

GIBSON 2015 LES PAUL STUDIO, DELUXE & STANDARD £899, £1,699 & £2,499
ELECTRICS

PAUL SHOOK UP

For 2015, Gibson's annual makeover is more radical than ever. We take a close look at a trio of classics

VIDEO DEMO



<http://bit.ly/guitarist389>

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Gibson 2015 Les Paul Studio, Deluxe & Standard £899, £1,699 & £2,499

What we want to know

1 Another year, another Les Paul?

Yes, 2015's line-up from Gibson USA is the most radical we can remember. The forums are alight with comment: it's fair to say Gibson has 'done a U2'.

2 What's the problem?

The 'problem' is that Gibson's meat and potato production division has piled innovation into most of the new guitars, whether we want it or not. You can't buy a 2015 Les Paul, for example, without the rebranded Min-ETune self-tuning system, which is now called G Force.

3 What, no options?

No. The options are all in-built to the specific model: neck profile, weight relief, top carves, pickups, controls. On top of that, virtually all the models have wider necks than ever before. Like we say, radical.

The new line-up of Gibson's USA production guitars is full of change. Are you ready?

First off, the Tronical-designed Min-ETune 'robot' tuning system has been rebranded as the G Force Tuning System and is standard – not optional – on all the guitars, with the exception of the Derek Trucks SG and Firebird. In fact, while the Trucks model sticks to its 2014 specs the rest get a raft of changes. There's the Zero Fret Adjustable Nut – a first for Gibson – wider necks and thicker rosewood fingerboards, pearl inlays, lower frets and improved Plek set-up and intonation. All the models have proper gloss nitro finishes and come in a new-design TKL moulded case; each has a Les Paul 100th birthday signature on the headstock; there's a new 'improved contact' output jack and "more robust cables" for a "stronger signal strength", and each guitar also has a small Les Paul hologram sticker.

Our three review samples give us a taste of the three levels of Les Paul in this year's line-up. Aside from all the above changes, each model has a quite specific specification in terms of weight relief, neck profile and other instrument-specific features. The Deluxe and

Standard, for example, have upgraded Tune-O-Matic bridges with titanium saddles; the Deluxe features new mini humbuckers for "improved tonal balance and coil-splitting versatility", while the Standard offers a slot-in/pull-out removable pickguard.

Studio

Gibson is hugely detailed in the specifications of these new guitars. The Studio features a 'multi-piece' mahogany back that's classed as 'medium' density (the lower the density the lighter the weight). The back has an opaque colour, so you can't see any joins or the 'modern' weight relief that is one of a number of ways Gibson attacks the problem of weighty mahogany. The modern relief

The Rivals

There's no shortage of guitars based on the LP blueprint. **Fret King's Eclat Standard** (£575) is a great-value single-cut. **PRS's SE Bernie Marsden** (£750) is a crackin' vintage vibe alternative, while the **S2 Singlecut** is USA-made with a bevelled-edge top at £1,300. A more rock choice is **ESP's LTD EC-1000**, in various formats and pickup options from £800. **Schecter's Solo 6** has several versions at around £700. If your budget stretches to the Standard bracket, **Vigier's GV Wood** is worth a look (approx £2,900); it's more mainstream and around the same price as **PRS's SC 245**



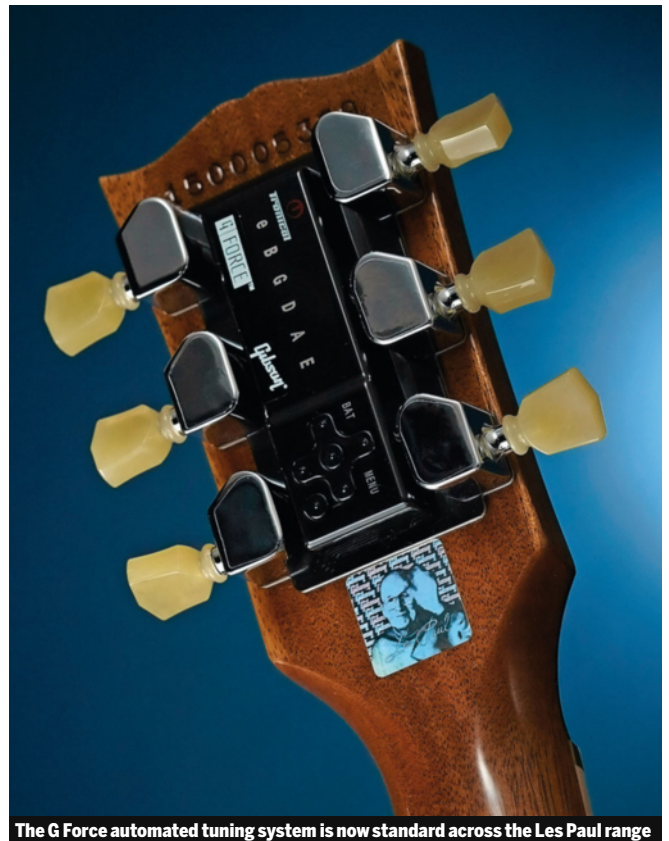
The larger strap buttons present on 2014 Les Pauls have been retained



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Gibson has treated the 2015 Les Paul Studio to a pair of tasty 57 humbuckers



The G Force automated tuning system is now standard across the Les Paul range

was introduced last year and is described by Gibson as being “elliptical sound-chambers inside the mahogany body. Fully ‘chambered’ Les Pauls can, some argue, feedback like a semi. Modern weight relief solves all that.”

The Studio’s maple top is B grade, which sounds a little lowly, and there’s only one grade (C) below it, with eight grades, up to AAAA, above it. Save for a little flame in the centre of the two-piece top, it’s plain, but it works really well with the stripped-down, classic vibe created by the unbound Desert Burst gloss finish, dark cream pickup surrounds and switch collar and the almost aged-looking satin nickel-plated hardware. There’s another quality grade in terms of the top, and that affects the carve, or ‘body contour’ as Gibson calls it, especially around the edge of the top. We have four grades: flat, slight (as here), classic and enhanced – the latter, presumably, making the most of the violin-like dishing as the top flows into the outer edge. There’s not much of

that here, but time is money – more contouring means more time sanding, and compared to either of the other LPs on review, the Studio is really very attractively priced.

The neck has similar options. There are colour classifications for the rosewood ‘board: light, medium and dark; ours is medium and does look a little ‘dry’. Then, of course, there are the neck profiles. The Studio has the slim taper (measured at 21mm at the 1st fret, 22.4mm at the 12th) – one of five profiles offered across the range. If you’re thinking, “I know that profile” prepare to be wrong. Gibson has retained its standard string spacing at the nut and bridge (36.5mm and 50mm respectively) but increased the actual width of the neck, so the nut width, depending on profile, is approximately 45mm wide and the width at the 16th fret neck join is a little over 57mm.

As the price reflects, this is a more deluxe upgrade but it drops to the lowest C grade maple top

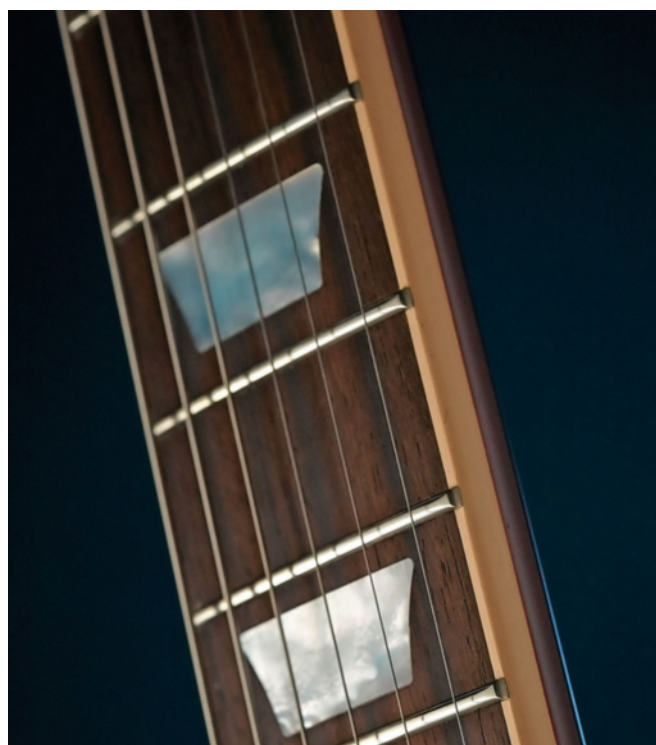
As a result, the outer strings sit some way from the edge of the fingerboard; there’s a standard 12-inch radius to the fingerboard itself and the fret wire is on the small side of medium: approximately 2.24mm wide and 1.1mm high. A radical change is the height-adjustable zero fret. Made from cryogenically treated brass (an ultra-low temperature process used to harden certain metals), a central section – that sits within a fixed outer nut-like housing – is held in place by string tension and two locating posts. The front edge, like a fret, is domed; the back edge is a series of grooves which act as string guides. Between the outer pairs of strings are two small Allen key bolts, which can raise or lower the height of the nut – not itself a new idea: Gordon-Smith has a height-adjustable brass nut, so does Warwick, but we’ve not seen

a height-adjustable zero fret like this before.

Face-on, nut aside, the headstock looks pretty standard, except for 2015 we get a thick gold signature ‘Les Paul 100’ script logo – referring, of course, to Les Paul himself, who was born in 1915. Flip the guitar over and we have the new G Force tuning system, which looks identical to the previous Min-ETune. Aside from the red, green and blue banks of the previous system we have two additional banks (white and yellow) of six presets, all aimed at those players who want to access low tunings such as C to C, for example. There’s also another six-slot user bank (magenta). Including standard tuning, that’s 24 different tuning presets with space for 12 of your own. There seem to be a lot more in-depth editable parameters for the more serious musician, not least the ability to ‘sweeten’ the tuning via +/- 12 cent ‘offsets’ on each string.

There’s a wide choice of pickups across the range. The Studio offers the 57 Plus and 57 Classic humbuckers, both with





The neck is virtually the same width as the Studio's but more rounded in feel



New mini 'buckers feature steel-blade pole pieces under nickel-plated covers

Alnico II magnets. We get the higher-speed knobs with multi notches, for grip, around the top edge, too. Wiring is all to a PCB with push-in contacts – the coil splits, via pull/push switches on the volume controls, are what Gibson calls 'tuned coil taps'; the single-coil sound is created via a capacitor acting as a filter rather than knocking one coil out. You still get a little hum in individual pickup selections, but full hum-cancelling in the mixed pickup mode; there's also less volume drop in the 'single-coil' mode. The larger strap buttons are retained, too.

Deluxe

As the price reflects, this is a more deluxe upgrade but it

drops to the lowest C grade maple top, as it's offered either under a very cool-looking Wine Red translucent finish, as reviewed, or completely opaque Gold Top or Pelham Metallic Blue. That said, there is a 'burst option that will be very plain-looking, like those Deluxes of the 70s: not everyone wants figure and flame.

Weight relief is the earlier nine-hole variety, and designated as being 'low' density mahogany for the back, although it's the heaviest of our

Under the hood is the modern weight relief and centre-joined 'ultra low' density mahogany back

review trio. The top's contour is 'classic', noticeably more dished than the Studio, plus we have cream binding around the top edge and the fingerboard. The neck's width is pretty much identical to the Studio, but the profile is 'rounded asymmetrical', putting more meat on the bass side (21mm at the 1st fret, 24.6mm at the 12th) and more overall girth further up the neck. The new-design mini humbuckers – that use Alnico V magnets with steel-blade pole pieces, hidden under

nickel-plated covers – have a hefty DC resistance, quoted as 26k ohms for the bridge and 17k for the neck; they have standard coil-splits, too, voicing the inside single coil of each pickup – once again, they are fully hum-cancelling in the mixed position. Finally, we have the active level boost (with adjustable gain on the circuit board to set and forget), meaning we drop down to a master tone control plus two volumes, both with pull/push switches to engage those coil-splits. The hardware is nickel-plated.

Standard

As the definitive Les Paul, the Standard has gone through





The Standard packs a pair of Gibson Burstbucker Pro covered humbuckers



We get an active level boost with a single master tone control and two volumes

some changes over the years, not least recently! This year's model builds on the Deluxe with a very classic-looking AA-grade figured maple top that certainly isn't over-dramatic, and with the 'enhanced' body contour is subtly more dished than the Deluxe. Under the hood is the modern weight relief and centre-joined 'ultra low' density mahogany back – it's still no lightweight, though. The neck profile is the 'slim' profile but asymmetric, again putting more beef on the bass side (20.8mm at the 1st fret, 22.5mm at the 12th). The fingerboard is classed as 'dark' – a very close call between that and the Deluxe's in colour, there's slightly more 'interest'

here with purple streaks to the grain.

A neat addition is the easily removable no-screw pickguard, which via three small prongs slots into the cream pickup rings, leaving no open screw holes as the standard fixings do when you remove it.

It returns to the four-control layout with dual Burstbucker Pro humbuckers, with their slightly unmatched coils – a difference of about 200 turns – and Alnico V magnets. Again, we have the tuned coil-taps via

the volume controls' pull/push switches, but we also have pull/push switches on the two tone controls – pulling up the bridge pickup's tone sends that pickup straight to the output jack, bypassing the tone and any interaction of the other controls; the neck pickup's tone, with the switch pulled up and both pickups selected, puts them out of phase.

Overall, the gloss finishing on all three guitars is really good: typically Gibson in that it's not mirror-perfect, but it's clearly

thin, crisply coloured and also pleasantly non-sticking on the neck backs. The Standard's Candy finish refers to a subtle metallic gold fleck that's barely visible under normal light, more noticeable – still very subtle – under a brighter illumination.

Sounds

For all the forum inches devoted to pricing, the rebranded Min-E-Tune and *that* script logo on the headstock, the most striking aspect of each of these instruments is the way their respective neck shapes feel in your left hand. The three profiles here are all comfy enough, but there's no doubt that the wider nut width of all three is initially something of

The most striking aspect of each of these instruments is the way their neck shapes feel in your left hand



The Standard delivers classy refined tones with a clean sound that may surprise you



From the front, the hologram and G Force remain hidden



The AA-grade maple top typifies the Standard's high-quality feel

a curveball for those who find grasping the company's classic neck shapes akin to sliding your feet into a comfy old pair of slippers. As string spacing is the same as ever, the additional real estate on the treble and bass sides of the fingerboard might prove a challenge for thumb-over-the-top players – less so for guitarists used to a traditionally dimensioned classical guitar – but it provides a safety net for those with a more exaggerated left-hand vibrato technique, and for inexperienced players there's much less chance of slipping off the edge of the 'board when playing either E string. In practice, though, it's initially a little disconcerting for a dyed-in-the-wool Gibson addict; it takes only about half an hour of playing time before the fingerboard dimensions become a non-issue and you get on with the matter in hand: making music.

It wasn't that long ago that Gibson reserved 57 Classics for

its USA vintage reissue models, and here they help the Studio deliver authoritative humbucker tones that are every bit a grown-up Les Paul. There's plenty of treble, too; it's a far cry from the woolly high end and heavy mids of the ceramic pickup-loaded LP Studios of the 1990s. Pulling either volume pot to put the corresponding pickup into single-coil mode yields an alternative set of hollower, spankier sounds that are eminently usable onstage – there's none of the gut-wrenching drop in volume that made many of the coil-split options of yesteryear so unappealing in a live context. For the price, the 2015 LP Studio is a serious guitar.

Although, with its pleasingly chunky neck profile, the Deluxe

is the most comfortable to play, the mini-humbuckers are initially a little underwhelming compared to the authoritative punch and bite of the Studio's 57s – especially as it's almost double the price – but, hold your horses, there's the small matter of that gain boost mini-toggle to consider. Flip that switch and you'll be sorely tempted to snap it off, leaving it permanently engaged; suddenly, there's a red hot firecracker of a guitar in your hands with a satisfyingly crisp high-end and huge output (though you can tame this internally should you need to) that's great for anything from Mick Ronson tones to hot-rodded 80s hard rock.

Compared to the Deluxe's active boost, the Standard is, of

course, somewhat tamer. That said, it's a seriously classy performer that feels richer and more sophisticated than its siblings in every position. Played clean, even the full humbucking tones have a three-dimensional, bell-like complexity that may redefine your expectations of how much clean mileage you can get from a Les Paul Standard. The single-coil voicings are, likewise, a more expressive step up from those of the Studio and Deluxe.

Additional sauce here comes courtesy of the 'straight out' setting, providing a little more raunch, and you get a honky, out-of-phase tone that's useful should you need a T-Bone Walker or pseudo-Varitone-type lead voice to slice through a mix in the studio.

Back in full humbucking mode, crank up your amp or add a nice overdrive pedal and the Burstbucker Pro pickups excel for the kind of classic lead tones that the likes of Clapton, Page, ➤

Flip the gain boost switch and there's a red hot firecracker of a guitar with a crisp high-end and huge output



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Kossoff and many more used to define the vocabulary of rock. The Les Paul Standard may be priced dangerously close to a used R8 or R9, but in the heat of battle with a hot, loud amp you'd struggle to get a cigarette paper between the tones on offer here and their Gibson Custom equivalents. Not for the first time, we encounter a crop of new Gibsons, in which the Les Paul Standard sets the standard when it comes to sonic quality.

Verdict

As usual, new Gibsons arrive with no shortage of talking points, and there are plenty here to alarm the purists – not least that if you want to buy a new Les Paul Standard that doesn't have a brass zero fret, board-mounted components, G Force tuners and non-traditional fingerboard dimensions then you'll have to shell out at least £3,199 for the 'entry-level' Gibson Custom Plaintop R8.

However, our recent conversations with Gibson indicate that the company's 2015 USA models simply aren't aimed at the same players who lust after vintage accuracy – onboard self tuning, more beginner-friendly fretboard dimensions and the like are symptomatic of a conscious decision to appeal to a new generation of guitarists.

Less controversial are improvements in the fit and finish, but it remains to be seen whether the people Gibson is targeting have the funds to splash out on the Deluxe or Standard; both are fine instruments, and the Standard is the real 'heart purchase' here, but we'd suggest that it's priced in a ballpark that's accessible only to older, well-heeled beginners, rather than the next generation of guitar heroes.

The Studio might not be the best looker here, but it's the star performer overall, as £899 buys you a great-sounding, versatile, USA-made Les Paul with a 'proper' nitro finish and a serious hard case. We expect them to fly. **G**



Gibson 2015 Les Paul Studio

PRICE: £899 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Medium density mahogany (w/modern weight relief), B grade figured maple top
NECK: 1-piece, slim taper profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 624mm (24.6")
NUT/WIDTH: Brass zero fret/45.6mm
FINGERBOARD: Medium rosewood, m-o-p trapezoid inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Satin nickel-plated Tune-O-Matic bridge and stud tailpiece, G Force 'robot' tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 50mm
ELECTRICS: Gibson 57 Plus (bridge) & 57 Classic (neck) covered humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual volume (w/ coil-split) and tone controls
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 3.85/8.48
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: See LP Deluxe
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Desert Burst (as reviewed), Manhattan Midnight, Wine Red
Gibson
GuitarGuitar
0800 456 1959
www2.gibson.com

GUITARIST RATING	★★★★★
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: Excellent value, high-quality sounds – including those single-coil voices – these will sell by the truckload



Gibson 2015 Les Paul Deluxe

PRICE: £1,699 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Low density mahogany (w/ 9-hole weight relief), C grade maple top
NECK: 1-piece, rounded asymmetrical profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 624mm (24.6")
NUT/WIDTH: Brass zero fret/45.5mm
FINGERBOARD: Cream bound medium rosewood, m-o-p trapezoid inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Nickel-plated Tune-O-Matic bridge and stud tailpiece, G Force 'robot' tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 50mm
ELECTRICS: Gibson new LP covered mini-humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual volume (w/ coil-split pull/push switch) controls, master tone, 2-way level boost toggle switch
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 4.8/10.5
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: LP Junior Single Cut (£699), Special DC (£799), LPM (£799), Classic (£1,599), Traditional (£1,999), Standard Premium Quilt (£3,199) & Supreme Heritage (£4,299)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Heritage Cherry Sunburst, Pelham Blue Metallic Top, Wine Red (as reviewed), Gold Top

GUITARIST RATING	★★★★★
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: A little more niche tonally, but a great option for hot 70s sounds and 80s rock, thanks to the onboard boost



Gibson 2015 Les Paul Standard

PRICE: £2,499 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Ultra density mahogany (w/ modern weight relief), AA grade maple top
NECK: 1-piece, slim taper asymmetrical profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 624mm (24.6")
NUT/WIDTH: Brass zero fret/45.4mm
FINGERBOARD: Cream bound dark rosewood, m-o-p trapezoid inlays, 254-406mm (10-16") compound radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Chrome-plated Tune-O-Matic bridge and stud tailpiece, G Force 'robot' tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 50mm
ELECTRICS: Gibson Burst Buckner Pro covered humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual volume (w/ coil-split pull/push switch) and tone controls w/ straight out and out-of-phase pull/push switches
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 4.1/9
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: See LP Deluxe
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Heritage Cherry Sunburst Candy, Tobacco Sunburst Candy, Trans Amber Cherry Back Candy, Honey Burst Perimeter Candy

GUITARIST RATING	★★★★★
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: It's expensive, but if you can get on with the 2015 spec there's a depth of tone that's a cut above its siblings