



Words: Jonathan Horsley
Photography: Ollie Curtis

ALTERNATIVE OFFSET ROUND-UP

Forget the cookie cutter, here are four super-cool, vintage-voiced electrics that have all been shaped by a more maverick hand



Straight off we've got to admit that "alternative offset" doesn't scream rock 'n' roll. It sounds like something that grim, grey-suited man does with your tax return. But, please, bear with us: these offset electrics, so-called for their asymmetric silhouettes and misaligned waists, are right on the money if you're looking for something a little left of centre.

An instrument such as Fender's Offset HS Duo-Sonic, perhaps? A short-scale electric with a string-through tailpiece, the Duo-Sonic is a stripped-down rocker that juices Leo's signature twang with hot sauce. Or the Reverend Double

Agent OG. A princely retro-rocker, hewn from korina, sprayed with an awesome Metallic Alpine finish, it belies the Detroit company's recent formation with a look and feel that suggests early 60s. Then there's the Ibanez RC250, a svelte little double-cut with a mahogany body, vintage look and contemporary feel. If it weren't for its immaculate finish, replete with binding on neck and body, you'd want to swing it around a bit. And, rounding out the round-up, the Cort Alder G260, a hot-rodged S-style that features some serious Trevor Wilkinson hardware and boasts an HSS pickup suite that promises a wide spectrum of rock-ready tone.



IBANEZ RC520

£429

Hit the Roadcore, Jack

Wait! This is an Ibanez but it looks like it's from the 1960s?

The headstock decal does not lie, but remember: Ibanez has a proud history that pre-dates the epoch of shred, monkey grips and fluoro finishes. The Roadcore series is a millennial addition to the brand that offers a contemporary feel to an electric with vintage vibe and tone. Think of it as a classic car with power steering and air con.

This neck is a little thicker... Isn't that a little *Last Of The Summer Wine*?

No. There's no age barrier when it comes to using a slightly clubbier



neck, and we think the Roadcore's neck is a super-comfortable alternative to some of the emaciated alternatives you might find on the latest modern electric.

Does it sound old-school?

Fitted with two Ibanez-designed ToneCore humbuckers and a coil-split under the master tone knob, the Roadcore sounds all kinds of schools. It's bright and resonant, but dial in some gain and it sends some midrange right in the guts, while the coil-tap surrenders some sweet single-coil tones.



AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Mahogany body, bolt-on maple neck, 648mm (25.5") scale, 22 frets, 2x Tone Core humbuckers w/ coil-tap, Tight-Tune bridge
FINISH: Navy Metallic (as reviewed), Jet Stream Green, Candy Apple
CONTACT: Headstock Distribution
 0121 508 6666 www.ibanez.com

FENDER OFFSET DUO-SONIC

£517

Short and sweet

This feels smaller than your average Fender...

Mexican-built and designed to play any style imaginable, this pocket rocket has a 609mm (24") scale neck, similar to a Fender Jaguar and 38mm shorter than a Telecaster or Strat. Like the Jag, the Offset Duo-Sonic has a sort of fugitive, indie charm, and that scale length allows you to really lean into string bends.

Doesn't that mean smaller tone?

No way. With the humbucker/single-coil pickup combination, not to mention the now seemingly ubiquitous coil-split on the 'bucker,



there's a whole lot of tone. And allied to its alder body, the shorter scale also adds a little saturated fat and warmth.

Who is it made for?

Fender would say everyone and they'd be right. It's a lot of fun. The Duo-Sonic series has existed in some version since 1956, when it was originally the 'student' series and had an even shorter 571mm (22½") scale. But with that naturally warm, almost unruly tone, its minimalist vibe and compact silhouette makes it a sound choice for punks, surf-rockers and grunge heads.



AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Alder body, bolt-on maple neck, 609mm (24") scale, 22 medium jumbo frets, 1x Duo-Sonic single-coil (neck) and 1x Duo-Sonic humbucker (neck) w/coil-split, String-Thru Hardtail bridge with bent steel saddles
FINISH: Black (as reviewed), Daphne Blue, Surf Green
CONTACT: Fender GBI 01342 331700
www.fender.com

CORT G260 ALDER

£449

All bases covered

This looks familiar. Exactly what is so special about another S-style?

There's plenty special about the G260 Alder, as Cort has stacked the spec to turn what is a handsome but relatively familiar-looking electric into a Swiss army knife of tone and playability. There's a set of locking tuners, a beautifully-engineered Trevor Wilkinson VS50II vibrato unit, a thin C profile Canadian hard maple neck that feels raw, smooth and speedy – and, for the tonal connoisseur in your family, a Graph Tech Black TUSQ nut that helps this resonant lil' puppy sing.



And the body's made of alder, too. What's the big deal?

Well, the other models in Cort's G Series use basswood, and this is a welcome tonewood upgrade that immediately makes you think classic Fender: bright but full-bodied with authoritative lows.

What about that pickup combination?

With a vintage-voiced humbucker in the bridge and two single-coils in the middle and neck positions, plus a coil-split to turn that bridge 'bucker single, the G260 is something of a tonal chameleon. Blues, funk, 80s metal – it's got it covered.



AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Alder body, bolt-on maple neck, 647mm (25.5") scale, 22 frets, 1x Cort VTH-59 humbucker (bridge) 2x Cort VTS-63 single-coil (middle and neck), Wilkinson VS50II vibrato, Graph Tech Black TUSQ nut, locking tuners

FINISH: Tobacco Burst (as reviewed), Sea Foam Green

CONTACT: Proel 020 8761 9911
www.cortguitars.com

REVEREND DOUBLE AGENT OG

£649

Son of a preacher man

This looks truly vintage but Reverend are the new kids on the block, right?

Relatively, yes. Reverend Guitars was spawned in 1997 in a bicycle shop in east Detroit, but now operates out of Ohio. Patroned by the likes of Billy Corgan and Ron Asheton, its stable is inspired by old-school Americana.

What's this bass contour all about?

With the near ubiquitous coil-tap offering that extra tonal versatility in the other round-up models, you might think the



Double Agent is feeling left out, but the bass contour is a broad-sweeping tone control that changes the voice of its pickups. It can thicken up that P-90 in the neck and sharpen the humbucker in the bridge in a fashion that's not unlike a coil-tap. It's incredible.

What does it sound like?

The Double Agent harks back to a time when colour TVs were unheard of. There's attitude and snarl in the bridge humbucker while the P-90 is all punchy clarity. Factor in the bass contour and it's got sharp twang, squawk and woody thickness on tap.



AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Korina body, bolt-on maple neck, 647mm (25.5") scale, 22 medium jumbo frets, 1x Special H humbucker (bridge), 1x CP90 single-coil (neck), bass contour, Reverend pin-lock locking tuners.

FINISH: Alpine Green (as reviewed), Midnight Black, Natural Flame, Coffee Burst

CONTACT: Andertons 01483 456777
www.reverendguitars.com

HEAD TO HEAD

Keeping time: a quartet of vintage-toned delights

While all four of these guitars are designed with vintage tone in mind, and will no doubt appeal to a similar player, no two sound exactly alike. Take the Cort G260 Alder: it's arguably the most modern, with the HSS pickup combo reminiscent of the sort of hot-rodged S-types that were bred in the 80s, and yet its pickups, with their Alnico magnets, favour the dynamic voicings of late 50s and early 60s tone over the sort of high-output, high-gain consensus that prevails in so many of today's electrics. We love that the G260 can approximate those classic Strat tones, with the elastic spank of the single-coils and split humbucker and, then, when dialling in a little more gain, it responds with a harmonically rich rock tone. The vibrato, too, sets it apart. The Wilkinson unit is a lovely feature and, combined with locking tuners, it offers a little wobble without compromising tuning stability.

THE REVEREND'S THICK, CLUBBY NECK MAKES FOR A TRANSFORMATIVE PLAYING EXPERIENCE

At the other end of the round-up's aesthetic spectrum, the Reverend Double Agent feels like a guitar that was born too late; oh, to have seen it demoed at NAMM by Luther Perkins. Its thick, clubby neck is in marked contrast to the Fender Duo-Sonic and Cort, and makes for a transformative playing experience that's more befitting the age of *American Graffiti* than *American Idol*. The Fender Duo-Sonic has a slimmer C profile neck but, with its short scale, it has a similarly uncanny playability and feel. It's so comfortable for string bends and for playing the more complex fingerings from your favourite chord grimoire, which is good to know, even if you prefer to stick to three powerchords. The Ibanez Roadcore is an impressive instrument, too. Of course, being an Ibanez, it's eminently playable – even its volume and tone controls are tactile. Like the Fender, it's lightweight but solid, and it has a tone that's almost SG-esque and just begging for an overdriven amp.



The tortoiseshell pickguard on the Reverend seals the deal for this reviewer



The Ibanez is so playable even the volume and tone controls are tactile

FINAL VERDICT

Which alternative offset is the right one for you?

What's most encouraging about a round-up like this is the choice on offer. Not just between each guitar, but within each guitar itself. All four feature a coil-tap, or a variation thereof, and each has a dynamic voice that can handle clean and dirty tones alike. Even the most vintage-voiced, the Reverend Double Agent, sounds great through an overdriven amp. The Cort feels like the all-rounder; its sculpted neck-heel,

offering some upper-register access, is a nice modern touch, and the vibrato unit is sure to be a hit with those who might covet a Strat but are open to mid-priced alternatives.

The Ibanez RC250, with its binding and mahogany warmth is a great option to pair against the Fender Duo-Sonic, whose snot-green pickguard and smaller frame make it just so much fun to play; and the offer of genuine Fender tone is not to be sniffed at. The gigging hard-rocker would do

well to better these and both are instruments you could stamp your own style on.

In a world of templated design, the Fender, Ibanez and Reverend models seem especially intent on being different. To that end, the Reverend Double Agent – with its analogue bass contour, vintage feel, and tone evoking classic Americana – makes a strong case for being star of the show. That the tortoiseshell pickguard on a Metallic Alpine looks cooler than a snowman's underpants seals the deal.

IBANEZ RC520



TOTAL Guitar
BEST FOR CLASSIC ROCK

FENDER OFFSET DUO-SONIC



TOTAL Guitar
BEST FOR PUNK

CORT G260 ALDER



TOTAL Guitar
BEST VALUE FOR MONEY

REVEREND DOUBLE AGENT OG



TOTAL Guitar
BEST FOR OLD-SKOOL COOL

TOTAL Guitar
BEST BUY AWARD

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

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	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★