

Tribute To A Master





What appeared to be a return to vintage in 1994 when the McCarty Model first arrived, today seems like just another PRS. So, what's changed 21 years on?

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PRS McCARTY £3,079

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What You Need To Know

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What American metal band does McCarty play for then?

Tut, tut. Theodore 'Ted' McCarty was Gibson's president during the company's 'golden era' (1950 to 1966) and was befriended by Paul Reed Smith in the mid-80s as a mentor and consultant.

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It looks like a Custom, doesn't it?

It's the same outline, yes, with all the PRS hallmarks – bird inlays, natural body edge, and so on – but back in the day, it introduced numerous features to PRS guitars, such as a thicker body, covered humbuckers and the three-way toggle and pull/push coil-splits from the tone control.

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Why would we be interested?

Well, the new McCarty is one of a select few 'core' models – including the P254 – that uses the new 58/15 covered humbuckers: the latest and best-yet 'date' series pickups.

Turn the clock back to the early 90s and Paul Reed Smith – who had started his production factory in 1985 – frankly, was looking for clues. While his 24-fret guitars, such as the Custom, had certainly grabbed the attention of serious guitar players, not all of them were taken by its sound. So Smith re-designed his soon-to-be-calling card with a shorter 22-fret neck, introduced the intonated wrapover Stoptail bridge and re-evaluated the key ingredients of his build. The first fruits of this 'new' PRS were the ultra high-end limited Dragon I in '92, followed by the regular production Custom 22 in '93, hinting at a more 'vintage' or classic-sounding and feeling PRS.

The McCarty Model, however, took the redesign further when it arrived the following year. And with it, the players who appreciated the classic Gibsons of yesteryear and had maybe found the Custom 24 a little too different seemed to have found *their* PRS. It was little surprise that the McCarty's design had substantial input from Texas-based guitarist David Grissom, who'd been an early adoptee of PRS, and whom, after playing the 24-fret guitars for some time, had his own ideas for a slightly more vintage-y recipe.

In truth, the McCarty signalled a gateway to the past that Paul Reed Smith would hungrily absorb over the following years. But it also got right up the nose of a certain guitar company based in Nashville: it was the most 'Gibson-like' PRS to date and, of course, took its name from the mentoring of that ex-Gibson president.

Today, things are very different. PRS Guitars is 30 years old and makes plenty of highly vintage-informed guitars: David Grissom finally got his own McCarty-based PRS signature, the DGT; the SC245 is aimed at 'burst lovers'; and a string of new 'date' pickup designs, from the 57/08s to the current 58/15s featured here, all aim to capture a classic PAF-alike flavour. Even the best-selling Custom got a classic makeover this year with the uncovered 85/15 humbuckers producing what we believe is the most classic-sounding Custom to date. So, then, what's the deal with this new 'revamped' McCarty?

While we compare an early McCarty with this new version elsewhere in this feature, the majority of the original McCarty's features have been absorbed into many of PRS's other designs. At the time, its slightly thicker body was new to PRS. Today, only



Paul Reed Smith's tone quest has been continuous... The pickup voice is so much more alive than PRS's older guitars: Smith's tinkering is not without purpose

the Custom has the thinner original-depth body – the other 'core' double-cuts are 'McCarty thickness' (in current PRS terminology, known as 'fat backs'). Not quite originally, the McCarty added a coil-splitting pull/push switch to the tone control that, in combination with the three-way toggle switch – as opposed to the five-way rotary pickup selector of the early Customs – gave a more classic 'drive' to the PRS guitar. This setup, used on numerous subsequent models, became known as the 'McCarty electronics'.

What was once a unique model for PRS, today seems a little homogenised: there really is nothing new here that we haven't seen before. Its closest predecessor is virtually the last McCarty model, the Ted McCarty DC 245, which shares its bound fingerboard but featured a 622mm (24.5-inch) scale and pre-factory 'Santana' headstock shape. Our new McCarty has both the regular PRS 635mm (25-inch) scale and headstock.

Of the 22-fret double-cut guitars in the current 'core' range – the McCarty, Custom 22, Paul's Guitar, P22, 408, 513 and the DGT – all are thick body (52.2mm), except the Custom 22 (49mm). With the

THE RIVALS



FAME FORUM IV SD £709

This Polish-made PRS-alike is, imitation aside, a nicely built electric that also features Seymour Duncan humbuckers and a piezo acoustic circuit. www.dv247.com



PRS SE CUSTOM 22 SEMI-HOLLOW £759

Available also as a solidbody, this new 22-fret Custom is made in Korea and is a great entry-point to the lofty USA-made 'core' PRS guitars. A lot of guitar for the money. www.prsguitars.com



CAPARISON ANGELUS M3B £1,875

A new, progressive range of Japanese-made rock-aimed axes includes this offset double-cut with maple/mahogany construction and dual Caparison humbuckers. www.caparisonguitars.com



PRS DGT £2,825

David Grissom's own signature guitar is based on the McCarty but with vibrato, signature pickups and additional volume control. It's still one of our favourite PRS guitars. www.prsguitars.com



Ted who?

"I found out about Ted in the patent office," says Paul Reed Smith. "His patents were the ones that had made it to market. I thought, 'Who's Theodore McCarty?' Then I realised he's the one who did the Gibson thing."

"Paul called me on the phone," remembered Ted in 1998 (he passed away in 2001). "He wanted me to come to Annapolis [in Maryland]; he wanted to discuss [guitar making] for a consultancy fee. Why he chose me, I don't know. But I said, no, I couldn't come so Paul said he'd come [to me]. He came down to Kalamazoo. We spent the whole day discussing his problems at the plant."

"So we hired him as a consultant," says Paul, "and he downloaded the hard disk. I spent a week with him, in Maui, just picking his brain. He told me how PAFs were wound, not by hand but by machine. In their research, they tried every kind of magnet; they tried everything. When they made the Les Paul they tried every combination of everything and they found that a mahogany back with a maple top, mahogany neck and Brazilian rosewood fingerboard sounded the best – that's why they did that."

"It was to verify what they did back at Gibson with what we were doing at PRS," remembers Paul today. "Back then I was only guessing but now I had proof. How did you glue the tops on? How did you glue the fingerboard on? How did you glue the frets in? I was guessing, but all of a sudden I knew because Ted told me. We finally figured out what Seth Lover did. He put the hum-cancelling coil in there and put it in a mu-metal can – which is what you do with transformers – that's what a cover is. People have been doing that forever. He did what electrical engineers do and the sound of the humbucking pickup was invented that day."

Not all of Ted's advice was utilised by PRS, though. "He said we should put the frets in with fish glue. I tried that. It smelled awful – I wanted nothing to do with it, it smelled like fish. So we didn't end up doing that," laughs Paul.

1. Paul Reed Smith shows Ted McCarty his eponymous model in the PRS factory in the early 90s

2. The original McCarty Model introduced the three-way toggle pickup selector to PRS guitars. Players considered it a faster drive than the five-way rotary switch of the original PRSes

3. The McCarty wasn't the first guitar to use the PRS-designed Stoptail bridge but this pre-intonated wrapover bridge is essential to the vibe

4. On the modern McCarty, the pickups are the latest 'date' series 58/15s. The same pickups, uncovered and called 85/15s, are used on this year's 30th Anniversary Custom

5. The fingerboard here is bound and features PRS's hallmark bird inlays. It's a shame the original's moon inlays aren't an option

6. While the original used classic Gibson-style speed knobs, today's PRSes have the proprietary design 'lampshade' knobs. The tone control has a pull switch to engage the partial coil-splits



exception of the 641mm (25.25-inch) scale 513, all the others use PRS's standard scale length. Which leaves the new McCarty as the only 22-fret double-cut guitar to feature the new 58/15 covered humbuckers, and the only one that has a bound fingerboard. It's also the only one of these 22-fret models to use the non-adjustable Stoptail bridge – the only other is the P22, but that comes with the piezo-loaded adjustable Stoptail, with a vibrato option.

Of course, the way PRS blends its ingredients is second to none, honed over 30 years and with numerous improvements, such as the hybrid V12 ultra thin finish, the 'pattern' profile neck with its slightly V'd lower position shape, the perfect fretwork (with slightly larger than standard wire) and setup, the proprietary pickup rings and lampshade knobs, even the special blend composite nut, low-mass open



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McCarty Timeline

Since 1994, the McCarty has appeared in numerous guises. Here are the main production versions:

- **McCarty Model** 1994-2007, 2010
- **McCarty Standard** 1994-2006
- **McCarty Soapbar** 1998-2008
- **McCarty Soapbar Standard** 2000-2006
- **McCarty Brazilian** 2003
- **McCarty Korina** 2008-2009
- **McCarty II** 2008-2009, 2011
- **Smokeburst McCarty** 2009-2010
- **Ted McCarty DC 245** 2010
- **25th Anniversary Narrowfield** 2010
- **McCarty 58 Model** 2011-2012
- **McCarty** 2015

NB: The various Archtop and Hollowbody guitars were originally prefixed with 'McCarty', which was also on the truss rod covers until 2006. To match the double-cut version, the Singlecut Ted McCarty SC 245 appeared in 2010.

back Phase III tuners and that beautifully machined aluminium Stoptail with its unplated brass posts. There's tweak after tweak to maximise the ring, resonance and musicality. Even the weight is just the right side of 3.6kg (8lbs). It might not be that unique to PRS, but it's great guitar-making.

Sounds

Paul Reed Smith's tone quest has been continuous and the humbucker has certainly seen plenty of his attention in recent years. We first encountered a set of prototype 58/15s at the end of last year and, after listening to various 57/08s, 59/09 and 53/10s, we had to conclude that there's a balance, clarity and musicality to these pickups that certainly enhances the clear, ringing acoustic sound of the modern PRS guitar. The uncovered 58/15s, the 85/15s, used on the 30th Anniversary Custom 24 were equally impressive, giving a more nuanced tone, with numerous classic references to the 30-year-old design.

This new McCarty, much like the original model, is a very grown-up guitar. If you think the unplugged ring is impressive, then just wait until you plug in. Unlike the pre-configured pickup selections of the Custom, you have an open canvas here. With the partial coil-splits selected there's beautiful resonance and a balanced tonality that moves through very Fender-y chime and jangle to (with a little gain boost) P90-like 'throat'. There's a clearly defined neck pickup voice that's jazzy, bluesy but never too thick with a harmonic bloom when you dig in that sounds almost like an internal reverb. It's so much more alive than PRS's



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older guitars: Smith's tinkering is not without purpose.

Switching to full-coil mode we're greeted with a classic rock grunt from the bridge pickup, soup-y solo blues from the neck, but without that midrange-heavy voice that perhaps polarised some of the earlier PRS sound. This sounds clear but not over-bright, mellow but not dark. There's a definite nod to earlier Les Paul voices, but it's the coil-splits that again wave at Fender, mixing up some very classic benchmarks into something that retains its own voice.

As ever, both the tone and volume controls add tonal shade – if that's how you



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7. On the original's 22-fret wide fat neck, the neck heel was extended compared to the heels used on the 24-fretters. It's all part of the guitar's shorter, stiffer neck design.

8. The serial numbers on the 'core' USA guitars are always hand-written with the year, 15 for 2015, appearing first. The '10' indicates our review guitar's maple 10-top grade

9. Although the original McCarty introduced non-locking Kluson-style 'vintage' tuners, the modern design uses the open-backed, lightweight Phase III locking tuners (designed by PRS and made by Gotoh), exclusive to PRS



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The McCarty is about a lot more than LP-style rock. There's an organic, musical voice that just allows you to play

like to play – illustrating that the McCarty is about a lot more than LP-style rock. Switch to the coil-splits, pull the volume back, then apply your boost and it's like you have a completely different guitar in your hands. However you use it, there's an organic, musical voice that just allows you to play.

Verdict

There's a vintage-like delicacy to this guitar that's very endearing. PRS isn't about the hot chilli sauce or garlic mayonnaise – it's about much more subtle, sophisticated

flavours. And very rarely, as a musical instrument, does a PRS disappoint. But, as good as this is, we wonder whether what was once a milestone instrument for an emerging brand is now just a subtle, vintage-y shade of the all-conquering Custom. The thing is, if you like the style, appreciate PRS's hard-earned reputation for consummate quality and your musical tastes lie in classic rock and what came before it, then this is simply a no-brainer for the serious player. The McCarty has just gotten better – and then some. **G**



PRS McCARTY

PRICE: £3,079 (inc. case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Double-cutaway, carved-top solidbody electric

BODY: Mahogany with flame maple carved top

NECK: 1-piece mahogany, pattern profile, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25")

NUT/WIDTH: Friction reducing/43.7mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound rosewood, bird inlays, 254mm (10") radius

FRETS: 22, medium

HARDWARE: PRS Stop-Tail, PRS Phase III locking tuners (w/ brass posts) – nickel plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm

ELECTRICS: PRS 58/15 Treble and Bass covered humbuckers, 3-way selector switch, master volume, tone control (w/ pull/push coil-split switch)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.52/7.74

OPTIONS: 10-top figured maple, as reviewed, adds £549. Artist pack version (£4,620) adds Artist-grade flame maple top, select mahogany back, Artist-grade Gaboon ebony fretboard & headstock veneer w/ green abalone signature, green ripple outline/green abalone center Artist bird inlays, Artist case

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Vintage Sunburst (as reviewed) from choice of 18 colours

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www.prguitars.com



9/10

PROS Superb, build, feel and sound. This McCarty is up there with the very best money can buy

CONS £3,000 is a lot of cash; there's unfortunately no moon inlay option