

Rocked & Rated

Adam Black
Orion Raised
Centre

Yamaha
Pacifica 112V

Group Test

Giggable electrics around £200

With quality through the roof and prices through the floor, there has never been a better time to be young, idealistic and paid the minimum wage. Here are four reasons why...

WORDS **HENRY YATES**



Squier
Standard
Telecaster

Vintage
VRS100



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

TG remembers the bad old days. It's 1976, we have short trousers and no facial hair, and we're stood in a guitar shop waiting to buy our first electric. But this isn't a happy memory. As the shop assistant notes our youth and budget, he gives a patronising sneer and leads us past the Les Pauls to the back room, where he takes down a Japocaster copy, complete with balsa wood body, rusty fretwire and pickups that fizz like broken hair straighteners. For the fledgling guitarist, this is as good as it gets.

It's strange to think of that now, in the buoyant entry-level market of 2009, where crap guitars are just something that people used to put up with but don't any more, like scurvy and black-and-white TV. Thanks to the Far Eastern copy boom of the 70s (leading to Fender's fightback with the Squier series in 1982, which sparked the launch of entry-level

ranges from every big-gun luthier), you'll never have to suffer as your forefathers did. Right now, for the thin end of your overdraft, you can pick up an axe that'll take you from fumbled chords, through first bands and the loss of your stage virginity, up to virtuosity and studio sessions. This Group Test is here to prove that beggars can be choosers.

Gigging on a budget

We're not saying you *have* to spend £200 to secure an electric – a quick squizz at the internet reveals doublecut guitars for the frankly laughable sum of £65 – but we suspect you'll struggle to find a truly giggable instrument for much less

than this, so we've settled on this figure as a price ballpark.

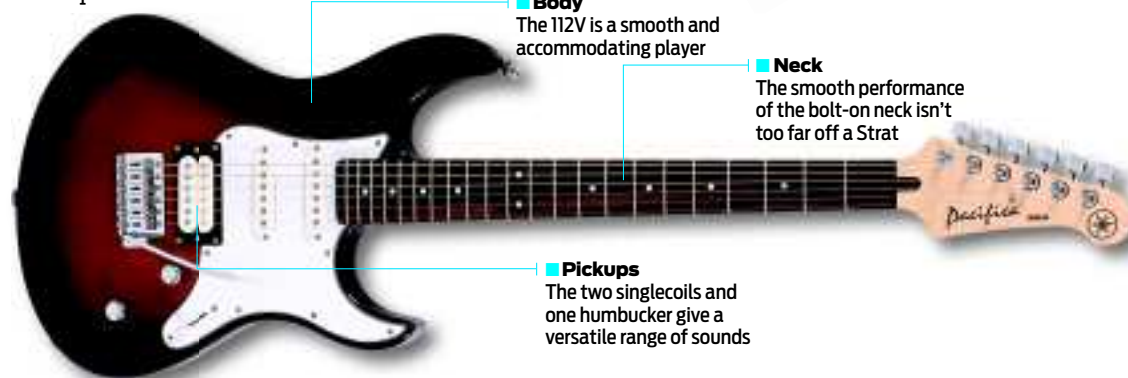
The good news is that a £200 wad opens up your options. Seeing as Squier set the ball rolling and is feted in entry-level circles, we couldn't resist the official Fender affiliations of the tasty Standard Telecaster (£219). But it's certainly not guaranteed the gold medal. Yamaha's Pacifica Series has been flying off racks since '93, and the updated hardware and pickups of the 112V (£199) made its inclusion a no-brainer. To add spice, TG lined up the Adam Black Orion (£194), before turning once again to entry-level hero Vintage to see if its VRS100 (£239) could blow our minds, if not our budget. ■

"IN THE ENTRY-LEVEL MARKET OF 2009, CRAP GUITARS ARE JUST SOMETHING THAT PEOPLE USED TO PUT UP WITH"



Yamaha Pacifica 112V £199

Cheap thrills



Body

The 112V is a smooth and accommodating player

Neck

The smooth performance of the bolt-on neck isn't too far off a Strat

Pickups

The two singlecoils and one humbucker give a versatile range of sounds

At a glance

Yamaha Pacifica 112V

BODY: Solid US alder
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
SCALE: 25½"
PICKUPS: Custom Alnico V SSH (2x singlecoil, 1x humbucker)
CONTROLS: Volume, tone, 5-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Chrome
FINISH: Old Violin Sunburst [pictured], Black, Red, Silver, Natural, Blue
CONTACT: Yamaha-Kemble Music (UK) Ltd 01908 366700
WEB: uk.yamaha.com

Most sub-£200 electrics are played through necessity. Since 1993, Pacificas have been chosen by proper grown-ups with jobs, cars and everything. No wonder we have high hopes for the updated 112V.

The sizzle: The 112V is designed to let us "play harder". Yamaha refers us to the solid US alder body, maple neck, rosewood fingerboard, vintage vibrato and a tantalising configuration of singlecoils and humbuckers



bolstered by a coil tap. If we had a guitar tech, he'd "approve of the stage-ready setup".

We say: Stick a blindfold on a guitar snob and they'll swear this is a mid-price Strat. That boring

body is contoured in all the right places, giving you free reign over a neck that is sensibly pitched between fast and fat, and offers fledgling players a decent platform for learning. The only conceivable criticism is that it feels a little generic, dealing in all styles but excelling at none.

You might argue the same applies to the tone. The 112V is easily the most adaptable model in the test, delivering a decent Strat quack from the singlecoils and scoring with a bridge humbucker that has

decent weight behind it for rock and blues licks. Again, our only issue is its slight lack of sonic identity, with the balanced tone covering all bases but never quite polarising its audience. Maybe that's the point. There are saucier models in this Group Test, but for now, we're calling this 'the all-rounder'.

SUMMARY

For: Versatility, pro feel, tone
Against: Slight lack of identity

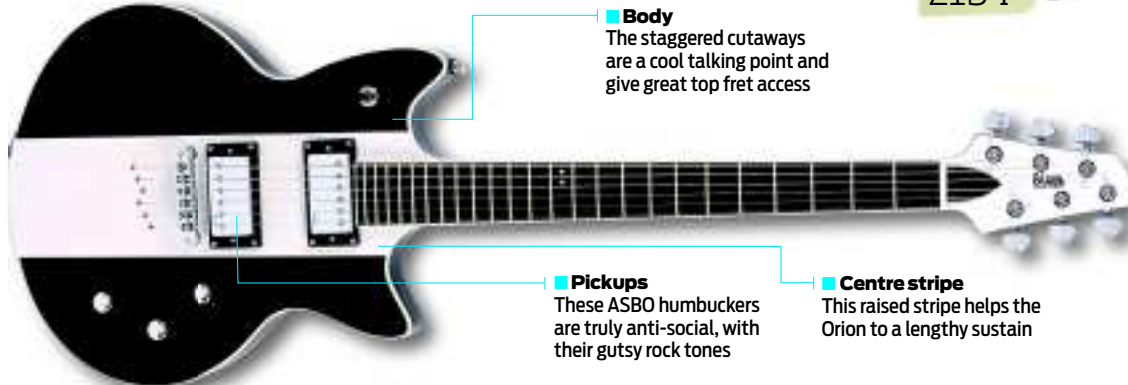
★★★★☆

TG says: The sensible choice

Adam Black Orion Raised Centre

Back in Black

£194



Body

The staggered cutaways are a cool talking point and give great top fret access

Pickups

These ASBO humbuckers are truly anti-social, with their gutsy rock tones

Centre stripe

This raised stripe helps the Orion to a lengthy sustain

At a glance

Adam Black Orion Raised Centre

BODY: Solid alder
NECK: Maple, set
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
SCALE: 25½"
PICKUPS: 2x ASBO humbuckers
CONTROLS: 2x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Black nickel
FINISH: Black/White [pictured]
CONTACT: Rosetti 01376 550033
WEB: www.rosetti.co.uk

When Adam Black told us the price of the Orion, we told them to stop messing us about, we've got deadlines to meet. They weren't. This is officially the sexiest thing you can do with a week's salary.

The sizzle: The Orion is touted as a "hard rocker hidden beneath a classic-looking exterior" and backs this up with a cock-eyed alder body and humbuckers so badass that they've been served



with anti-social behavioural orders (sort of). Then there's that raised central stripe. "It not only looks great," claims Mr Black, "but it also slightly increases the mass for improved sustain."

We say: Having stirred our loins with visuals not unlike Tom DeLonge's signature Gibson, the Orion continues to impress with a physical performance that never feels like corners have been cut. The quirky, staggered cutaways let you right up to the 24th fret, while the weight and the unfussy neck carve mean you'll quickly feel at home. It's not tailored to shred, but eats up gutsy hard rock and blues licks.

If you call your humbucker the ASBO, you'd better make

sure it rocks. These do. The target market should love the spit 'n' sawdust tone that can be coaxed from this electric. You don't get the warmth you'd get from a mahogany model, but there's plenty of punch and great sustain. It's not quite the best here on test, but it's the sexiest.

SUMMARY

For: Distorted tone, unfussy feel
Against: We just liked others more

★★★★☆

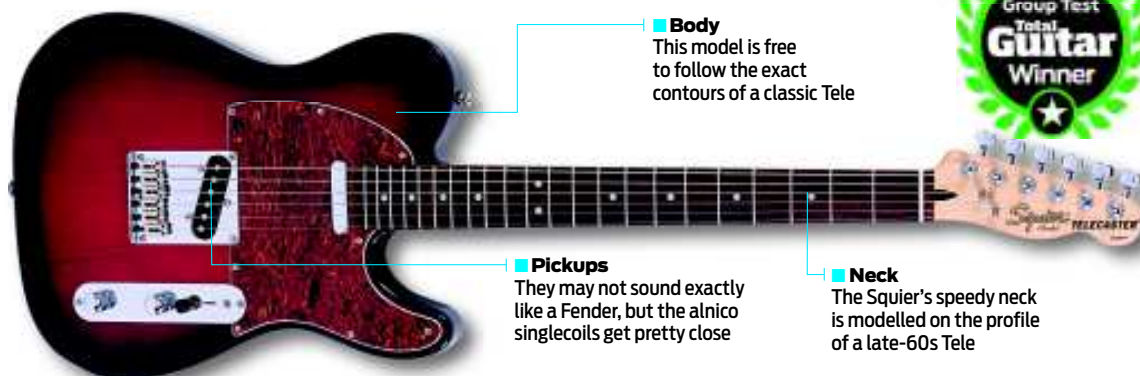
TG says: It's earned its stripes

"ONLY THE HEADSTOCK OF THE SQUIER TELE REMINDS US WE'RE IN THE BARGAIN BASEMENT"

GIGGABLE ELECTRICS AROUND £200 **★ GROUP TEST**

Squier Standard Telecaster £219

Nothing standard about this Tele



Body
This model is free to follow the exact contours of a classic Tele

Pickups
They may not sound exactly like a Fender, but the alnico singlecoils get pretty close

Neck
The Squier's speedy neck is modelled on the profile of a late-60s Tele

At a glance

Squier Standard Telecaster

BODY: Solid agathis
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
SCALE: 25½"
PICKUPS: 2x singlecoils
CONTROLS: Master volume, master tone, 3-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Chrome
FINISH: Candy Apple Red [pictured], Vintage Blonde, Antique Burst, Black Metallic
CONTACT: Fender GB: 01342 331726
WEB: www.fender.co.uk

As the official entry-level division of Fender, Squier is the only brand that can recreate every detail of the Tele without a cease-and-desist order landing on the doormat.

The sizzle: The best thing about Fender's involvement is the sharing of trade secrets. When Squier claims this model has "a fast-action neck profile modelled on a late-60s Tele", you're more inclined to believe it. The agathis body and maple neck have been



executed in much the same way as its US sibling too. The pickups aren't Fender-spec, but the "hot singlecoil in the bridge provides bite for stinging leads, while the chrome singlecoil helps you find your own voice".

We say: This reviewer owns a US Fender Tele and was fully expecting to pick holes in this budget equivalent. Instead, we were left slack-jawed. OK, so the Squier model doesn't feel as luxurious, but there is nothing tangible to fault here, with a deliciously playable neck and fingerboard feeling totally professional, the build more than competent, and only the headstock logo reminding us we're in the bargain basement.

We'd know that distinctive Tele quack anywhere, and while

you can't expect these singlecoils to match the twang-some character of a Fender, they get far closer than you deserve. The warmth of the neck and the throaty bite of the bridge are both quality, but it's the out-of-phase snap of the 'in-between' setting that really seals the deal. It's the winner by a nose.

SUMMARY

For: Authentic vibe, classic tone
Against: The name on the 'stock

★★★★★

TG says: 50s vibe and price!

Vintage VRS100 £239

White Lightning



Body
The VRS100's poplar body and flame maple top add a lot of sustain

Pickups
Trev Wilkinson's pickup reputation is upheld by these beefy 'buckers

Vibrato
The Wilkinson vintage vibrato offers a far smoother bend than competitors in this price bracket

At a glance

Vintage VRS100

BODY: Poplar with flame maple top
NECK: Maple, set
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
SCALE: 24¾"
PICKUPS: 2x Wilkinson humbuckers
CONTROLS: Master volume, master tone, 3-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Gold
FINISH: Arctic White [pictured], Maple Blue/Green, Gloss Black/Blue
CONTACT: John Hornby Skewes 0113 2865381
WEB: www.jhs.co.uk

Despite looking like the kind of electric that should be kept in a display case, this is a dues-paying workhorse that's gagging for a gigging.

The sizzle: The VRS100 does creep out of our £200 ballpark, but feel that spec. It's a marriage of "ultra-modern looks with classic values", citing in evidence the smooth knife-edge vibrato, the carved top and the Wilkinson humbuckers. "Their meaty



doublecoil tone will capture the heart of the most sceptical guitarists. These versatile guitars move from fruity-toned neck pickup sounds to flat-out bridge pickup excitement."

We say: The VRS100 looks incredible, but this is no skin-deep performance: the tuners hold pitch, the whammy whams well and the finish is decent for the price. The neck has a chunky old-school profile and it suits this axe perfectly, prompting you to squeeze meaty rock riffs from that luxurious fretboard and suggesting you'll always hang onto this model as a spare.

There's a quality to the VRS100's tone that really doesn't belong in this price bracket. It

overflows with character and class; the humbuckers roar and the chunky poplar body brings a sustain that makes your tired old riffs sound soulful and emotive.

It doesn't quite elbow the Tele off the podium, but if you're horny for humbuckers, this model is a bit of all white.

SUMMARY

For: Features, characterful tone
Against: It's almost mid-market

★★★★★

TG says: A close second place