

RETRO SOLIDBODY ELECTRICS

Words Jonathan Horsley
Photography Neil Godwin

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Modern life getting you down? Experience the sound of yesteryear without the excruciating vintage price tag with these old-school rockers



The electric guitar is not yet 100 years old but already we are forensically scouring its history in search of authentic tone from a bygone era. Already we're sighing, "They don't make 'em like they use to." But they do. Take the Danelectro DG67-YL, a banana milkshake yellow electric, its design straight from 1967. With a pair of lipstick pickups and asymmetrical masonite semi-hollow body, it has an oddball quality, unmistakably Dano. But if you think the Dano's weird, wait until you see the Hagstrom Retroscape H-II. An aggressively horned double-cut with an arcane switching system and

dainty vibrato, the H-II is a real curio that promises an easy ride courtesy of that famed Hagstrom neck profile. Then there's the Supro Jamesport. This minimalistic, super-cool electric takes the unique Supro Ozark bevelled body from the 60s, plants one Gold Foil single coil pickup someway past the bridge position, and sounds like a decades-old echo from rock 'n' roll history. Rounding out this issue's quartet is the Gretsch Electromatic G5438 Pro Jet; with a swanky gold finish and pearloid pickguard, it's as handsome a single-cut as you'll see, and promises 'that great Gretsch sound' – a trademarked guarantor of old-school tone. ➔



GRETSCH ELECTROMATIC G5438 PRO JET

The gold standard

£445

This is kind of like a Les Paul, right?

Wrong. Okay, it is a single-cut and dates back to a similar era, but it's very different. The Pro Jet has a basswood body with an arched maple top, and like many of Gretsch's solidbody electrics, it's chambered, making it lighter, and, they say, more resonant.

What's the deal with those pickups?

The Pro Jet sports a pair of Gretsch's Black Top Filter'Tron pickups, giving you a bright snap and twang that'll cut through any mix. Created by Ray Butts as a means of killing the buzz that near drove



country guitar legend Chet Atkins mad in 1954, the Filter'Tron is regarded as the first humbucker – just predating Seth Lover's PAF, which became the core of Gibson's sound.

So, what's this 'Great Gretsch sound' you mentioned?

In short, it's incredible. Uncanny, even. For here we are in 2017, and yet you fret a couple of doublestops on the Pro Jet Electromatic and all of a sudden it's like you're the Fonz, just waiting for Richie, Joanie and Chachi to show up. The cleans are sharp and jazzy, but just take your amp into overdrive and you're in rockabilly heaven.

AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Chambered basswood body with arched-maple top, 24.6" scale, 22 medium-jumbo frets, 2x "Black Top" Filter'Tron humbuckers, Anchored Adjusto-Matic bridge
FINISH: Gold [as reviewed], Silver Sparkle, Black
CONTACT: Fender GBI 01342 331700
www.gretschguitars.com



HAGSTROM RETROSCAPE H-II

Switching things up

£599

There are a lot of switches here... what are they for?!

Okay, so there's a killswitch in the upper horn... largely useless. There are on/off switches for neck and bridge pickups – all quite simple – and then a mute switch that cuts output to a fraction and a master tone that toggles between the H-II's natural elastic twang for jazzier, woody warmth. Think of them as factory presets.

Is it true the neck was inspired by a fighter jet?

That is indeed correct! Hagstrom's patented H-Expander truss road was inspired by the wing design of a Saab J-35 Draken fighter jet.



But what makes the H-II a top gun is that this clever truss rod invention allows for low action and thin, super-stable neck – which should mean slick playability in spades.

What does it sound like with the afterburners on?

Settle down, Maverick. Cranking up the overdrive drowns the H-II's subtle charms, and it can be a little muddy. But those cleans? They're incredible. There's sassy elastic spank with the neck pickup, sharp twang in the bridge, toggle the master tone and open your chord grimoire to the dim7s, et voila! You're a master of jazz.

AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Alder body with bolt-on maple neck, 24.75" scale, Resinator fretboard, 22 medium jumbo frets, Trema vibrato, 2x Hagstrom Ceramic C-Spin single coils
FINISH: Aged Sky Blue [as reviewed], Three-Tone Sunburst, Black, White
CONTACT: Rosetti 01376 550033
www.hagstromguitars.com



DANELECTRO DG67-YL

They call me mellow yellow

£499

Where have we seen this before?

Well, the Dano's body looks rather like it been cut from the counter in some idyllic US diner on Route 66. And in truth, it's probably made from the same material, too, what with its masonite laminate body and vinyl linoleum trim. But this is exactly the retro vibe that makes Danelectro so cool.

They make some bold claims about the neck don't they?

Yes, they do: "Arguably the best neck feel of any guitar at any price", says Dano. That's quite a statement, but it is a real skinny Minnie



and a lot of fun. It wouldn't be out of place on some hi-tech shred machine, but this 67 Dano isn't for the quinoa-munching shred yogi in your life; it's a rock 'n' roll machine.

What about that Dano twang?

It's all there. Bright, responsive, and a little unruly once you dial in the gain – or even better, run it through your favourite fuzz pedal. The trademark Dano Lipstick single coils are a dainty but pugnacious pairing. The Shadows, surf rock, classic 70s-style dinosaur rock a la Blue Cheer; the Danelectro 67 eats it all up.

AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Masonite, semi-hollow laminate frame body, 25" scale, 21 frets, 2x Lipstick single coils

FINISH: Dano Yellow [as reviewed], Red, Black, Aqua

CONTACT: JHS
0113 286 5381
www.danelectro.com



SUPRO JAMESPORT

The bronzed Adonis

£799

Supro? Super... er, who?

More famous for its amps, the likes of which were used by Hendrix, Jimmy Page and Albert Lee, Supro was no slouch when it came to putting a guitar together back in the day either. While the Jamesport is the most expensive guitar here, it offers some serious vintage quality and spec. And that finish has to be seen to be believed.

What era are we talking?

The Jamesport is a bolt straight out of the swinging 60s. Its body is based on the Supro's Ozark body shape and has a bevelled profile



for comfort. Pretty darn suave, but hinting at some serious power underneath the hood...

What does it sound like?

Surprisingly versatile despite having only one humbucker-sized Gold Foil single-coil pickup, a tone and a volume knob. There's a lot of play between the sharp 60s hippy jangle, and an aggressive rock bite. Named for the coastal town of Jamesport, New York, and part of the Island Series, we're happy to report that there is plenty of gnarly chew here that makes it perfect for surf rock.

AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Alder Vintage Ozark solid body with set maple neck, 25.5" scale, 50s wiring volume and tone controls, 1x Vintage Gold Foil single coil, Wave tailpiece

FINISH: Bronze [as reviewed], Antique White, Jet Black, Tobacco Sunburst, Blue Metallic

CONTACT: JHS
0113 286 5381
www.suprousa.com





HEAD TO HEAD

Which of our retro axes belongs in your future?

No two guitars here are alike. You've got the studied refinement of the Hagstrom, the majesty of its Aged Sky Blue finish, the weirdness of its switching system. Then there's the auric splendour of the Gretsch Pro Jet, a stunning singlecut with that breeding, that Gretsch DNA. Then there's the Danelectro 67, its voice even louder than the yellow finish, uniquely lightweight, full of skronk and attitude from deceptively powerful pickups. And there's the Supro with its classy minimalism, that finish and tailpiece hard to beat.

In terms of playability, the Hagstrom nicotine-yellow neck is incredible, and even though the bridge is a little squeaky, the Tremar vibrato a stiff ol' wobbler, it still feels like the Hagstrom is on your side. The Danelectro, well, that invites all sorts of abuse; it's a joy for rock 'n' roll rhythm playing and disgorging a chaotic, shambling lead break. Some might

THE SUPRO'S TONE WILL CATCH YOU OFF-GUARD; THAT SINGLE COIL IS WARM AND RICH

find the Pro Jet off-balance when playing seated, but there is no quibbling with its clubby neck profile, which comfortably seats the hand, offering plenty support. The Supro, too, enjoys a clubbier neck profile, but with a satin finish that helps you glide across it.

The Supro's tone will catch you off-guard; that big humbucker-sized single coil is deceptively sharp, but warm and rich, dynamic, and there is a lot of range in that tone knob. While the Hagstrom's cleans are untouchable, remember that Kurt Cobain once played one; so while its distorted tone won't be tight, it can be a little muddy, it nonetheless has a lovely feral character to it. The Danelectro's pickups are wired in series, so the middle position with both pickups selected has some real oomph, perfect for hot-rodged rock. The Gretsch, meanwhile, well, its tone is so hot you could grill hamburgers by wafting it in front of the speaker cone. Tex-mex shuffle, country, blues, jazz, rockabilly... You name it, and it'll play it.



The Supro's unusual looks are enhanced by the 'wave' tailpiece



The sides of Dano bodies are usually covered in this vinyl binding tape

FINAL VERDICT

Which old-school electric is the right one for you?

With guitars like these, you've got to assess your needs. What are you going to be playing? If the answer to this isn't death metal, then one of this group is going to make a very persuasive case for being 'the one'. For those with a little extra cash and don't mind shelling out the extra £200, then the Supro offers a truly unique piece of American vintage guitar. It's a player and a workhorse; its pickup position finds a sweet

spot somewhere past the bridge, and brings both brightness and warmth. The ideal surf rock guitar? Maybe, but then you've got the Danelectro, which is just begging for a Fender Twin and a little tremolo for a spot of surf action, and then, with a more svelte neck, its off-kilter looks, and a little more tonal range, it might be a better bet.

The sophisticates might boil this test down between the urbane Swede, the Hagstrom, or the classy American hot-rod, the Gretsch. If

you're looking for a guitar with unbeatable cleans, then go for the Hagstrom, but if you wanted that versatility and the kudos that comes with a Gretsch, well, we wouldn't think ill of you. Indeed, it's hard to look past that finish, that build, and that tone.

Ultimately, you can't go wrong here. Without breaking the bank, you could get yourself some old-school tone, old-school cool. And you know what they say about the classics: they never go out of style.

GRETSCH ELECTROMATIC 65438 PRO JET



TOTAL Guitar
BEST VALUE FOR MONEY

TOTAL Guitar
BEST BUY AWARD

HAGSTROM RETROSCAPE H-II



TOTAL Guitar
BEST FOR JAZZ

DANELECTRO DG67-YL



TOTAL Guitar
BEST FOR ROCKIN'

SUPRO JAMESPORT



TOTAL Guitar
BEST FOR VINTAGE KUDOS

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

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