

FIRST PLAY



PRS MCCARTY 594
£3,235

WHAT IS IT? A more vintage take on the already vintage-style McCarty with four-control layout and numerous tweaks

Spirit of '59

The desire to recreate vintage Les Paul tone in a modern double-cut guitar is the focus of PRS's McCarty 594. Is it the most vintage PRS yet?

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Adam Gasson

As PRS watchers will know, the McCarty Model – named after Theodore ‘Ted’ McCarty, Gibson’s president during its 1950s to 1960s heyday and, much later, ‘mentor’ to Paul Reed Smith – originally appeared in the early 1990s and was the company’s first attempt at a more vintage-informed guitar. Back in issue 400, some 21 years after its launch, we reviewed the latest version at the time. Now, less than a year on, comes the launch of the McCarty 594.

This latest McCarty appeared in February 2016 as the second model of a year-long ‘Guitars of the Month’ run, made by PRS’s elite Private Stock team, to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the Private Stock programme. Our 594, however, is a new ‘core’ level production model and around half the price of that earlier, limited model.

It takes its name, primarily, from its scale length of 24.594 inches or, as Paul Reed Smith told us earlier this year, “It’s a ‘59 spec guitar with four knobs.” Smith expands: “In the







50s, Gibson's scale length was 24.594 inches [624.7mm],” not the quoted 24.75-inches and is “three thirty-secondths of an inch longer than our 24.5-inch [622mm] scale,” used primarily on PRS's Singlecut models, and 0.4-inch (10.3mm) shorter than PRS's standard 25-inch scale. In reality, there's a visible difference from PRS's standard scale, but here, at just 2.4mm longer than PRS's 24.5-inch scale (about the width of a piece of PRS's fretwire), it's barely noticeable at all.

Vintage Tone

However, the focus of the 594 is *not* just that scale length but a desire to recreate, as closely as possible, the ‘holy grail’ of vintage Gibson tone – a 1959 Sunburst, but in a modern double-cut guitar. “A way of getting someone who grew up in that world to be very, very happy,” says Smith today. “Some vintage guitars stay in tune, some don't. This is designed to play and stay in tune.”

There's plenty more up the 594's sleeve to differentiate it from the standard McCarty. Firstly, its body is very slightly deeper with a higher mahogany back-to-maple top wood ratio. It means the rim depth is slightly thicker

than the McCarty, which itself is slightly thicker than the PRS Custom. Slight extra depth (just under a millimetre) is added to the neck – although in width it's the same as the standard Pattern neck profile. The carve is slightly asymmetric, too. “I bought a '53 Les Paul,” says Smith, “and it has an asymmetric neck carve – it's subtle, yes, but you can feel it; it's very cool. The 594 is not as pronounced as that,” he adds, “but still noticeable.”

Like the standard McCarty, we get a bound, dark rosewood fretboard that retains a 10-inch radius, not a 12-inch like Gibson, but here we have old-school (solid) bird inlays. The nut changes from the usual friction-reducing formula to more classic bone, plus the Phase III open-backed tuners are ‘tweaked’ and add a small screw on the collar of the button post. “It's the best thing we've done in years: the combination of these pickups and these tuners. We've figured out how to make our tuners *sound* like old Klusons,” says Smith. (PRS adds that the added set screw pulls the tuner's shaft, gear and worm together – but takes the tuner button out of play – to promote tone transfer from the string directly into the guitar itself). Instead of the standard McCarty's one-

1. Yes, four controls on a double-cutaway PRS: a first. Both the tone controls have pull/push coil splits

2. Another new feature for the 594 is this shoulder-placed pickup toggle switch, which is recessed into the wood

3. PRS's two-piece bridge looks almost handmade. In fact, the very early examples of this design were made in the UK by Keith Robson



4. You can clearly see the set screws on the tuner collars, which (subtly) promote string vibration and resonance

5. Another change to the 594 is the bone nut used on the Private Stock version earlier this year



piece wrapover bridge, the two-piece setup here is PRS's version of the fabled Gibson tune-o-matic and stud tailpiece. The almost handmade-looking parts combine various materials: the bridge using chunky brass-looking saddles, the tailpiece, with its top-slot grooves for fast re-stringing, is aluminium with brass posts. Like the tuners, there's little, or no, plating of any kind.

Yet another change comes with the pickups, which are PRS's latest date-series 58/15 humbuckers but with an 'LT' (Low Turns) suffix, which on a meter shows the bridge unit to have a lower DC resistance than the standard McCartney's 58/15, although the neck pickup seems virtually identical. "The treble and bass pickups are exactly the same pickups," says Smith. "We haven't done that, ever! Normally, we'd change the turns a little [making the treble bridge pickup slightly hotter in terms of output]; this time we didn't."

When PRS introduced its Singlecut in 2000, it featured four controls but laid out in a different diamond shape to Gibson. It meant that, unlike a Gibson, you couldn't move both volumes, or tones, simultaneously with a quick grab of your right hand. Here, the four-control

layout (the first PRS double-cut guitar to use it) changes back to that classic protocol and feels immediately comfortable to any player used to the much-copied Gibson layout. Along with that shoulder-placed toggle switch, it's really all very familiar.

Feel & Sounds

With a late 2015 standard McCartney as reference, the ride on the 594 remains very similar. The lower positions of the neck do feel deeper – in a good way – and the higher positions have a little more girth; less noticeable is that asymmetric shape. Playing each guitar unplugged, the standard McCartney, with its 25-inch scale, does feel marginally stiffer and there's a little more high-end zing. The 594 just feels a little more buttery-smooth in both its bending feel and its acoustic response. Plugged in, again, it's subtle perception rather than chalk-and-cheese difference: the 594's sounds, especially the bridge pickup, are slightly less hi-fi clarity, almost as if you've knocked your tone back a little, but not clouded it in the least. Combine that with the oh-so-classic drive and with your eyes shut, you could be playing a single-cut.



6. Each covered PRS 'date-series' humbucker has its name engraved. Here, 'LT' means lower turns, as in the coil wire

The seemingly subtle changes have quite a profound effect... dynamic, expressive – it purrs, it roars

Setting up a classic-rock-gained Marshall amp tone, the standard McCarty keeps us enthralled; switch over to the 594 and the seemingly subtle changes have quite a profound effect. It's like auditioning two guitars and – almost without reason – you just choose one over the other, and it's the 594 that gets the most test time. Full humbucking, or with the partial coil splits engaged, full volume, half volume, tones rolled off – not to mention the shades with both pickups on – there's not a duff sound that we can find. Dynamic, expressive – it purrs, it roars. Not for the first time do we find ourselves cursing Mr Smith and his team for their continual quest for a better tonal experience.

Verdict

We concluded our previous review of the current standard McCarty with, "The McCarty has just gotten better... and then some." Is the 594 better still? For the vintage-informed player, the answer is yes. The combination of all the tweaks, not to mention the control layout, certainly moves the 594 closer to that 'holy grail' sound and feel. But it's still 100 per cent a PRS guitar: simply one of the most highly-tuned instruments money can buy. **G**



PRS MCCARTY 594

PRICE: £3,235 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Double-cutaway, carved-top solidbody electric

BODY: Mahogany with flame maple carved top

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

SCALE LENGTH: 624.7mm (24.594")

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43.45mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound rosewood, 'old-school' green ripple abalone bird inlays, 254mm (10") radius

FRETS: 22, medium

HARDWARE: PRS 2-piece Stop-Tail, 'tweaked' PRS Phase III locking tuners – nickel plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm

ELECTRICS: PRS 58/15 'LT' humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, volume and tone control (with pull/push coil-split switch) for each pickup

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.49/7.67

OPTIONS: 10-top flame maple, as reviewed, adds £549. Artist pack version (£4,620)

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: McCarty sunburst from wide range; PRS V12 finish

PRS Europe

01223 874301

www.prsguitars.com



9/10

PROS: Four-control classic layout and shoulder-placed toggle switch; superb build; oh-so-classic vintage single-cut tones

CONS: Never cheap, but then neither is what we see, feel or hear!