







# Top Ranking

After a lull of new models, Guild launched plenty of them at the start of 2020. This pair of single-cuts combines vintage style and lighter weight at a temptingly affordable price

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## GUILD ARISTOCRAT HH & P90 BOTH £795

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### What You Need To Know

- 1 More Les Paul copies?**  
Single-cuts, yes; Les Paul copies, no. Both of these new-for-2020 Aristocrats are 'chambered' resulting in relatively light weights. Of course, that'll also influence the sound, along with that distinctive harp tailpiece.
- 2 So, these are Asian builds, then?**  
Yes, China to be precise. The Newark St Collection – released in 2013 by then-owners Fender and continued after the brand was bought by Cordoba Music Group – were all Korean-made, and while they don't aim to be exact replicas of models from Guild's past, there are plentiful nods in that direction.
- 3 Doesn't Guild already have an Aristocrat? I'm confused...**  
The original Newark St Collection boasted a (Korean-made) M-75 Aristocrat in Antique Sunburst or Black (with a limited M-75G gold-top version) that was fully hollow in construction. Yes, it looks the same, but that one is a very different guitar and is slightly higher in price than our chambered duo here.

**T**he Guild M-75 Aristocrat might not be a household name in terms of classic electric guitars, but over some 66 years it has been played by the likes of John Lee Hooker, Keith Richards, John Mayer and Annie Clark, to name but four. Even if you've never played an original from the 50s or 60s – which now command around \$4k on the vintage market – the current Newark St Collection M-75 Aristocrat of the past seven years is a pretty tidy facsimile of the guitar that first appeared in 1954. It might have looked like Guild's response to the Les Paul, but, as many of us have found, it is actually an evocative mini-archtop that's just as useful for your jazz studies as it is for really rootsy Chicago electric blues and quite a bit more. Accurately classed as a "hollowbody with spruce braced top", the Korean-made M-75 is built like an acoustic guitar with separate back, laminated sides and arched top, joined with kerfed linings: the laminate spruce top has two longitudinal braces; the back has a couple of transverse braces.

But while these two new versions of that original M-75 Aristocrat look very similar, pretty much everything has changed. We have the same outline and classic three-a-side domed-top headstock but on the P90 model a more generic-looking tortie plastic pickguard replaces the usual style with its cartoon-ish 'Guild' under a small chevron

seen on that M-75 and many others in the range. The top's edge binding doesn't have the inner black/white purfling stripe, either, and the HH model ditches the pickguard altogether.

Colour options are limited, too. The P90 comes in Vintage Sunburst, and the top's bursting is very subtle – it looks more like a deep mahogany brown, pretty much the colour of the back, sides and neck, too. As well as an opaque Snow Crest White option, our HH model comes in Trans Black Burst and has a figured maple veneer top, hinting at a more contemporary style. Aside from the top, though, the rest of the guitar is opaque black. Hidden under these sombre but classy-looking glossy colours, the construction is all mahogany aside from that flame maple veneer.

Of course, it's the weight that gives the game away, even if you're wearing a blindfold. Our reference M-75 weighs in at just 2.46kg (5.4lb), while the P90 here is 3.45kg (7.59lb) and the HH a shade heavier

Strapping on either chambered Aristocrat feels great: the beefy bulk of a Les Paul but without the tonnage





## THE RIVALS

Chambered electrics without f-holes (let alone single-cuts) are a rare breed, especially at this price. However, PRS has the well-liked SE Zach Myers (£799, inc gigbag) with its semi-solid construction, single f-hole, figured maple veneered maple top with mahogany back and neck, a pair of 245 'S' humbuckers and adjustable Stoptail bridge.

Gretsch's Duo Jet preceded Guild's M-75 Aristocrat by a year and was another example of a Les Paul-ish electric but with semi-solid construction. Offering great value for money, the solid-bodied G5230T Electromatic Jet FT in Black With Bigsby (£459 street price) features a chambered mahogany body, includes a licensed Bigsby and comes fitted with dual Black Top Filter'Tron humbuckers.

Meanwhile, many of D'Angelico's contemporary designs come from its illustrious jazz archtop heritage. The Indonesian-made single-cut Premier SS Stairstep (£719 street price) is a centre-blocked model that has dual f-holes, a stairstep tailpiece and dual Duncan-designed humbuckers.

at 3.52kg (7.74lb), reflecting the 'chambered' rather than hollow construction. What do we mean by chambered? Our new 'Crats start out with a solid chunk of mahogany that is routed out leaving the central section solid with plenty of air in the wings. You can easily see that if you peer into the rear control cavity of either, and you can also see that the separate top is mahogany, too. In fact, this chambered construction style here is closer to the Newark St Bluesbird, although both new models retain the depth of the M-75: 50mm at the rim with an overall depth of approximately 60mm. The Bluesbird is slimmer: 40mm at the rim and 49mm overall.

The actual Guild legend with its Chesterfield logo on the headstock appears to be simply silk-screened metallic paint in certain lights: gold on the P90 and silver on the HH to match the hardware's plating. But move either in the light and they become more pearlescent, rather like one of those metallic-looking stamps on a bank note. The back of the headstock bears a simple GY-prefixed serial number with peel-off compliance and 'Made in China' stickers; our older M-75 has a KSG-prefixed serial number and 'Handcrafted in Korea' legend underneath. A final identifier is simply the maple stripe down the back of the M-75's neck; you don't see that through the slightly translucent finish of

the P90 model, but you can clearly see the headstock splice and the additional heel stack. On closer inspection, the specs differ further with a flatter 305mm (12-inch) fingerboard radius on these new models as opposed to the slightly more rounded 240mm (9.5-inch) radius of the M-75.

Hardware is identical across both the new models, the obvious exception being the plating: gold on the P90, nickel on the Trans Black Burst HH (although, just to confuse things, its Snow Crest White

1. Although it looks like the slightly larger Guild HB-1, the HB-2 is regular humbucking size

2. Guild's elegant headstock with its 'Chesterfield' logo. The top nuts on both guitars on review are bone





**3.** Both guitars are a classic drive with individual volume and tone controls, with these very neat Guild 'reflector' knobs

option comes with gold hardware). Their tuners are simple, open-backed and Grover Sta-Tite in style but have a Guild logo and metal 'butterbean' buttons; the tune-o-matic bridge mounts into ferrules inset into the top. Again, this differs from the M-75 model: its tune-o-matic style bridge actually sits on metal feet and 'floats' (although we understand later models are pinned), more like an unpinned archtop bridge, while its tuners are stamped Grover with oval metal buttons.



### Feel & Sounds

While that earlier M-75 is extremely light and feels it on a strap, both these new chambered Aristocrats feel much more Les Paul-like – although you'll struggle to find ones in this weight range. Strapping on either feels great: the beefy bulk of a Les Paul but without the tonnage. But the combination of the chambering and that harp tailpiece give them a different response even before you plug in – a little more semi-like and acoustic-y than an

**4 & 5.** Unlike the existing M-75 Aristocrat, both tune-o-matic bridges here mount directly into the top. The only difference is the gold-plating of the P90 model's bridge (below)



'A bit different' sums up these single-cuts that move away from the original 'midget' jazz hollowbody M-75

all-solid single-cut with a stud tailpiece but noticeably less acoustic-like than the hollow M-75.

The neck profiles are nicely done if a little generic-feeling: a perfectly good C that's thinner in depth at the 1st fret, 21mm, than it actually feels, filling out to 23.3mm by the 10th fret and, in typical Guild style, the heel feels quite square and consequently a little bulky in higher positions. The frets are pretty beefy but not overly high



## UNDER THE HOOD

How the electrics measure up to the Gibson standard

**B**oth guitars use the same Gibson-style circuit with a shoulder-placed toggle switch pickup selector and quite widely spaced volume and tone for each pickup. The pots all sit in a rear cavity, with a recessed cover plate that also bears the 'Guild Guarantee' label – always a nice touch. Circuit wise, there are no surprises with a green polyester film .022 microfarad (233J) capacitor on each tone, wired modern style with 500k pots. The HH model has simple coil-splits accessed via pull-switch on the individual volumes, not the more usual tone controls. The cavities are all screened, and whichever factory these come from they've clearly made a big effort to produce a tidy guitar.

Both HH and P90 pickup types are made by Booheung in Korea – like the pickups we've seen on other Newark St Guilds. The Guild HB-2 humbuckers on the HH feature the distinctive covers of both the larger HB-1 humbuckers and smaller LB-1 'mini-humbuckers' fitted on the

P-90-style single coils can polarise opinion, but on the right guitar they can be glorious

Starfires, for example. Those original or replica HB-1s are the same width (treble to bass) as the industry standard Gibson humbucker but slightly broader as if the two coils inside are wider. As a consequence, the pickup mounting ring is larger than standard and has two height-adjustment screws on the bass side, too, so you can adjust both the height and tilt of the pickup to match the string angle. These HB-2s aim to offer the same tonality as the HB-1 but are standard humbucker-sized and sit in standard mounting rings. It means any standard-sized humbucker will fit. Good news, tone tweakers.

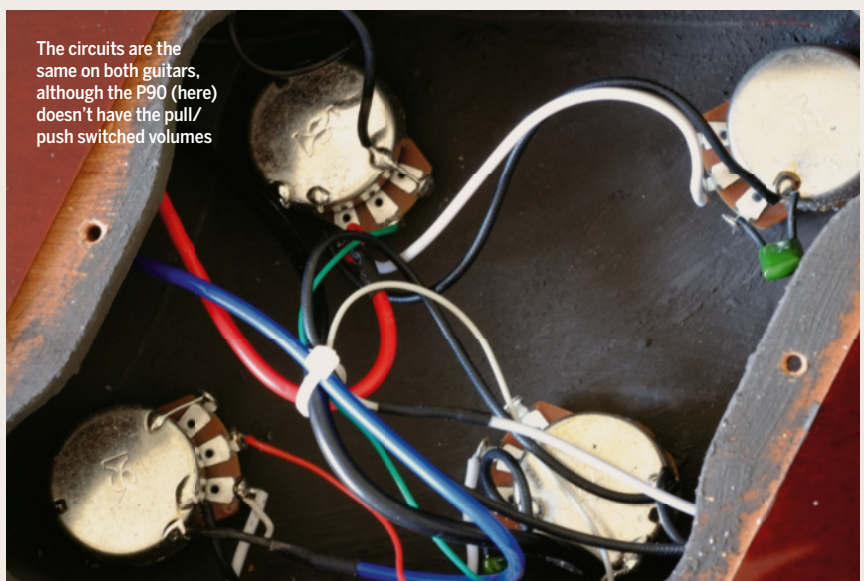
The Franz P90s differ from the Gibson standard as they look like standard soapbars but mount differently to the guitar. If you remove the cover via that single central bolt between the D and G strings' polepieces, you can see mounting screws on each corner of the baseplate. Both neck and bridge pickups have two pieces of hard foam under their bases that act as cushions and allow a little height adjustment. To do that, you have to remove the covers, which means slackening the strings.



The distinctive shape of the Franz P90 with its cover removed



These rubber strips on the underside provide minimal height adjustment



The circuits are the same on both guitars, although the P90 (here) doesn't have the pull/push switched volumes





6. These Franz soapbar single coils mount to the guitar in a different fashion to a regular Gibson P-90 (see Under The Hood on the previous page)

(approximately 2.73 by 1.08mm) and sit over the binding, which is slightly edge-rounded. Pretty tidy stuff.

P-90-style single coils can polarise opinion, but on the right guitar and in the right song they can be glorious, especially for those of us after a rootsy, rawer voice. Yes, they hum (the mix here is hum-cancelling, though) and these don't sound or feel heavily potted at all. It's an airy voice, spiky, punky at the bridge, thicker at the neck (and a little louder), but above

all unrefined... and that's a compliment. The HH actually sounds a little polite by comparison in humbucking mode – smoother but still with some spike and life. The splits do thin things out considerably, but dial in a little level boost and you're certainly in the ballpark if you like your single-cuts cleaner and brighter, particularly on the neck pickup. In mix position, voicing the neck split with the full bridge cleans things up a little, too. These HB-2s don't capture the power of the real thing when we plug in our 1976 Guild S-90, but with some pedal/amp adjustment that raw, bright-edged voice is almost there. Either way, both sit in the lower-output category compared with something like Gibson's Burstbucker 1 and 2s on our modded 2019 Les Paul Classic.

Using both models for an ongoing recording project, however, reveals just how good 'cheap' guitars have become. Straight out of the boxes the setups are good, the guitars are in tune and stable, and while both would benefit from a little fine-tuning it's not a necessity. Some hours later the tracks sound good and we've formed quite an attachment to the P90. The HH is little different – used for some cleaner parts and overdubs, and chasing a more hollow Gretsch-y voice, it really delivered, especially that split neck and full bridge mix.

7. A typical Guild feature is this squared heel, which you'll also see on the hollowbody M-75 Aristocrat





### Verdict

It's fair to say that Guild has struggled to gain market share against more obvious classic brands. Even back in the day it was the guitar you played until you could afford a Gibson. That past perception is impossible to change, but the Newark St Collection offers considerable style, particularly if you dare to be a bit different.

And 'a bit different' sums up these two well-priced single-cuts, which move away from the original 'midget' jazz hollowbody

8. Tuners on both guitars are simple, open-backed and in the style of Grover Sta-Tite but have a Guild logo and metal 'butterbean' buttons

Using both models for a recording project reveals just how good 'cheap' guitars have become

M-75 Aristocrat to a contemporary voice that's as at home with 60s hipsters as it is with much rockier and even heavier styles. From a practical point, the good weights here mean we have a pair of single-cuts that won't bother you on a long set, and straight from the shipping boxes they were ready to go. Of course, it's a combination of all their parts that result in what we hear – and that's a subtly different texture and sound compared with more generic single-cuts. There's character in spades and some vintage-styled class, all at a very tempting price. **G**



### GUILD ARISTOCRAT HH

**PRICE:** £795

**ORIGIN:** China

**TYPE:** Single-cutaway chambered body electric

**BODY:** Chambered mahogany with carved figured maple (veneer) top

**NECK:** Mahogany (3-piece), 'C' profile, glued-in

**SCALE LENGTH:** 629mm (24.75")

**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/43mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Bound pau ferro, pearloid block inlays, 305mm (12") radius

**FRETS:** 22, medium jumbo

**HARDWARE:** Nickel-plated tune-o-matic-style bridge with harp tailpiece, vintage-style open-gear tuners with 'butterbean' buttons

**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 52.5mm

**ELECTRICS:** Guild HB-2 humbuckers with nickel covers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual pickup volume (with pull/push coil-splits) and tone controls

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.52/7.74

**OPTIONS:** See Aristocrat P-90

**RANGE OPTIONS:** See gallery over the page

**LEFT-HANDERS:** No

**FINISHES:** Trans Black Burst (as reviewed) and Snow Crest White with gold hardware – all gloss polyester



9/10

**PROS** Vintage style, weight, good build, pretty versatile old-school voice; excellent modding potential

**CONS** Limited colour choice; coil-splits are a little thin especially at the bridge; no gigbag or lefty option



### GUILD ARISTOCRAT P90

**PRICE:** £795

**ORIGIN:** China

**TYPE:** Single-cutaway chambered body electric

**BODY:** Chambered mahogany with carved spruce (veneer) top

**NECK:** Mahogany (3-piece), 'C' profile, glued-in

**SCALE LENGTH:** 629mm (24.75")

**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/43.57mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Bound pau ferro, pearloid block inlays, 305mm (12") radius

**FRETS:** 22, medium jumbo

**HARDWARE:** Nickel-plated tune-o-matic-style bridge with harp tailpiece, vintage-style open-gear tuners with 'butterbean' buttons

**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 52.5mm

**ELECTRICS:** Guild Franz P90 soapbar single coils, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual pickup volume and tone controls

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.45/7.59

**OPTIONS:** See Aristocrat HH

**RANGE OPTIONS:** See gallery over the page

**LEFT-HANDERS:** No

**FINISHES:** Vintage Sunburst (as reviewed)



9/10

**PROS** As the HH – vintage style, weight, good build and characterful old-school voice

**CONS** No colour choice; no gigbag or lefty option