



Squier
Stratocaster
Obey Dissent
Graphic

Spear RD-W



Group Test

Pocket pleasing axes under £300

After spunking the budget on last issue's dream machines, TG went to the market to meet a man with magic beans. He didn't have any, but he did give us four stellar electric guitars at a bargain rate...

WORDS JONATHAN HORSLEY



LTD Eclipse
EC-50

Gretsch
Electromatic
Junior Jet II



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

These are tough times: fuel's up, house prices are down, and the canteen at TG Towers is serving beans on toast all day, every day. So, understandably, we're feeling a little frugal round these parts. Every penny is a prisoner held without trial in a maximum security pocket. Now, if you're lusting after a nice bit of kit, handcrafted in the US, sprayed lovingly in nitro and limited to 100 units, this might be a highly disagreeable state of affairs. But we're nowhere near being that desperate. *Au contraire!* With 300 quid and our bus fare jingling in our pockets, our trawl round the high street unearthed four face-spanking and bottom-melting guitars that we'd happily rock on any stage.

First on the scales... Weighing less than a Les Paul but looking every ounce the solid-bodied star, crafted from pink mahogany and finished

in walnut: the Spear RD-W. A list price of £199 and a street price even more miserly makes the RD-W a real contender for those with Les Paul tastes and an Encore budget.

Penny pinchers...

Now, we need to make this a fair scrap – no flying elbows or knees – so let us bring into the ring the LTD Eclipse EC-50, a dynamic little thoroughbred that, though raised in the wild streets, has a classic look and gentrification to defy its price tag. Many things incite TG to a froth. Cool graphics on a Strat packing a Seymour Duncan Designed pickup in the bridge position being one of them. The Squier Obey Dissent

Graphic is a 21st century rebel with balls like watermelons. *Cojones* and attitude? You gotta have a Gretsch in there somewhere. And so the single cutaway, minimalist-retro design of the Junior Jet 2 completes the quartet of TG's sinewy workhorses.

So there you have it. The Spear RD-W and LTD's EC-50 offer Les Paul stylings and tone for poor people of all ages, while the Squier Strat (complete with the cooler-than-the-coolest-person-you-know Obey Dissent graphic) can only be matched in the cool stakes by Gretsch's Electromatic Junior Jet II. Chorley Working Man's Club, here we come. We're forcing our pudgy legs into the polka dot spandex as we speak...

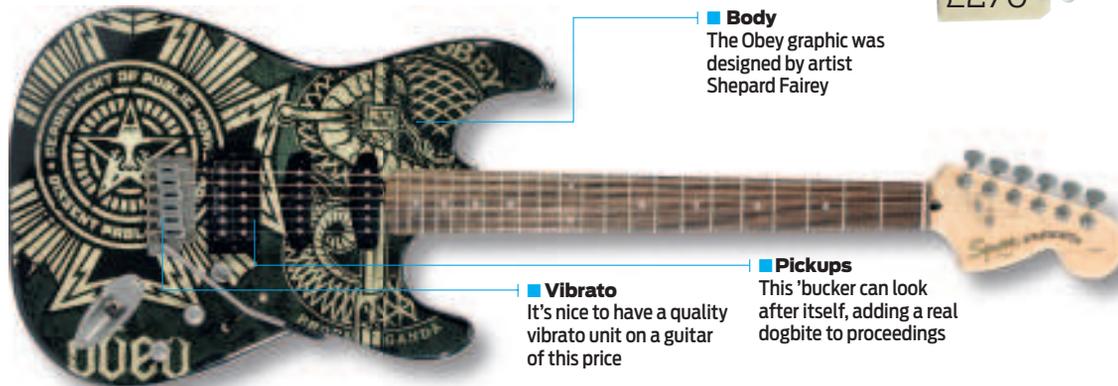
"WITH 300 QUID, OUR TRAWL ROUND THE HIGH STREET UNEARTHED FOUR FACE-SPANKING, BOTTOM-MELTING GUITARS"



Squier Stratocaster Obey Dissent

Beat on the Strat

£270



Body

The Obey graphic was designed by artist Shepard Fairey

Vibrato

It's nice to have a quality vibrato unit on a guitar of this price

Pickups

This 'bucker can look after itself, adding a real dogbite to proceedings

OK, so it's the only Strat in this Group Test but the Obey Dissent has got moves. It looks every inch the product of a difficult upbringing: its hardware is 'rustic and worn', giving it a Detroit, circa *RoboCop* vibe. You have 20 seconds to comply...

The sizzle: Leo Fender was a good sort. His vision to produce a guitar for every man, woman or child (regardless of their income) is more prescient than ever. Crafted in Indonesia, this Strat



has the hardware to back its lairy appearance: a basswood body, a super-smooth Synchronous Twin-Pivot Tremolo and that Duncan Designed humbucker backing up the singlecoils in the middle and neck.

We say: The 9.5-inch fingerboard radius is quintessentially Fender Stratocaster, and is reassuringly familiar on the fingertips. With the larger 60s style headstock and a comfortable 25.5-inch scale length completing a guitar that just feels like, well, a *proper* Fender guitar.

The vibrato might look rough with its moody finish, but there is both a stability and a liquidity that make it a joy to throb, wobble and wangle. But while the neck and middle pickups offer a classic Strat tone, snappy

and bright, it is the Duncan Designed bridge humbucker that starts the riot. The choice of basswood for the body calls to mind Ibanez guitars of the early 90s, but it's a suitable partner in crime with a top humbucker that hoists this guitar high over the barbed wire fence of mediocrity and escapes to kill again.

SUMMARY

For: Stable vibrato, tough 'bucker

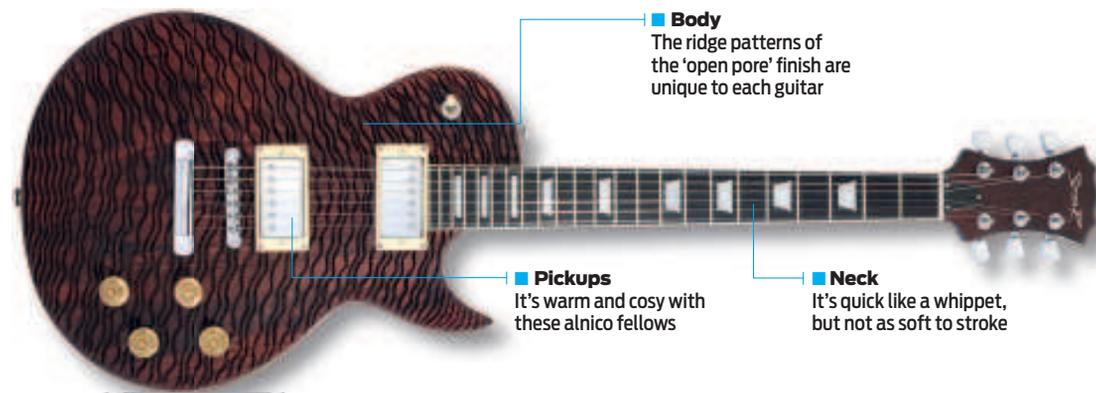
Against: Graphic not for everyone



TG says: It's Fairey nuff!

Spear RD-W £199

Carving its niche



Body

The ridge patterns of the 'open pore' finish are unique to each guitar

Pickups

It's warm and cosy with these alnico fellows

Neck

It's quick like a whippet, but not as soft to stroke

From a distance the RD-W looks like yet another Les Paul clone. But come a little closer. It says Spear on the headstock – shorthand for high-spec and low prices – and what have they done to that finish?

The sizzle: Black i, Spear's official UK distributors, were blushing with excitement about the RD-W. "Spear 'buckers with Alnico magnets give a warm, vintage-like tone," they cooed.



"The body is pink mahogany... a light tonewood that has all the sustain and tone of regular mahogany without the spine-troubling weight." Don't worry, the guitar isn't pink.

We say: Spear's reputation is rising thanks to all the quality components they lovingly ram onto their guitars. Take those alnico humbuckers. Anyone familiar with Slash will have an approximation of where these things are tonally: they're warm, dynamic, and can rock the blues to rock and back again.

At high volume, the RD-W is great for donning your Gary Moore mask and treading those *Parisienne Walkways*. The neck (geez, the neck!) is slim, glued

to the body, and a big surprise. Wannabe shredders will be intrigued; while young players and folk with small hands will find it a neat fit. The open pore finish *is* controversial. Purists' heads will revolve like Linda Blair, while others will just get biscuit crumbs stuck in the grooves.

SUMMARY

For: Resonant, with great tones

Against: Slim neck, crazy finish



TG says: Crinkle cut, cheap as chips!

At a glance

Squier Stratocaster Obey Dissent Graphic

BODY: Basswood
NECK: Maple, C-Shape
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
SCALE: 25.5"
PICKUPS: Duncan Designed HB102B humbucker, 2x alnico single-coil
CONTROLS: Master Volume, 2x tone, 5-way toggle switch
HARDWARE: Rustic and Worn
FINISH: Shepard Fairey Obey Dissent Graphic
CONTACT: Fender GBI 01342 331700
WEB: www.fender.co.uk

At a glance

Spear RD-W

BODY: Pink mahogany
NECK: 3-ply pink mahogany, set
SCALE: 24.75"
PICKUPS: 2x Spear Alnico Humbuckers
CONTROLS: 2x tone, 2x volume, 3-way toggle switch
HARDWARE: Tune-o-matic bridge and stop bar
FINISH: Open Pore, Walnut (pictured) or Black
CONTACT: Black i Distribution 01236 861261
WEB: www.blacki.eu

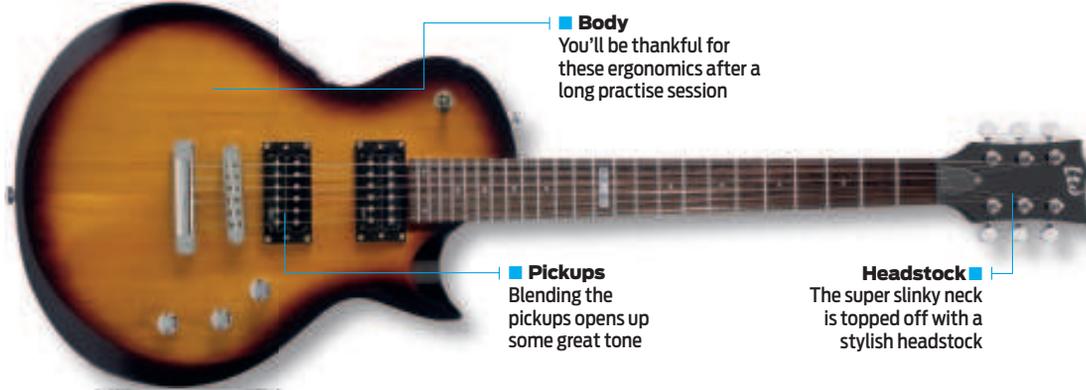
"THE GRETSCH JUNIOR JET II IS BEGGING TO BE STRANGLER, BUT THIS GUITAR IS NO CHOKER"

POCKET PLEASING AXES UNDER £300 **★ GROUP TEST**

LTD Eclipse EC-50

£299

Bursting out



Body
You'll be thankful for these ergonomics after a long practise session

Pickups
Blending the pickups opens up some great tone

Headstock
The super slinky neck is topped off with a stylish headstock

At a glance

LTD Eclipse EC-50

BODY: Solid basswood
NECK: Maple, bolted, thin U neck contour
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with dot inlays
SCALE: 24.75"
PICKUPS: 2x ESP LH-150s (neck and bridge)
CONTROLS: 2x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Chrome
FINISH: Two-tone burst (pictured), Burst cherry, Black, Original White
CONTACT: Selection UK 01795 419460
WEB: www.espguitars.com

LTD is like the Red Cross of luthiers. For those less fortunate than your average rock star, these chaps slim down the spec and build some guitars with serious kudos. Take the EC-50; it's way more than the sum of its parts.

The sizzle: At this price there are going to be a few concessions to the spec. That's OK. LTD knows where to trim and where not to. Firstly, like the Squier, the body is made from basswood. Unlike the Spear, LTD has bolted a thin



U-shaped maple neck onto the body. The neck is slim enough to accommodate those flash bastards who dash off speedy arpeggios while sticking their tongue out like a dog in heat. When you consider the ESP LH-

150 pickups, warming the bridge and neck positions, then the Eclipse EC-50 must have a bit of tonal wallop.

We say: With such a sartorial debt to the Les Paul, the EC-50 would be forgiven for being a dowdy wee copycat. But it's no clone. Both tonally and ergonomically the EC-50 has a real feel of its own. The back is contoured and, in a brave concession to modern rock guitar playing, the upper fret access is fantastic – the cutaway is

contoured allowing even the chubbiest hulk of a mitt up there.

The LH-150 pickups are spunky little brutes: in the bridge position there is plenty of aggression; in the neck, as you'd expect, things warm up and some fantastic piano-esque clean tones will prove that you're not just a reprobate.

SUMMARY

For: Tonal variety, great comfort
Against: Fingerboard is a little dry

★★★★★

TG says: The whole of the moon...

Gretsch Electromatic Junior Jet II

Happy birthday to ya



Neck
It feels a bit like a baseball bat... in a good way, natch

Pickups
These retro cuties won't please metal heads but we love 'em

Headstock
Gretsch has added some fizz with this Coke bottle-esque head

£230

At a glance

Gretsch Electromatic Junior Jet II

BODY: Solid mahogany
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, with dot inlays
SCALE: 24.6"
PICKUPS: 2x Gretsch mini-humbucking pickups
CONTROLS: Volume, tone, 3-position toggle
HARDWARE: Chrome
FINISH: Tobacco Sunburst (pictured), Black Transparent
CONTACT: Fender GBI 01342 331700
WEB: www.fender.co.uk

Retrosexuals better stock up on eggs, flour, butter and sugar – we need to bake a cake. It's the 125th birthday of Gretsch, crafter of some of the coolest guitars on the planet, with rock 'n' roll stylings and retro tone.

The sizzle: The single pickup, single cutaway Junior Jet I really floated TG's boat, so we thought it would be cool to have a look at what is one of Gretsch's most Spartan efforts yet. The Junior



Jet II is a solid bodied guitar with the confidence to stand alone. Vintage-style tuners, two Gretsch mini-humbucking pickups, a slab of mahogany, a fat bolt-on maple neck and that's it.

We say: The Electromatic Junior Jet II is a guitar for those who want to stand out. Gretsch players don't want to join the herd – they're the ones branding 'been there, done that' on the rump of their audience.

The clubby neck profile is a bit like holding a baseball bat, but it's the responsive retro punch of those pickups that gilds this Gretsch's lily. A three-position toggle switch lets you switch between them and those macho G-Arrow knobs will roll back the

volume and tone. The Junior Jet won't do metal, but then it won't do bland either. Whether its played through some old fuzz, or in a clean to overdriven blues tone, this sexy guitar is begging to be strangled. Still, in this Group Test, the Gretsch has proved it's no choker.

SUMMARY

For: Vintage kudos, individualist tone
Against: Not the most versatile

★★★★★

TG says: Junior's got us rattled