



LTD  
EC-401FM

Parker  
P-44V

Group Test

## Top-end rock guitars under a grand

Life is too short to play a mediocre guitar. So screw the credit crunch, pop your wallet, and let TG find you an axe to be proud of (don't worry - we're not prepared to go over a grand!)

WORDS **HENRY YATES**





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

Dean  
SplitTail  
Floyd

Schecter  
Hellraiser  
Solo-6

**F**act: the average human blows £1.5million over a lifetime. So don't tell us you can't spare a slice for a world-beating electric guitar. Sure, the entry-level bargains and watertight workhorses will get you a long way, but if you want to deliver on your talent, bring character to your tone and become an icon to millions, investing a few sheets in your weapon of choice is a no-brainer. Let's face it – there's a reason why your heroes don't still play the guitar their dad bought them on their ninth birthday...

Everyone has their own definition of 'top end'. Here's ours. This Group Test is not about guitar porn for investment bankers, limited-edition Les Pauls personally inspected by Jimmy Page or esoteric boutique axes from firms you've never heard of. In TG's book, 'top end' means a guitar that can be picked up and rocked out without us looking around for

anything better. To hold our attention, we'll need quality timbers, stellar pickups, bulletproof hardware, flashes of imagination and the unmistakable whiff of class in our nostrils.

Granted, the four guitars we've picked out are a stretch, but as any financial advisor will tell you, it makes more sense to secure your ultimate guitar now than clutter your home with incremental stopgaps.

### **Awesome foursome**

While British industry withers in the credit crunch, sales of electric guitars have remained buoyant, suggesting that punters would rather starve in a ditch than live without rock 'n' roll, and ensuring that luthiers continue

to build quality models for discerning toneheads. Let's spend our way out of the recession, people!

With a grand burning a hole in our pocket, the doors of the guitar market are wide open, but rather than go down the obvious road, we've allowed our heads to be turned by a quartet of slightly left-field lovelies. First into the line-up was LTD's flagship EC-401FM (£849) and it's closely followed by Dean's budget-scraping SplitTail Floyd (£949). We're hoping that Schecter's Hellraiser Solo-6 (£749) lives up to its name, that Parker's P-44V (£699) lives up to the hype, and that our bank manager forgives us for what we are about to do... ■

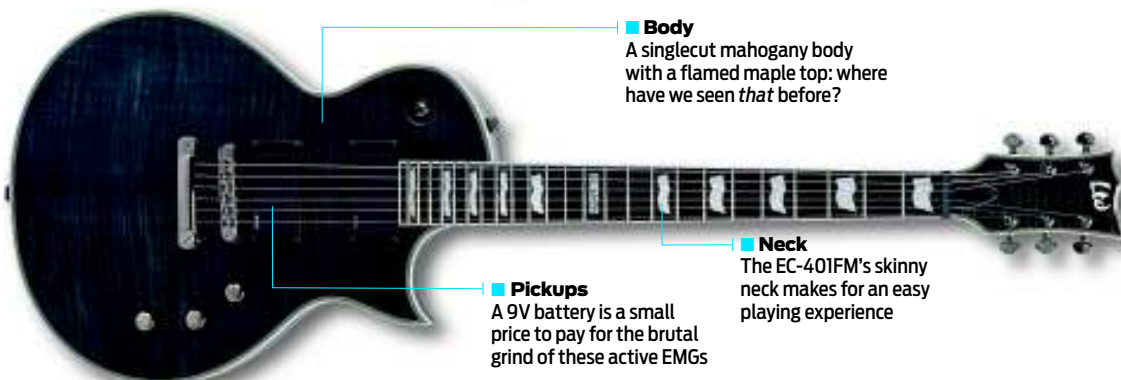
**"IT MAKES SENSE TO SECURE YOUR  
ULTIMATE GUITAR NOW RATHER THAN  
CLUTTER YOUR HOME WITH STOPGAPS"**





## LTD EC-401FM £849

Classic FM



### ■ Body

A singlecut mahogany body with a flamed maple top: where have we seen *that* before?

### ■ Neck

The EC-401FM's skinny neck makes for an easy playing experience

### ■ Pickups

A 9V battery is a small price to pay for the brutal grind of these active EMGs

### At a glance

#### LTD EC-401FM

**BODY:** Solid mahogany with flamed maple top  
**NECK:** Set mahogany neck  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood  
**FRETS:** 24  
**SCALE:** 24¾"  
**PICKUPS:** EMG 60 (neck) and 81 (bridge) active humbuckers  
**CONTROLS:** 2x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector  
**HARDWARE:** Black nickel  
**LEFT-HANDED:** No  
**FINISH:** Black [pictured]  
**CONTACT:** Selectron UK 01795 419460  
**WEB:** www.espguitars.com

**T**he name might be as sexy as damp slippers, but the EC-401FM represents the lofty peak of the LTD range. If James Hetfield were reading this, he'd shout, 'Hell, yeah!' and send his butler out for one immediately.

**The sizzle:** On paper, the only lame thing about the EC-401FM is that we've paid £849 and it still doesn't say 'ESP' on the headstock (despite a spec that mirrors ESP's Eclipse-II range). The 'FM' stands for 'flame



maple' (as in the cap that sits atop the mahogany body) but it could equally mean 'For Metal', with EMG 81 and 60 active humbuckers. All evidence suggests LTD has this model down as a Les Paul-beater,

perhaps for the player who fancies Zakk Wylde's signature Gibson, but doesn't own a goose that lays golden eggs.

**We say:** It wouldn't kill LTD to make its models look more original, but the EC-401FM stands out from other Les Paul wannabes with a significantly lighter mass and a dead-thin neck that gets your fingers firing. But its relatively slim dimensions won't compromise your tone.

Thick and buttery when clean, this guitar is dark, malevolent

and dripping with sustain under distortion, with the neck 'bucker supplying a dense crunch and the razorblade sneer of the bridge meaning you won't miss your precious PAFs for a second. Granted, this model doesn't exactly break new ground, but it's the perfect choice for bursting ears and cracking skulls.

### SUMMARY

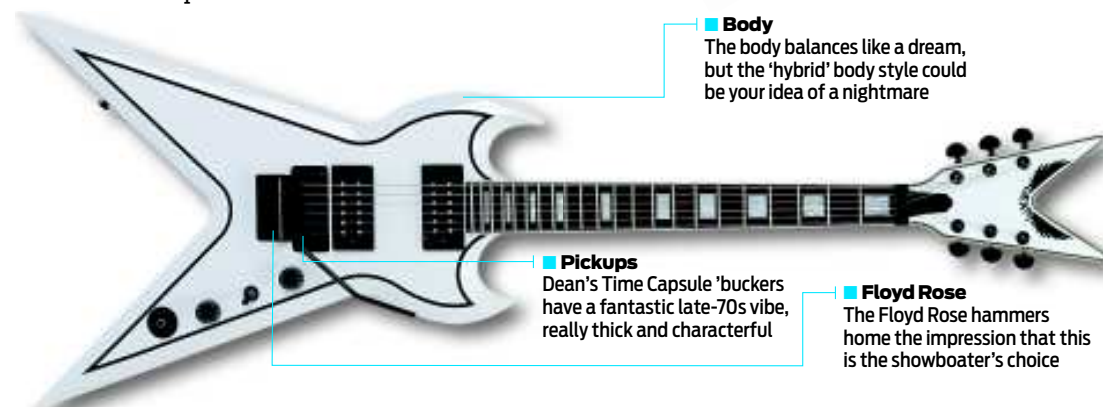
**For:** Savage EMG tone, easy to play  
**Against:** Derivative looks and format

★★★★☆

**TG says:** The Les Paul beater

## Dean SplitTail Floyd £949

Freak or unique?



### ■ Body

The body balances like a dream, but the 'hybrid' body style could be your idea of a nightmare

### ■ Pickups

Dean's Time Capsule 'buckers have a fantastic late-70s vibe, really thick and characterful

### ■ Floyd Rose

The Floyd Rose hammers home the impression that this is the showboater's choice

### At a glance

#### Dean SplitTail Floyd

**BODY:** Solid mahogany  
**NECK:** Mahogany, set  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood  
**FRETS:** 22  
**SCALE:** 24.75"  
**PICKUPS:** 2x Dean DMT USA Time Capsule humbuckers  
**CONTROLS:** Master volume, master tone, 3-way pickup selector  
**HARDWARE:** Black chrome  
**LEFT-HANDED:** No  
**FINISH:** White, Black  
**CONTACT:** Bill Lewington 01268 413366  
**WEB:** www.deanguitars.com

**R**emember when scientists grafted a human ear onto a mouse's back? Dean's SplitTail is the same concept, mashing up a doublecut front end with a V-shaped tailpiece.

**The sizzle:** Dean reckons the SplitTail is unique, but we're not sure, with Zakk Wylde's new Epiphone ZV looking like a brother-from-another-mother on the shelf. We wouldn't say it to Zakk's face, but the SplitTail



Floyd spec is marginally tastier, with the all-mahogany body and set neck bolstered by Dean's DMT USA Time Capsule humbuckers and an original Floyd Rose vibrato.

**We say:** We love the SG. We love the Flying V. Bolt them together, though, and it feels like too many ideas stuck on one guitar. But don't put your wallet away. While the SplitTail is divisive to look at, in terms of finger velocity, this is undoubtedly the slickest performer in the group, balancing better than you'd think and letting you burn across the neck and pull off every Floyd Rose party piece in the book.

The tone ain't too shabby either. Voiced to recreate Dean's

legendary 70s models, those Time Capsule humbuckers drip with ragged character, boxing your ears with beefy lows and mids, and ensuring this guitar isn't just a soulless widdlestick. Close your eyes and you'll be smitten. Open them and this is guitar Marmite.

### SUMMARY

**For:** Speedy feel, characterful tone  
**Against:** Expensive, divisive looks

★★★★☆

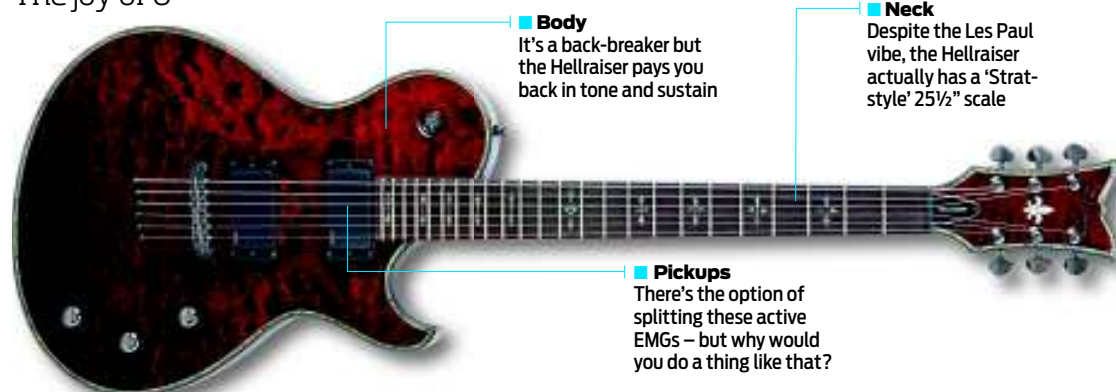
**TG says:** You'll love it or hate it

"ONCE YOU'VE EXPLORED THE P-44V'S PICKUP CONFIGURATION YOU'LL BE PUNCHING IN YOUR PIN"

TOP-END ROCK GUITARS **★ GROUP TEST**

## Schecter Hellraiser Solo-6 £749

The joy of 6



**Body**  
It's a back-breaker but the Hellraiser pays you back in tone and sustain

**Neck**  
Despite the Les Paul vibe, the Hellraiser actually has a 'Strat-style' 25 1/2" scale

**Pickups**  
There's the option of splitting these active EMGs – but why would you do a thing like that?

### At a glance

#### Schecter Hellraiser Solo-6

**BODY:** Solid mahogany  
**NECK:** Mahogany, set  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood  
**FRETS:** 24  
**SCALE:** 25 1/2"  
**PICKUPS:** EMG 81-TW (bridge) and 89 (neck)  
**CONTROLS:** 2x volume, tone, 3-way pickup selector  
**HARDWARE:** Black chrome  
**LEFT-HANDED:** No  
**FINISH:** Black Cherry [pictured], Black, White  
**CONTACT:** Westside  
Distribution 01412 484812  
**WEB:** www.schecterguitars.com

**F**rom humble roots as a spare parts specialist in 70s California, Schecter has blossomed into one of the most credible names on the modern rock scene. Not since Pussy Galore has a name promised as much as the Hellraiser Solo-6.

**The sizzle:** The contours of that time-honoured mahogany body might scream, 'Les Paul derivative!', but there's more to this model, with 24 XJ frets lined up on the 'ultra-access'



mahogany set neck and a 25 1/2-inch scale that will be more familiar to Strat fans. And if you think you've got the number of those active EMGs, you might be surprised to find the volume pots break 'em into singlecoils.

**We say:** In the future, humanoids will look at the Hellraiser and wonder how anyone could play anything so cumbersome. More fool them. The girth of this singlecut is precisely what makes it so cool, with the neck swamping your palm compared to the LTD, the body hanging at your side like a barn door, and the resulting sustain ringing out for days.

Sure, those EMGs mean your riffs drop like cluster bombs, but you'll do far more than chug, with the generous neck

access combining with the longer scale to get you climbing the fingerboard, bending notes and squeezing out idiosyncratic vibrato. As long as you don't split the mighty humbuckers into relatively wimpy singlecoils – which is like putting a muzzle on a pet dinosaur – you'll be in heaven. Or possibly hell.

### SUMMARY

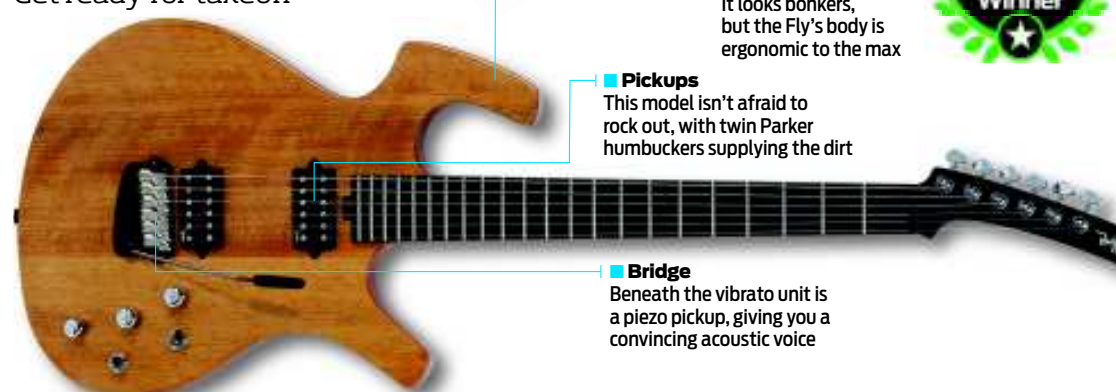
**For:** Beefy dimensions make it soar  
**Against:** It's a bit of a bloater

★★★★★

**TG says:** It's big and clever

## Parker P-44V £699

Get ready for takeoff



**Body**  
It looks bonkers, but the Fly's body is ergonomic to the max

**Pickups**  
This model isn't afraid to rock out, with twin Parker humbuckers supplying the dirt

**Bridge**  
Beneath the vibrato unit is a piezo pickup, giving you a convincing acoustic voice



### At a glance

#### Parker P-44V

**BODY:** Solid mahogany  
**NECK:** Maple, bolt-on  
**FINGERBOARD:** Ebony  
**FRETS:** 22  
**SCALE:** 25 1/2"  
**PICKUPS:** 2x Parker humbuckers (splittable), Fishman piezo  
**CONTROLS:** Mag volume/tone, piezo volume, 2x pickup selectors  
**HARDWARE:** Nickel silver  
**LEFT-HANDED:** No  
**FINISH:** Natural, Red, Black  
**CONTACT:** First Line 01626 830336  
**WEB:** www.parkerguitars.com

**B**y 1997, the electric guitar was at a dead end. Enter Ken Parker, a bushy-bearded maverick whose Fly model fused electric and acoustic in a package that looked like it had fallen off the Starship Enterprise. This is the cheap version.

**The sizzle:** "[This model] has the signature capabilities of the high-end Fly in a beautiful solid mahogany body," notes the Parker website, before



playing the trump card: "The humbuckers deliver twang and shimmer... count on the piezos for a very realistic acoustic sound, then mix them with the magnetics for a hybrid

that introduces a whole new dimension to music."

**We say:** Run your hands along the gorgeous neck and tickle a few licks from the humbuckers, and you'll realise this is a different class. By the time you've explored the mind-boggling versatility of that pickup configuration, you'll be punching in your PIN. Hit the bridge humbucker for ear-melting shred, try the coil splitter for snappy rock solos and select the piezo

pickup for warm acoustic rhythm parts. The crazy mixture of mag' and piezo can't be described on paper. Critically, these disparate sounds are always underpinned by the P-44V's unique flavour, meaning this axe actually has the strongest personality of the bunch. And it's the cheapest!

### SUMMARY

**For:** Mind-blowing versatility, feel  
**Against:** Zilch

★★★★★

**TG says:** Come Fly with me