

Fender '65
Mustang

Danelectro
'63

Group Test

Retro rockers under £700

Danelectro is hoping its retro-style '63 reissue guitar has a bright future. It'll have to get through our tough Group Test first, and we're pitting it against three other old-school style axes...

WORDS **ED MITCHELL**



Airline Twin
Tone

Gretsch
Electromatic
Corvette



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

Retro sells. Just look at the motor industry. Some of the coolest cars you'll see on the road these days are based on old designs. Volkswagen finally listened to consumers and launched its update of the iconic Beetle 10 years ago; BMW did the same with the Mini Cooper back in 2001; and Fiat have jumped on the nostalgic bandwagon this year with its cute little 500 model, a car that last caught the public's imagination in the Swinging 60s.

We're all suckers for this retro vibe. It's in the cars we drive, the clothes we wear (Ben Sherman and Fred Perry being prime examples of old-school chic), it's even in our household appliances – we'd love one of those big curvy SMEG fridges!

Don't think for a second that guitars are immune from all this looking back to the future. The guitar industry has been playing the

nostalgia card for years. Think about it: the best Fender and Gibson designs are 60 years old, give or take a year. Even the so-called modern rock and metal guitars – the Ibanez JEM and Dean ML, for instance – have been around since the 70s and 80s. It's the six-string equivalent of *Groundhog Day*. Only without Bill Murray and the little hairy rat with big teeth.

The time travellers

We unashamedly love retro guitars here at TG Towers. When we heard that Danelectro had reissued one of its 60s classics – the '63 model – we couldn't wait to get our hands on it. And to really give it a run for its money we decided to pit it against

three of the best current retro-style rockers. The Dano '63 retails at £199 (we'll soon reveal whether that's a bargain or not), so we gave it a tough contest by putting it up against some pricier competition on the market: the Airline Twin Tone retailing at £360; the Gretsch Corvette at £499; and the popular Fender '65 Mustang, which prices up at £699.

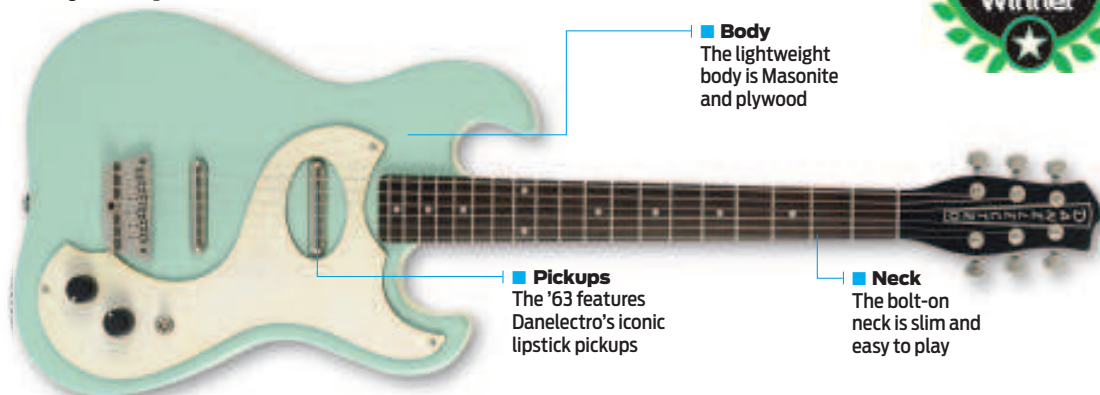
What do you mean that's not fair? In each case, to even things up, we shopped around and found all of these guitars selling much less than their retail prices. In the end we enjoyed playing them all but only one guitar could take first prize. Turn the page to find out which axe made us do the time warp...

"WE'RE ALL SUCKERS FOR A RETRO VIBE. THE GUITAR INDUSTRY'S BEEN PLAYING THE NOSTALGIA CARD FOR YEARS"



Danelectro '63 £199

Put your lipsticks on



Body
The lightweight body is Masonite and plywood

Pickups
The '63 features Danelectro's iconic lipstick pickups

Neck
The bolt-on neck is slim and easy to play



At a glance

Danelectro '63

BODY: Masonite/plywood
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 19
SCALE: 25"
PICKUPS: 2x 'lipstick' singlecoils
CONTROLS: Volume, tone and three-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Satin chrome
FINISH: Aqua, black, burgundy, gold, keen green, peach, red burst and tangerine
CONTACT: John Hornby Skewes 01132 865381
WEB: www.jhs.co.uk

Danelectro guitars have been played by Beatle George Harrison, Jimmy Page, Eric Clapton, Elvis Presley, Bruce Springsteen, punk pioneer Link Wray, dinky Dave Navarro and the brilliant Rick Miller of Southern Culture On The Skids. Not bad for a guitar that was designed as an entry-level model for kids!

The sizzle: The '63 model is based on a Silvertone guitar that came with an inbuilt amp in its case. This reissue features



the 'coke bottle' headstock and classic lipstick singlecoil pickups. There's even a baritone at £249.

We say: Take it as read that this guitar plays as brilliantly as the other models in the Dano range.

It has the slim neck and low action that we've come to expect and love. And thanks to the unique Danelectro construction method this guitar is lightweight and perfectly balanced.

The coolest thing about this guitar is its tone. 200 quid guitars don't usually sound this good. Think of the '63 as a fat-sounding Strat: the bridge pickup has loads of bite but never sounds harsh; and the neck unit adds warmth but there's still plenty of clarity. Combine both pickups and you get this

fat beefy tone that's perfect for blues leads and fuzzed-out solos.

Like Jimmy, Eric and Elvis, we're sold on the Dano vibe. Some of the most expensive guitars in the world pass through the TG office. Not many of them can match the fun we had with the '63. You can't get a better recommendation than that.

SUMMARY

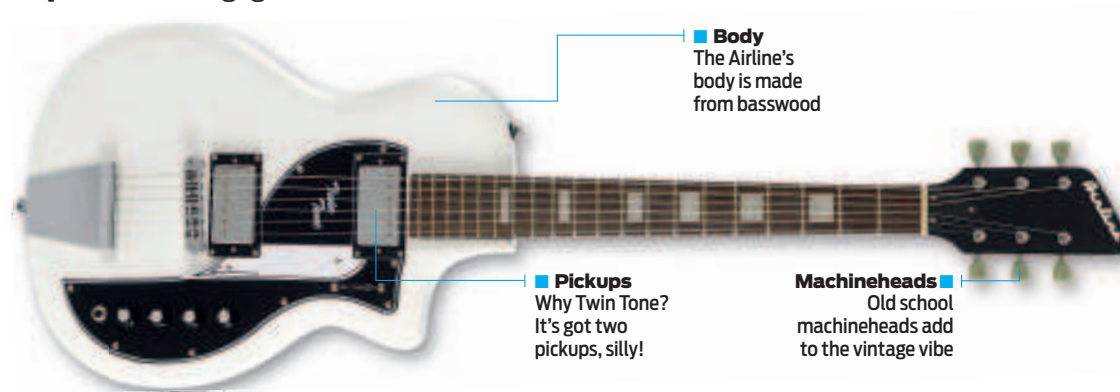
For: Looks, tone, playability, price
Against: You must be joking!

★★★★★

TG says: It's Dan-tastic!

Airline Twin Tone £360

Supro, smashing, great



Body
The Airline's body is made from basswood

Pickups
Why Twin Tone? It's got two pickups, silly!

Machineheads
Old school machineheads add to the vintage vibe

At a glance

Airline Twin Tone

BODY: Basswood
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 20
SCALE: 24.75"
PICKUPS: 2x humbuckers
CONTROLS: 2x volume, 2x tone and 3-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Chrome
FINISH: White, black, sunburst, metallic red, metallic blue
CONTACT: Michael@myrareguitars.com
WEB: www.eastwoodguitars.com

We've reviewed a lot of Eastwood-made guitars. We fell in love with the Airline Tuxedo, Coronado, Town and Country Deluxe, H44 and the GP. And you'll find its electric mandolin on p.145. The Airline Twin Tone is another corker.

The sizzle: This is based on the classic 50s Supro Dual Tone model played by guitarists like Jimmy Page and Link Wray – yep, they didn't just play Danelectros.



You can see Joe Perry playing his Supro Dual Tone in the video for Aerosmith hankfest *I Don't Want To Miss A Thing*. Our budget Airline offers all that rock star vibe on a busker's budget.

We say: The Airline Twin Tone feels like a vintage guitar. It doesn't quite have the easy playability of most modern guitars but, to be honest, that only adds to its old-school vibe. You might not agree.

Tonally, this guitar packs a real punch thanks to its beefy sounding humbuckers. The bridge unit in particular pushed our amp into a thick overdrive that we couldn't get enough of. That tonal power makes the Twin Tone a cool alternative to

the Epiphone Les Paul or any of its many derivatives.

We can't wait to get our hands on the latest Eastwood/Airline reissue. If you're not experienced with old-school guitars you might take a bit more convincing, but you may just fall in love like we have. Pass the tissues...

SUMMARY

For: Looks, rocking tone
Against: Not quite as playable

★★★★☆

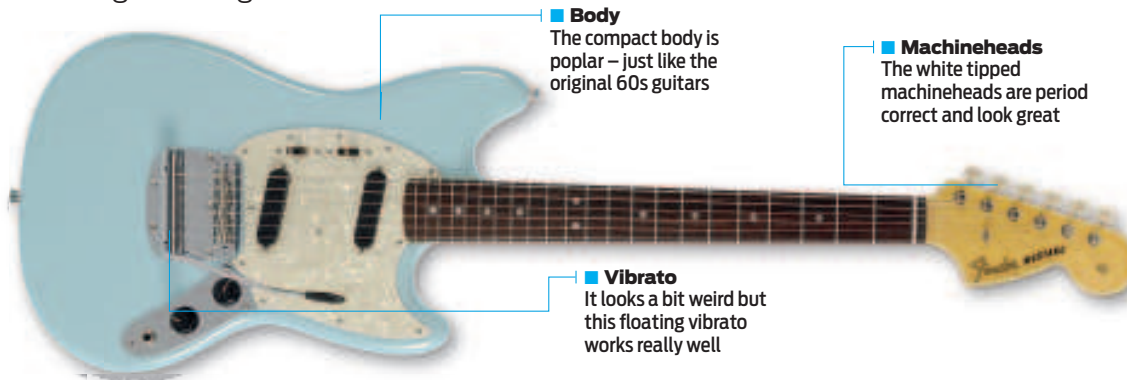
TG says: Any complimentary nuts?

"OF ALL THE GUITARS TG'S SEEN,
NOT MANY MATCH THE FUN WE
HAD WITH THE DANELECTRO '63"

RETRO ROCKERS UNDER £700 **★ GROUP TEST**

Fender '65 Mustang £699

The original budget Fender



■ Body

The compact body is poplar – just like the original 60s guitars

■ Machineheads

The white tipped machineheads are period correct and look great

■ Vibrato

It looks a bit weird but this floating vibrato works really well

At a glance

Fender '65 Mustang

BODY: Poplar

NECK: Maple, bolt-on

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with dot inlays

FRETS: 22 vintage

SCALE: 24"

PICKUPS: 2x Mustang singlecoils

CONTROLS: Volume, tone, on/off slider and in/out phase switch for each pickup

HARDWARE: Dynamic vibrato, Gotoh machineheads

FINISH: Olympic white, Dakota red and Daphne blue

The Fender Mustang was originally launched in August 1964, but its first full year of production was 1965 – hence the reissue's name. The Mustang was an entry-level student guitar that went on to be popular with famous folk like Kurt Cobain, Blixa Bargeld of Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds, John Frusciante and Graham Coxon of Blur.

The sizzle: The Mustang here on test is part of Fender's Classic Series. It features the poplar



body of the original guitar as well as other period-correct details like the white-buttoned machineheads, '65 headstock logo and floating Dynamic vibrato. Look around and you'll pick one up for £499.

We say: If you've never played a Mustang, you're in for a treat. The compact body and shorter scale neck make the guitar a dream to play. The strange-looking floating vibrato is very smooth and, as long as you've given your strings a good stretch, it won't knock the guitar's tuning out.

Plugged in this guitar offers a range of bright tones selected via slider controls. If you're expecting to emulate Kurt Cobain's raucous tone you may be disappointed with the Mustang's mild-mannered singlecoils. Kurt

preferred a humbucker in the bridge position (like on his Jag-Stang). The Mustang is more 60s garage punk.

Few axes combine vintage tone, stunning looks and easy playability as well as this. Ultimately, the Dano '63 shared the same virtues as the Mustang, but for a lot less money.

SUMMARY

For: Beautiful looks, vintage tones

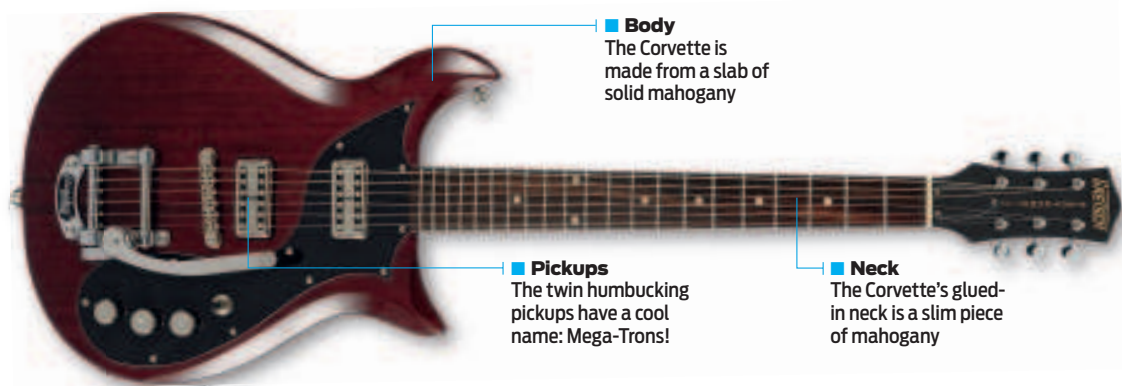
Against: Wee bit pricey

★★★★★

TG says: Smells like... a classic

Gretsch Electromatic Corvette £499

No quiff required



■ Body

The Corvette is made from a slab of solid mahogany

■ Pickups

The twin humbucking pickups have a cool name: Mega-Trons!

■ Neck

The Corvette's glued-in neck is a slim piece of mahogany

At a glance

Gretsch Electromatic Corvette

BODY: Solid mahogany

NECK: Mahogany, set-neck

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood

FRETS: 22

SCALE: 24.6"

PICKUPS: 2x Mega-Tron humbuckers

CONTROLS: 2x volume, master tone and three-way pickup selector

HARDWARE: Licensed Bigsby vibrato

FINISH: Burgundy only

CONTACT: Fender GBI

01342 331700

WEB: www.fender.co.uk

Gretsch Guitars will always be best known for its big fat semi-acoustic guitars like the 6120 and the White Falcon played by legends like Eddie Cochran and Brian Setzer. The company also produced a range of solidbody guitars with names like the Princess, Bikini, Astro-Jet and the Corvette.

The sizzle: Our Corvette comes courtesy of the Electromatic range instigated to bring some



big bucks retro cool to folk on a budget. Considering its price, the spec is high with a solid mahogany body, glued-in neck, good quality Mega-Tron pickups and a licensed Bigsby vibrato.

We say: If everyone you know is playing an SG, the Corvette offers a similar spec with a touch of individuality. Tuning can wander a bit thanks to the glued-in neck, but that unobtrusive neck joint does provide superb access to the upper frets.

Plugged in clean the Corvette jangles like any good 60s axe should. It also loves light overdrive and old-school fuzz, but it did squeal a bit when we pushed the distortion too high. We can't imagine many

shredders picking this guitar up anyway, so that's fine.

You get a lot of 60s vibe for the money here. And with prices as low as £429 online, it's even more desirable. If you're looking for a class axe with a style all of its own you should take a look at the Electromatic Corvette.

SUMMARY

For: Stylish looks, vintage tones

Against: Tuning stability

★★★★★

TG says: Gretsch: not just rockabilly