



Vintage VS6MRP

Höfner  
Galaxie

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## Total Guitar LESSON

### USE A CAPO

A capo raises the pitch of your guitar by clamping the strings at a certain fret. This changes the key you're playing in and can also change the timbre of your instrument

### Group Test

# Budget Classic Rockers

This month, TG casts aside the modelling, MIDI and USB capabilities of modern axes and takes you back to the golden age of rock 'n' roll with four retro workhorses that will make for a bright future

WORDS HENRY YATES

Aria PE-90

Spear  
NSG-Relic

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## Total Guitar TRICK

### TWEAK YOUR EQ

"I let the bass player do his job by filling up the low end, so I only keep my bass EQ at around 4 or 5 out of 10. Mid range gives your tone clarity and character, so I keep that around 7.5. And it's the same with the treble... It sets your tone on top of things, rather than letting it get lost in the mix"

ROB ARNOLD,  
CHIMAIRA

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## Total Guitar TIP

### LABEL YOUR CABLES

Mark your cables with coloured tape so that you can identify them. Cables are easily 'lost' when you pack up after a gig, especially if you're playing with other bands, so treat them with love



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

**W**elcome to the new decade. In this bold new dawn, nothing much has changed: there are still no androids, cars don't fly, tourbus toilets can't cope with solids – and most of us still want to be Jimmy Page, Angus Young or Keith Richards. This Group Test is for the old-schoolers. No USB ports, MIDI interfaces or modelling technology here: just four electrics inspired by the golden age of rock 'n' roll. Vintage looks. Traditional feel. Olde-worlde hardware. Retro sounds.

But there's a twist. While a casual scan of the line-up suggests you're perusing Lot #305 at Sotheby's, closer inspection reveals these 'museum pieces' to be modern, giggable, keenly priced workhorses that

belong on the road, and not in a display case at your local Hard Rock Cafe.

Truth is, these guitars aren't beyond anyone. Most expensive is the still-affordable Aria PE-90 (£389), while Höfner's £259 demands for the new Galaxie suggest the Germans have miscalculated the exchange rate. At £279, Vintage's VS6MRP puts an AC/DC vibe within reach of real schoolboys, while the 'faux-abused' Spear NSG-Relic (£329) won't leave anyone distressed. ■

**"THIS IS FOR THE OLD-SCHOOLERS: VINTAGE LOOKS, RETRO SOUNDS"**





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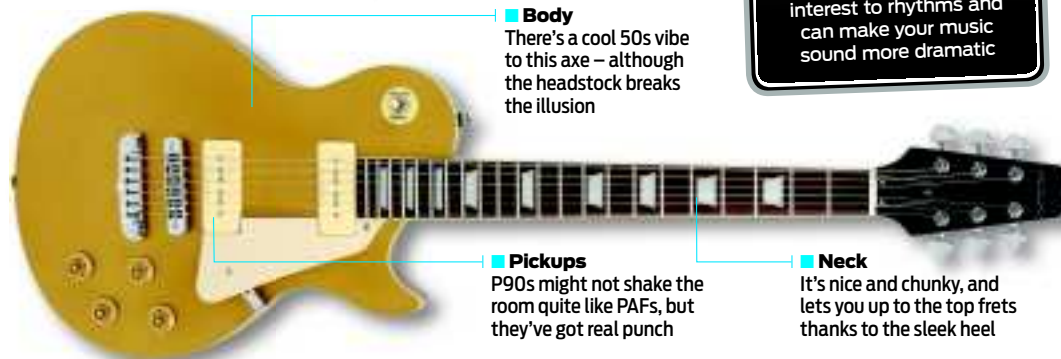
## Total Guitar LESSON

### HAVE A REST!

Rests are periods of time in music where you don't play anything and you should keep your guitar quiet. They help to add interest to rhythms and can make your music sound more dramatic

## Aria PE-90 £389

Golden axe



### ■ Body

There's a cool 50s vibe to this axe – although the headstock breaks the illusion

### ■ Pickups

P90s might not shake the room quite like PAFs, but they've got real punch

### ■ Neck

It's nice and chunky, and lets you up to the top frets thanks to the sleek heel

## At a glance

### Aria PE-90

**BODY:** Solid mahogany  
**NECK:** Mahogany, set  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood with block inlays  
**FRETS:** 22  
**SCALE:** 24¾-inches  
**PICKUPS:** 2x Duncan-Designed P-90-1 singlecoils  
**CONTROLS:** 2x volume, 2x tone, 3-way pickup selector  
**HARDWARE:** Chrome  
**FINISH:** Gold [pictured]  
**LEFT-HANDED:** No  
**CONTACT:** Aria UK 01483 238720  
**WEB:** www.ariauk.com

For most working musicians, the only Goldtop within budget is a pint of milk. If that's you, the Aria PE-90 demands investigation, sticking to the 50s vibe with a singlecut mahogany body, tune-o-matic-style bridge and double-dose of rock's most underrated pickup, the P90.

Les Paul performance hinges on body bulk, and while the PE-90 is slimmer than you'd hope, it feels physically convincing thanks to a chubby neck, a



comfortable fingerboard and a svelte heel that lets you right up to the teeny frets. As for tone, things start off slow on the clean channel – where there's bags of warmth but not enough bite

– but improve rapidly once you hit the gain, with stinging sustain at the bridge and a buttery, bluesy voice over at the neck. It's not as seismic as a humbucker singlecut, and the absence of a maple top costs the overall tone a little sweetness, but for £389, this is impressive.

**Conclusion:** Throw a stick in a guitar shop and you'll hit an entry-level Les Paul derivative. It's the toughest bracket in which to make an impression, yet Aria

has managed it with a guitar that delivers bulletproof performance for a watertight price. No, it's not perfect (we'd have liked a little more clean clarity at the bridge pickup) and it may not be for life. But until the first royalty cheque rolls in, this is your golden ticket to the world of rock.

## SUMMARY

**For:** Meaty distorted tone, feel, price

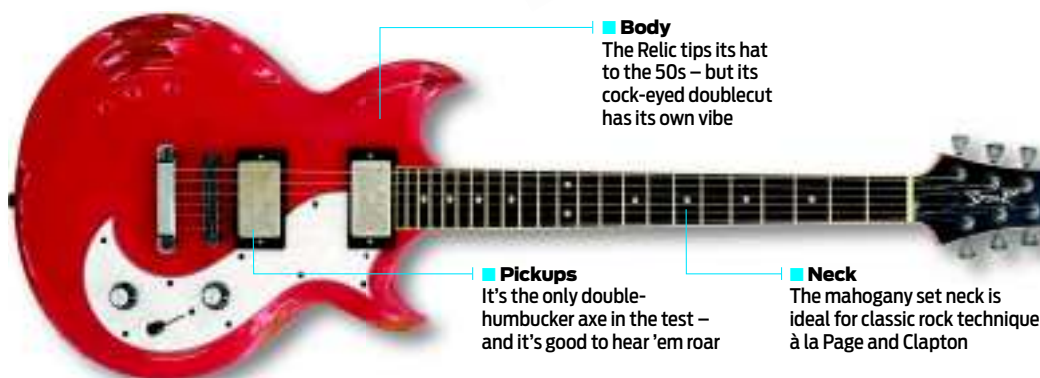
**Against:** Clean voice a bit woolly

★★★★☆

**TG says:** Aria has the Midas touch

## Spear NSG-Relic £329

Chip off the old block



### ■ Body

The Relic tips its hat to the 50s – but its cock-eyed doublecut has its own vibe

### ■ Pickups

It's the only double-humbucker axe in the test – and it's good to hear 'em roar

### ■ Neck

The mahogany set neck is ideal for classic rock technique à la Page and Clapton

## At a glance

### Spear NSG-Relic

**BODY:** Solid mahogany  
**NECK:** Mahogany, set  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood, with dot inlays  
**FRETS:** 22  
**SCALE:** 24¾-inches  
**PICKUPS:** 2x Spear Vintage humbuckers  
**CONTROLS:** 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector  
**HARDWARE:** Rust-effect die-cast  
**FINISH:** Red [pictured], Black, White  
**LEFT-HANDED:** No  
**CONTACT:** Black i Distribution 01236 861261  
**WEB:** www.spear-guitars.co.uk

Thanks to our modern lifestyles, nobody has time to organically chip a guitar over the course of six world tours any more. Enter Spear Guitars with the new NSG-Relic: a battle-scarred, designer-scuffed warhorse that they've kicked about so you don't have to. The spec's been around the block too (twin 'buckers, mahogany body, set neck), making this a guitar that rock nostalgists should love.

To paraphrase Howlin' Wolf, the NSG-Relic is built



for comfort, baby, it ain't built for speed. Lug this hefty brute from its stand and the weight is reassuring; seize the neck and the profile is the anti-Jackson; tickle the fretboard and you'll find yourself pulling

out expressive (rather than flashy) techniques like lazy bends and vibrato. OK, the weight distribution means it has a slight tendency to pull south, but you'll get used to the vibe. Besides, that bulk is a big factor in what is arguably the test's most characterful tone, with the mahogany fusing with quality 'buckers to deliver a dark, soulful roar that sustains for yonks.

**Conclusion:** Spear impressed with its higher-end Tomcat models; the Relic proves it can

get down and dirty too. It almost ran away with the test thanks to its soulful tone, beefy handling and road-worn looks, and when the only criticism is a subjective quibble over how it hangs on a strap, you know you're doing well for £329. There's no shortage of rivals, but the Relic has its own vibe and deserves a test-drive.

## SUMMARY

**For:** Beefy beast with tone to match

**Against:** Pulls down a little

★★★★☆

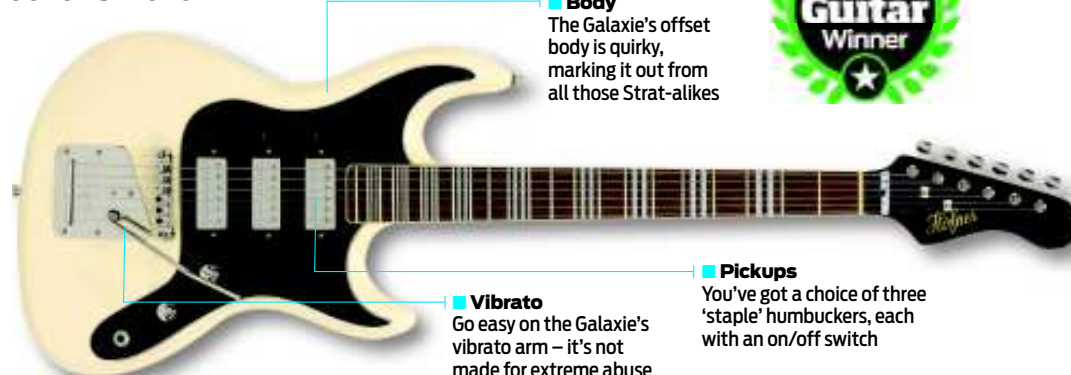
**TG says:** A Relic, not an antique

"THE GALAXIE'S UNFINISHED NECK IS A GREAT SURFACE FOR PRETTY MUCH ANY TECHNIQUE"

## ★ GROUP TEST

# Höfner Galaxie £259

Out of this world?



■ **Body**  
The Galaxie's offset body is quirky, marking it out from all those Strat-alikes

■ **Vibrato**  
Go easy on the Galaxie's vibrato arm – it's not made for extreme abuse

■ **Pickups**  
You've got a choice of three 'staple' humbuckers, each with an on/off switch

## At a glance

### Höfner Galaxie

**BODY:** Solid basswood  
**NECK:** Maple, bolt-on  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood with 'stripe' inlays  
**FRETS:** 22  
**SCALE:** 25½"  
**PICKUPS:** 3x Höfner 'staple' humbuckers  
**CONTROLS:** 3x pickup on/off switches, volume, tone  
**HARDWARE:** Nickel  
**FINISH:** Cream [pictured], Red  
**LEFT-HANDED:** No  
**CONTACT:** Barnes and Mullins 01691 652449  
**WEB:** www.hofner.com

Genius is never appreciated in its own time. Thus, while most rockers looked at the Galaxie in the 60s and thought "too many switches", Höfner's CT Series reissue is just what the retro-obsessed market is crying out for. With three humbuckers, umpteen dials and an art-school quirkiness, this is the axe equivalent of Franz Ferdinand. Should you take it out?

Stupid name, but we love everything else. The offset body



is fresh enough to catch your eye, but close enough to a standard doublecut to offer true comfort and access. The unfinished neck is a great surface for pretty much any technique, and the inlays

give a sense of retro whimsy you don't expect for under £300.

That extends to the pickup configuration, switching system and vibrato. It's hard to imagine a post-millennial luthier designing 'em, but a certain type of player will be charmed by the scope of warmth and twang, and left misty-eyed by the Shadows-style wobbles that roll off the bar.

**Conclusion:** We're not saying the Galaxie is the same kind of 'five star' product as a 60s

Gibson. We're just pointing out that it offers an impressive level of performance that bears no relation to the horror axes budget-conscious players had to contend with in the past. Just as important, it looks cool and carries an iconic name. Call us shallow, but that stuff matters.

## SUMMARY

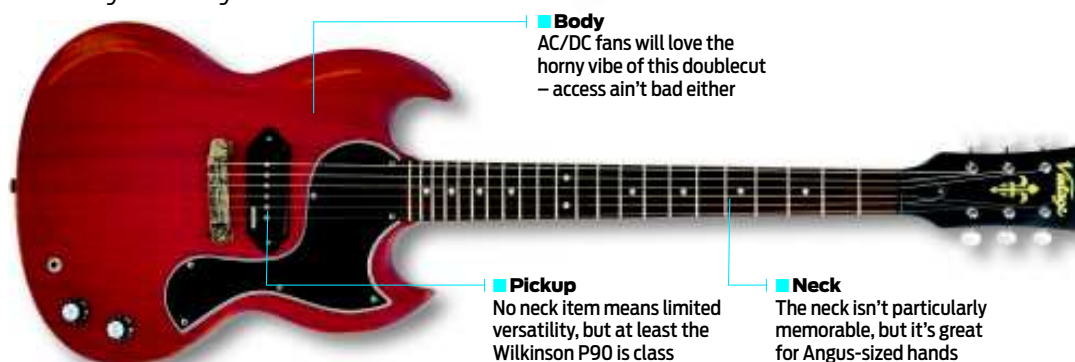
**For:** Quirky, versatile, amazing value  
**Against:** We can't knock it at £259

★★★★★

**TG says:** It rocks the planet

# Vintage VS6MRP £279

Schoolboy fantasy?



■ **Body**  
AC/DC fans will love the horny vibe of this doublecut – access ain't bad either

■ **Pickup**  
No neck item means limited versatility, but at least the Wilkinson P90 is class

■ **Neck**  
The neck isn't particularly memorable, but it's great for Angus-sized hands

## At a glance

### Vintage VS6MRP

**BODY:** Solid mahogany  
**NECK:** Mahogany, set  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood with dot inlays  
**FRETS:** 22  
**SCALE:** 24¾-inches  
**PICKUPS:** 1x Wilkinson P-90  
**CONTROLS:** 1x volume, 1x tone  
**HARDWARE:** Distressed nickel  
**FINISH:** Distressed Cherry Red [pictured]  
**LEFT-HANDED:** No  
**CONTACT:** John Hornby Skewes 0113 286 5381  
**WEB:** www.jhs.co.uk

Finding an adult-size school uniform is hard enough, but the real ballbreaker for AC/DC fans is trying to pin down a budget substitute for Angus' SG. At £279, it's hard to believe the VS6MRP can compete... but then it was built by entry-level hero Vintage, with hardware and bridge pickup courtesy of in-house expert Trevor Wilkinson. Let's see if it shoots to thrill.

You can kinda see how Vintage keeps these models so cheap. The body is totally simple



(just a faux-battered mahogany slab), the set neck is somewhat generic, and the absence of a neck pickup may frustrate rhythm players who want the beef of Malcolm to go with the bite of Angus. Horses for courses,

but we'll take one great pickup over two lame ones, and we think the bridge item qualifies. It's got the spit and sawdust tone of a 'textbook' P90, and even though turning the tone control full treble doesn't quite deliver the razor's edge we'd like, it's a decent all-round voice that you can tailor with a good amp.

**Conclusion:** Vintage knows how to make a great budget axe, so we're not surprised how far the VS6MRP stretches our £279. Yeah, so the sonic limitations

of this stripped electric may frustrate developing players who are hunting for an original sound. But live for the moment, people. If you're just starting out, this is a great choice for first rehearsals and gigs, and perfect for nailing lead technique (played while you duck-walk across the stage, of course). This rocks. We salute it.

## SUMMARY

**For:** Brilliant value, punchy tone  
**Against:** Lack of versatility

★★★★☆

**TG says:** Pop the cherry