing V electrics, with the only visual whimsy coming via the cool notches on the mahogany body. It's hard to

stay mad at this guitar for long though. Featuring the slim neck profile specified by Mustaine himself, this model copes equally well with both sides of the Megadeth man's style, supporting you when you thrash out complex rhythm parts and putting a rocket under your fingers when you solo.

The physical performance is reason enough to take the VMNT1 off the shelf, but it's the raw power of those active humbuckers that will have you

reaching for your wallet. These bad boys crank out some of the darkest and dirtiest sounds we've heard in ages, with the neck turning in a menacing grind that demands powerchords and the bridge coming on like a banshee gargling nails. It's not our favourite – but it's mighty close.

SUMMARY

For: Humbucker tone, adaptability

Against: Design a bit conservative?

★★★★★

TG says: Honourable mention