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Words Ed Mitchell / Photography Neil Godwin

SG-STYLE ELECTRICS UNDER £900

For those about to rock, we salute the latest descendant of the classic Gibson SG and three challengers for its throne...



Things you probably know about the Gibson SG Standard. Angus Young of AC/DC loves them. So does Black Sabbath's Tony Iommi, Robbie Krieger of The Doors, and Modfather Paul Weller. If you're up on your Gibson history, you'll be aware that the SG was the replacement for the original poor-selling single-cutaway Les Pauls. The SG was named the 'Les Paul' on its launch in 1961. It was rechristened the SG [aka 'Solid Guitar'] in 1963.

What you might not know is that the SG Standard is the biggest-selling Gibson solidbody

of all time. Players discovered that something magical happens when you whack two humbuckers into a lightweight mahogany body. It didn't take long for other manufacturers to pick up on it too. That's why the latest Gibson SG, the 2019 Tribute wasn't born into a vacuum. Tough contenders like the Yamaha Revstar RS620, LTD Viper-400M and Guild S-100 Polara take some of their design cues [mahogany construction, 629mm [24.75"] scale length, great upper fret access] from the SG. They also intend to divert your attention from the guitar that made their existence possible in the first place. Let's see how they get on...





GIBSON 2019 SG STANDARD TRIBUTE

£899

The devil's in the detail...

This is basically your classic SG then?

Well, it throws that timeless shadow, right down to the double pointed body horns of Beelzebub. The sculpted mahogany body, 'bat-wing' scratchplate and nickel hardware are all iconic appointments. The only real surprise on the spec sheet is the substitution of maple over the more traditional mahogany for the neck timber.

Some SGs have super-thin necks...

You're referring to the "60s slim taper" profile that Gibson spec on



many modern SGs. The Tribute has a slightly meatier 'rounded' shape that's reminiscent of mid-60s SGs. Don't get the idea that it's hard to handle. This neck hits that sweet spot between pleasantly plump and thin.

Is the fingerboard made of something weird?

It's a fact that Gibson has been quite experimental with its tone wood choices in recent years. You can put that down to environmental concerns or cold, hard economics. In this case, nothing has been baked or sautéed to make it look like rosewood. The Tribute comes spec'd with a generous slice of the real deal.

YAMAHA REVSTAR RS620

£772

Another 'killer' from Yamaha?

The first time I've seen a mahogany SG-style with a flame top...

Okay, it's a fair cop. The RS620 has a thin maple top with a sweet-looking flame veneer. The fact that the body is predominantly mahogany qualifies it for inclusion in this round-up. So there. By the way, the RS620 pays tribute to the 70s Super Flighter models, the so-called 'Les Paul killers' Yamaha despatched to snag the punters when Gibson was struggling with quality control.

This one looks pretty high spec from here...

Yeah, someone really put the hours in on the drawing board with



the RS620. Quality touches include a satin top offset by the rest of the guitar's gloss finish. That juxtaposition alone makes this guitar look more expensive than it is. We also like the satin finish hardware and the additional tonal variation offered by the push/pull Dry Switch.

What's that all about then?

The Dry Switch circuitry sucks the bass out of the humbuckers to give a single-coil like tone. Unlike traditional coil-splitting, Yamaha's approach doesn't result in excessive volume drops or annoying background hum when you engage the circuit.



AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Double cutaway mahogany body and 629mm [24.75"] scale 'rounded' profile set maple neck, 305mm [12"] radius rosewood fingerboard, 22 medium-jumbo frets, Gibson 490T humbucker [bridge], Gibson 490R humbucker [neck], 2x volume, 2x tone, three-way pickup selector toggle switch, Vintage Deluxe tuners, soft shell case.

FINISH: Vintage Cherry Satin [as reviewed], Natural Walnut

CONTACT: gibson.com



AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Double cutaway mahogany body, flame maple laminate top, 629mm [24.75"] scale three-piece mahogany C profile set neck, 350mm [13.7"], 22 jumbo frets, Yamaha VH5b+ humbucker [bridge], Yamaha VH5n+ humbucker [neck], master volume, master tone with push/pull Dry Switch, brushed satin finish combined bridge/tailpiece and diecast tuners, padded gigbag

FINISH: Snake Eye Green [as reviewed], Burnt Charcoal, Brick Burst

CONTACT: yamaha.com

LTD VIPER-400M

£699

All bite. No hiss

The force of the SG is strong in this one...

Yeah, just like the ESP/LTD Eclipse gear pays, ahem, tribute to the Gibson Les Paul, the Viper has its wicked way with the aesthetics of the SG. This is not a copy, however. The offset body is much deeper than the lightweight SG, closer to a Les Paul, in fact. It also has an incredibly thin neck.

This is a shredder's guitar, then?

If you happen to thrive on the rapid-fire heavy stuff, the 24 extra jumbo frets, 350mm [13.7"] radius Pau Ferro, not to mention the



ultra-slim neck profile, will put a big fat grin on your Satan-worshipping chops.

What's the deal with the pickups?

You get American-made Seymour Duncan SH-4 JB and SH-1 '59 humbuckers; aka the most iconic pup partnership since Disney's *The Lady & The Tramp*. Rest assured, these Seymours have way more tonal variation than your usual overwound meat-grinding metal pickups. This Viper is a rock/metal/shred beast that - gasp! - actually sounds good through a clean channel.

GUILD S-100 POLARA

£629

Superunknown? Not for long...

What's with the Soundgarden reference?

An original white 70s S-100 is actually 'superunknown' as the constant companion of Soundgarden guitarist Kim Thayil. That should give you some idea of what the Polara is capable of in terms of tone and output. In fact, the twin HB-1 'buckers fitted to our reboot are higher output than Kim's 70s era pickups.

Do you get a rosewood 'board?

Well, it all depends when your S-100 left the factory. At some point Guild switched to a Pau Ferro 'board just like you'll find on our LTD



Viper and Mexican-built Fender stuff. You should find plenty of examples of both rosewood and Pau Ferro spec'd S-100s for sale out there...

What's the difference?

As Pau Ferro is harder than rosewood you can expect a slightly brighter tone and a shinier surface. The difference will likely be pretty subtle. In other timber-related news, you might well be interested to know that the 3.2kg [7lb] S-100 is only two ounces heavier than the Gibson and almost .9kg [2lbs] lighter than the Yamaha and LTD.



AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Satin finish double cutaway mahogany body and three-piece 629mm [24.75"] scale mahogany 'Thin U' profile set neck, 350mm [13.7"] radius Pau Ferro fingerboard with 'Racing Flag' inlays, 24 extra jumbo frets, Seymour Duncan SH-4 JB humbucker [bridge], Seymour Duncan SH-1 '59 humbucker [neck] master volume, master tone, three-way pickup selector toggle switch **FINISH:** Natural Satin **CONTACT:** espguitars.com



AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Gloss polyurethane finish double cutaway mahogany body and 629mm [24.75"] scale 'Soft U' profile mahogany set neck, 305mm [12"] radius Pau Ferro fingerboard with 'Pearloid Block' inlays, 22 narrow jumbo frets, 2 x Guild HB-1 humbuckers, 2 x volume, 2 x tone, three-way pickup selector toggle switch, nickel tune-o-matic bridge and compensated stop tailpiece **FINISH:** White [reviewed], Black, Cherry Red **CONTACT:** guildguitars.com

HEAD TO HEAD

Four SG-style beauties with classic rock credentials

In terms of playability, the Gibson, Yamaha and Guild guitars have a similar feel. Only the LTD bucks the trend with its ultra-skinny effort. Upper fret access on all four contenders is great thanks to the deep cutaways. Big frets equal easy string-bending. The flattish fingerboards help too from the Gibson-approved 305mm [12"] radius on the, er, Gibson and Guild to the even flatter 'Super Strat' feel of the LTD and Yamaha.

Plugging in, you can hear why the mahogany/humbucker partnership has been so enduring. All four guitars have an agreeable level of jangle when run clean. That's especially prevalent in the bridge Seymour Duncan JB on the Viper. That pickup - usually nicknamed 'the Jeff Beck' - has bags of midrange punch. Think of it as a great all-round classic rock pup that sparkles clean yet likes to scream when you pile on the filth.

Speaking of the heavy stuff, we love the grunt of the Guild's humbuckers. If you like

IF YOU LIKE YOUR DIRT FAT AND THICK YOU'LL LOVE THE GRUNT OF THE GUILD'S HUMBUCKERS

your dirt fat, thick and intense - like Soundgarden for instance - you'll get off on these things.

The SG feels alive in your hands before you even plug it in. It pumps out an impressive level of sustain. It's also brighter than we expected. That could be down to the stiff maple neck but whatever the reason for it, we like it. As with the other guitars on review here, the SG's neck pickup comes over warm and jazzy but it's the bridge pup that takes you on a sonic journey from mid-60s George Harrison to 70s Angus.

Given that three of these guitars have all-mahogany bodies and full-blown humbuckers, it's left to the Yamaha RS620 to offer some different voices. For a start, the maple top adds a frisson of treble to the mix. Kick in the 'dry switch' and there's your authentic single-coil tones. That extended tonal palette might just be enough to push it ahead of the competition for you.



Shining star: Yamaha's Revstar's finish makes it look more expensive than it is



Kim Thayil of Soundgarden used a white Guild S-100 when the band reunited

FINAL VERDICT

Which SG-style electric will tick your box?

It's a long way to the shops if you wanna rock'n'roll on a double-cut, mahogany body, humbucker-loaded guitar. That's why we picked four of the best examples for you to shortlist before you set off.

The LTD Viper-400M stands out from the crowd as the shredder's dream. We reckon that's where most examples will find their forever homes. Of course, if you happen to love a super-satin top offset by the rest of the guitar's gloss finish slim neck but don't

sweep-pick or tap, the pickup choices give the Viper appeal beyond your classic ESP/LTD customer base. We also have to salute this guitar's exceptional build and finish quality.

The Yamaha RS620 and Guild S-100 are the pretty boys. We love the former's satin and gloss finish combination and the latter's beautiful white finish. The S-100 awards itself a gold star on its scratchplate. We'll add another one for the great sounding pickups but we would've liked an easier action.

Likewise, the RS620 scores big for its tonal palette but some sharp fret ends marred the playing experience a bit.

So what of the Gibson? Well, it's everything we expect from a great SG. The 2019 Tribute is the perfect little rock guitar with a timeless quality. Lightweight on a strap yet tonally anything but, it conjures up classic sounds from the 60s and beyond. It also comes with a padded case and more than half a century of history and influence.

GIBSON 2019 SG STANDARD TRIBUTE



SUMMARY	FEATURES	★	★	★	★	★	★
	SOUND QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★	★
	VALUE FOR MONEY	★	★	★	★	★	★
	BUILD QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★	★
	PLAYABILITY	★	★	★	★	★	★
	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★	★

YAMAHA REVSTAR RS620



SUMMARY	FEATURES	★	★	★	★	★	★
	SOUND QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★	★
	VALUE FOR MONEY	★	★	★	★	★	★
	BUILD QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★	★
	PLAYABILITY	★	★	★	★	★	★
	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★	★

LTD VIPER-400M



SUMMARY	FEATURES	★	★	★	★	★	★
	SOUND QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★	★
	VALUE FOR MONEY	★	★	★	★	★	★
	BUILD QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★	★
	PLAYABILITY	★	★	★	★	★	★
	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★	★

GUILD S-100 POLARA



SUMMARY	FEATURES	★	★	★	★	★	★
	SOUND QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★	★
	VALUE FOR MONEY	★	★	★	★	★	★
	BUILD QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★	★
	PLAYABILITY	★	★	★	★	★	★
	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★	★