



Gibson Faded Les Paul Std, Les Paul DC & LP Special

Thin, matt and worn finishes are all the rage and these Faded Gibsons look great value. Let's hope they shine as musical instruments
by Neville Marten

£2,080, £880 & £880

Fender's aged Time Machine series has been the runaway success of recent times. Initial scepticism has all but vanished and, in fact, these instruments have been received so well that several other manufacturers have adopted the idea. Most notable of these is Gibson, with the stunning Tom Murphy aged Les Paul and SG reissues.

While it's hardly staggering that guitars like bona fide aged Strat and Les Paul remakes would succeed – after all, it was these that created the 'vintage' phenomenon in the first place

– the fact that some of the more lowly models within the ranges are also getting the 'aged' treatment is a little more surprising.

Yet there's something very fetching about these Gibsons, two of them very reasonably priced indeed. So let's see if they're as welcoming to play as their lived-in look suggests...

Faded Les Paul Standard

Guitars with little or no finish always seem more organic and immediate. Not only do they look as comfortable as an old shoe, but pick them up and the fingers are treated to a tactile feast: you want to run your hands across every contour and body curve, up and down the neck and into every nook and cranny.

Essentially the Faded Standard is a typical Les Paul. Gibson has used AA grade flamed maple for the heavily dished cap, to add a touch of class to what could have been a rather bland →

GIBSON FADED LES PAUL STANDARD, FADED LES PAUL DC, FADED LP SPECIAL £2,080, £880 & £880

ELECTRICS  CD TRACKS 2 & 3



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GIBSON FADED LP STANDARD

PRICE: £2,080 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Carved-top, single-cut solidbody

BODY: Mahogany with AA maple cap

NECK: Mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75-inch)

NUT/WIDTH: Plastic/43mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with trapezoid inlays

FRETS: 22, medium

HARDWARE: Nickel-plated stud tailpiece and tune-o-matic bridge, Kluson-style vintage tuners with green 'tulip' buttons

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm

ELECTRICS: Two open-topped 'zebra' BurstBucker Pros, two volumes, two tones and three-way toggle switch pickup selector

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4/8.5

RANGE OPTIONS: There are dozens of Les Pauls in the Gibson line, but here are a few important ones: The LP Studio (£1,100) is unbound and features 490R and 490T alnico pickups; the LP Classic (£1,600) uses high-gain ceramic pickups for a more modern edge; the LP Standard (£2,200) is the full cellulose lacquered version of the Faded Standard; the LP Supreme (£3,000) is the luxury Les Paul, with split parallelogram inlays, brass truss rod cover and special peghead inlay; while heavy pearl inlays, multiple binding and gold parts epitomise the LP Custom (£3,000)

LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Heritage cherry sunburst, honey burst, cherry sunburst

Rosetti
01376 550033
www.gibson.com

FADED LP STANDARD	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
■ WE LIKED Great tones; cool appearance	
■ WE DISLIKED RRP looks expensive; attention to fret detail could be better	

The Standard is packed with great, versatile tones that really breathe

→ looking guitar – remember, the carving won't reflect back at you as with the gloss finished variety. It's stained by hand to produce a pretty random sunburst effect, instead of the often rather regimented line created by a spray gun's pattern. Some here did say it looked rather messy though. Neck, back and sides are treated to worn-looking cherry stain and then the whole thing is sealed with a very thin coat of matt finish. The guitar's mahogany body is actually made in two halves, joined down the centre, to save on material costs.

Naturally, the finish sinks into the timber's porous grain but again, because of the non-reflective coating, this really doesn't matter – in fact it only adds to the charm of the whole thing. Of course, the body is top-bound in cream plastic which also wends its way up the side of the Indian rosewood fingerboard that bristles with 22 medium oval frets and Gibson's classic trapezoid position marker inlays.

Fret finishing could be better. Some of the frets have just been dressed but not re-crowned afterwards, so some are flatter than others. We'd like more attention to detail in this most important area.

Gibson reckons these pickups – the new BurstBucker Pros – are the best sounding Standard humbuckers ever. On the Faded Standard they come in the attractive 'zebra' style with no covers. Hardware is just as you would



Open-topped 'zebra' coiled BurstBuckers look and sound the part on the Standard

expect, with nickel tailpiece and tune-o-matic bridge, plus a set of Kluson-style 'tulip' button tuners.

The guitar comes in a choice of either 1959 or 1960 neck style. The former is a more 'clubby' affair, while the latter (as fitted to our review guitar) is shallower, which gives it that wider, thinner feel. With the action set low, but with enough air under the strings to create the desired purchase for string bends and vibrato, the Faded LP feels good. Its matt finish is drag free, so you forget it and get on with the business of playing.

SOUNDS: Even unplugged you know it's a Les Paul. There's that indefinable honk that seems restrained but which you know will turn into a raging torrent of tone when amped up. And sure enough, it does.

Whether it's the pickups, the all but non-existent finish or both; the Standard's sound is both hot and 'open'. The bridge 'bucker has an edgy yet solid sound that works well either clean or overdriven. It's articulate and

evokes the vintage bluesy tones we know and love, but happily kicks out snarling or even quite restrained modern voices too. Neck position is clear and bell-like, but crank up the gain and the tone thickens, giving that perfect 'flutey' tone. Place the three-way toggle switch in the middle and you're suddenly faced with two sets of tone and volume pots. The initial 'clanky' two-pickup sound – which is suitable for more or less anything aside from metal – can be either tamed or exaggerated, depending on where you set the controls. There's a real feeling that the light finish is adding considerably to the guitar's articulation. The Standard is packed with great, versatile tones that really breathe. If you like the sound of even the average Les Paul – you'll love this.

Faded Les Paul Special DC

Back in the fifties Gibson led the way with its Junior and Special styles of guitar. These were stripped down versions of the classic models and the Les Paul, in both single and double-



FADED LES PAUL DC	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

- **WE LIKED** Fantastic looker; 'Junior' vibe; cool sounds
- **WE DISLIKED** Can be noisy at volume

cutaway forms, was often the basis for these more keenly priced ranges.

The double-cut Les Paul was the link between the original slab-bodied single-cutaway version and what eventually became the SG. It featured two asymmetrical cutaways, a drastic but ultimately complementary scratchplate, simple plastic-buttoned tuners, dotted rosewood fingerboard and either one (Junior) or two (Special) P-90 pickups. But while Gibson used less attractive cuts of mahogany for these 'beginner' guitars, its quality was still high and this marked them out as instruments that even pros could play.

Even cheaper models came and went, under the Melody Maker guise, and the Faded Les Paul DC we have is a perfect melding of the two, with a slightly thinner body than on early Specials. Again it's made from two pieces of mahogany, this time the join dissecting the two pairs of control knobs. Pickups are P-90 single-coils, with twin volume and tone rotaries, a three-way selector mounted within the control cluster and the scratchplate – a hefty lump of single-ply black plastic. Bridge and tailpiece are the usual Gibson fare, while tuners are cream-buttoned mini Kluson-alikes.

One of the great things about the slab-bodied double-cut is a neck that joins the body at its very last fret. This leaves the full complement of 22 frets at the player's disposal, and on this guitar the unbound expanse of mahogany and rosewood is a breeze to play on. The DC is so light in weight that you can forget it's there and simply concentrate on the playing. A few more

minutes on the bench would have had those frets and fingerboard edge a tad smoother though.

SOUNDS: Once again the thin finish helps to add life to the Faded DC's tones. P-90 pickups are wonderfully earthy power plants and, although usually huge and fat, in this setting with less mass around them they take on a brighter and more dynamic edge. Wiry, gritty and rude are apt descriptions of the sounds on offer, and through a little valve Fender amp we reckon this would make the meanest slide guitar around. And with street prices nearer the £500 mark, who could resist?

Faded Les Paul Special SC

Very much in the vein of the original single-cut Specials and Juniors, this new model combines the simple construction (no carved maple cap) of those instruments with the more sophisticated humbucking pickups associated with big bro. Once again the ethic is simplicity, the thin-skin finish

and mild cherry stain covering a two-piece mahogany body with one-piece, glued-in mahogany neck. The fingerboard is the same dotted rosewood affair found on the DC, but this time the neck-to-body join comes at the 16th fret.

Pickups are the tried and trusted 490R and 498T humbuckers that Gibson has used in a host of its models for many years. These are chrome covered, with cream surrounds and cream toggle plate and knob. The overall vibe is very cool, the stripped-down look working well within the single-cut format.

These three guitars all have fairly similar neck dimensions but that doesn't mean they feel or play the same. Different neck joints and body thicknesses add considerably to an instrument's playing personality, and this one feels the best all round. While it has the same neck join as its maple-capped brother, the thinner body means top-end excursions are that much easier. It also feels more substantial and balanced in the hands

GIBSON FADED LES PAUL DC

PRICE: £880 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75-inch)
NUT/WIDTH: Plastic/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with pearloid dots
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: Chrome-plated stud tailpiece and tune-o-matic bridge, Kluson-style tuners with cream mini buttons
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Two Gibson P-90 pickups, two volumes, two tones, three-way toggle switch pickup selector
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.1/6.75
RANGE OPTIONS: As above
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Worn cherry, worn yellow, satin ebony

The DC is so light in weight that you can forget it's there and simply concentrate on the playing



The DC's cutaways and neck joint allow for complete access

The rivals

ESP LTD Truckster	£1,129
Fender Highway 1 Tele	£599
Gordon-Smith Gypsy 1	£532

James Hetfield's ESP Truckster model has a cool worn grey primer finish. LP-inspired, it features EMG active pickups and Sperzel locking tuners. Fender's thin-finish Highway 1 Tele is a raucous sounding six-string and boasts a great neck. Gordon-Smith's famous Gypsy 1 model is a twin-cutaway (with single-cut option), single humbucker guitar (P-90 available at extra cost) with matt finish body and neck and high gloss front



GIBSON FADED LP SPECIAL

PRICE: £880 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Slab-bodied, single-cutaway solid
BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75-inch)
NUT/WIDTH: Plastic/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with pearloid dots
FRETS: 21, medium
HARDWARE: Chrome-plated stud tailpiece and tune-o-matic bridge, Kluson-style vintage tuners with green 'tulip' buttons
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Gibson 490R humbucker at neck, 498T at bridge, two volumes, two tones, three-way toggle switch pickup selector
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.25/7
RANGE OPTIONS: As above
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Worn cherry, worn brown



The single-cut Special comes with humbuckers for added versatility

Hitting that sonic spot directly between Les Paul and SG, the Special is an expressive and great value guitar

→ and on a strap than the double-cut version does.

SOUNDS: As with playability, body mass and construction affect a guitar's tone significantly. So different combinations of timbers and electrics can conspire to give very different sounds – think of an SG compared to a Les Paul Standard. And where this style of guitar would usually come with P-90s and offer typically grinding blues tones, kitted out with these units the Special is a much more sophisticated and potentially more versatile beast.

Actually it's not a million miles away from an SG. The bridge humbucker has a tight edge to it that is really articulate: less narrowly focused than the maple-capped version and yet ready to spit out meaty riffs and lucid leads at a moment's notice. The alnico magnets of the neck position's 490R pickup give a sweet but defined sound, great either clean or overdriven – the perfect half-way house between Strange Brew and Still Got The Blues. The less powerful but extremely usable

middle position sings out all those more surprising tones – where Gretsch meets Guild, with twangier voices than we expect from Gibson. Rhythm, riffs and more countrified soloing are well served by this position, the four controls providing almost infinite possibilities within the humbucking ballpark.

Verdict

If you look through our ad pages, you'll see a massive difference between the quoted store prices and the 'guide' retail prices supplied by Gibson's distributor for this review. While that makes our value for money evaluation difficult, it's great news for the customer and, in Gibson terms, you're getting an awful lot of classic-brand guitar for your money.

From a distance the Faded Standard could be a genuine original, with its dull finish and medium flamed top. But don't expect perfection up close. The top's staining is pretty random and obviously the thin finish has sunk well into the grain. We don't mind this, as

FADED LP SPECIAL SC	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<p>■ WE LIKED Simple but sexy look; vintage vibe; playability; sound</p> <p>■ WE DISLIKED Sharp fingerboard edges</p>	

it's a deliberate attempt to get in on an 'antiquing' craze that's affecting everything from jeans to guitar straps. And anything that gets six-strings in a few more hands is fine by us.

The Faded DC is the coolest looking of the three. Its slim body, light weight and all-access neck make for a guitar that you can chuck around to your heart's content. Those P-90 pickups are mean and dirty and we reckon this could be the perfect slide guitar – and a real Gibbo for a potential £500 can't be ignored.

If you want something that's more versatile and would cover most of the bases occupied by the Standard and DC, then look no further than the Faded Les Paul Special, our surprise all-round favourite of the Faded trio. Hitting that sonic spot directly between Les Paul and SG, the Special is an expressive and great value guitar.

If you like the minimalist idea behind these instruments, evoking as they do the vibe of Gibson's 'Junior' models from the fifties and sixties, then do check them out. It's a shame that a little more time could not have been spent on the fret and fingerboard finishing of some of the examples we've seen, but of course that can be remedied (albeit at extra cost) after purchase. Frankly, with these current street prices, who cares?

Gibson Faded Les Paul Standard

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Gibson Faded Les Paul Special DC

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Gibson Faded Les Paul Special SC

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★