

GEAR

REVIEW

LINE 6 JTV-59 JAMES TYLER VARIAX



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£1,099

27 guitars, an electric sitar and a banjo: one gigbag

WHEN Line 6 launched the first generation Variax modelling guitar 10 years ago some hailed it as the second coming, others wanted to see it burned at the stake. Disciples were seduced by its 26 authentic-sounding guitar tones, modelled from such Grade A guitar porn as a 1959 Fender Stratocaster and a 1958 Gibson Les Paul Standard. The haters grumbled that the Variax was an over-priced gimmick with about as much chance of commercial success as a Cradle Of Filth Christmas album.

The lovers and loathers agreed on one thing: the original Variax was no oil painting. In fact, it was more like a blank canvas. So, Line 6 commissioned US luthier James Tyler to build the Variax technology into a series of classic-looking electric guitars. Tyler's new designs now feature real singlecoil and humbucking pickups that function independently of the modelling technology.

There are three new Korean-made models based on Tyler's US Variax guitars (priced from a whopping £2,749). The humbucker and twin singlecoil format, vibrato-equipped JTV-69 (£1,049) clearly takes inspiration from the world's most famous doublecut. The twin-humbucker JTV-89 (£949) is all about the reverse-headstock, 80s hair metal attitude. And you don't get a lollipop for guessing that our JTV-59 is based on a certain singlecut. You can run the '59 as a straight ahead electric thanks to a pair of great-sounding, vintage-voiced alnico humbuckers or press down the Guitar Model knob for access to a whole bunch of authentic modelled tones like a 1967 Epiphone Casino and a big-bodied 1995 Gibson J-200 acoustic.

You will have to take a few of the sounds at face value. The Strat and Les Paul inspired stuff is easy

to place but would you really know what the neck pickup of a real 1957 Gibson ES-175 archtop jazz guitar sounds like? In those instances, it really comes down to whether that particular tone works for you. There are enough options to satisfy anyone. Once you have selected the instrument type you can manipulate the Alternate Tuning knob for options like drop D, open G and baritone. You can also customise the models and tuning with Line 6's brilliant Work Bench software and link the Variax up to a Line 6 POD to program models and effects to change simultaneously.

As much fun as it is to play the *Sweet Child O' Mine* riff on a 'Gibson Mastertone banjo' you have to get realistic about owning a JTV-59. The wooden bit is basically a decent mid-range singlecut that would probably sell for around £500 if it were a regular electric guitar. That means you're paying a lot for the privilege of owning the Variax technology. Not all of the sounds are 100 per cent convincing. For instance, the 1966 Rickenbacker 360/12 12-string sounds a bit synthetic and the acoustic models are definitely best heard through a dedicated acoustic amp or PA system, which promote a wider frequency range.

If all you need is a couple of good humbucker sounds, the Swiss Army knife approach of the JTV-59 probably isn't for you. However, for the session players or cover band guitarists who need as wide a range of tones as possible in a single instrument, then Line 6's Variax is a great deal.

Ed Mitchell

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

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Mahogany, with carved maple top
NECK: Mahogany, set-in
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, with dot inlays
FRETS: 22 medium jumbo
SCALE: 24 9/16"
PICKUPS: 2x alnico humbuckers, LR Baggs Radiance Hex piezo
CONTROLS: Master volume, master tone, Guitar Model, Alternate Tuning, three-way pickup selector toggle switch
HARDWARE: Chrome James Tyler-designed bridge and machineheads
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Black (shown), Cherry Sunburst, Tobacco Sunburst
CONTACT: Line 6 01788 566566
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1 HUMBUCKERS

UNLIKE THE first generation of Variax guitars the new JTV-59 comes loaded with a pair of Alnico-magnet-loaded humbuckers wired to a three-way toggle switch

2 BRIDGE

THE LR Baggs Radiance Hex piezo pickup that feeds the Variax system is built into the beefy looking James Tyler-designed chrome bridge

3 KNOBS

THIS CLUSTER of knobs includes a volume and tone that function in magnetic pickup and Variax modes and a 'Guitar Model' and 'Alternate Tuning' selector

