



# EPIPHONE INSPIRED BY 1966 CENTURY

£499

## Bay's guitar gets an affordable revival

**W**e love seeing an unsung guitar getting a second chance, because sometimes they're just not appreciated like they should be first time around. For instance, back in 2013 Fender finally gave Starcaster fanatics the comeback they were crying out for by adding it to its Modern Player series, and since then the 70s footnote has found reissued life in the hands of a whole new generation of players – including Wes Borland. That brings us to another return, this time of a rather idiosyncratic old design from Epiphone. And like Jonny Greenwood's patronage of the Starcaster earned it a cult

to oblige. Plus, for those who are particularly sensitive about the connotations of being seen on stage with the Bay-approved Cherry finish, this Sunburst alternative could seal the deal.

The hardware we want to draw your attention to most here is that floating rosewood bridge – the angle of string elevation over it definitely adds a tight bounce to the tension, and we'll get to that later. First, there's a couple of small bugbears. It would have been good to have a bone nut instead of the cheap-looking white nylon on a guitar with such a strong acoustic element. Some rough finishing on the edge of the rosewood fretboard around the

## IT COULD OFFER A NEW MUSE FOR THOSE HITTING THE WALL

following, an original P-90-loaded 1966 Century has been gaining attention in the hands of a British hitmaker; James Bay.

Its tones can be heard all over megahits *Hold Back The River* and *Let It Go*, but that's not all that's piqued our interest – the Century really intrigues because it seems to offer something different. A tantalising crossover between the acoustic and electric worlds? We better get playing and find out.

Bay plays a Cherry Century and these reissues will offer an Aged Gloss version of that finish and this Vintage Sunburst. The somewhat satin (if that's what Epiphone mean by 'aged') finish on the laminated maple top is classy but understated, with amber hues blending into dark edges with waves through the grain tempting us to take a closer look. And of course, we're happy

first fret is a evident, too. But elsewhere this is a charmer...

The Century is a lightweight guitar (5.5lbs) and feels instantly comfortable on the strap. It's even better sat down before we plug in; because it's hollow there's a satisfying experience to be had playing away from the amp, and it has an appealing rounded woody character. All this could combine towards your heart, head and hands forming a bond with the Century, and that's always vital with any guitar, but especially so here. Because the Century lives in a world of its own.

Plugged in, we're immediately encouraged to strum by the acoustic experience and the almost-neck position of the P-90 Pro rewards that with a warmth topped with an unusual compressed nature that gives the Century its own voice. Having

### 1 TUNERS

Unlike the rest of the Epiphone-made hardware, the three-in-a-row tuner with plastic Ivory buttons are made by Wilkinson, and they impress with a responsive performance

### 2 PICKUP

Epiphone's P-90 Pro appears on a few other models, too – including a version of its ES-339 semi

### 3 BRIDGE

A rosewood bridge is something you'd expect to find on an acoustic, and aides the Century's resonance, here's it's floating and adjustable

### AT A GLANCE

**BODY:** Aged Gloss finish on laminated maple top and fully hollow body

**NECK:** Mahogany  
**SCALE:** 25.5"

**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood

**FRETS:** 20, medium

**PICKUPS:** P-90 Pro

**CONTROLS:** Master volume and tone

**HARDWARE:** Wilkinson Vintage 3-in-a-row with plastic Ivory buttons,

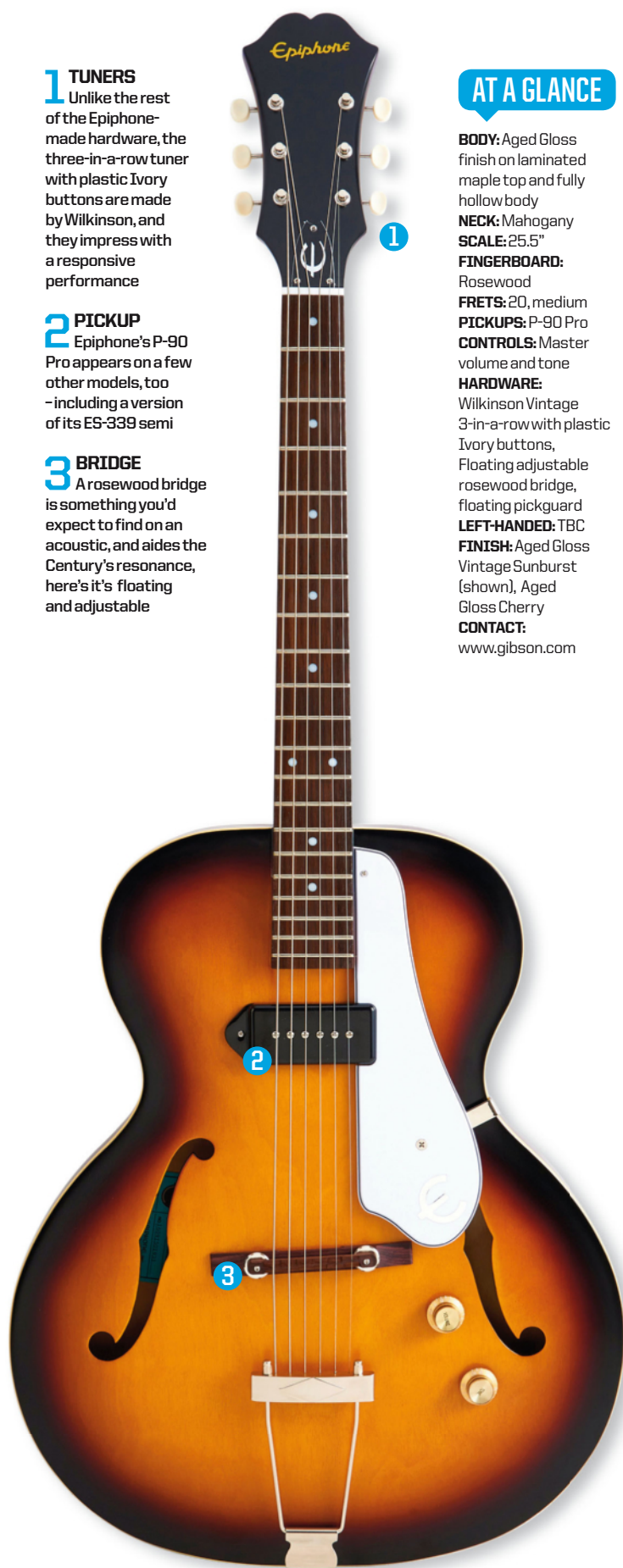
Floating adjustable rosewood bridge,

floating pickguard

**LEFT-HANDED:** TBC

**FINISH:** Aged Gloss Vintage Sunburst (shown), Aged Gloss Cherry

**CONTACT:** [www.gibson.com](http://www.gibson.com)





## Nuthin But A Wound G Thang

James Bay on his unsung 20th Century classic

It's tempting to connect the return of the Century with the rise of James Bay. And here he explains to us about the special connection he made with his '66 original...

"I picked it up in a guitar shop in New York. I thought, 'Wow, that's a cool-looking electric guitar' and immediately it has the wooden bridge, wound G-string. A wound G-string is something you find on an acoustic guitar of course... and you can't bend it as much as you can the B and the E. So immediately there was this argument to be had with the guitar; this fight, and I was really drawn to that.

"And obviously these are hollowbody guitars... if somebody tells you to shut up because you're too loud plugged in, you can soothe things with more of an acoustic sound!"

one pickup does limit your options but will inspire you to use the other tools more; strumming away from the P-90 for softer dynamics and increased 'acoustic' texture, dropping the volume control down a notch to clean up and dialling the tone down to enter authentically jazzy archtop territory.

The Pro is not the hottest P-90 we've encountered, but this is a hollowbody and feedback is a consideration. Move into medium gain and things can get wooly in the bottom end, but pitch your amp's treble right and there's



Rosewood bridge and P-90: where acoustic and electric meet



Using these controls is key to getting the best from the Century

ragged character for rock rhythm. Unsurprisingly, the Century is happiest strummed and picked up and down its C-shaped neck over cleaner ground, pushed with light gain in places. Trying some blues licks, we experience that tension from the bridge design and the wound G string. Whole tone bends aren't given for free (we find it friendlier in E<sub>b</sub>) but it inspires more muscle from your approach.

This really is an unusual guitar – it is essentially an acoustic with a P-90 wired in – and could offer a new muse for those who are hitting

the wall with an acoustic, onstage or writing. A singer/songwriter frustrated between the worlds of unplugged intimacy and rock power could find their tonal catalyst here; a different voice. And for that alone we welcome the return of the Century.

**Rob Laing**

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

## ALSO TRY...

### GODIN 5TH AVENUE KINGPIN

The closest rival to the Century on spec but pricier; made from Canadian Wild Cherry with a single Godin P-90 and three finish options; this black, natural and Cognac Burst

£749

### IBANEZ ARTCORE AF71F

Just like the Century, this is another maple hollowbody with a single pickup. The Artcore is comparatively thicker, however, and offers a Classic Elite Mini 'bucker in the neck

£379

### EPIPHONE ES-339 PRO

ES-335 too large for your tastes? This semi-hollow P-90 Pro-loaded option give you an additional pickup over the Century, and also comes in this stunning Pelham Blue finish

£TBC