

GRETSCH ELECTROMATIC G5105 CVT III, G5435T PRO JET & G5448T DOUBLE JET £274, £514 & £514
ELECTRICS



THE JET SET

As Gretsch overhauls its affordable Electromatic range, we find out just how close a few hundred quid gets you to the real deal... **by Ed Mitchell**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSE WILD



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What we want to know

- 1 So Electromatics are like Gretsch's Squier or Epiphone, yes?**
Yup, and aside from the models we have on review there's plenty more in the updated range such as the hardtail Pro Jet, the bolt-on necked Jet Club and the Special Jet, which sports a bolt-on neck and humbuckers.
- 2 Er, a bolt-on neck on a Gretsch? That's... new...**
Yes, that took us by surprise too! Obviously it's been done to keep prices down. As it happens we got on like a house on fire with the bolt-on model here.
- 3 Who are they aimed at?**
Aside from the usual cash-strapped musos, Gretsch, like Rickenbacker, has a unique place in rock 'n' roll history. If you've never owned one, this is a good place to start. Don't blame us if you get hooked on them, mind...

Electromatic Series guitars aren't just a good way of getting your hands on an affordable Gretsch, they've actually developed a bit of a cult following in their own right. For example, owners of the Pro Jet and 5120 semi-acoustic often rip out the existing pickups to replace them with higher spec TV Jones models. Type in 'Electromatic modification' into YouTube and you'll see what we mean. These guys want to convert their Electromatic Pro Jets into Duo Jets; and Electromatic 5120s into G6120 rockabilly machines; just like Eddie Cochran and Brian Setzer's big orange guitars. You might recall that we had a go ourselves back in issue 327, where we relic'd an Electromatic 5120, adding Seymour Duncan pickups, dice knobs and pinup girl decals.

Now even Gretsch has got in on the Electromatic pimping fad. The freshly scrubbed Pro Jet and Double Jet models now feature pickup upgrades and new fingerboard inlays. There are even new models including a sixties classic reborn with, gulp, a bolt-on neck...

G5105 CVT III
'CVT' is short for Corvette, the model originally launched by

Gretsch in 1961. While the first Corvettes had slab bodies, the outline was eventually honed into the shapely beauty you see before you. Our CVT III has a mahogany body with a maple neck held in place with four screws through a plate, just like a Fender. Yep, this guitar has a bolt-on neck, which is not the

norm for a Gretsch, but more on that soon. The chubby profile neck is mated to a rosewood fingerboard, with a 305mm radius and 22 well-seated and dressed medium jumbo frets.

The hardware includes an anchored (ie screwed into the body) adjust-o-matic bridge and bar tailpiece. Again, this is

Now even Gretsch has got in on the Electromatic pimping fad, with pickup upgrades and new fretboard inlays



The CVT's mini humbuckers were previously seen on the Electromatic Jets



The Rivals

For an interesting alternative to the freshly tweaked Pro and Double Jets, keep 'em peeled for the semi-acoustic **Italia Maranello '61** (£549). The double cutaway guitar has a definite Gretsch vibe (it even comes in a trans orange finish) and has two great-sounding Wilkinson humbuckers and a pawnshop prize-style vibrato unit. And while we may already be sold on the Electromatic CVT III Corvette, the **Danelectro '56 Single Cutaway** (£349) and **Eastwood's** cheekily-named **'Big Horn'** (£319) are also well worth a spank for retro punks. The latter guitar is available in a left-handed version at no extra cost.

not classic Gretsch, but it does a textbook job of keeping the strings attached to the guitar. The CVT comes with a master volume and master tone control both manipulated with lovely chrome 'G Arrow' knobs. The real frontpage news is the trio of mini-humbuckers encased in chrome-plated covers. These pickups were originally spec'd on the Pro Jet and Double Jet models that you're about to read about. We liked them plenty on the Jets, so we're expecting good things when we plug this Corvette into an amp.

G5435T Pro Jet

The Pro Jet is based around a chambered basswood body with a laminated arched maple top. You can own a Pro Jet in a black or gold finish with a deep brown back and neck. The set maple neck is topped with a

The Pro Jet features similar, '57-era 'hump block' inlays to those on the George Harrison signature: fab indeed

slice of rosewood, 22 medium jumbo frets and again has a 305mm (12-inch) radius, the same as a Les Paul, which might give you an idea of the great playability on offer here. By the way, the fingerboard comes studded with similar, '57-era 'hump block' inlays to those featured on the recent Gretsch George Harrison Signature and Custom Shop Tribute model guitars: fab indeed.

The Jet's complement of hardware includes a set of vintage-style tuners, classic screw-on strap buttons and beautiful chrome 'G Arrow' control knobs. You also get a

horseshoe Bigsby Licensed B50 vibrato although this isn't period correct: fifties-era Jets would have been retrofitted with the longer-bodied B3 Bigsby. Just like the one on Beatle George's original guitar in fact.

As we mentioned before, the previous Pro Jet – and Double Jet – were loaded with the same mini-humbuckers that now come fitted to the CVT III Corvette. As such, both Jets have been duly upgraded with sexy-looking Blacktop Filter'Tron humbuckers which claim to offer a more authentic Gretsch tone.



The Pro Jet's chambered basswood body makes it a friendly gigging companion in terms of weight



G5448T Double Jet

The Electromatic Double Jet pays tribute to the double-cut Duo Jet that Gretsch launched in 1961. Aside from the extra cutaway, the Double Jet's spec is identical to its single-cut brother. As we've obviously blown our beans running through the wonders of the Pro Jet, we should also mention one slight niggle with the DJ.

Right, here's the thing: the pre-facelift Electromatic Double Jet had period-correct thumbnail fingerboard inlays, and they just looked 'right'. Here Gretsch has chosen to replace the Double Jet's thumbnails with '57 'hump block' inlays. It's unlikely to make any difference to the vast majority of people, but it's the kind of thing that keeps us – and Gretsch nerds – awake at night. [Note: must get out more

– Ed]. Fellow detail fans will be pleased to know, however, that the horseshoe Bigsby fitted to our Double Jet is period-correct, although some sixties Jets came with a Burns vibrato unit or a G-cutout tailpiece. So much for history – it's gold, sparkly and still as cool as your granny's mood when you wake her at 4am with AC/DC riffs. Which you will. Let's plug in...

Sounds

The CVT III is a blast. The bolt-on neck actually works well on this guitar. It feels robust, like you can beat the hell out of it and it won't give up. It jangles through a clean channel but it really comes to life when you add some overdrive. With the bridge pickup engaged it comes across like a miffed Rickenbacker; that explosive power-chord thing that you

hear on Jam records. Selecting the other humbuckers one-by-one reveals some usable warmer tones, but it's the punk rock bliss in the bridge pickup that made our day. How about a single-pickup version, Gretsch?

Running the Jets through a clean channel it's immediately clear that the new Blacktop Filter'Tron pickups are more Gretsch-like than those original mini-buckers. The bridge Blacktop has much of that punchy clean sound that we expect from a Duo Jet. It's great for beating out old-school rock 'n' roll riffs. Gretsch guitars are more versatile than we give them credit for and both Jets pump out convincing rockabilly, blues and surf tones. Then there's the rock stuff. Steve Marriott of The Small Faces and Humble Pie, and Malcolm Young of AC/DC,



The DJ's period-correct Bigsby

have both proven how great Gretsch Jets sound with some overdrive. The Blacktop Filter'Trons work great with the filth. The inherent brightness of the pickups cuts through an gives the overdriven tones a ballsy edge. We're not claiming the Pro and Double Jets sound like the high rolling Professional Series Gretsch models. There is still a big difference, but these latest Electromatics get closer than ever to the real deal.

It's time to give that elephant in the room a right good kick up the rear. Which is to say, why didn't Gretsch go the whole hog and build affordable replicas of its classic Jets while it had the chance? It wouldn't have taken much more effort. For example, the Pro Jet only needs a B3 model Bigsby vibrato, a chunky silver-backed perspex pickguard, sculpted pickup rings and a pair of DynaSonic lookalike single-coils to nail the '57 Duo Jet's aesthetics.


Maybe Gretsch doesn't want to compromise its Japanese-made Professional range: if you buy a two grand-plus work of art such as the Gretsch G6128T-GH George Harrison Signature Duo Jet, you want everyone to know you unloaded your bank account on it. A 500



Both Jets now sport these impressive Blacktop Filter'Tron humbuckers



quid doppelgänger of your new pride and joy would likely not make you happy.

But as they stand, the Pro Jet and Double Jet are perfect for Gretsch virgins seeking out great build, playability, tone and good looks. And the Electromatic cultists will no doubt keep on pimping them to get them even closer to the real thing, despite the pickup upgrades. As for the CVT III Corvette, it's a cheap, tough, unsophisticated little rock 'n' roll guitar that does its job very well. No mods required. 



Gretsch G5105 CVT III

PRICE: £274.80
ORIGIN: China
BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 625mm (24.6 inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with dot inlays, 305mm (12-inch) radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Chrome anchored adjust-o-matic bridge, bar tailpiece and vintage-style tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53mm
ELECTRICS: Three Gretsch mini-humbuckers, master volume, master tone, three-way pickup selector toggle switch
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.7/6.1
OPTIONS: See finishes
RANGE OPTIONS: Electromatic G5135 CVT (£670.80); Electromatic G5135GL G. Love Signature CVT (£1042.80); Electromatic G5135PS Patrick Vaughn Stump Stump-O-Matic CVT (£826.80)
LEFTHANDERS: See Pro Jet
FINISHES: Black (as reviewed), cherry
Fender GBI
01342 331700
www.gretschguitars.com

Test results

Build quality	★★★★☆
Playability	★★★★☆
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★☆

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Gretsch G5435T Pro Jet

PRICE: £514.80
ORIGIN: China
BODY: Chambered basswood with arched maple top
NECK: Maple, set-in
SCALE LENGTH: 625mm (24.6 inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with pearloid 'hump block' inlays, 305mm (12-inch) radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Chrome anchored adjust-o-matic bridge, Bigsby Licensed B50 vibrato and vintage-style tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53mm
ELECTRICS: Two Gretsch Blacktop Filter'Tron humbuckers, two volumes, master volume, master tone, three-way pickup selector toggle switch
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.5/7.7
OPTIONS: See finishes
RANGE OPTIONS: Hardtail G5434 Pro Jet (£418.80), left-handed hardtail G5434 Pro Jet (£418.80), G5415 Special Jet (£238.80) and G5425 Jet Club (£274.80)
LEFTHANDERS: The lefty hardtail Pro Jet shares the spec and price tag of its right-handed brother
FINISHES: Black (as reviewed), gold

Test results

Build quality	★★★★☆
Playability	★★★★☆
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★☆

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Gretsch G5448T Double Jet

PRICE: £514.80
ORIGIN: China
BODY: Chambered basswood with arched maple top
NECK: Maple, set-in
SCALE LENGTH: 625mm (24.6 inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with pearloid 'hump block' inlays, 305mm (12-inch) radius
FRETS: 22 medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Chrome anchored adjust-o-matic bridge, Bigsby Licensed B50 vibrato and vintage-style tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53mm
ELECTRICS: Two Gretsch Blacktop Filter'Tron humbuckers, two volumes, master volume, master tone, three-way pickup selector toggle switch
WEIGHT (kg/lbs): 3.6/8
OPTIONS: See finishes
RANGE OPTIONS: N/A
LEFTHANDERS: See Pro Jet
FINISHES: Gold (as reviewed), black

Test results

Build quality	★★★★☆
Playability	★★★★☆
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★☆

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

The Bottom Line

Gretsch G5105 CVT III

We like: The bridge pickup equals rock 'n' roll heaven; the chubby bolt-on neck makes the guitar feel almost indestructible
We dislike: A bolt-on neck Gretsch will seem a bit weird to some
Guitarist says: It's great when you find a budget guitar that punches above its weight. The CVT III is a little knockout

Gretsch G5435T Pro Jet

We like: Looks enough like George's Duo Jet to make us happy; the upgraded Filter'Tron pickups are a real improvement
We dislike: Hard to fault. This is a whole lot of very cool guitar for the money
Guitarist says: While the previous Pro Jet was a great guitar, this tweaked version leaves it in the dust thanks to its new pickups

Gretsch G5448T Double Jet

We like: Great build quality, playability and tone; well worth the asking price
We dislike: Just the changed inlays, but that's hardly a deal breaker...
Guitarist says: Yes, we wish it still had the thumbnail inlays but we'll get over it. The Double Jet is a versatile rock 'n' roll guitar